

Syrian University Students' Perceptions of the Future: The Case of Konya

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Abstract: In today's world where education has gained an international form with great speed, Turkey hosts students from different geographies and has become the center for attracting international students. In addition to the thousands of international students who come each year to Turkey of their own means, approximately 4,000 students also come to Turkey under the scope of Türkiye Scholarships for the purpose of receiving undergraduate and postgraduate education. As of 2017, of the approximately 7.2 million university students in Turkey, the total number of foreign students was 108,076. Students from Syrian come in first place at 15,042 students. When taking into account that, of the 3,400,195 Syrians residing in Turkey, 1,608,806 are under 18 years of age, Syrian university students will be seen subject to much research in the period ahead, as well as studies on Syrian university students having an important place in the literature. When viewed from this angle, Konya is located within the top ten provinces with the largest Syrian population, aside from coming at the top of the provinces that foreign students also heavily prefer. In the three universities located in Konya, two being public universities and one being a foundation university, 278 Syrian university students are found continuing their education. With respect to this, 29 Syrian university students are enrolled in the Konya Chamber of Commerce Karatay University, which is the foundation university, 145 are at Selçuk University and 104 are at Necmettin Erbakan University. In this context, our research is on revealing the future expectations Syrian university students studying at universities in Konya have on education, profession, and employment. The qualitative research method has been preferred in the research. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted in the data collection stage with a total of nine people (4 from Selçuk University, 2 from Necmettin Erbakan University, and 3 from Konya Chamber of Commerce Karatay University) in their 3rd or 4th year of study in various departments. Sampling has been achieved using the stratified sampling technique, a probability sampling method. The data obtained as a result of the research has been classified and interpreted from an analytical perspective by sorting them with respect to problem areas.

Keywords: international students • Syrian university students • education • future expectations

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When looking at the literature related to the topic, one performed study is seen to exist resembling the research problem of the current study. This study is the study Canan Erdem (2017) titled *The Future Expectations of the Syrian Youth Immigrated to Turkey: "A Case of Malatya."* My study carries the quality of being a first in terms of having a sample from Konya, which is both much preferred by international students and one of the top 10 provinces hosting Syrians. While the future expectations of Syrian students in the case of Malatya reached generalizable results using the quantitative research technique, this study attempts to examine students' perceptions of the future in depth.

When considering the uncertainty of the war in Syria and that the number of Syrian students studying at universities in Turkey comes in first place among international students, the question of what Syrian students plan to do during education and afterward awakens great interest. Therefore, our study attempts to reveal the expectations Syrian university students studying in Konya have on the issues of education, profession, and employment by seeking answers to the questions "Why have Syrian students taken Turkey for their education and what problems have they experienced in this education they've received?", "What are Syrian students' goals regarding their education?", "What do Syrian students think about the status of their profession and getting hired", and "Are the students considering returning to their country when the war is finished?". The qualitative research method has been used in the research. Sampling was achieved using the stratified sampling technique, a probability sampling method. A qualitative research has been conducted with nine Syrian students (4 from Selçuk University, 2 from Necmettin Erbakan University, and 3 from Konya Chamber of Commerce Karatay University) studying in their 3rd or 4th year in different departments. The data in the research have been collected using a semi-structured interview form. The interviews were conducted between January and May, 2018.

An analysis was attempted to be performed from the categorizations that were determined in the form of what Syrian students had encountered in the process of their education in Turkey, their goals regarding education, their profession and employment status, and what they will do after the war ends.

According to the research findings, Syrian students have difficulty understanding lessons about Turkish culture and history. Giving Syrian students these lessons by forming a program in way where they can be explained to Syrian students from the start is a possible solution to this problem. Thus, Syrian students will finish these lessons they're seeing for the first time by understanding the lessons more easily. The students find foreign language education in Turkey to be inefficient and inadequate compared to in their own countries. When considering the importance of English in today's global system and that Syrian students are also within the scope of international students, Turkey should improve itself by removing the shortcomings on the issue of

foreign language education. Most of the interviewed Syrian students have received the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities Türkiye Scholarships. These students had chosen the departments where they would be educated in Turkey from among limited options due to the province and quotas. For this reason, they were forced to choose departments they either didn't want or whose name they had never heard before. Students who had been skeptical toward and biased against their departments began to love their departments as time went by. No situation like this had been experienced in the foundation university: Those students stated receiving education in their preferred department.

If the Syrian students had been given the opportunity, they would have wanted to receive an education abroad both in terms of academics and foreign language. European countries are what most of the students preferred in this desire of theirs.

The Syrian students are considering living in Turkey after finishing their education in Turkey if the war in their country hasn't ended. The interviewed students want to continue their academic education after finishing their undergraduate education; however, more of them want to get their education abroad, stating that both work and study conditions are difficult compared to other countries. The students who stated these requests of theirs to be impossible under current conditions see the only solution for these requests of theirs is to be granted citizenship.

While the students think pessimistically about being able to do their profession and being able to become employed with regard to Turkey, they have optimistic thoughts about this topic with regard to their own country. The Syrian students do not consider returning to their country before graduating due to being unable to be sure about the political situation of their country because of war and due to the concern of the education they receive in Turkey not being accepted in this case. After graduating, they would like to return to their country but the result is connected to the state of their country.

As a result, the study has attempted to reveal Syrian students' education, profession, and employment expectations. The Syrian students in public universities and foundation universities are understood to have no sharp differences in their expectations of the future and to have similar goals and ideals. The Syrian students are seen to be more inclined to study abroad on the topic of education. The students also consider continuing their education after their undergraduate education. The situation of the war in Syria is what will determine the state of the students' professions and employment in line with their future goals and is what had previously determined their educational lives. According to the students' statements on this case, Turkey will be the place where they must live rather than the place they prefer on the issue of making their profession and being employed.

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