Turkish Immigrant Children's Involvement in Life in the USA

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ABSTRACT Through globalization and the gains and losses of industrialization, people move from one place to another both inside or outside their cultural boundaries. Most of these people continue their lives in the new socio-cultural environment, and thus need to adopt a new lifestyle. If they have dependents, they may also need to change other aspects of their way of life. The United States of America receives a large number of immigrants from many other countries all over the world, and the children of these immigrants represent the diverse child population in the US. This study considers the socio-cultural adaptation of Turkish immigrant children into the US society. Data concerning the viewpoints of the children themselves as well as of their teachers and parents were collected and analyzed for the study. The results obtained show that Turkish immigrant children are involved in life in the US with great success and do not have socio-cultural problems in the host society.

INTRODUCTION

The immigrant- stock population of the United States (foreign born and their US-born children) surpassed 60 million in the year 2000 as the most diverse and fastest growing child population (Zhou 1997). The way their children define themselves is significant, revealing much about their social attachments as well as their perception of belonging, and how and where they perceive themselves to "fit" in the society of which they are the newest members (Rutter and Tienta 2005: 301-302). For migrants, memories of their cultural identity give rise to strong ties with their home country (Naidu and Nzuza 2014). The Turkish population in the US is one of these immigrant groups on the rise-there are about 400-450 thousand Turkish immigrants in the US (Kaya 2003; Akçadað 2009). In addition, it is also reported that second generation Turkish Americans are much more integrated, as linguistic proficiency and cultural adaptation are less significant barriers to their participation in larger American society (Kaya 2003). These findings reflect the progressive trends of social mobility across generations, determined by educational attainment, job skills, length of stay, and rates of inter-marriage, as elaborated in numerous sociologi-

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cal studies on various immigrant groups (Zhou 1997).

Socio-cultural Adaptation in Europe Vs. America

Turks represent the largest immigrant ethnic minority in Europe, and a body of literature spanning many disciplines has burgeoned in recent years (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003). However, there are very few comparable studies on Turkish individuals or communities in North America despite the recent influx of migrants. Even among the much larger and longer established cohort of immigrants in Europe, "research on Turkish children, the specific situation of their families, and parenting cognitions as well as practices still remains scarce" (Leyendecher et al. 2006). While "there appears to be general agreement that the Turkish community is very heterogeneous with regard to acculturation and bicultural competencies," the Turkish communities are composed primarily of economic migrants coming from rural and economically depressed regions, as well as political refugees and asylum seekers (Bericht der Sachverstandigenkommission 2000). One study in Germany found that, "aside from language barriers, many Turkish parents had little or no experience with formal schooling in their own childhood and were unfamiliar with the school system" (Leyendecher et al. 2006). Furthermore, studies on the Turkish children in German schools attribute their lack of academic success as well as prevailing negative stereotypes about them to their parents' lack of schooling,

rather than to their culture of origin (Baumert 2001; Kristen 2003).

In stark contrast to these demographics, the migrants to the U.S. are more likely to be of urban origin and possess advanced degrees and professional occupations-both the most recent arrivals and the second wave immigrants (between 1950 and 1970), who were "part of an elite reared and educated in the Republic, which strongly emphasized Turkish ethnicity, secularism and modernity" (Karpat 2008). It should be noted of these relatively affluent and well educated migrant communities that, "in contrast with the first Turkish immigrants to America [Ottoman subjects arriving prior to the First World War] and to contemporary Turkish migrants in Europe, these Turks in the United States appear far more willing to adapt and live in their host country, as a substantial number struggle to obtain the miraculous 'green card'" (Karpat 2008).

Transnational dialogues between Turkish citizens and German and Turkish authorities have recently opened over, "issues not only of citizenship rights and dual nationality, but also of discrimination and social exclusion of Turkish citizens, mother-tongue teaching, and religious education" (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003). However, structural constraints and the prevalence of discriminatory view towards migrants from Turkey continue to characterize the experience of the Turkish immigrant throughout Europe (Robins 2003).

This scenario appears to be at variance with the Turkish migrant experience in the US, where there is scant historical basis for any such cultural tensions, and few people have strong preconceived notions or even basic knowledge about Turkey. From the perspective of the child in school, these varied environments must have profound qualitative and even quantitative effects on peer interaction and assertion (or lack thereof) of ethnic identity.

Socialization

The rights of a person do not emerge suddenly with adulthood (Caswell 1942). The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulated that children have rights to optimal development, learning, and protection from birth (UNICEF 1989). For today's immigrants to the United States and their offspring, the processes of adaptation and ethnogenesis unfold in an era of civil rights, affirmative action, and ethnic reviv-

als that differ in kind from those which obtained during the heyday of hegemonic Americanization in the early 20th century (Rutter and Tienta 2005).

Intercultural communication refers to the communication phenomena in which participants, different in cultural backgrounds, come into direct or indirect contact with one another (Gudykunst and Kim 1984). If communities with traditions as diverse as those Quakers, Roman Catholics, Hasidic Jews, Muslims, and Christian fundamentalists reject the premises inherent in public education, they may tend to seek out their own independent schools (Applebee 1996).

The first school is the home, and the first teacher is the mother. In recent years such movements as parent-teacher associations and child-study programs have caused educators to plan school activities with the values and needs of home life in mind, and have led teachers and parents to become partners in curriculum making (Shepherd and Ragan 1982). We become who we are, develop character and virtues of one sort or another, in the daily experience of living social settings (Beyer and Liston 1996). Culture itself affects the communicative behavior of its members (Prosser 1973). When the national and cultural boundaries are more sharply crossed, the cues and codes may be so different that the communicator has no idea of how to respond in the setting at all (Prosser 1978). Individual traditions represent dynamic, changing ways of knowing and doing (Applebee 1996). Obviously, after self-identity has first been achieved (without self-identity there can be no self-actualization) self-realization is possible at every age and in every activity, and there may be transitions in self-realizing activities in various stages of the life cycle (Krau 1989). Different genetic and environmental conditions may influence the structure of general and cognitive abilities as well as mental health at different occasions in childhood (Cooper 1997; Australian Human Rights Commission 2014). Culture and personality are concerned with certain aspects of the theory of culture process, including the intergenerational transfer of culture (enculturation or socialization), culture change and the institutionalization of models of coping with individual diversity (Wallace 1970).

Motivational Aspects

Most human learning is complex and difficult. Yet, when people are interested in some-

thing, when they believe they have a need to know, they learn with relative ease (Bertrand and Stice 2002). When people have been efficacious in their transactions with the world, they reach the point where there is the realistic determination of their abilities, limitations, and potentialities (Aronoff and Wilson 1985). Certain motivational and cognitive processes such as low self-efficacy and inefficient self-regulation may act over extended periods of time to depress intellectual functioning by reducing a person's motivation to acquire and develop specific intellectual skills (Collins and Messick 2001). Defining personality is like defining human nature. The concept of culture is at least as complicated as personality (Lee et al. 1999). Personal engagement, supportive responses, time, multiple demonstrations, a safe community, celebrations of children's successful approximations, and a teacher who trusts and values what each child is capable of doing are the key elements in a successful classroom (Bertrand and Stice 2002). Culture also determines the frame of the specific course and content of the interactions as a learning field for the child (Friedlmeier et al. 2005). Because public schooling is readily available in the US and education is accepted as the main means of socioeconomic mobility, schooling often becomes a focal point in immigrant aspirations (Ogbu 1974). American classrooms are designed around individual learning tasks and fragmented bits of information (Bertrand and Stice 2002). Reasons for immigration also have an impact on the school performance of child immigrants. According to Gibson (1997), student success in school can be impacted by the reasons for leaving its homeland, its status in the new country, the context it encounters upon arrival, the nature of resources available to the group. Also, immigrant children with strong cultural and family identities tend to outpace their American peers, because their families reinforce values of diligence and educational attainment, as studies have shown (Portes 1995; Portes and Schauffler 1994; Rumbaut 1994, 1996).

Describing a good teacher, Featherstone (1971) points out that, teachers make demands on the children, as well as on themselves. They are concerned about if the environment is stimulating enough, and they teach some things that they believe are of value.

As a teacher one is responsible for the individual development of each student. Professional expertise must be conveyed in a variety of ways if each is to grow intellectually and emotionally from the encounter (Anderson and Lapp 1988). The atmosphere of acceptance of diversity in a community plays an important role in identity conflicts in persons of mixed heritage (Ramirez 1998). If the community was to be preserved this could only be done by transforming its children. Central to this transformation was a change in the way in which students were assessed and evaluated in the classroom; a reunification of central elements of the traditional classroom in terms of culture, background,, and attitude as differences, even deficiencies, in ability and aptitude (Packer and Tappaan 2001).

Longitudinal studies have shown that while parents' socio-economic status, length of US residence, and homework hours significantly affect academic performance, controlling for these factors did not eliminate the effect of ethnicity (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Rumbaut 1995). Just as important as social class and gender in shaping the lives of children is are the cultural norms and expectations of their ethnic group. The so-called 'ethnic effect' is persistent in important explanatory variables of school success, such as belief in the payoff of schooling, attributional styles, and peer groups (Steinberg 1996). Linguistic data in particular is relevant to this line of inquiry, particularly the situational use of the native language of Turkish. A command of the parents' tongue and the desire to use it "allows immigrant children to gain access to some kind of social capital generated from a distinctive ethnic identity, such as support and control from bilingual or non-English-speaking parents and communities (Zhou 1997). Furthermore, advanced ethnic language abilities such as literacy are related to achievement because they anchor children to their traditions, their families in both countries, and their communities, reinforcing the values related to education. Immigrant youth with such strong connections do better in school than their peers, particularly when they feel supported in adopting a strategy of selective or additive acculturation (Gibson 2006).

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METHODOLOGY

The US welcomes a large population of Turkish immigrants each year, and these immigrants have varying intentions to spend the remainder or only a slice of their lives in the US. They may

be university students or academics; they may seek professional or occupational opportunities; they may be spouses of an American citizen. They may also come through a network of home-town connections, expecting wage-earning employment in Turkish-owned small businesses. Therefore they are in need of being involved in the socio-cultural life in the US. If immigrants have brought their children along or if they have had children in the US, the children may need some parental, educational, or governmental support during the adaptation process. This study seeks to determine the socio-cultural adaptation features of the Turkish immigrant children to the US society, and to offer the children, parents, teachers and the US society suggestions for adaptation and assistance based on the findings of the research.

The study is based on the research question "Do the Turkish immigrant children in the US have any socio-cultural adaptation problems?" The sub-problems of the research are related to the choice of such socio-cultural elements as friends, the daily language, TV channels, movie language, food and leisure.

In this descriptive study, qualitative and quantitative data were collected through review of literature as well as through a standard questionnaire developed by Cuéllar and Maldonado (1995) with some minor changes in the terminology (that is, Anglos will be Americans, Mexicans or Hispanics will be Turks). For the study, 40 immigrant Turkish children, their parents and teachers in the compact cities of Florida, such as Tallahassee, Tampa and Jacksonville were accessed through e-mails and phone calls, and they were invited to respond to the online questionnaire. For those who did not have Internet access some hard copies were printed out and their responses were recorded in the main online data base. Children received help from their parents. In the study, the viewpoints of the children themselves as well as of their teachers and parents were collected in a period of about eight months, and were analyzed through nonparametric tests such as percentage and frequency.

RESULTS

It was found out that there was evidence of the aforementioned "ethnic effect", as well as a syncretic relationship between the school and home identities of the children in the post-modernist sense of each individual carrying multiple identities. It was also discovered that there were indicators of a high level of biculturalism in the majority of the respondents-they do not feel themselves lost between two cultures but they live in both cultures, with a feeling of belonging to one as well as carrying the other cultural identity.

In the study, 67% of the sample children were boys while 33% are girls; 50% of them and their parents were born in Turkey or in another country and 50% of them and their parents were born in the US. They were between the ages of 7-12 and wereall elementary education students. In addition, 55% of the parents were male and 45% were female; 20% are undergraduates 80% were graduates from a university. Moreover, 33% of the teachers were male and 67% were male; 33% had five years or less professional experience and 77% had more than five years of professional experiences.

The responses of the children, the parents and the teachers were classified in four categories such as linguistic ability, social interaction, entertainment preferences and identity formation. The results were as follows:

Linguistic Ability

The rate of the children who spoke Turkish very often or extremely often is 80% whereas this rate was 100% for the English language. In addition, 90% of the children said that they enjoyed speaking English. Similarly, all of them wrote letters in English and did their thinking in English.

The parents' and the teachers' responses about the children's linguistic ability were parallel to the responses from the children. Therefore it is safe to claim that the children had a highly developed linguistic ability in English and had positive attitude towards the use of English.

Social Interaction

The rate of the children who declared that they associated with American children was 100%. This rate was 70% in terms of their contact with Turkish or Turkish-American children. From their responses it was understood that when they were growing, their friends were of Turkish origin whereas at the moment the rate of

their American friends was 90%. On the other hand, they had no prejudices about having close friends of Turkish origin.

There was also a complete consistency with the children's responses and the viewpoints of their parents and teachers about the children's social interaction. Hence, it was understood that the Turkish immigrant children had good relations with their Turkish or Turkish American friends while they also prefered to spend time with their American friends in their daily life.

Entertainment Preferences

The rate of the children who enjoyed listening to Turkish songs was 70% while it was 90% in English songs. Similarly, 88% of the children enjoyed watching American channels, 88% of them enjoyed English language movies, and 80% of them enjoyed reading in English very often or extremely often. For Turkish language these rates were 30%, 40% and 40%, respectively.

The responses from their parents and the teachers showed complete consistency with the

Table 1: The responses from the children

Questions	Responses									
	Not at all		*Very little or not very often*		*Modera- tely*		*Much or very often*		*Extre- mely often or almost always*	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
My father identifies or identified himself as "Turk".	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	97.5
My mother identifies or identified herself as "Turk".	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5	0	0	38	95.0
I like to identify myself as an American.	6	15.0	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5	32	80.0
I like to identify myself as a Turkish-American.	34	85.0	3	7.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5
I like to identify myself as a Turk.	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5	2	5	34	85.0
I have difficulty accepting some ideas held by Americans.	37	92.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting certain attitudes held by Americans.	36	90.0	3	7.5	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some behaviors exhibited by Americans.	37	92.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some values held by Americans.	38	95.0	2	5.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting certain practices and customs commonly found in some Americans.	38	95.0	2	5.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have, or think I would have, difficulty accepting Americans as close personal friends.	38	95.0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
I have difficulty accepting some ideas held by Turks.	37	92.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting certain attitudes held by Turks.	37	92.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some behaviors exhibited by Turks.	36	90.0	2	5.0	2	5.0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some values held by Turks.	38	95.0	2	5.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting certain practices and customs commonly found in some Turks.	37	92.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some ideas held by Turkish Americans.	40	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting certain attitudes held by Turkish Americans.	39	97.5	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some behaviors exhibited by Turkish Americans.	39	97.5	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting some values held by Turkish Americans.	39	97.5	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
I have difficulty accepting certain practices and customs commonly found in some Turkish Americans.	38	95.0	2	5.0	0	0	0	0	0	0

responses from the children. Therefore, it was understood that the children prefered English as the language of their entertainment activities.

Identity Formation

Similar to the rates of the responses in the linguistic ability, social interaction and entertainment preferences categories, there was complete consistency in the identity information category between the responses from the children and their parents and teachers (Table 1). Hence, we could infer that the Turkish immigrant children did not feel any socio-cultural pressure to hide or to change their Turkish identity. In addition, they understood and respected differences between Turkish and American culture. They had no difficulty in adapting American culture with their Turkish identity.

DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to investigate if the Turkish immigrant children in the US have any socio-cultural adaptation problems in terms of such socio-cultural elements as friends, the daily language, TV channels, movie language, food and leisure.

Prior studies have noted the importance of the enculturation or socialization of the immigrant children in the host society. Migrants often face particular social, economic and health disadvantages relative to the population of the host country. As mentioned in the literature review, educators feel the need of planning school activities based on the values and needs of home life, and teachers and parents collaborate in designing the curriculum.

The results of this study indicate that immigrant Turkish children, their parents and their teachers are in complete agreement about the children's successful adaptation to the social life in the US in terms of linguistic ability, social interaction, entertainment preferences and identity formation. The most interesting finding is that when they were growing, their friends were of Turkish origin whereas at the moment the rate of their American friends is 90%. They have the capacity to understand and respect differences between Turkish and American culture. Therefore there is no evidence for a risk of difficulty in adapting American culture with their Turkish identity.

This study has produced results which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous works in this field. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Thomson and Crul (2007) who found educational and labor- market status of different immigrant generations in Europe and the US. Moreover, although, the results differ from some published studies (Huntington 1993; Robins 2003), they are consistent with those of Kilinc and Granello (2003) and Pyrazli et al. (2001) in terms of providing more effective health services and educational facilities for the immigrant Turkish population in the US.

However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to all Turkish immigrants in every western society. It can thus be suggested that such researches be conducted with a larger population in different parts of the US. In addition, more number researches on this topic need to be undertaken before the association between immigrant Turkish children and their involvement in the host society is more clearly understood.

CONCLUSION

Immigrant children from flexible, social and supportive cultural contexts are unlikely to have socio-cultural adaptation problems in their host society. Even if in the environment where the dominant culture shows significant differences from their own culture, such children are unlikely to have serious involvement problems in their social or educational activities.

The data analysis of the study revealed the fact that the Turkish immigrant children in the American society in Florida State do not have difficulties in adapting the life in the US. They are the representatives of the immigrant children who are linguistically, and socially successful without any identity problems. They are enjoying all sorts of entertainment activities in the language of the host society without having to forget their native language or having to hide their cultural identity. Therefore we can assume that American education system and social interaction in Florida is quite helpful for the immigrant children to keep their original identity and to adapt the life in the US without any social or cultural barriers.

This can also be assumed as a significant chance for many other western societies to re-

consider their immigrant policy. Especially, those countries where it has been determined that immigrant children have socio-cultural adaptation problems are highly suggested to examine the educational system in the Florida state in order to create a healthy society with the involvement of the new respectful members of their society. It should be remembered that the children are the main source of our future social structure. They will become presidents, prime ministers, ministers, teachers, doctors, businessmen, engineers, architects, mechanics, salespersons, employees, and so on in many fields of working life regardless of the origin of their culture. Educational model in Florida can be a way to avoid any possible risk of social conflicts in the societies where immigrant children are observed to be resistant to integration in the dominant culture.

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