



## The Problems Of The International Students: Comparison Of Turkey And Belgium

**Prof. Dr. Tuğba YANPAR YELKEN**

Mersin University  
Faculty of Education  
tyanpar@gmail.com

**Kerim ÜNAL**

Mersin University  
PhD Student, Institute of Education Sciences  
kerimunal@hotmail.com

**Mesut ÖZONUR**

Mersin University  
PhD Student, Institute of Education Sciences  
ozonur@cu.edu.tr

**Halil KAMIŞLI**

Mersin University  
PhD Student, Institute of Education Sciences  
hallper77@hotmail.com

**Abstract:** Every year many International Students (ISs) go to different educational institutions via such programs as Erasmus and Socrates to improve their qualifications, explore new cultures and broaden their life experiences. However, during their stay in these institutions, the ISs have to deal with some problems. This article aimed to find out and analyse the similarities and the differences of the problems of the ISs in two different countries: Turkey and Belgium. The ISs in Turkey (23) and Belgium (58) completed an 18-item questionnaire (reliability = .94) about the problems faced in the tertiary institutions. The ISs in both countries were content with their accommodation. Moreover, the ISs stated that the ways the classes were delivered were quite similar to those in their own country. Furthermore, the ISs in both countries were found to have difficulty in understanding reading passages, responding to the teacher's questions, and participating in the class discussions.

**Key Words:** Erasmus; international students; education; Türkiye; Belgium

## Uluslararası Öğrencilerin Problemleri: Türkiye ve Belçika Karşılaştırması

**Özet:** Her yıl, birçok uluslararası öğrenci (UÖ), niteliklerini geliştirmek, yeni kültürleri keşfetmek ve hayat deneyimlerini geliştirmek için Erasmus ve Sokrates gibi programlar aracılığıyla farklı eğitim kurumlarına giderler. Fakat, bu kurumlarda kaldıkları süre boyunca, bu öğrenciler bazı problemlerle baş etmek zorunda kalırlar. Bu makalenin amacı, iki farklı ülkedeki (Türkiye ve Belçika) UÖlerin karşılaştıkları problemleri belirlemek ve benzerlikler ve farklılıklar açısından değerlendirmektir. Türkiye (23) ve Belçika'daki (58) UÖler, misafir oldukları kurumda karşılaştıkları problemleri belirlemeye yönelik 18 maddeden oluşan bir anket (güvenirlilik= .94) doldurmuşlardır. Her iki ülkedeki UÖler kaldıkları yerlerden memnun olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Ek olarak, sınıfta ders işleme yönteminin kendi ülkelerindeki ders işleme yöntemine oldukça benzediğini de vurgulamışlardır. Bununla birlikte, her iki ülkedeki UÖlerin sınıf içi tartışmalara katılmakta, öğretmenlerin sorularına cevap vermekte ve okuma parçalarını anlamakta zorlandıkları bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erasmus; uluslararası öğrenciler; eğitim; Türkiye; Belçika

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Sorbonne declaration in 1998 and the following declarations (Bologna in 1999 and Berlin in 2003 respectively) signed by the European Union (EU) Ministers of Education, there have been great improvements in the integration of Higher Education (HE) structures and practices (Goodman et al., 2007). For this integration, the EU initiated such programs as Erasmus and Socrates to support the students who wish to improve their qualifications and expertise at tertiary institutions in countries other than their own (Myburgh et al., 2002). However, not only do these International Students (ISs) benefit from those programs; they also face some problems during their stay in the tertiary institutions.

### 1.1. Literature Review

Studying and living in another country for a period of time help ISs gain many experiences (Myburgh et al., 2002). First, as well as developing their academic proficiency, they have the opportunity to explore the new culture and thus broaden their life experiences when they are exposed to these cultures and foreign places. Second, ISs have the chance to learn how to cope in all parts of life. Third, they can have the opportunity to obtain different perspectives and deeper understanding of their own lives, cultures and countries.

On the other hand, despite the benefits mentioned above, studies in this field show that ISs have to overcome many problems when they are in the tertiary institutions. The most common problems can be listed as: a) cultural differences, b) language proficiency, c) problems with native students, e) housing f) financial problems, g) academic requirements, support and involvement h) transportation, i) food and weather, and j) social support (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Sarıkaya, 2010; Myburgh et al., 2002; Goodman et al., 2008; Salvaduari, 1992; Ağbuga, 2009; Smith et al., 2007; Grayson, 2008; Yeh and Inose, 2003; McLachlan and Justice, 2009; Fritz et al., 2008). However, it is seen from these studies that the priority of the problems listed above changes depending on the country. Lazarus and Folkman (cited in Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008) consider these problems as potential stressors which affect the ISs negatively, putting them into three main factor groups: demographic, academic and social.

One of these stressors is the demographic factors which include financial and accommodation satisfaction. Ağbuga (2009) states that the Turkish ISs have great financial problems in the host country. This problem is also supported by international studies. For instance, Fritz et al. (2008) adds that because of the financial problems the ISs face, they want to work, yet they are not allowed to work outside the campus, which never help the ISs overcome their financial problems. On the other hand, Sarıkaya (2010) states that 80% of the ISs in Turkey were happy with their financial situations. As can be seen from these studies, the

economic situation of the ISs depends on the socio-economic condition of the countries they are to go. As for the accommodation satisfaction, Smith et al. (2007) states that although ISs seem to be happy with their accommodation in the host country, they experience housing problems in the first months of their stay. In addition, Ağbuga (2009) underlines in his study that the ISs have transportation problems, as well.

Another stressor is the academic factors. These factors can be the language proficiency and learning related problems. Many studies show that the ISs have deficient language skills, influencing not only their academic success but also their social interaction skills (Selvadurai, 1992; Biggs, 2006; Fritz et al., 2008; Ağbuga, 2009). Besides, a lack of language proficiency for the ISs also results in the difficulty in understanding lectures, expressing ideas and writing reports (Salvaduari, 1992). Poyrazlı and Grahame (2007) and McLachlan and Justice (2009) state in their studies that the ISs struggle to develop relationships with their teachers, advisors and professors and lacking the necessary language proficiency affects the ISs' academic success, communication and making friends. Moreover, Biggs (2006) mentions that the academic factors are not only the deficient language skills, but learning-related problems such as reliance on rote learning, passivity, teacher dependence, and lacking creativity. This is supported by the studies by Lebcir, Wells and Bond, 2008; Selvaduari, 1992 that these factors have an impact on the academic performance of the ISs because of the different teaching styles and assessment methods.

The last stressor is the social factors such as adequate supportive social networks to overcome isolation. The social support system and the quality of the system are very important for ISs because the social support system has an influence on the ISs in many ways both positively and negatively. With the help of a good social support system, the ISs can easily adopt to college environment, make friends and achieve academic success (Poyrazlı and Lopez, 2007; Grayson, 2008; Yeh and Inose, 2003). On the other hand, Grayson (2008) emphasizes that many ISs integrate into hardly any aspects of campus life and thus they receive very little social support. Such ISs may have lower academic achievement, loneliness, depression and homesickness and become sensitive to cultural differences (Keogh and Russel-Roberts, 2009; Poyrazlı and Grahame, 2007; Grayson, 2008; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

## 1.2. Purpose

In this research, it is aimed to describe the present situation of the ISs, and to find out what kind of problems the ISs face in both countries and how they solve them. In this respect, answers to the questions below are sought:

- 1) What is the present situation of the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium?

- 2) What are the problems the ISs in Turkey and Belgium face?
- 3) What do the ISs in Turkey and Belgium suggest for the solutions to the problems they encounter?
- 4) Are there any differences between the present situations of the ISs, the problems they encounter and the suggestions for the solutions to those of the ISs in Turkey and Belgium?

## 2. METHOD

This is a descriptive study as it is aimed to bring out the present situation of the ISs, and to find out the possible problems and suggestions for the solution to those problems and whether they are different in these countries: Turkey and Belgium.

### 2.1. Participants

23 ISs from the universities (Mersin University and Çukurova University) in Turkey – the reason why this number is lower is because there are not many Erasmus students – and 58 ISs from two campuses (Tielt, Torhout) of Katho University in Belgium participated in the study. 41 of the ISs taking part in the study from the Katho University in Belgium are female; 17, male. Moreover, the number of the female ISs joining the study from the universities in Turkey is 12 ; male, 10. One of the ISs in Turkey didn't answer this question.

56 of the ISs taking part in the study in Belgium are single and one of them is married. One IS in Belgium did not respond to this question. All of the ISs in Turkey are single.

The ISs who joined the study in Belgium were from Bulgaria (10), Spain (7), Turkey (7), Germany (5), Finland (4), Poland (4), France (3), Holland (3), the Czech Republic (3), Romania (3), Cyprus (2), Austria (2), Portugal (1), Latvia (1), Equator (1), Russia (1) and Mexico (1). The ISs who came to the universities in Turkey were from the Czech Republic (9), Romania (4), Slovakia (3), Spain (2), and Germany (1), Denmark (1), Italy (1) and Belgium (1).

### 2.2. Data Collection

A questionnaire was used in the study. As a result of research and revision, the items of the questionnaire were prepared by the researchers. The opinion of an expert in the field about whether the items were appropriate was requested. In line with the feedback of the expert, the items of the questionnaire were revised. The questionnaire was sent to the ISs in Mersin and Çukurova University, Turkey via e-mail. However, since a few of the ISs replied to the e-mail and filled in the questionnaire, the questionnaire was handed in the ISs personally and collected

right away. The ISs in Belgium, on the other hand, filled in the questionnaire during one of the “Global Issues” classes delivered by a guest lecturer in Belgium.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

A statistical program was used to analyze the data from the questionnaire to find out the frequency and percentage values of the data. “Qualitative Content Analysis” was used for the data obtained from the open-ended items in the questionnaire and the data were analyzed in three phases. These phases are 1) defining the categories, 2) giving the samples, and 3) defining the codification rules beforehand (Mayring, 1996). This analysis was performed by two experts. The experts individually named the open-ended items as a theme and the responses to these themes as sub-themes. After the categorization, the experts identified the themes they agree upon and the ones they disagree on and the consistency ratio was identified. This ratio was calculated by using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) reliability formula (Reliability Formula = (number of agreements / (total number of agreements + disagreement)) and the result was found as 0,94.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

There were 18 items in the questionnaire besides the demographic questions. These questions and the demographic questions were analysed in three categories mentioned before: Demographics Stressors, Academic Stressors, and Social Stressors.

### 3.1. Demographic Stressors

The first Stressor is demographic stressors which include accommodation and financial factors. The items of the questionnaire related to accommodation were about where the ISs were staying in the host country, how long they have been in the country and whether they are satisfied with their accommodation.

**Table 1: Accommodation of the ISs.**

Countries	Place				Length of Residence				Satisfaction															
	House		Flat		Dormitory		Youth Hostel		0-3 months		4-6 months		7-9 months		10-12 months		Very Dissatisfied		Average		Satisfied		Very Satisfied	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>Turkey</b>			6	26	16	70			2	8	5	21	10	43	5	21	1	4	3	13	10	44	8	35
<b>Belgium</b>	34	59	9	16	13	22	1	2	2	4	55	96			1	2			21	36	25	43	12	21

As can be seen from the Table 1, while the ISs in Belgium were staying in houses, apartments, dormitories and youth hostels, the ISs in Turkey were staying either in apartments or in dormitories. The reason why the number of ISs staying in the dormitories in Turkey is

higher can be said that the universities usually provide dormitories which are either in the university campus or nearby. However, in Belgium, the reason why the number of the ISs staying in houses is higher is thought that those houses can be used like a dormitory and there is an opportunity for an IS to stay in the house with many other ISs.

The ISs were asked a demographic question related to this item, which was about the length of their residence in the host country. According to the findings, while most of the ISs in Katho University were in Belgium for 5 months and most of the ISs in Mersin and Çukurova University were in Turkey for more than 6 months. It is found that the ISs in Turkey stayed in the tertiary institution longer than those in Belgium.

As for whether the ISs were satisfied with their accommodation in the host country, the ISs both in Turkey and in Belgium are seen to be generally satisfied with their accommodation. The ISs in Turkey can be said to be satisfied with their accommodation in the dormitories because the dormitories mostly are in the university campus or nearby and reliable, thus providing a lot of opportunities for social interaction. Since the houses rented by ISs in Belgium have good facilities, it is thought that the ISs were generally satisfied with their accommodation in Belgium. In his studies, Yağcı (2007) also found similar results concerning the accommodation of ISs.

Secondly, the items related to financial support of the questionnaire were about how they provided their financial support and whether they are satisfied with their financial support.

**Table 2: Financial support of the ISs.**

Countries	Financial Support								Satisfaction																	
	Erasmus Grant		Family Support		Government Grant		My Own Savings		Student Scholarship	Private Resources		I don't Know	National Agency		I work	Very Dissatisfied		Dissatisfied	Average		Satisfied	Very Satisfied				
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		f	%		f	%		f	%		f	%			f	%	f	%
<b>Turkey</b>	10	43	7	30	3	13	3	13		1	4			3	13		4	17	14	61	3	13				
<b>Belgium</b>	43	74	16	28	6	10	6	10	5	9	2	4	3	5	2	4	4	7	11	19	15	26	22	38	2	4

As can be seen in the table 2, the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium had their financial support mainly from the Erasmus grants. Besides, these students also had other income means such as the money their families sent, government grants and their own savings to live on during their stay in the host country. When the Erasmus budget allotted to the countries is considered to differ from country to country, it may not be surprising that the ISs had their financial support

from multiple resources. Furthermore, it can be thought that the monetary value of Euro over the currencies of other countries can affect this situation.

It can be said that the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium were generally content with their financial situation. The reason why the ISs in Turkey were satisfied with their financial situation can be explained by the fact that the monetary value of Euro is higher than that of Turkish Lira. As for the situation in Belgium, that the budget has a standard level can be said to put forth different financial situation satisfaction for each individual. Yağcı (2007) found that most of the ISs were satisfied with their financial support during their stay in the tertiary institutions.

### 3.2. Academic Stressors

The second stressor is the academic stressors that can be the language proficiency and language related problems. The medium of the instruction in the tertiary institutions was the fifth item asked to the ISs (Table 3). It can be seen that the medium of instruction of the ISs in Turkey and Belgium is English. The reason why English is preferred can be thought that English is one of the most widely spoken languages all over the world.

**Table 3: Medium of instruction**

Medium of Instruction	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Only English	52	90	19	83
English and Dutch	4	7		
English, German and Dutch	1	2		
Turkish			1	4
Turkish and English			1	4
Turkish and German			1	4
English and Spanish	1	2		

The sixth item the ISs were asked was about how the lessons were delivered in the tertiary institutions. According to the findings, it is found that the ISs in Belgium were doing more practice during the classes and besides this, the teachers in the tertiary institutions in Belgium preferred formal teaching and the students did presentations. Some students emphasized this by writing “*teacher lectures → little participation and interaction (teacher-centred), some workshops, presentations, discussions → more student-centred (we do arts, drama, dancing, rhythms,...)*”. On the other hand, it is clear that formal teaching and discussion techniques were used in the classes by the teachers in the tertiary institutions in Turkey. The reason why the lessons are delivered differently in both countries can be said to be due to the educational facilities and the content of the classes in both countries. Furthermore, teacher factor can be thought to be one of the reasons which affect the way the classes are delivered differently.



**Table 4: How the lessons were delivered.**

How are the lessons delivered?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Practice	13	22	1	4
Teacher-Centred (Formal Teaching)	9	16	6	26
Student Presentations	9	16		
Discussion Technique	8	14	5	22
Projects	4	7		
Group Work	3	5		
PowerPoint Presentation	1	2	2	9
Homework	2	4		
Game Method	1	2		
Seminars			1	4
Study Trips	1	2		
Individual Book Study			1	4

There were two sub-questions related to this item in the questionnaire. One was about whether the ways the lessons were delivered in the host country were similar to those in their own country.

**Table 5: Similarity of how the lessons were delivered in both countries.**

Are the ways the lessons are delivered in the host country similar to those in your country?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Yes	40	69	15	65
No	18	31	7	30

As can be seen in Table 5, the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium stated that the ways the lessons were delivered in the host country are mostly similar to those in their own countries. The reason for this may be the fact that the countries in Europe are trying to establish educational unity throughout Europe. The other sub-question was about what kind of differences there were in the way the classes were delivered. As can be seen in Table 5 above, only % 30 of the ISs in Turkey and Belgium stated that the classes in the tertiary institutions were different from those in their own countries. Below are some of the statements these ISs noted down:

- *In Finland teaching / lectures are more interactive*
- *In my country we focus more on theory, here it was easy for me because interactive*
- *Here is better because in my country we concentrate mainly on the theoretical part*
- *Here more presentations and more students' participation is expected*
- *We don't have to attend theoretical lessons, we have more practical lessons. The lessons are also longer*
- *Turkish universities are more like schools in Germany than like universities*



**Table 6: What the students thought about the teachers in the host country.**

What can you say about the teachers in the host country?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Friendly and Helpful	15	26	12	52
Good	11	19	9	39
Nice	8	14	2	9
Well-educated	8	14	3	13
Understanding	3	5	1	4
Open-minded	3	5		
Prepared	2	4	1	4
Dynamic	1	2		
Hospitable	1	2		
Do more repetitions	1	2		
Interesting	1	2	1	4
Compulsive	1	2	2	9
Must encourage the students to think	1	2		
Arrogant	1	2		
Sometimes inconsiderate	1	2		

The seventh item the ISs were asked was about what they thought about the teachers in the host country. The results indicated that the ISs had the idea that the teachers working at the universities in Turkey and Belgium were generally friendly and helpful. Other studies also indicated that the ISs had similar opinions about the teachers (Yağcı, 2007). In fact, when it is thought that the teachers should have the counsellor role regarding the humanity perspective in the new teaching and learning approaches, it can be normal to have such similar results. Chen (1996) also stated in her study that the teachers should be helpful and supportive for the adaptation of the ISs in the tertiary institutions.

Some questions in the questionnaire were related to what is going on in the classroom and the results are given in Table 7. The ISs were asked whether they had any difficulty in understanding the reading texts in the tertiary institutions, which was the eighth item in the questionnaire.

**Table 7: Various academic problems the ISs have**

The ISs have difficulty in	Belgium					Türkiye														
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always										
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%										
Reading	15	26	25	43	14	24	1	2	1	2	3	13	7	30	7	30	3	13	2	9
Understanding the lectures in class	17	29	29	50	8	14	2	4			7	30	4	17	8	35	1	4	2	9
Responding to the questions of the teacher	12	21	28	48	18	31					6	26	3	13	7	30	3	13	1	4
Joining the class discussions	15	26	21	36	17	29	4	7	1	2	5	22	6	26	6	26	2	9	1	4
Adopting the education system	27	47	20	35	10	17	1	2			4	17	7	30	6	26	3	13		

When the findings of this question were analysed, the ISs both in Turkey and in Belgium seldom had difficulty in understanding the reading texts, the reason of which could be

attributed to the idea that the teachers chose reading passages according to the levels of the students.

The ninth item was about whether they had any difficulty in understanding the lectures in the tertiary institutions. While the ISs in Belgium seldom had difficulty in understanding the lectures, the ISs in Turkey sometimes had trouble in understanding the lectures. This can be attributed to the idea that either the lectures were in the native language of the host country or the teachers may not have sufficient language proficiency. One of the ISs in Turkey pointed out in the questionnaire that “...*There are some very good teachers, but most of them doesn't speak very good English, ...*” In some other studies, it was also found that the ISs faced problems in understanding the lectures (Sawir, 2009).

The tenth item which the ISs were asked was about whether they had any difficulty in responding to the questions of the teachers in the tertiary institutions. As can be seen in Table 7 above, although most of the ISs in Belgium rarely had difficulty in responding to the questions of the teachers, the ISs in Turkey sometimes faced this problem. It is thought that the language proficiency level of the teachers resulted in such problems.

The eleventh item asked to the ISs was about whether they had hard times joining the class discussions in the tertiary institutions. It is clearly seen from the findings that the ISs generally had hard times taking part in the class discussions in the tertiary institutions.

The ISs were asked whether they had difficulty in adopting the education system in the tertiary institutions in the twelfth item of the questionnaire. As can be seen from the table above, the ISs have no difficulty in adopting the education system in Belgium while the ISs in Turkey have more adaptation problems to the education system than those in Belgium.

### 3.3. Social Factors

The last stressor is the social factors such as adequate supportive social networks to overcome isolation. The fourteenth item was about whether the tertiary institutions provide social activities for the ISs to take part in.

**Table 8: Whether the tertiary institutions offer any social activities for the ISs.**

Do the tertiary institutions offer any social activities for the ISs to join?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Often	34	59	7	30
Sometimes	9	16	6	26
Always	9	16	3	13
Rarely	4	7	1	4
Never			2	9

As can be seen from the table above, the universities both in Turkey and Belgium mostly offered some social activities for the ISs to participate in and the activities the universities offered are listed in the following table.

**Table 9: What kind of activities the universities offered for the ISs.**

Social Activities offered by the tertiary institutions	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Country and city trips	27	47	10	44
Sports activities	12	21	10	44
Parties	15	26		
Meeting with the host students and local people	7	12	1	4
Cultural activities	6	10	1	4
Dancing courses	1	2	3	13
Meetings	4	7		
Museum excursions	2	4		
Conferences			3	13
Theatres			2	9
Attending Dutch courses	1	2		
Photography Course			1	4
Mountaineering			1	4
Exhibitions	1	2		
Cinema Club			1	4
Fairs	1	2		
Cocktails	1	2	1	4
Festivals			1	4
Music courses			1	4

As can be seen from the table above, the universities both in Turkey and Belgium mostly offer country and city trips and sports activities for the ISs. Apart from these activities, the universities also offer the following activities: parties, meeting with the host students and local people, cultural activities, dancing courses, meetings, museum excursions, conferences, theatres, photography course, mountaineering, exhibitions, cinema club, fairs, cocktails, festivals, and music courses. Within the Erasmus programme, the universities aim to create common European consciousness and provide inter-cultural interaction in addition to their educational goals. It is thought that the universities try to fulfil this mission via such activities.

**Table 10: Whether the universities fulfil the ISs' expectations.**

Does the university in the host country fulfil your expectations?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Often	31	54	13	57
Sometimes	14	24	3	13
Rarely	7	12	2	9
Always	4	7	1	4

The ISs were asked whether the university in the host country fulfil their expectations in the fifteenth item and the frequency table to the responses was shown in Table 19 above. The results showed that the universities, in which the ISs were enrolled, in Turkey and Belgium

fulfilled the ISs' expectations. In other studies, it was also seen that the universities in the host countries fulfilled the ISs' expectations (Yağcı, 2007).

**Table 11: Whether the ISs had emotional distress.**

Have you ever had emotional distress?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Never	22	38	3	13
Rarely	16	28	12	52
Sometimes	15	26	5	22
Often	3	5		

The sixteenth item in the questionnaire was about whether the ISs had any emotional distress and the frequency table to the responses was shown in Table 20 above. As can be seen from the results, the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium sometimes had emotional distress. The next question in the same item was about what kind of emotional distress the ISs had in the host country and the ISs were asked to write down these emotional distresses and the frequency table to the responses was given below.

**Table 12: What kind of emotional distress the ISs had in the host country.**

Experienced emotional distress	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Longing for the family and friends	5	9	3	13
Longing for the country	3	5	1	4
Loneliness	3	5		
Disappointment	1	2		
Having problems with the tertiary institution when determining the subject of the study	1	2		
Problems with the residence permit	1	2		
Disrespectful behaviour of some teachers in the tertiary institutions	1	2		
Compulsory attendance			1	4
Lack of communication			2	9
Too detailed lessons	1	2	1	4
Lack of Internet connection			1	4
Exams			1	4
Having stress when preparing the presentations			1	4

As can be seen from the table above, the main emotional distress the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium had was that they longed for their families and friends. Besides, the ISs in Belgium emphasised the following emotional distresses respectively: longing for the country, loneliness, disappointment, having problems with the tertiary institution when determining the subject of the study, problems with the residence permit, disrespectful behaviour of some teachers in the tertiary institutions, and having too detailed lessons. In addition to them, the ISs in Turkey highlighted such emotional distresses as longing for the home, compulsory attendance, lack of communication, having too detailed lessons, lack of Internet connection, exams, and having stress when preparing the presentations. Other studies also showed similar results (Chen, 1996; Poyrazlı and Lopez, M.D., 2007; Fritz et al., 2008; Sarıkaya, 2010).

The seventeenth item was about which students they preferred to come together in the host country.

**Table 13: Which students the ISs preferred to come together.**

Which students do you prefer to come together?	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
I prefer to come together with the students who come from other countries	39	67	18	78
I prefer to come together with the students from my own country	15	26	3	13

As can be seen from the results, the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium preferred to come together with the students from other countries. The ISs were also asked, in the same item, the reasons why they come together with the students from other countries and the frequency table to the responses was shown below.

**Table 14: Reasons for the ISs to come together with the ISs from other countries.**

The reasons why they prefer to come together with the students from other countries	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
To get to know different cultures	13	22	2	9
To assist language development	6	10	1	4
To set up new friendships with foreigners	2	4		

According to the results in the table above, the first reason why the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium preferred to come together with the students from other countries is that they wanted to get to know different cultures. Besides, the ISs in Belgium thought that coming together and staying with students from other countries helped them develop their language and set up new friendships with foreigners. Yağcı (2007) found in his study that the ISs see the Erasmus programme as a language development programme. Also, this shows that there is similarity between the results for the ISs in Turkey and those in Belgium.

However, there were some ISs who preferred to come together with the students from their own country. The following frequency table showed the responses of those ISs.

**Table 15: Reasons for the ISs to come together and stay with the ISs from their own country.**

The reasons why they come together with the students from their own country	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Easy to communicate	2	4	3	13
Insincerity of the Erasmus students	1	2		

As can be seen from the results, the reasons why the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium preferred the students from their own country are that they found it easy to communicate with these students and that they were of the opinion that the Erasmus students were insincere.

### 3.4. Problems the ISs face and suggestions they provide

The item thirteen was about what kind of problems they faced in the host country. The ISs were asked to write down the problems they faced in addition to the ones discussed above and the frequency table to the responses was shown below.

**Table 16: What kind of problems they faced in the host country.**

The problems the ISs have faced	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
<b>Demographic Stressors</b>				
Language problem	5	9	6	26
Accommodation Problems	2	4	2	9
Financial Problems	2	4		
Weather	1	2		
Transportation difficulty	1	2		
Heating problems	1	2		
Safety of the rooms			1	4
<b>Academic Stressors</b>				
Too much homework	5	9		
Compulsory Attendance	1	2	2	9
That the education is based on application	2	4		
Plenty of Group Work and Presentations	1	2		
That the lessons are delivered fast	1	2		
No opportunity to practice			1	4
That the computers have inadequate software and hardware			1	4
Visa and the Final Exams are forgotten			1	4
Having to fulfil the required credit of the lessons	1	2		
Too detailed lessons	1	2		
Punctuality problems			1	4
<b>Social Stressors</b>				
Visa Problems	1	2		
Bound to get permission constantly	1	2		
That the students from the same country don't stay together	1	2		
That the Erasmus students are not introduced to each other	1	2		
More waste of time			1	4
No response to our mails			1	4
Timetable was not on the Internet			1	4
Not fulfilling the promises	1	2		
Difficulty in contacting with the people in the International Office	1	2		
Insufficient electronic devices			1	4

As can be seen from the table above, the most common problem the ISs in Turkey and Belgium faced was the language related problems. Another common problem for the ISs in Belgium was that they were given too much homework. Besides these problems, the ISs in Belgium also faced many other problems such as accommodation, finance, weather, transportation, heating, visa, and permission. It can also be said that these ISs in Belgium had academic-related problems like compulsory attendance, having to do group work, too many

presentations and application-based education. Besides, that the ISs from the same country could not stay together, that the lessons were delivered fast and that the ISs were not introduced to one another at the initial stage of their stay were other problems emphasized by the ISs in Belgium. Furthermore, when the responses given to this item were analysed, it can be easily seen that the ISs in Turkey had accommodation and compulsory attendance problems as the ISs in Belgium did. But, the ISs in Turkey had somewhat different problems than those in Belgium. That they had no opportunity to practice what they had learned, that the computers lacked updated hardware and software and that the ISs saw the program in the tertiary institution waste of time were considered as problems by the ISs in Turkey (Trice 2001; Nicholson, 2001; Fatima, 2001; Zhai, 2002; Chen, 1996; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Sarıkaya, 2010; Goodman et al., 2008; Ağbuga, 2009; Smith et al., 2007; Grayson, 2008; McLachlan and Justice, 2009; Fritz et al., 2008). Furthermore, the ISs in Belgium shed light into the problems such as having to fulfil the required credit of the lessons, not fulfilling the promises, and difficulty in contacting with the people in the International Office, which were different from the problems they mentioned previously. However, the ISs in Turkey put emphasis on such problems as insufficient electronic devices, safety of the rooms and punctuality.

The ISs were asked to write down what their suggestions were to overcome these problems they faced in the host country.

**Table 17: The ISs' suggestions to overcome the problems they faced.**

Suggestions to Overcome the Problems	Belgium		Turkey	
	f	%	f	%
Improving the foreign language	3	5	3	13
Decreasing the amount of homework	4	7		
Providing confidence among students	1	2		
Residence permit should be given	1	2		
Cultural differences should be taken into consideration	1	2		
Having a thorough knowledge of the host country beforehand			2	9
Fulfilling the promises given	1	2		
Getting used to the situation	1	2		
Providing more time for essays and diaries	1	2		
Financial support from my own university	1	2		
Gathering the ISs from different universities together	1	2	1	4
Merely doing what is told	1	2	1	4
Breaking the ice among the ISs by group work activities when the ISs first come to the host country	1	2		
Doing more discussion activities	1	2	1	4
Speaking English more often			1	4
Providing enough computers with updated software and hardware			1	4
Giving instructions about the daily life	1	2		
Being paid attention			1	4
Having the Erasmus students come together more often in other occasions rather than only in parties	1	2	1	4



When the findings were analysed, the most important suggestion for the solution to the problems the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium faced was to improve the foreign language. Next, the ISs put emphasis on the following suggestions respectively: decreasing the amount of homework, providing confidence among students, residence permit should be given, cultural differences should be taken into consideration, having a thorough knowledge of the host country beforehand, fulfilling the promises given, getting used to the situation, providing more time for essays and diaries, financial support from their own university, gathering the ISs from different universities together, merely doing what is told, breaking the ice among the ISs by group work activities when the ISs first come to the host country and doing more discussion activities. On the other hand, the ISs in Turkey had different suggestions to overcome the problems they faced. These suggestions are as follows: having a thorough knowledge of the host country beforehand, gathering the ISs from different universities together, merely doing what is told, doing more discussion activities, speaking English more often and providing enough computers with updated software and hardware. In addition, the ISs in Belgium wanted to have instructions about the everyday life such as recycling, opening hours of the shops and practical things. The ISs in Belgium thought that this would save time if someone explained in advance. Yet, the ISs in Turkey wanted to be paid more attention. A striking example for this was what an IS wrote: *“it would be great sometimes if we got a phone call asking how we are doing, from both countries!! I have been in the hospital and had an operation here, and the coordinator still doesn't know that!”*. Besides, the ISs in both countries stated that the tertiary institutions should have the Erasmus students come together more often in other occasions rather than only in parties.

#### 4. Results

The ISs in Belgium mostly stayed in houses; the ISs in Turkey, in dormitories, and they were content with their accommodation. Besides, the length of the ISs' stay in Turkey and Belgium varied. It was also found that the ISs both in Turkey and Belgium used Erasmus funds as financial support and they were happy with this situation. In addition, it was uncovered that the medium of education was mostly English, that the teachers in Belgium focused on practice in the lessons, and that the teachers in Turkey usually preferred the teacher-centred classes. Moreover, the ISs stated that the ways the classes were delivered were quite similar to those in their own country and that the teachers in Turkey and Belgium were friendly and helpful.

Furthermore, it was found that the ISs in Turkey and Belgium often had difficulty in understanding reading passages and the lessons, responding to the teacher's questions, and

participating in the class discussions. It was also seen from the results that the ISs had hard times adapting to the education system in the host country.

As for the problems the ISs encountered, it was seen that language was the most common problem the ISs in Turkey and Belgium had to deal with and the ISs suggested that they develop their language skills to overcome this difficulty. Another problem stated by the ISs in Belgium was that they were given too much homework and the amount of the homework should be decreased. The other problems given by the ISs in Turkey were accommodation and compulsory attendance to the classes. Similarly, the ISs in Turkey and Belgium sometimes had emotional distresses, the most common of which was that they long for their families and friends.

The universities in Turkey and Belgium often carried out social activities for the ISs. Country and city trips and sports activities were the most common ones. It was also found that the universities both in Turkey and Belgium fulfilled the ISs' expectations to some extent. Furthermore, the ISs in Turkey and Belgium usually preferred to come together with the students from other countries in order that they could be acquainted with other cultures. In contrast, some ISs indicated that they wanted to come together with the students from their own country because they found it easy to communicate with them.

Apart from the problems the ISs mentioned previously, the ISs in Belgium stated that they encountered such problems as having to fulfil the required credit of the lessons, not fulfilling the promises, and difficulty in contacting with the people in the International Office. Unlike the ISs in Belgium, the ISs in Turkey emphasized such problems as insufficient electronic devices, safety of the rooms and punctuality.

When the suggestions of the ISs for the solutions to the problems they faced were considered, the ISs in Belgium wanted to have instructions about the daily life, and the ISs in Turkey wished to be paid more attention. The ISs in both countries stated that the tertiary institutions should have the Erasmus students come together more often in other occasions rather than only in parties.

#### **4.1. Suggestions**

(1) It would be useful if the accommodation for the ISs were provided by the host universities and this would also help decrease the financial problems they encounter.

(2) By planning the activities offered by the universities in advance and handing in the schedules of the activities to the ISs, the ISs can spend their time fruitfully.

(3) If the universities which send their students to tertiary institutions provide detailed information about the host university, the host city and the host country itself, this will help the ISs be more aware of what they will encounter in the host country.

(4) It is important that the ISs fulfil the necessary requirements for the language to be used in the tertiary institutions. Thus, such potential problems as failing to understand the lessons, being unable to take part in the class discussions, and being unable to communicate with the teachers and other students would be somewhat avoided.

(5) By fulfilling the requirements of the Bologna Agreement immediately, the universities in Turkey should be aligned with the European universities; therefore, the students will have less adaptation problems when they are sent to the tertiary institutions in Europe.

## References

- Ağbuga, B. (2009). Problems of Confronting College Turkish Students in an American University. *E-Journal of New World Sciences Academy*, 4, 33-50.
- Biggs, J. (2006). Teaching for Quality Learning at University. *The Cromwell Press, GB*.
- Chen, S. (1996). Learning Multiculturalism from the Experience of International Students: The Experience of International Students in a Teacher Training Program, American Educational Research Association, New York.
- Fatima, N. (2001). International Female Graduate Students' Perceptions of Their Adjustment Experiences and Coping Strategies at an Urban Research University, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle.
- Fritz, M.V., Chin D. et al. (2008). Stressors, Anxiety, Acculturation and Adjustment among International and North American Students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, 244-259.
- Goodman, B., Jones, R. et al. (2008). An Exploratory Survey of Spanish and English Nursing Students' Views on Studying or Working Abroad. *Nurse Education Today*, 28, 378-84.
- Grayson, J.P. (2008). The Experiences and Outcomes of Domestic and International Students at four Canadian Universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 27, 215-30.
- Keogh, J. and Russel-Roberts, E. (2009). Exchange Programs and Student Mobility: Meeting Student's Expectations or an Expensive Holiday?. *Nurse Education Today*, 29, 108-16.
- Khawaja, G. N. and Dempsey, J. (2007). Psychological Distress in International University Students: An Australian Study. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counseling*. 17, 13-27.
- Khawaja, G. N. and Dempsey, J. (2008). A Comparison of International and Domestic Tertiary Students in Australia. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counseling*. 18, 30-46.
- Lebcir, R.M., Wells, H. et al. (2008). Factors affecting academic performance of international students in project management courses: A case study from a British Post 92 University. *International Journal of Project Management*, 26, 268-74.
- Mayring, Ph. (1996). Einführung in die qualitativer Sozialforschung. Eine Anleitung zu qualitativem Denken (3. Auflage). Weinheim: Psychologie Verlags Union.

- McLachlan, D.A. & Justice J. (2009). A Grounded Theory of International Student Well-being. *The Journal of Theory Construction & Testing*, 13, 27-32.
- Myburgh, C.P.H., Niehaus, L. et al. (2002). International Learners' Experiences and Coping Mechanisms within a Culturally Diverse Context. *Education*, 123, 107-29.
- Nicholson, M. (2001). Adaptation of Asian Students to American Culture.
- Poyrazlı, S. & Lopez, M.D. (2007). An Exploratory Study of Perceived Discrimination and Homesickness: A Comparison of International Students and American Students. *The Journal of Psychology*, 141 (3), 263–80.
- Sarıkaya, N. (2010). A Study on the Erasmus Students' Expectations and Perceptions of the Sakarya University. Retrieved May 04, 2010, from <http://mevzuatdergisi.com/2010/02a/01.htm>
- Selvadurai, R. (1992). Problems faced by international students in American Colleges and Universities. *Community Review*, 12, 27-32.
- Smith, S., Forbes-Mewett, H., et al. (2007). The Right to Adequate Housing in the Context of International Education. *Australian International Educational Conference*. [www.idp.com/aiec](http://www.idp.com/aiec)
- Sawir, E. (2009). Language Difficulties of International Students in Australia: The Effects of Prior Learning Experience, *International Education Journal*, v6 n5 p567-80.
- Trice, A. (2001). Faculty Perceptions of Graduate International Students: The Benefits and Challenges, Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Richmond.
- Yağcı, E., Ekinci, E., et al. (2007). Yurt Dışına Giden Hacettepe Üniversitesi Erasmus Öğrencilerinin Memnuniyet Düzeyleri, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 33: 229-39.
- Yeh, C.J. and Inose, M. (2003). International Students' reported English Fluency, Social Support Satisfaction, and Social Connectedness as Predictors of Acculturative Stress. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 16, 15-28.
- Zhai, L. (2002). Studying International Students: Adjustment Issues and Social Support.