



Cultural Distance Perceptions of International Students: Turkey and Their Home Countries

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The cultural distance is the totality of the perceived similarities and differences between the target and the (source) cultures in contact. Cultural distance knowledge can facilitate adapting students from diverse cultural backgrounds to the target culture. This study aims to ascertain the cultural distance perceptions of international students who study Turkish as a second language in Turkey by the classification made by Karluk (2022) into high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost categories. A case study method based on a qualitative research approach was implemented to reach that aim. Participants are determined by criterion sampling, one of the targeted sampling methods. The data collected from 15 international students through semi-structured interview forms were analyzed through content analysis. The study showed that the participants in the high-cost groups thought their culture was different from Turkish culture in terms of “daily life,” “physical, social, and economic conditions,” “interpersonal relations and social traditions,” and “values, attitudes, and beliefs.” Whereas the low-cost and zero-cost group participants thought their culture was similar to Turkish culture. Accordingly, it appears that the high-cost groups will have more difficulty in adapting. The outcomes were discussed in light of literature and the importance of creating a third space between the target and source cultures, giving students in-class and out-of-class experience-oriented tasks, organizing events introducing Turkish culture, and providing students with psychosocial support was emphasized.

Introduction

For millennia, individuals and societies have been geographically nomadic for numerous reasons. Their motion causes them to engage with each other inevitably. In the framework of intercultural interaction, migration between geographies is of considerable importance since it generates opportunities for development and change in the sociocultural field. Those who have reached the consciousness of participation in society try to learn each

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other's languages or benefit from the acquisition possibilities due to exposure when they realize intercultural engagement.

Culture is described as the beliefs, principles, perspectives, behavior patterns embraced by a society and the effect of all these common categories on individuals' environments (Bennet, 2001; Peterson, 2004). All speakers, regardless of their familiarity with local customs, can engage in social interactions and fulfill their professional and educational requirements by actively participating in daily conversations through intercultural communication (Kramsch, 2009; Macdonald & O'Regan, 2012). Intercultural communication competence involves effectively adapting both verbal and nonverbal messages to suit the cultural context (Macdonald & O'Regan, 2012; Kiss, 2008).

Since the discrepancy in understanding among individuals occurs during communication and interaction, individuals from various cultures endeavor to merge into the target culture by mutually modifying their behaviors (Aydın, 2020; Lee & Padilla, 2014). Individuals who encounter a language barrier during the adaptation process may experience various internal conflicts and struggle with the lack of understanding of the host society members (Aydın & Avaroğlu, 2023). This is because a problem of meaning arises between individuals. Individuals' challenges in conveying their identity should not be solely attributed to their language skills (Bhabha, 2004). Several factors, including ethnic identity, gender, family structure, living circumstances, direct perceptions of commonality/similarity and difference in the minds of individuals from distinct cultures impact sociocultural harmony. This study focuses on cultural distance, which pertains to the extent of similarities and variances across cultures.

The entirety of perceived similarities and differences between the target culture and the culture in touch refers to cultural distance. The more similar the cultures in contact are, the easier intercultural transition and understanding becomes (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). The study conducted by Furnham and Bochner (1982) concluded that students, far from the target culture, have difficulties adapting sociocultural than those who are in a medium or close distance. Particularly, immigrant learners who evaluate their language skills as inadequate and show dissatisfaction have the perception that they will be rejected by the host society (Lou & Noels, 2019; Zimmermann, 1995). Additional research on international students supports this finding, revealing the adverse impacts of cultural disparity on social and psychological adaptation outcomes (Albada et al., 2021; Bethel et al., 2020; Furukawa, 1997; Harrison & Peacock, 2010).

Hall (1990) highlights both visible and hidden aspects of cultures using the metaphor of the cultural iceberg. The visible portion of the iceberg indicates the observable components of a culture while the invisible portion represents the components that cannot be directly recognized. The concept of cultural distance can be associated with both aspects of the cultural iceberg according to this metaphor (Ghemawat & Reiche, 2016). The criteria of the invisible part of the iceberg of cultural distance in the process of social and psychological adaptation include factors like inequalities between the target and source cultures, geographical and regional origins, traditions, religious and linguistic differences, intellectual values, behavioral differences, and lifestyles.

Various methods have been applied to evaluate the cultural distance criteria, one of which is Hofstede's theory, known as *cultural dimensions*. These dimensions, also called *national culture dimensions*, are power distance, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculine society-feminine society, short-term orientation-long-term orientation, and enthusiasm-restriction (Hofstede, 2009). These dimensions, utilized for assessing cultural



variations, unveil the degree of separation or proximity resulting from the acculturation process and its associated stress. Berry (1995) defines the situation in which individuals experience increased anxiety, depression, marginality, and identity confusion during acculturation as acculturation stress. When individuals become aware of the disparities between their cultural identities, they are prone to encountering stress as a result of the cultural distance, leading to contradictions and conflicts (Haritatos & Benet Martinez, 2002). As cultural distance increases, acculturation stress, adaptation problems, social tensions, and cultural conflicts also increase (Berry et al., 1987; Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005; Pan et al., 2008; Pan & Wong, 2011; Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

According to Bai (2016), the focal points of acculturation stress and cultural distance are language deficiency, social isolation, perceived discrimination, academic pressure, and feelings of remorse toward the family. By expanding social networks, developing activities with members of the host society, preventing academic anxiety by clarifying uncertainties, and preventing all types of discrimination due to ethnicity, acculturation stress and cultural distance are reduced, facilitating adaptation to the target culture (Bai, 2016; Bashir & Khalid, 2020; Hansen et al., 2018; Lee & Padilla, 2014; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Wan et al., 1992).

The growing awareness of the free movement of individuals, thoughts and technological advancements have led to increased interactions across different geographical regions. As of 2023, the number of international students in higher education worldwide has reached 6.3 million, and it is projected to increase to 8 million by 2025. In Turkey, the number of international students enrolled in associate, undergraduate, and graduate programs during the 2023-2024 academic year is 336,366. Additionally, the number of international students coming to Turkey through exchange programs is 6,091. With these figures, Turkey ranks as the eighth country in the world with the highest number of international students (Higher Education Council, 2025; Higher Education Information Management System, 2024). This situation, both globally and in Turkey, has made culture more prominent in all contexts, including environments where the target language is learned and taught. This is because perceptions of similarities and differences play a crucial role in managing interactions.

The concept of cultural distance in teaching second/foreign languages in international literature has been the subject of numerous studies. Some of these studies are designed to examine the perceptions of cultural distance and social adaptation among students and immigrants (Arnold & Versluis, 2019; Felix et al., 2019; Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007; Iskhakova et al., 2021; Lou & Noels, 2019; Malay et al., 2023; Muthuswamy & Varshika, 2023; Peng et al., 2023; Svanes, 1987; Yeung, 2016) while some are aimed at the social adaptation and cultural distance perceptions of pre-service teachers and instructors (Cohen, 2007; Damrow & Sweeney, 2019; Hoare, 2013; Khairutdinova et al., 2019; Lam & Lidstone, 2007; Uusimaki & Swirski, 2016). Nevertheless, there are limited studies on cultural distance in the national literature. In this context, Demirci (2024) aimed to determine the relationship between the perception of cultural distance and the motivational barriers of those learning Turkish as a foreign language. Karluk (2022) explored the concept of cultural distance from a sociological perspective, specifically examining immigrants and refugees who migrate or seek asylum in Turkey. The study also evaluated the potential economic, sociological, psychological, and ecological costs that cultural distance might impose on the host country. Mohammed Ahmed (2023) determined the relationship between cultural distance perceptions and intercultural communication anxiety in Arab students learning Turkish as a foreign language. Şengül and Demirci (2023) examined the cultural distance of learners studying Turkish as a foreign language in terms of variables such as clothing, communication, family

life, values, friendships, traditions, worldviews, religious beliefs, language, and food. Temur and Aydın (2023) examined the dimensions of acculturation orientation, psychological adaptation, and perceived cultural distance in their research. They analyzed their interrelations and provided an evaluation of learners studying Turkish as a second language within this framework.

There is a significant scarcity of literature regarding cultural distance in teaching Turkish as a second language. Research focused on student perceptions and views is believed to enhance the current collection of research on the issue. International students experience a challenging transition as they adapt to a new language and culture. When attempting to adapt to the culture and social dynamics of the host country, individuals may encounter difficulties arising from unfamiliar educational institutions and distinct academic perspectives (Malay et al., 2023). Determination of the students' perceptions and interpretations of the target language and culture is the resource for the language teaching process. Accordingly, the teacher can enhance the quality of second language instruction by establishing a third place between the target and source cultures (Kramsch, 1993).

This study aims to ascertain the perspectives of advanced international students at B2 and C1 proficiency levels studying Turkish as a second language concerning the cultural distance between Turkish culture and their native cultures. The cultural distance perceptions of international students were determined based on Karluk's (2022) assessment of the adaptation and integration costs of immigrant groups in Turkey. The study analyzed the students' proximity to Turkish culture by categorizing them into high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups based on distance. Within this particular setting, it is aimed to identify and address the following research inquiries:

- (1) What are the distance perceptions of international students selected from high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups who learn Turkish as a second language regarding Turkish culture?
- (2) Do the distances of international students selected from high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups learning Turkish as a second language to Turkish culture differ in terms of “daily life”, “physical, social, and economic conditions”, “interpersonal relations and social traditions” and “values, beliefs, and attitudes?”

Method

Research model / pattern

In this study, which aims to determine the situation regarding the cultural distance perceptions of international students who learn Turkish as a second language and continue their education in Turkey, a qualitative research approach based on the case study method was employed. Qualitative research is an investigative method that focuses on comprehending the interpretations and significance that individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue. This strategy involves the development of theories to enhance knowledge (Creswell, 2017; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Case study is a unique method employed to investigate scientific inquiries in accordance with the research's objectives (Büyüköztürk et al., 2023). This allows for thoroughly examining and investigating one or several events, circumstances, locations, programs, social groups, or systems in real-life settings (Creswell, 2023; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). The case in this study is the perceptions and views of students learning Turkish as a second language in Turkey about cultural distance in a natural context.



Participants of the study

The participants were selected using the criterion sampling method, which is a type of purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling enables a thorough investigation of circumstances that are believed to have abundant information and knowledge (Patton, 2018). Criterion sampling involves selecting participants and scenarios that satisfy specific predetermined criteria for the research being undertaken (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The participants of this study consisted of international students learning Turkish at Turkish Language Teaching Research and Application Centers of state universities in Turkey during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. To ensure the collection of reliable and precise data from the participants, the primary criteria was that they possessed proficiency in the Turkish language at B2 and C1 levels.

Another criterion was that the participants were from the countries specified in Karluk’s cost classification (2022). Three distinct participant groups were established in accordance with Karluk’s (2022) classification of “high-cost groups, low-cost groups, and zero-cost groups” for Turkey to facilitate a more accurate comparison in the context of cultural distance in the selection of the Nationalities of the Participants. Those utterly different from Turkish society in terms of social and cultural aspects constitute high-cost groups, those who have a shared past with Turkish society constitute low-cost groups, and those related to Turkish society constitute zero-cost groups. Thus, high-cost groups regarding language and culture in terms of adaptation to Turkish society were selected from the Middle East geography; low-cost groups from the Balkan geography and zero-cost groups were chosen from Turkestan and the Caucasus geography, each consisting of five students. Table 1 provides the demographic information of the study’s participants, which is comprised of 15 individuals.

Table 1. Demographic information about the participants

Variables	Participants	N	
Gender	Female	10	
	Male	5	
Age	17-22	10	
	23-28	4	
	29-34	1	
Language Level	B2	1	
	C1	14	
Duration of stay in Turkey	6-7 month	14	
	1 year and above	1	
Nationality	Lebanese	1	
	High – Cost Groups	Iraq	1
		Palestine	1
		Jordan	1
		Persia	1
		North Macedonia	1
	Low – Cost Groups	Bosnia Herzegovina	1
		Montenegro	1
		Albania	1
		Serbia	1
Zero – Cost Groups		Azerbaijan	1
	Kyrgyzstan	1	
	Uzbekistan	1	
	Turkmenistan	1	
	Kazakhstan	1	
Total		15	

In terms of cost classification, it can be seen that the participants are from 15 different countries according to their nationality. The diverse distribution among the participants is thought to provide data richness.

Data collection

The semi-structured interview method, a qualitative data collection method, was employed to collect the data for this study. Interviews were conducted with 15 students studying at Turkish Language Teaching Research and Application Centers affiliated to state universities in Turkey. Semi-structured interviews enable the acquisition of identical information from a variety of individuals regarding comparable subjects (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The researcher has the advantage of obtaining more detailed information by asking additional questions to the questions he has prepared in advance, which are based on the topic he has determined (Büyüköztürk et al., 2023; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

The researchers developed the interview queries on the fundamental issue of the study, utilizing expert views and literature reviews. The interview form, which was finalized as a result of expert views and suggestions, contained thirteen questions regarding the cultural distance perceptions of international students in the context of daily life, physical and social conditions, interpersonal relations and social traditions, values, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as the questions about demographic information (gender, age, language proficiency, duration of stay in Turkey, nationality). The interviews were conducted voluntarily, and participants were informed before the interviews. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes. The data was collected over two weeks. The personal information of the participants was maintained in confidence during the recording of the collected data in the computer environment. The high-cost group was assigned codes of H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄, and H₅, the low-cost group codes of L₁, L₂, L₃, L₄, and L₅, and the zero-cost group codes of Z₁, Z₂, Z₃, Z₄, and Z₅.

Analysis of data

This research data was analyzed using the content analysis method, which was founded on the perspectives of international students learning Turkish as a second language. Content analysis enables the detailed examination of the data collected within the research's scope, thereby enabling the development of themes, patterns, and categories that were previously unclear (Patton, 2018; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The primary themes were identified in the context of the interviews conducted with international students during the content analysis. The primary themes were classified based on the expressions in the interview forms, resulting in the creation of categories and codes. The determined codes are denoted with (S) when the similarity of the two cultures is mentioned and (D) when the difference is referred to, as similarities and differences are significant factors in determining cultural distance.

Reliability, consistency, and ethics

The most critical criterion for assessing qualitative research is the consistency and reliability of the data collected and the results obtained throughout the research process (Büyüköztürk et al., 2023). This investigation utilized common ideas as a foundation and solicited expert views from the outset to the conclusion. The selection of nationality was a critical factor in selecting participants, as it would provide data that would directly influence the research results. The volunteerism of the participant group was the basis for this decision. It took approximately two weeks to conclude the data collection phase of the research. Participants were afforded sufficient time to respond in a manner that was as comfortable as feasible during the individual interviews. The participants' responses to the interview queries established the themes, categories, and codes. The students' statements were respected, and



the researchers' agreement was considered when establishing the themes, categories, and codes. The level of accord between the researchers was determined using Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula. The research was determined to have a reliability of 94% based on the formula $[\text{agreed themes} / (\text{agreed} + \text{contested themes})] \times 100$. The ideal level of reliability between programmers is 90%, as per Miles and Huberman (1994). This also demonstrates that the outcome is adequate in terms of coding consistency. The results are presented in tables corresponding to the order of the questions in the prepared interview form, including the frequency values and participants. The incidence values and the number of participants in the tables differ as some participants expressed more than one view. The results are corroborated by direct quotations from the participants' views. In-depth explanations are provided for each stage of the investigation.

In all scientific research, certain norms must be adhered to, including the design of the research and the publication process, as well as certain ethical principles that must not be flouted. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021; Creswell, 2023). Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University Ethics Committee approved this research via letter numbered 263559, dated 29.04.2024. The data sources of the research were informed, and the participant group was guaranteed to consent to participate voluntarily, thereby providing sincere and realistic information. In summary, the study was conducted following the ethical standards of scientific research and publication, and the process was reported fairly and accurately.

Findings

Themes were developed, various categories and codes were established, and the results were presented based on the data collected from the interviews regarding the cultural distance perceptions of international students studying Turkish as a second language. Accordingly, the findings were categorized under 13 themes in four main dimensions about the interview questions (see Table 2). The codes given under the categories are indicated with (S) when the similarities of the two cultures are expressed and with (D) when the differences are expressed.

Table 2. Dimensions and themes related to the presentation of findings

Dimension	Theme
Daily life	<i>Communicating with Turkish citizens</i>
	<i>The roles of men and women in society</i>
	<i>Public holidays and activities held on holidays</i>
	<i>Food and drinks consumed</i>
Physical, social, and economic conditions	<i>Living conditions</i>
	<i>Comprehension of education</i>
	<i>Houses resided in and social places visited</i>
Interpersonal relations and social traditions	<i>Family and kinship situations</i>
	<i>Attitudes towards guests</i>
	<i>Concept of marriage</i>
Values, beliefs and attitudes	<i>Value given to adopted beliefs and national symbols</i>
	<i>Traditional rituals adopted</i>
	<i>Treatment of citizens of different countries</i>

Daily life

Views on communicating with Turkish citizens

The categories and codes created based on the students' views on the theme of communicating with Turkish citizens are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories and codes for communicating with Turkish citizens

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Communication	Difficulty in socialization (D)	H ₁ , H ₅ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	8
	Similarities make it easier to make friends and socialize (S)	H ₃ , L ₂ , Z ₁ , Z ₃	4
Language anxiety and academic pressure	Being comfortable and confident (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , L ₂ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	8
	Afraid of not being able to learn Turkish (D)	H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₄ ,	4
	Not being able to express your thoughts comfortably (D)	L ₄ , Z ₅ ,	2
Communication in the source culture	Similarity of the understanding of communication (S)	H ₂ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Being sincere, warm, and friendly (D)	H ₁ , Z ₂	2
	Feeling under pressure during communication (D)	H ₃	1
	Differences in nonverbal communication (D)	Z ₃	1

Table 3 shows nine different codes were identified in three basic categories regarding communication with Turkish citizens. In the codes identified, similarities were emphasized in seven views from high-cost groups, eight views from low-cost groups, and nine views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were mentioned in six views, each from the high, low, and zero-cost groups.

In the “Communication” category, one code related to similarity and one related to difference emerged. In the similarity code (*f*: 4), zero-cost groups come to the fore while in the difference code (*f*: 8), there is a balance between low-cost and zero-cost groups. In the similarity code ‘similarities make it easier to make friends and socialize,’ H₃ emphasized cultural commonality saying, “*Communicating with Turks is normal for me. Because our cultures are not very different from each other.*” In the difference code ‘having difficulty in the socialization process,’ L₄ stated that “*I had a hard time; that process was complicated for me. I had a lot of problems.*”

In the “Language anxiety and academic pressure” category, one code related to similarity and two related to difference emerged. In the similarity code (*f*: 8), there is a balance between high-cost and zero-cost groups, while in the difference codes (*f*: 6), low-cost groups come to the fore. Regarding the similarity code of ‘being comfortable and confident,’ eight students emphasized that they are social individuals and did not experience language anxiety. Regarding the difference code of ‘being afraid of not being able to learn Turkish,’ four students stated they had problems due to language differences.

In the “Communication in the source culture” category, one code emerged regarding similarity, and four codes emerged regarding difference. While low-cost groups stand out in the similarity code (*f*: 12), a balance is seen between high-cost and zero-cost groups in the difference codes (*f*: 4). In the similarity code of ‘similarity of the understanding of communication,’ H₂ drew attention to the fact that the understanding of communication in Turkey is no different from their own culture with the view that “*Communication is very similar, people here are also respectful and warm-hearted.*” Regarding the various codes of ‘feeling under pressure during communication,’ H₃ stated the difference between the two cultures: “*There is more pressure in Iran than here; there are many rules. People do not talk well to each other, and they fight.*”

Views on the roles of women and men in society

The categories and codes created based on the students' views on the theme of the roles of women and men in society are presented in Table 4.



Table 4. Categories and codes regarding the roles of women and men in society

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Clothes	Wearing similar clothes to Turkey (S)	H ₁ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	9
	Faith – specific clothing (D)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , Z ₂	5
	Traditional and national clothes (D)	Z ₁ , Z ₃ ,	2
	European style clothes (D)	L ₄ ,	1
Business life	Having the freedom to work (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	13
	Not being able to do the job they want/pressure (D)	Z ₂	1
	Change according to situation (D)	Z ₅	1
Behavioral freedom	Limited communication with individuals of the opposing gender (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₅	8
	Comfort (S)	L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₄	7
	Restrictions specific to belief (D)	H ₂	1

Table 4 shows 10 distinct classifications were identified in three fundamental categories concerning the roles of women and men in society. In the codes identified, similarities were emphasized in six views from high-cost groups, 15 views from low-cost groups and eight views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were mentioned in nine views from high-cost groups, one view from low-cost groups, and eight views from zero-cost groups.

One code was established for similarity in the “Clothes” category while three codes were established for difference. In the code related to similarity (*f*: 9), low-cost groups were prominent, whereas high-cost groups were prominent in the code about difference (*f*: 8). Nine students expressed their belief that women and men in their country preferred clothing similar to that of Turkey in the code related to similarity, “*Wearing similar clothes to Turkey.*” Z₁’s perspective of “*Clothes are different from here*” is reflected in the code related to the difference, “*Traditional/national clothes. Even in our northern and southern regions, there are distinct garments that are indigenous to our nation.*” serves as an illustration.

In the “Business life” category, a single code was established to indicate similarity, while two codes were established to indicate difference. In the code related to similarity (*f*: 13), a balance was observed between high-cost and low-cost groups, whereas in the code about difference (*f*: 2), zero-cost groups were at the vanguard. 13 students who expressed their views on the code of ‘having the freedom to work’ about similarity stated that in their country, women and men were able to work in the field of their choice, as is the case in Turkey. Z₂, in the code about the difference, ‘not being able to do the job they want/pressure,’ emphasized the disparity between the two cultures, asserting that “*Women are not as comfortable here. They are subjected to more incredible dress than their male counterparts. They are obligated to return home before sunset and unable to labor as they wish.*”

The “Behavioral freedom” category was divided into two codes: one for similarity and two for difference. In the code related to similarity (*f*: 7), low-cost groups were at the forefront, whereas high-cost groups were at the forefront in the code related to difference (*f*: 9). Seven students who conveyed their views regarding the ‘comfort’ code about similarity stated that individuals in their country could live in a manner that was both comfortable and unrestricted, similar to that of Turkey. The statement “*there are behavioral restrictions in our country*” by H₂, who expressed his views on the “*restrictions specific to belief*” code related to difference, underscored the differences and limitations between cultures. “*Due to the presence of numerous sects. Shia, Christian, Sunni, and Druze. They examine our identity papers. Our sect distinguishes behaviors.*”

Views on public holidays and activities held on holidays

Information on the categories and codes created based on the students' views on the theme of public holidays and activities held on holidays is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Categories and codes for public holidays and events held on holidays

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
National/religious holidays	Having liberation/independence days (S)	H ₁ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	11
	Celebrating in a similar way to Turkey (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	9
	Celebrating national holidays of different countries (D)	H ₁ , L ₄	2
	Celebrating the holidays of different religions and sects (D)	H ₂ , L ₁	2
Traditional holidays / festivals	Celebrating Nowruz (S)	H ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	7
	Whether festivals are paid or free (S)	H ₅ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	7
	Having more fun and enthusiastic celebrations (D)	H ₁ , H ₃ , L ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	5
	Having more holidays and festivals than Turkey (D)	L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃	4
	Not having festivals	H ₂ , H ₄ , L ₁	3
Routine holidays	Weekends different from Turkey (D)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₄ , Z ₂ , Z ₃	8
	Weekends similar to Turkey (S)	H ₂ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	7

Table 5 shows 11 distinct identifiers were identified in three primary categories concerning public holidays and activities that occur on holidays. In the codes identified, similarities were emphasized in nine views from high-cost groups, 13 views from low-cost groups, and 19 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in nine views from high-cost groups, seven views from low-cost groups, and seven views from zero-cost groups.

In the category of “National/religious holidays,” two codes were established to categorize two differences in terms of similarity. Although zero-cost groups were prevalent in the codes concerning similarity (f : 20), it was noted that the codes concerning difference were balanced between high-cost and low-cost groups (f : 4). The students who expressed their views on the code of ‘celebrating in a similar way to Turkey’ regarding similarity stated that they celebrated the holidays in their country by engaging in activities and preparing similar to those in Turkey. H₁ expressed that “*We also celebrate the holidays of people from different countries in Iraq.*” in the ‘celebrating national holidays of different countries’ code regarding differences.

The “Traditional holidays/festivals” category was divided into three codes based on two distinctions. Zero-cost groups were predominant in the codes related to similarity (f : 14). Still, they were not as prominent in the codes related to difference (f : 12). In the code of ‘celebrating Nowruz,’ all seven students who conveyed their views regarding similarity stated that they observed Nowruz like Turkey. The statement “*We are more enthusiastic*” was used by Z₄ to emphasize the distinction between the two cultures in the code of ‘having more fun and enthusiastic celebrations’ regarding differences. “*Nowruz is home to a plant known as Semeni, cultivated in households. We place a high value on holidays; I have not observed this in Turkey.*”

In the category of “Routine holidays”, one code was formed regarding similarity and one regarding difference. In the code regarding similarity (f : 7), it is seen that there is a balance between low-cost and zero-cost groups, while in the code regarding difference (f : 8), high-cost groups come to the forefront. All the students who expressed their views in the code of

‘weekend holiday being like in Turkey’ regarding similarity stated that Saturday and Sunday are holidays in their countries. In the code of ‘weekend holiday being different from Turkey’ regarding difference, L₁ stated the view that “*In Montenegro, the weekend is only Sunday. Unlike here, markets and stores, in other words, everywhere is closed on Sunday.*”

Views on food and drinks consumed

Table 6 provides information on the categories and classifications established based on the students' perspectives on the theme of consumed food and beverages.

Table 6. Categories and codes for consumed food and beverages

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Foods/ drinks	Traditional foods / drinks (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₅	10
	Similar foods/drinks to Turkey (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	9
	Differences in cookery (D)	H ₁ , H ₄ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	4
Eating habits/ concepts	Using a fork and knife (S)	H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	10
	Eating with family (S)	H ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₄	8
	Eating with hands (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂	8
	Having table manners (S)	L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₃	3
	Eating on the floor (D)	H ₂	1
The effect of faith on food/drinks	Consuming pork is considered a sin (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Consuming alcohol is considered a sin (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	10
	No religious restrictions (D)	L ₁ , Z ₂	2

Table 6 shows that 11 distinct codes were identified under three main categories related to consumed food and beverages. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 13 views from high-cost groups, 23 views from low-cost groups, and 16 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in 10 views from high-cost groups, five views from low-cost groups, and nine views from zero-cost groups.

One code related to similarity and two related to difference were identified in the “Food/drinks” category. In the code about similarity (*f*: 9), low-cost groups are prominent, whereas, in the code related to difference (*f*: 14), a balance is observed between high-cost and low-cost groups. Students who conveyed their views in the code ‘similar food/drinks to Turkey’ regarding similarity emphasized the similarities between the food/drinks in their country and those in Turkey. They provided examples of ‘ayran’, ‘dolma’, ‘sarma’, and ‘pilav’. In the code ‘differences in cookery,’ H₄ expressed the following view regarding the difference: “*Our food is mixed, while yours is plain.*” *Your food is comparable to diet food, as their flavors and preparations are distinct.*”

Three codes related to similarity and two related to difference emerged in the “Eating habits/concepts.” Low-cost groups are distinguished in the codes that pertain to similarity (*f*: 21), whereas high-cost groups are distinguished in the codes that pertain to difference. Regarding the ‘eating with the family’ code in terms of similarity, L₃ underscored the similarity with Turkey by stating, “*While the family's mealtimes differ, everyone gathers for dinner.*” “*We never use forks; we eat with our hands.*” H₁ stated in the ‘eating with hands’ code regarding the difference.

Two codes related to similarity and one related to difference emerged in the “Effect of faith on food/drinks.” High-cost groups are prominent in the codes related to similarity (*f*: 22), whereas the code related to difference (*f*: 2) exhibits a balance between low-cost and zero-cost groups. Like Turkey, the students believe that consuming pork is prohibited according to their

beliefs, as ‘consumed pork is considered a sin’ in the code related to similarity. Z₂’s statement, “*We consume pork during religious holidays*” is included in the code associated with the absence of any religious restrictions. “*We do not consider it an offense. The statement attracted attention, there are no prohibitions.*”

Physical, social, and economic conditions

Views on living conditions

Table 7 provides information on the categories and classifications that were established in accordance with the students' perspectives on the theme of living conditions.

Table 7. Categories and codes regarding living conditions

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Job opportunities	Poverty/unemployment rate higher than Turkey (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₂	9
	Poverty/unemployment rate lower than Turkey (D)	L ₂ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₅	5
	Easy job finding after education (D)	L ₂ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅ ,	5
	Working in known occupations (S)	H ₁ , H ₄ , H ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	5
	Inability to find a job in the field of education (S)	H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₄ , Z ₂	4
	Nepotism, acquaintances and favoritism (S)	L ₁ , L ₄ , L ₅	3
	Working to meet basic needs (D)	H ₂	1
Working hours	Similar to Turkey (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	15
Access to health care	Availability of private and public hospitals (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	9
	Access to hospitals and doctors (D)	H ₄ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₅	4
	Coming to Turkey for treatment (D)	Z ₅	1
	Lack of health insurance (D)	H ₂	1

Table 7 shows 12 different codes were identified in three primary categories of living conditions. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in eight views from high-cost groups, 10 views from low-cost groups, and 12 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in 10 views from high-cost groups, eight views from low-cost groups, and 10 views from zero-cost groups.

Three codes related to similarity and four related to differences were identified in the “Job opportunities” category. High-cost groups are particularly noticeable in codes that pertain to similarity (*f*: 12), whereas zero-cost groups are particularly noticeable in codes that pertain to difference (*f*: 20). Students reported that they encountered unemployment issues despite having graduated from university and that they sought employment in different occupational groups, similar to Turkey, in the code related to similarity. Z₃ expressed that “*In Uzbekistan, we can find a job right after graduating from university*” in the code related to the difference, ‘finding a job easily after education.’ “*In contrast to Turkey, there is no extended waiting period. Individuals who possess a diploma and certificate are employed.*”

In the category of “Working hours,” a code related to similarity emerged. In the code (*f*: 15), all the students stated that people in their countries work similar hours as in Turkey. For example, while S₃ expressed her view on this issue as “*Working hours are like in Turkey, they work 8 hours a day*”, Y₃ emphasized the general similarity by saying, “*Working hours are different in each occupational group in our country. But in general, it is similar to Turkey.*”

One code was identified as indicating similarity in the “Access to health services” category, while three codes were identified as indicating difference in the code related to similarity (*f*: 9); zero-cost groups are prominent, while in the code related to difference (*f*: 6), a balance is observed between high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups. In the code, students who

conveyed their views on the similarity between private and state hospitals stated that individuals in their country could receive treatment at both state and private hospitals. Z₅ indicated in the ‘coming to Turkey for treatment’ code related to the difference that “*State hospitals are bad in Kyrgyzstan. Some individuals travel to Turkey for treatment due to the exorbitant cost of private hospitals.*”

Views on the comprehension of education

Information on the categories and codes created based on the students' views on the theme of comprehension of education is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Categories and codes regarding the comprehension of education

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Education opportunities	Free education (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	13
	Compulsory education (S)	H ₁ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Paid education (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	11
	Scholarship opportunities (S)	H ₃ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	4
	Poor education system and inadequacy of teachers (D)	H ₂ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₄	4
	Education system and exams are more difficult than in Turkey (D)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₅	3
	Voluntary education (D)	H ₂ , Z ₁	2
	Othering towards ethnic group (D)	L ₁	1
Higher education opportunities	No exams for higher education (D)	L ₃	1
	Number of universities is high (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₅	9
	Number of universities is low (D)	L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₄ , Z ₄	4

Table 8 shows 11 distinct codes were identified in two primary categories concerning the comprehension of education. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 16 views from high-cost groups, 15 views from low-cost groups and 16 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in three views from high-cost groups, eight views from low-cost groups, and two views from zero-cost groups.

There were four codes related to similarity and five related to the difference in the “Education Opportunities.” While zero-cost groups stand out in the codes related to similarity (*f*: 40), there is a balance between high-cost and low-cost groups in the codes related to difference (*f*: 11). The standard view of 13 students regarding the code ‘free education’ regarding similarity is that there are state schools in their country. Emphasizing that educational services can be used free of charge as in Turkey, Z₃ said, “*There are state schools and private schools like here. State schools are free. They do not pay for primary and secondary schools.*” Regarding the difference in the code ‘education system and exams being more difficult than in Turkey,’ H₃ stated, “*Exams are tough in our country. Even if you have money, you cannot study medicine and dentistry. A private university will not accept you if you are not successful. Turkey is more comfortable.*”

In the “Higher education opportunities” category, one code was formed regarding similarity and one regarding difference. While high-cost groups stand out in the code regarding similarity (*f*: 9), low-cost groups stand out in the code regarding difference (*f*: 4). In the code regarding similarity, ‘the number of universities is high,’ H₁ emphasized the high number of universities in Turkey with the view that “*There are many universities in Turkey. There are also many state universities but more private universities.*” The common point of the four students who expressed a view regarding the difference in the code, ‘the number of

universities is low,' is that the number of universities in their country is lower compared to Turkey.

Views on houses resided in and social places visited

Table 9 provides information on the categories and codes that were established based on the students' perspectives on the theme of social places visited and homes resided in.

Table 9. Categories and codes regarding houses resided in and visited social places

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Rooms of the houses	Having a guest room (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Not having a guest room (D)	L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅	3
Types of houses	Detached houses/ apartments (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	15
	Wider and bigger houses (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄	4
	Rented houses (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , L ₂	3
Cafes, parks and entertainment centers	Being numerous (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	14
	Being open late (D)	H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , Z ₃	4
	Being a few and expensive (D)	H ₂	1

Upon examination of Table 9, eight distinct codes categorized into three primary groups describe the types of houses resided in and social establishments visited. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 16 views from high-cost groups, 13 views from low-cost groups and 15 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in eight views from high-cost groups, three views from low-cost groups, and one view from zero-cost groups.

Within the “Rooms of houses” category, two codes were identified: one related to resemblance and another about difference. In the code regarding similarity (f: 12), high-cost groups are prioritized, whereas in the code referring to difference (f: 3), low-cost groups are prioritized. The students who expressed their views on the concept of a ‘guest room’ indicated that households often have a dedicated room where guests are accommodated in their nation. In the code corresponding to the absence of a guest room, L₄ indicated, “*There used to be a guest room in the distant past. The room was accessible exclusively for guests arriving. There are currently no residences of that kind in existence.*”

Within the classification of “Types of houses,” two codes about similarity and one relating to difference were identified. The codes regarding similarity (f: 18) show a discernible equilibrium between high-cost and low-cost groups. Conversely, high-cost groupings take precedence in the codes belonging to difference (f: 4). In the code related to ‘rented houses’ and their similarities, H₃ highlighted the resemblance to Turkey by stating, “*There are houses available for rent that are similar to yours. Summer residences can also be leased as villas.*” In the ‘bigger and wider houses’ code about differentiation, H₂ highlighted the distinction by stating, “*Our houses possess considerable size, whereas houses in Turkey are comparatively smaller.*”

Within the “Cafes, parks, and entertainment centers” category, one code related to similarity and two relevant to difference were identified. In the code related to similarity (f: 14), there is an equilibrium between groups with high, low, and zero costs, whereas in the codes associated with difference (f: 5), groupings with high costs take precedence. In the code pertaining to similarity, the vast majority of students highlighted the abundance of amusement centers in their nation, such as Turkey. In the code related to disparity, characterized by



scarcity and high cost, Lebanese student H₂ highlighted the distinction by stating: “*There is a paucity of establishments such as cafes and parks. I was exhilarated to witness these in Turkey. The expenses in my country are high, making it unaffordable for tourists to visit.*”

Interpersonal relations and social traditions

Views on family and kinship situations

The categories and codes created based on the students' views on the theme of family and kinship status are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Categories and codes relating to family and kinship status

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Family relationships	Strong family ties (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	13
	Easy parenting (S)	H ₁ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	8
	Doing activities together (S)	H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	6
	Repressive parenting (D)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄	3
	Changing attitude due to gender (D)	H ₂ , H ₄ , Z ₂	3
Relationships with close relatives	Frequent meetings (D)	H ₂ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₂	7
	Meeting on special days, holidays and festivals (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , L ₁ , L ₄ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	7
	Intercity distance restrictions (S)	Z ₁	1

Upon examination of Table 10, eight distinct codes classified into two primary groups pertaining to family and kinship circumstances were found. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 10 views from high-cost groups, 10 views from low-cost groups and 15 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in eight views from high-cost groups, three views from low-cost groups and two views from zero-cost groups.

Within the “Family relations” domain, three codes related to similarity and two codes belonging to difference were identified. Zero-cost groups are prominent in codes associated with similarity (*f*: 27), while high-cost groups are prominent in difference-related codes (*f*: 6). S₁ noted resemblances in family relations between Turkey and our own, highlighting the notion of ‘strong family ties.’ Z₂ stated, “*Our relationship with our family is similar to the one in Turkey. We consistently spend time together throughout our vacations.*” H₄’s analysis of ‘gender-based behavior change’ focused on the contrasting aspects of family communication in Turkey and the prevalence of gender discrimination in their own country. H₄ observed that families in Turkey exhibit a higher level of ease in communication, whereas in their own country, families face discomfort due to gender discrimination. “*They struggle to grant permission to girls over boys. We conceal our romantic partners. You are experiencing a higher level of comfort.*”

Within the “Relationships with close relatives” category, two codes pertaining to similarity and one related to difference were determined. There is an observed equilibrium between high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups in the similarity codes (*f*: 6). Similarly, a well-balanced distribution is evident in the difference codes (*f*: 9). In the code analyzing the relationship between the distance between cities and likeness, the Kazakh student Z₁ stated the view that “*We do not frequently meet with close relatives.*” The statement “*They all work in different places*” suggests that families frequently face challenges in meeting each other owing to geographical distance. The viewpoints expressed in the ‘meeting frequently’ code about disparities underscore the importance of maintaining tight relationships with family members. L₂ said, “*We frequently gather with our immediate family members. Every*

weekend, we visit my grandfather's village. Additionally, my aunt and uncles attended. We are nearby.”

Views on attitudes towards guests

Table 11 displays data regarding the categories and codes established according to the students' perspectives on attitudes toward guests.

Table 11. Categories and codes regarding attitudes towards guests

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Hospitality styles	Giving importance to the guest (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	15
	Offering treats (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Pouring water during farewell (S)	L ₅	1
Guest behaviors	The concept of giving gifts (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₅	10
	Visiting times (S)	H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	10
	Giving money to children (S)	H ₄ , L ₁ , Z ₅	3
Ways of farewell	Sending the guest to the door (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	14
	Door conversations (S)	H ₁ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅	7

Table 11 shows that eight distinct codes were identified under three main categories regarding attitudes toward guests. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 21 views from high-cost groups, 28 views from low-cost groups, and 23 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that there were no views on differences.

There were three codes in the “Hospitality styles” category regarding similarity. In the codes regarding similarity (f: 28), it is seen that there is a balanced distribution between high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups. In the code of ‘offering treats’ regarding similarity, it is seen that H₅ said, *“We attach great importance to the guest. We give whatever we have at home. There are similar things with Turkey. Cake, food, pastry, chocolate, everything.”* In the code of ‘pouring water during farewell,’ Serbian student L₅ drew attention to another cultural similarity with his view that *“The culture in Serbia is like Turkey. For example, we pour water on a man when he leaves so that he goes well; this is the same.”*

There are three codes related to similarity in the “Guest behaviors” category. Zero-cost groups stand out in the similarity-related codes (f: 23). Two views draw attention to the code ‘gift-taking concept’ regarding similarity. These are: H₁, *“Guests do not come empty-handed. They buy fruit, cake, or something small from the market. It would be rude.”*; Z₂, *“We give gifts to those who buy a house on birthdays. Gifts are given if it is a special day.”*

In the “Ways of farewell” category, two codes regarding similarity were formed. Low-cost groups stand out in the codes regarding similarity (f: 21). In the code of ‘sending guests to the door’ regarding similarity, almost all students stated that they accompany their guests to the door, as in Turkey. Student L₂ emphasized the cultural similarity with the view that *“We also go to the door. They even talk when they get in the car. We are just like the Turks.”*

Views on the concept of marriage

The categories and codes established based on the students' views on the concept of marriage are presented in Table 12.



Table 12. Categories and codes for the concept of marriage

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Average age of marriage and the comprehension	Arranged/marriage by meeting and falling in love (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	15
	Age range 18-30 (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Being against consanguineous marriage (D)	L ₂	1
	Sectarian conflicts (D)	H ₂	1
	Concept of child marriage (D)	L ₄	1
Concept of dowry	Like Turkey (S)	H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	10
	Meeting needs together	H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₃ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	8
	Meeting needs by the groom (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₅ , Z ₅	6
	No dowry concept (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , L ₅	4
	Concept of bride price (D)	H ₁	1
Monogamy/	Concept of monogamy (S)	H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	9
Polygamy	Concept of polygamy and LGBT (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₄	6

When Table 12 is examined, 12 different codes were determined in three main categories regarding the concept of marriage. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 14 views from high-cost groups, 18 views from low-cost groups and 22 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in 12 views from high-cost groups, seven views from low-cost groups and one view from zero-cost groups.

In the “Average age of marriage and comprehension category,” two codes were formed for similarity, and three codes were formed for the difference. In the codes related to similarity (f : 27), it was seen that there was a balanced distribution between high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups, while in the codes related to difference (f : 3), low-cost groups came to the forefront. In the code of ‘18-30 age range’ related to similarity, most students stated that there was no such thing as marriage before the age of 18 in their country and that families disapproved of child marriage. In the ‘comprehension of child marriage’ code related to difference, North Macedonian student L₄ stated, “*They get married at a very young age in the villages. Some people get married at the age of fourteen.*”

In the “Concept of dowry” category, two codes related to similarity and three codes related to difference were formed. While zero-cost groups were prominent in the codes related to similarity (f : 18), high-cost groups were prominent in the codes related to difference (f : 11). In the code ‘similar to Turkey in comprehension of dowry’ regarding similarity, student Z₃ emphasized that similar dowry preparations were made with the view “*There is the same understanding of dowry. Mothers collect jewelry and fabrics for their daughters. They buy what is missing.*” In the code ‘understanding of bride price’ regarding difference, Iraqi student H₁ expressed his view as “*The man gives the girl a bride price. The family takes the money.*”

In the “Monogamy/polygamy” category, one code was formed for similarity, and two codes were formed for difference. While zero-cost groups were prominent in the code related to similarity (f : 9), high-cost groups were prominent in the code about difference (f : 6). Students who expressed their views in the code of ‘monogamy understanding’ regarding similarity stated that polygamy was not appropriate and welcomed in their countries. Z₂ drew attention to the cultural similarity with her statements, such as “*You cannot marry someone else while you are married to someone. It would not be appropriate. It would not be welcomed here.*” In the code of ‘polygamy and LGBT understanding’ regarding differences, high-cost groups stated that polygamy was appropriate from a religious perspective. While L₁ from the low-cost

groups reported that polygamy was considered normal in their countries, L₁ additionally noted that the LGBT understanding was as free as in Europe.

Values, beliefs, and attitudes

Views on the value given to adopted beliefs and national symbols

The categories and codes established based on the students' views on the theme of adopted beliefs and the value given to national symbols are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Categories and codes regarding adopted beliefs and values given to national symbols

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Religious beliefs	The similarity in forms/comprehension of worship (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	13
	more than one religious belief/sectarian understanding (D)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₅	12
	Freedom of religion and belief/tolerance (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₅ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	9
	Superstitious beliefs (S)	H ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₃	3
National symbols	Appreciating the flag and anthem (S)	H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	12
	Existence/importance of architectural structures (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₄ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	11
	Appreciating famous people/heroes (S)	L ₂ , L ₄ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	5
	Appreciating multiple flags and symbols (D)	H ₁ , H ₂	2

When Table 13 is examined, eight distinct codes are identified in two main categories regarding adopted beliefs and the value given to national symbols. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 12 views from high-cost groups, 20 views from low-cost groups, and 20 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in seven views from high-cost groups, five views from low-cost groups, and two views from zero-cost groups.

In the “Religious beliefs” category, three codes related to similarity and one related to difference emerged. While zero-cost groups stand out in the codes related to similarity (f : 25), a balance is observed between high-cost and low-cost groups in the codes related to difference (f : 13). In the code of ‘similarity in forms/understanding of worship’ regarding similarity, most of the students reported that Islam is more widespread in their country and therefore they perform similar worships with Turkey. Student Z₄ supported this with the statement, “Ninety-seven percent of the society is Muslim. There is no difference from Turkey.” In the ‘more than one religious belief/sectarian understanding’ code regarding difference, 12 students stated that there are different beliefs and sects in their country besides Islam. H₁ emphasized the view, “There are many beliefs in my country. Muslims are the majority. Then came Christians, Jews, Shiites, and other beliefs. Even if our neighbors have a different belief, there is tolerance.”

In the “National symbols” category, three codes related to similarity and one related to difference emerged. While low-cost groups stand out in codes related to similarity (f : 28), high-cost groups stand out in codes related to difference (f : 2). In the code of ‘valuing well-known people/heroes’ related to similarity, student Z₁ stated that well-known people/heroes are also given importance in their own culture with the statement “You value Atatürk. We value Ahmet Yesevi. We have commemoration ceremonies.” In the code of ‘valuing more than one flag and symbol’ related to difference, it is seen that H₁ from the high-cost group said, “There are many flags in our country. Everyone has a symbol. We all respect them.”



Views on traditional rituals adopted

Table 14 presents the categories and codes that were generated based on the students' views on the issue of adopted traditional rituals.

Table 14. Categories and codes regarding adopted traditional rituals

Category	Code	Student(s)	f
Birth	The tradition of flying forty (S)	H ₁ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	10
	The concept/offering of tooth wheat (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₄ , Z ₃	6
	The concept/offering of sherbet for the puerperal (S)	H ₅	1
	The concept of the sacrifice of Akika (D)	L ₃	1
	The absence of a birth ritual (D)	H ₄	1
Wedding/marriage	Like Turkey (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	13
	Different from Turkey (D)	L ₁ , Z ₅	2
Death/funeral ceremonies	Like Turkey (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	15
	Prayer recitation on certain days (S)	H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	10
	Three days of mourning/wearing black clothes (D)	H ₁	1
Birthday	Birthday celebrations similar to Turkey (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₂ , Z ₃ , Z ₄ , Z ₅	15

When Table 14 is examined, 11 distinct codes were identified in four primary categories regarding the traditional rituals adopted. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in 26 views from high-cost groups, 22 views from low-cost groups, and 22 views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were emphasized in two views from high-cost groups, two views from low-cost groups, and one view from zero-cost groups.

Within the “Birth” category, three codes related to similarity and two codes about difference were identified. Although high-cost groups are prominent in the codes associated with similarity (f : 17), there is a proportional representation of both high-cost and low-cost groups in the codes related to difference (f : 2). In the code ‘the tradition of flying forty’ with regards to similarities, Z₃ highlighted the resemblance with Turkey by stating, “*Indeed, we use the same term 'forty.' After forty days, the wheat is subjected to roasting and cooking and then shared among the neighboring individuals.*” In the context of the ‘Akika sacrifice concept’ code, a Bosnian student L₃ expressed that when a baby is born, an Akika is sacrificed. This is done as an expression of gratitude towards Allah. In the ‘no birth ritual’ code, Palestinian student H₄ highlighted the cultural disparities by stating, “*These concepts do not exist. We exclusively commemorate birthdays.*”

Two codes were identified within the “Wedding/Marriage” category: one about similarity and another related to difference. Although the code about similarity (f : 13) highlights high-cost groupings, the code concerning difference (f : 2) reveals a balance between low-cost and zero-cost groups. In the code pertaining to similarity, specifically with the topic of ‘similar understanding of wedding/marriage with Turkey,’ a significant number of students highlighted the resemblance between the pre-wedding and marriage rituals in their respective countries and those in Turkey. The ceremony of asking for the hand in marriage (H₄, L₂, L₄, Z₁, Z₃, Z₄, Z₅), the henna night tradition (H₁, H₂, H₅, L₃, L₅), bringing a sacrifice to the bride’s family (Z₁), and the understanding of taking the bride/taking out the bride (H₂) all stressed similar rites. Regarding diversity, a Montenegrin student named L₁ discussed the topic of weddings and marriages in Turkey. They explained that these events are arranged in their

culture based on variations in beliefs. On the other hand, the Kyrgyz student Z₅ highlighted the importance of serving traditional cuisine.

In the “Death/funeral ceremonies” category, two codes related to similarity and one related to difference emerged. In the codes related to similarity (*f*: 25), it is seen that there is a balance between high-cost and zero-cost groups, while in the code related to difference (*f*: 1), the view of one student from among the high-cost groups stands out. In the code of ‘praying on certain days’ related to similarity, student H₅ drew attention to the similarity of funeral activities held in his country with Turkey by explaining, “*It is the same as Turkey. We give them food for three days. We pray for the dead.*” In the code related to difference, ‘mourning for three days/wearing black clothes,’ the view expressed by Iraqi student H₁, “*When there is a funeral in the neighborhood, it is shameful to hold a wedding. People mourn for three days, wear black.*” emphasized the difference between countries in wearing black, mourning clothes at funerals.

A code about similarity has arisen inside the “Birthday” category. Within the code related to similarity (*f*: 15), an equilibrium exists among groups with high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost. In the code concerning similarity, student Z₅ expressed, “*Yes, analogous to Turkey, we have similar birthday celebrations. Only individuals in their thirtieth, fortieth, fiftieth, or sixty-seventh year are invited and honored. There is an increasing influx of individuals.*”

Views on the treatment of citizens of different countries

The categories and codes established based on the students' views on the theme of behaviors shown to citizens of different countries are presented in Table 15.

Table 15. Categories and codes regarding the behavior shown to citizens of different countries

Category	Code	Student(s)	<i>f</i>
Behaviors towards international students	Helpful/ hospitable (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , H ₃ , H ₄ , H ₅ , L ₂ , L ₃ , L ₄ , L ₅ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	12
	Showing respect (S)	H ₁ , H ₂ , L ₁ , L ₃ , L ₄ , Z ₁ , Z ₃ , Z ₄	8
	Otherring/bullying (D)	H ₄ , L ₁ , Z ₂	3

When Table 15 is examined, three distinct codes are identified in one primary category regarding the behavior shown to citizens of different countries. In the identified codes, similarities were emphasized in seven views from high-cost groups, eight views from low-cost groups and, six views from zero-cost groups. On the other hand, differences were mentioned in six views each from high, low, and zero-cost groups.

In the “behaviors towards international students” category, two codes were formed regarding similarity and two codes regarding difference. In the codes regarding similarity (*f*: 20), it was observed that there was a balance between the high-cost and low-cost groups, while in the codes regarding difference (*f*: 3), one student from each of the high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups came to the forefront. In the code of ‘being helpful/hospitable’ regarding similarity, student L₂ stated, “*When foreigners come to our country, they behave very well. They invite them to their homes. They also treated me very well when I came to Turkey. A family invited us to the iftar during Ramadan. I was thrilled.*”, indicating that both countries displayed a hospitable behavior. In the code of ‘othering/ bullying’ regarding differences, H₄ and Z₂, it was stated that they were excluded and felt inadequate in Turkey. In contrast, L₁ stated that people other than their citizens looked at them unpleasantly in Montenegro.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

This study aimed to determine the cultural distance perceptions of international students who learn Turkish as a second language and continue their education in Turkey. The students' views regarding "Communicating with Turkish citizens" were gathered under three categories: 'communicating,' 'language anxiety and academic pressure,' and 'communication in the source culture.' In the communication category, most students stated that they had difficulty in the socialization process by expressing their views on "differences". In the category of language anxiety and academic pressure, the students who indicated that they were comfortable and self-confident emphasized "similarity". In communication in the source culture, 'similarity of the understanding of communication' was prominent. In this theme, while zero-cost groups were prominent regarding "similarity", it was observed that there was a balance between high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups regarding the "difference". Zero-cost groups are expected to communicate and adapt more efficiently based on the common language and cultural bond. Furnham and Bochner (1982) also mentioned that the commonality between the target and source cultures would positively affect the adaptation process regarding communication and socialization. Ng et al. (2019) found that low cultural intelligence reduces the willingness to communicate as cultural distance increases, thus negatively affecting adaptation. Muthuswamy and Varshika (2023) emphasized that language barriers affect academic success and that failure is encountered in socialization in the country visited for educational purposes. Based on this view, it was thought that the communication process would be negatively affected since high-cost groups differ from Turkish society in terms of language and culture. It is believed that the result is not in this direction due to the individual differences of the students.

The views of the students who answered the question about the societal roles of women and men were categorized into the subjects of 'attire,' 'professional life,' and 'freedom of behavior.' The students focused on the "similarities" in dress and professional life. Still, they underlined the idea of 'restricted communication with the opposite gender' as a limitation in behavioral flexibility and highlighted this as a point of "distinction". Within this theme, it was observed that low-cost groups responded to "similarity", while high-cost groups responded to "difference". When looking at high-cost groups, it is understood that the Muslim population is dense. It is known that religion plays an important role in maintaining conservative attitudes in gender roles - especially among Muslims (Friberg & Jahanlu, 2024; Ponce, 2017; Yılmaz, 2015). In their study, Poppitt and Frey (2007) highlighted the issue of Sudanese students facing difficulties forming friendships with individuals of the opposite gender. They also underlined the gender-based limitations imposed by immigrant families. Our research is similar to the results of this study, as Sudanese students are also in the high-cost group for Türkiye.

About official holidays and the activities held during the holidays, students gave answers regarding "similarity" by emphasizing the codes of 'having liberation/independence days,' 'celebrating similarities with Turkey,' and 'celebrating Nevruz Holiday.'Kartaeva and Habijanova (2017) also emphasized in their study that Nevruz has a deep-rooted history in the lives of Muslim people and that this tradition is celebrated by being passed down from generation to generation. Regarding "differences", the codes of 'celebrating more fun and enthusiasm' and 'having a different weekend holiday than Turkey' stood out. Within this theme, it was observed that zero-cost groups placed more emphasis on "similarities", while high-cost groups placed more emphasis on "differences". It is stated that public and school holidays have significant effects on population dynamics at multiple spatial and temporal scales (Lai et al., 2022). Therefore, holidays and holiday activities shape life as a public and

cultural representation. Despite the decisive role of religion in this context, it is striking that high-cost groups in our study emphasize "differences".

In response to the question regarding consumed food and drinks, students emphasized the issue of "similarity" with the codes 'similar food/drinks to Turkey', 'use of cutlery', 'eating with family', and 'considering pork and alcohol consumption as sinful'. Furukawa (1997) states in his study that food has the greatest impact on intercultural adaptation. Beşirli (2010) emphasized the importance of food and eating habits in socialization. He stated that the time spent with family members at the dinner table and the prohibition of pork in Islam highlight the cultural characteristics of a community that distinguishes it from others. In views emphasizing "difference", the codes 'traditional food/drinks' and 'eating with hands' are dominant. Beşirli (2010) mentioned that conventional foods and the order in which these foods are consumed are indicators of the ethnic identities of societies and that food/drinks contain critical cultural elements. Şengül and Demirci (2023) also concluded that the food cultures of students from Middle Eastern countries are different from Turkish culture. In this theme, it was observed that low-cost groups stand out regarding "similarity" while high-cost groups stand out regarding "difference". Considering that the high-cost groups are Middle Eastern countries, it is understood that the findings of Şengül and Demirci (2023) align with the results of this study.

In the answers to the question about living conditions, the codes 'similar working hours with Turkey' and 'presence of private and public hospitals' emphasized "similarity". The codes that stood out with the emphasis on "difference" were 'poverty/unemployment rate being higher than Turkey', 'poverty/unemployment rate being lower than Turkey', and 'access to hospitals and doctors.' Living conditions provide important indicators of socioeconomic and sociocultural status. However, Ballı (2023) emphasized that Turkey is not included in the classification of living conditions and welfare levels in international literature. Based on this, it is thought to be wrong to comment on the poverty/unemployment rate. The students emphasized the difficulty of getting examined in their country regarding access to hospitals and doctors. Babiker et al. (1980) also suggest that immigrants perceive health services as a haven in a foreign environment and that access to doctors is easy. In this theme, while zero-cost groups stand out in terms of "similarity", a balance was observed between high-cost and zero-cost groups in terms of "difference". The prominence of zero-cost groups in the responses regarding difference is an unexpected result. Because zero-cost groups are the groups where the similarity is expected to be high, it is thought that this result may be because the socioeconomic levels of the families of the interviewed students are higher than other families in their country.

The views of the students about their comprehension of education were classified into the categories of 'educational opportunities' and 'higher education opportunities'. The codes of 'free education,' 'compulsory education,' 'paid education,' and 'many universities' dominated the students' views about "similarity". Here, the students emphasized the existence of both state and private schools in their country and the importance of compulsory education. The codes 'poor education system', 'the inadequacy of teachers', and 'a few universities' stood out in terms of "differences." The students stated that they came to Turkey because they could not receive quality education in their country. Malay et al. (2023) also focused on international students who went abroad to receive better education and drew attention to the importance of cultural interaction in facilitating adaptation processes in their research. In this theme, it was seen that there was a balance between high-cost and zero-cost groups regarding "similarity", while low-cost groups stood out in terms of the "difference". Although it was thought that the educational understanding of the high-cost groups differed from the

educational understanding in Turkey, the result showed the difference between the low-cost groups. This result may be related to the fact that high-cost groups are also included in the classification of developing countries.

The views of the students about the houses they lived in and the social places they visited were classified into the categories of 'rooms of the houses', 'types of houses', and 'cafes, parks, and entertainment centers.' In the students' views about "similarity", the codes of 'having a guest room' and 'detached houses/apartments' dominate. Gökçen and Ulutaş (2018) describe the functions of houses as a source of life and the climate of the soul. Drawing attention to the fact that sharing the table and hosting guests is essential, especially in Anatolian geography, they express the understanding that guests bring abundance to the household. Guest towels, guest dinnerware, and, most importantly, the concept of a guest room prepared for the guest bear essential traces of the tradition being kept alive. On the other hand, the 'bigger and wider houses' code came to the fore in terms of the "differences". It was observed that high-cost groups came to the fore in this theme regarding both similarity and difference. The reason why high-cost groups are prominent in views on similarity may be related to their status as countries that are changing and developing in terms of social life. Because vital practices find spatial correspondence.

In response to the question regarding family and kinship situations, the learners' views highlighted "similarity" with the codes 'strong family ties,' 'relaxed parenting approach,' and 'meeting on special days, holidays, and festivals.' It has been noticed that the students who responded to these codes are mostly students selected from zero-cost groups. Aydoğmuş (2018) stated in his research that the large family model is important in Turks, which plays a role in kinship terms. Demirbilek (2020) also noted that society is shaped through the family and that sincere relationships have been dominant in family structures since the Oğuz family structure. The fact that the result on "similarity" favors zero-cost groups is an expected result in the light of these studies. Regarding the "differences", the codes of 'oppressive parenting approach' and 'behavior change according to gender' are prominent. It has been noticed that the students who responded to these codes are primarily students selected from high-cost groups. Berry (1997) drew attention to the concepts of parental control and authoritarian attitude among the stress factors specific to acculturation. He stated that girls in immigrant families are exposed to more stress than boys. The prominence of high-cost groups related to difference is an understandable result from this point of view.

All students emphasized the "similarity" in the theme of attitudes towards guests. In the students' views, the codes of 'caring about the guest,' 'seeing the guest off to the door,' and 'offering treats' were dominant. It was noticed that those who responded to these codes were mostly students selected from zero-cost groups. Demirci and Bürkütbayeva (2020) also stated that Turkish hospitality and table culture have a concrete equivalent to the tradition of sharing; they emphasized that treats and gifts given to a person by Kazakh Turks express a social value. Doğan (2011) emphasized that hospitality is a characteristic feature of Turkish societies and drew attention to the traditions of hosting guests in the geography of Turkestan and Kazakhstan. This is an expected result, considering that the zero-cost groups in our research consisted of students selected from the Turkish world.

In the views of the students who answered the question about the concept of marriage, "similarity" was emphasized with the codes of 'arranged marriage/getting married by meeting and falling in love', 'the concept of dowry being similar to Turkey' and 'monogamy'. It was noticed that the students who responded to these codes were mostly from zero-cost groups. Karakelle and Özbağı (2019) touched upon the place and importance of the dowry tradition in Turkish culture and stated that although this tradition does not have a ceremonial nature as

before, it continues to exist to meet today's needs. The students also emphasized in their views that the understanding of dowry in their country is aimed at meeting the bride and groom's needs. As a result of the interviews, answers emerged that marriages are made without pressure. With regards to the "difference", the codes of 'needs being met by the groom' and 'polygamy' are dominant. In these codes, the answers of students from high-cost groups are prominent. In his research, Yılmaz (2019) stated that polygamy is considered legal under certain justifications and conditions based on Islamic law. Based on this research, it is thought that high-cost groups accept polygamy for religious reasons.

In the theme of adopted beliefs and the value given to national symbols, codes related to "similarity" came to the fore. The codes of 'similarity in forms/understanding of worship' and 'freedom of religion and belief/tolerance' dominated the students' responses. Furnham and Bochner (1982) drew particular attention to the concept of religion when classifying countries. They stated that tradition and religion shaped communication with host citizens. When determining perceptions of cultural distance, how similar/different the two cultures are in terms of religion is essential (Berry, 1997). It is thought that the responses given to the code of 'similarity of understanding of worship' reduced the distance between the students' cultures and Turkish culture. As a matter of fact, İnce-Yakar and Fedai (2022) stated in their study that Middle Eastern students stated that the most important element that brings Turkish culture and their own culture closer is religion. The 'more than one religious belief/sectarian understanding' code is dominant regarding "differences." High-cost groups emphasized that there was more than one sect in their country, while low-cost groups stressed the dominance of more than one religious belief. Yılmaz (2021) stated the Shiite sectarian understanding's political, social, economic, and cultural impact on Iran. In the responses of high-cost students, the existence and conflicts of sects such as Shia, Sunni, and Druze in Middle Eastern countries are noteworthy. In this theme, it was seen that there was a balance between low-cost and zero-cost groups regarding "similarity", while high-cost groups came to the forefront regarding "difference." The result for Middle Eastern students in the high-cost group also reveals that the result of İnce-Yakar and Fedai (2022) cannot be generalized.

In the view of the students who responded to the question on the theme of adopted traditional rituals, the codes of 'similar wedding/marriage understanding with Turkey,' 'similar death-funeral understanding with Turkey,' and 'similar birthday celebrations with Turkey' prevailed. It was noticed that the students who responded to the codes were mostly from high-cost groups. In this theme, it is thought that high-cost groups are prominent in views according to the similarity that stems from the adoption of the Islamic religion. It was observed that the tradition of giving food in both the wedding/marriage understanding and the death/funeral understanding included common answers. Sağır (2016) noted that reactions to death create commonalities between cultures and the connection between food and death. He emphasized that the understanding of giving food after the deceased conveys the message that life goes on through food during the mourning process (Sağır, 2016). A single student generally highlighted the differences. Therefore, it is thought that evaluating in terms of groups would be wrong.

The theme of behaviors shown to citizens of different countries was gathered under the category of 'behaviors toward international students.' Most students used the concepts of 'being helpful/hospitable' and 'showing respect' regarding "similarity." It was observed that the emergence of the concepts of othering and bullying in the context of "difference" negatively affected the students. Mahfud et al. (2018) and Piontkowski et al. (2002) reported that negative attitudes towards migrants are associated with greater perceived distance between host community members and migrants. Berry (1997) also supported this result and



stated that during acculturation, individuals with different cultures sometimes experience adaptation problems due to alienation. As the distance increases, both psychological and sociocultural adaptation becomes more difficult (Suanet & van de Vijver, 2009). In this theme, while low-cost groups stand out regarding “similarity”, a balance was observed between high-cost, low-cost, and zero-cost groups regarding “difference.” It is thought that this is due to the differences in students’ perceptions.

The findings based on the views of international students who learn Turkish as a second language were formed under the headings of ‘daily life,’ ‘physical, social and economic conditions,’ ‘interpersonal relations and social traditions,’ and ‘values, beliefs and attitudes.’ Under the title of “daily life”; the themes were ‘communicating with Turkish citizens’, ‘the roles of men and women in society’, ‘public holidays and activities held on holidays’, ‘food and drinks consumed’. When the cultural distance was examined in terms of “daily life,” it was seen that the high-cost groups were “different” (farther) from Turkish culture, while the low-cost and zero-cost groups were “similar” (closer) to Turkish culture.

Under the title “physical, social and economic conditions,” the themes were ‘living conditions,’ ‘comprehension of education,’ ‘houses resided in, and social places visited.’ When the cultural distance was examined in terms of “physical, social and economic conditions,” it was seen that the high-cost groups were “different” (farther) from Turkish culture, while the low-cost and zero-cost groups were “similar” (close) to Turkish culture.

Under the title “interpersonal relations and social traditions” include ‘family and kinship situations,’ ‘attitudes towards guests,’ and ‘concept of marriage.’ When analyzing the cultural distance in terms of “interpersonal relations and social traditions,” it was observed that the high-cost groups were more dissimilar (farther) from Turkish culture. On the other hand, the low-cost and zero-cost groups had a high degree of “similarity” (close) to Turkish culture.

Under the title “values, beliefs, and attitudes” include ‘value given to adopted beliefs and national symbols’, ‘traditional rituals adopted’ and ‘treatment of citizens of different countries.’ When analyzing the cultural distance in terms of “values, beliefs, and attitudes,” it becomes evident that the high-cost groups are significantly “distinct” (farther) from Turkish culture. Conversely, the low-cost and zero-cost groups strongly “resemble” (close) Turkish culture.

In conclusion, this study investigates the perceptions of cultural distance of Turkish as a second language learners and presents the perceptions of students about Turkish culture categorized according to cost groups. It is thought that the adaptation process is more difficult for students selected from high-cost groups because they are both geographically and culturally distant from Turkish society. Students may experience acculturation stress if the instructors fail to manage the relevant process. Therefore, it is recommended to create a third space between the target culture and the source culture, to give students life-oriented tasks in and out of the classroom, to organize events that introduce Turkish culture, and to provide psychosocial support to students. On the other hand, this study was carried out with a cohort of 15 international students hailing from 15 distinct nations during a restricted timeframe. Furthermore, it is necessary to undertake comparable investigations over a prolonged duration on cohorts of students representing diverse cultural backgrounds. Quantitative studies can be conducted to generalize the findings by enhancing the participant pool's variety in terms of nationality. To examine the impact of activities inside and outside the classroom on the perception of cultural distance, researchers can conduct interventional or longitudinal studies.

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Data availability: *Data are available upon requests.*