



A Relational Integration Study: African Immigrant Students in Ankara

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Abstract

The research presented in this article addresses the limited opportunities for immigrants in Türkiye, and specifically African students, to integrate into society. Therefore, the main research question was “How can the relational integration of some African higher education students living in Ankara be achieved?” The aims of this article, or the questions it attempts to answer, are as follows: 1) What are the reasons students choose higher education in Türkiye? 2) What are the main difficulties students experience? 3) What strategies do they develop to solve these issues? 4) What are their future plans? 5) Can the “Relational Integration Model” be an alternative for students’ inclusion and integration into society? Data collected through interviews were analyzed using “Grounded Theory Methodology”, first using open and then axial coding. The findings, presented through figures, revealed that immigrant students are stigmatized and excluded from society. However, they also demonstrated that they succeeded in staying in Türkiye by developing various strategies. While the research highlights the importance of relational sociological analyses, it also demonstrates that much more progress needs to be made in relational integration. In this context, it has become clear that the social, cultural, and class inequalities prevalent in Türkiye also impact the inclusion and exclusion of students.

Subject Areas

Culture, Sociology

Keywords

Relational Sociology, Relational Integration, Grounded Theory Methodology, African Students, Migration, Türkiye

1. Introduction

It is a social, economic, and cultural reality that millions of people worldwide ex-

perience population mobility through voluntary or involuntary migration. Türkiye, located on migration routes, hosts people from 190 different nations. According to 2020-2021 data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there are 6.1 million migrants in Türkiye [1]. In fact, projections that the current number of migrants worldwide, currently 215 million, will exceed 400 million by 2050 are quite alarming. As some sociological theories attempt to explain, migration stems primarily from global and local inequalities and is related to migrants' individual, cultural, social, and economic capital, as well as structural factors such as development [2]-[5]. According to United Nations statistics, the number of people taking risks to migrate for hope has increased in recent years, with one in every 33 people having a migrant background [6]. While some of these movements are undoubtedly for better education, health, and economic well-being, the majority are driven by compelling reasons such as racism and political conflict, climate change, drought, and famine. Many social scientists, particularly [7] and [8], argue that international migration, particularly undocumented and irregular forms, is detrimental to migrants [9]. As a matter of fact, single, insecure, low-wage immigrants, and especially women, created by neoliberal policies, are turning into a global reserve army of labor and are forced to do jobs they do not want [10]. As [11] stated, this situation is a necessary and inherent condition for the capitalist system and is fed by the colonial mentality, and it does not seem possible for it to disappear in the near future [12]-[14].

On the other hand, the United Nations' International Organization for Migration (IOM; [15]) reported that more than 72,000 people have lost their lives on migration routes worldwide in the last 10 years, with the greatest loss of life occurring when migrants from countries experiencing humanitarian crises such as war and famine resort to risky routes because they have no other options.

In fact, it is clear that people forced to migrate because they no longer have safe or viable living opportunities in their countries due to insecurity, lack of opportunities, and other pressures are risking their lives in this process. Unfortunately, creating safer, legal, and regular routes for forced migrants worldwide does not seem possible in the near future.

According to a 2024 United Nations Report, more than 52,000 people lost their lives while trying to flee one of the countries designated by the UN as a crisis zone. According to the report, the Mediterranean is, unfortunately, the world's deadliest migration route. Of the approximately 25,000 total casualties in the last 10 years, nearly half are known to have been those attempting to flee from post-war Libya via the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the UN reports a record undetermined number of African migrants missing while crossing the Sahara Desert.

On the other hand, it's always possible that the actual number of casualties is much higher. Most of these movements, whether crossing the desert or attempting to cross the sea, occur without documentation or witnesses. The loss of life, especially in war zones, is undoubtedly far higher than what's recorded. For example, it's known that more than 5000 Afghans have lost their lives in the last decade,

following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. It's also a fact that this number has increased further because Türkiye, under a special agreement with the USA, has turned a blind eye to the tens of thousands of Afghan migrants arriving via Iran by not strictly controlling its borders [16].

1.1. Africans in Türkiye

Between 2012 and 2021, approximately 50,000 African migrants were apprehended in Turkish Gendarmerie Regions. However, it should be noted that the number of those who remain unapprehended is also quite high [17]. Besides Afro-Turks, descendants of those who came to Anatolia during the Ottoman period and whose number is around 20 - 25,000. According to official records, some of the numerous Africans currently living in Türkiye as migrants also live in Ankara. In addition to factors such as drought and hunger, which generally increase in parallel with climate change, the intense racist political pressures and resulting conflict in some countries are also driving Africans to seek new opportunities. In fact, many Africans migrate abroad for economic reasons such as finding employment and work, as well as for better education and professional development. According to international statistics, 2.9 million of them are seeking better life opportunities, particularly in South Africa. The number of African migrants in Türkiye exceeds one million, 70% of whom live in Istanbul. That is why this metropolitan city of ours has been nicknamed Black Istanbul [18].

African students, on the other hand, ostensibly come to Türkiye for educational purposes, but many of them dream of going to Europe or Canada rather than returning later. In fact, for many migrants, Türkiye is a transit country rather than a destination [19]. In fact, some recent articles have begun to discuss the disadvantages of these issues for Türkiye [20].

Some studies on Africans are based on more macroeconomic analyses. These studies primarily discuss migration from Africa using global statistical data [21] [22]. More micro-level studies are based on scientific assessments of specific African countries. For example, in addition to some academic theses on Senegal [23], Somalia [24], Gambia [25], reports on Türkiye-Ethiopia relations have been published by the African Researchers Association (AFAM) [26], and on Türkiye-Rwanda Political Relations and Türkiye-Sudan Political Relations by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye [27].

Additionally, analyses of films such as *The Bus* (1974), *The Door* (1974), and *40 m² Germany*, which examine migration in Turkish cinema, have explored sociological issues such as East-West dichotomies and alienation [28]. In addition to this, a qualitative study conducted by [29] with Cameroonian immigrants, as well as a study titled "Africans in Istanbul" [30], which develops the concept of "everyday racism," another study on gender inequality and racism faced by Ugandan female immigrants [31], and studies that examine the issue of "exclusion" encountered in Istanbul, where the majority of African immigrants live, in comparison with immigrants from Türkiye and Sub-Saharan Africa [32], are noteworthy.

thy. While not overtly racist, the issue of “Black people in Türkiye” has also been addressed, and the reasons for the injustices they face have been explored [33].

It should also be emphasized that there is a substantial body of literature on the return of migrants in Türkiye [34]-[37]. This issue is undoubtedly of great public concern because it concerns Syrian forced migrants under temporary protection in Türkiye, who, according to official figures, number more than three and a half million [38]. Furthermore, the significant impact of the earthquake in Türkiye in 2023 on Syrian refugees further enhances the importance of studies on them [39].

This article is about international students in general, and African students in particular, and their integration into Turkish society, enabling them to complete their education in harmony, comfort, and peace, as well as to plan for the future. Therefore, it is closely linked to the internationalization policies of higher education in Türkiye. Indeed, starting with the 10th Development Plan, Türkiye has been encouraged to increase the proportion of international students in higher education institutions. This issue is crucial for achieving an estimated one billion dollars in revenue and Türkiye’s integration with the world [40]. In fact, the number of students, which was 250,000 in 2023, has now reached 350,000. Many state universities (such as Ankara, Istanbul, METU, Hacettepe, Dokuz Eylül University, Selçuk University, and Turgut Özal University) and private foundation universities (such as Başkent University, Kadir Has University, Altınbaş University, and Beykent University) are internationalizing in the name of fulfilling Bolognaization criteria and promoting diversity [41].

In fact, studies on international students in Türkiye are scarce. One such study is the perception of immigration among university students conducted in Istanbul and Şırnak [42]. A study on the impact of the problems faced by students, the majority of whom are Syrian, at Mersin University, where the largest concentration of international students is located, can be cited [43]. There is also another study demonstrating the areas of integration and conflict among Syrian students in higher education [44].

More than 60,000 of the 350,000 international students from 198 countries studying in Türkiye are African. Karabük University, which ranks among the top universities in this regard, provides education to 12,000 African students. In fact, very few studies directly concern African higher education students. However, an exceptional study can be cited regarding the feelings, thoughts, and problems experienced by African students in Karabük, their future plans and expectations, and their relationship with the city [45]. It is also worth noting that academics working in education faculties at various universities in Türkiye have extensively studied the adaptation and academic success problems of international students [35] [46]-[50].

1.2. Relational Integration

Relational integration is the most important concept in this article. In her article, “Relational Integration: From Integrating Migrants to Integrating Social Rela-

tions,” [51] attempts to respond to the ubiquitous debates surrounding the use of the concept of integration in migration studies. She argues that the challenging use of integration as a concept primarily describing how people adapt after migration actually conceals certain normative assumptions that are detrimental to immigrants. As we frequently encounter in the literature [52], integration is generally measured by how similar immigrants are to the “majority society” in economic, political, social, and cultural terms. Within this framework, integration is not only viewed as a “positive” phenomenon but also creates an expectation that immigrants should adapt to the majority society [53]. However, this expectation is open to criticism for two main reasons. First, it is unrealistic because there is often no clear standard to which to conform. Secondly, while it portrays society as an immutable norm, it also defines non-integrated immigrants as deviants from this norm, leading to an undesirable situation. In this context, two fundamental alternatives can be considered: The first is to completely reject the concept of integration because it excludes immigrants. The other is to render the concept neutral and analytical, that is, to purge it of value judgments.

In fact, [54] not content with these two options, makes a significant contribution by proposing a third approach. This approach, which we can call “Ameliorative Conceptual Engineering,” allows us to rethink the concept of integration. In other words, rather than rejecting the concept entirely, she seeks to define it in a more egalitarian, inclusive, and innovative manner. Thus, she assumes that rather than viewing immigrants solely as parties requiring integration, it is more realistic to consider it as a process involving everyone in society. Her approach to integration as a concept to be applied in the fight against social inequalities is highly innovative.

On the other hand, [51] develops a concept she calls Relational Integration. According to her, to achieve integration, social hierarchies must first be eliminated. This approach is fundamentally based on the philosophy of relational egalitarianism [55] [56]. On the other hand, it views integration problems as a subcategory arising from unequal relations within society. According to her, social isolation, hierarchies, and the unequal distribution of resources in society often lead to integration problems [57]. In this context, rather than solely focusing on the adaptation of immigrants to the society they migrate to, it is necessary to investigate the unequal relations among all members of society. This constitutes a major challenge to the traditional concept of integration.

Immigrants are normally considered subordinate members, both in their daily interactions within society and in their interactions with official institutions [58]. Therefore, the integration process prioritizes the elimination of social inequalities. This essentially means examining integration as a means of solving problems that arise within social relations, rather than viewing it as a normative goal.

Ameliorative Conceptual Engineering: According to those who advocate for the complete rejection of integration, the first of the integration strategies, integration is actually used as a tool to control and oppress immigrants [51]. The discourse

called “civic integrationism” is particularly criticized. This approach is inappropriate because it attempts to discipline immigrants under the pretext of protecting the values of the majority society. The second group is those who seek to neutralize integration. They define integration as “the process of becoming an accepted part of a society.” However, completely freeing oneself from normative assumptions without taking sides is certainly not possible [59]-[62].

Klarenbeek [51] does not find it appropriate to abandon the concept of integration entirely, preferring to change its meaning and use it as a tool for analyzing inequalities. She argues that alternative concepts such as inclusion or assimilation may not be as broad-ranging as integration. Furthermore, not using the concept at all can make it even more difficult for these issues to be addressed and examined in both public and academic circles. With these assumptions, the concept of integration is further developed when examining social inequalities and hierarchies. Thus, integration is defined as a concept that goes beyond simply the integration of immigrants into the majority and instead focuses on the analysis of inequalities inherent in the host society. Here, Klarenbeek [51] cleverly demonstrates that, rather than focusing on what perfect justice looks like, a better approach is to focus on how to reduce injustice.

In summary, instead of creating an ideal social model, she explains her approach to addressing existing integration-related problems as follows: First, it is impossible to find a single ideal “integration model.” This is because societies may differ in their demographic structures, cultural and religious diversity, and historical inequalities. Second, once the problem is defined, solutions can emerge. This essentially means that how an integration problem is approached relationally determines who is responsible and how it can be solved [51].

Therefore, defining integration problems in detail and clearly can lead to faster roadmaps for solutions. At the core of these lies the Relational Integration Problem. The starting point of her proposed ameliorative conceptual engineering approach is structural inequalities. These inequalities are not limited to economic differences. They can also include political, religious, and cultural differences. Therefore, she does not believe it is accurate to define the integration problem as “immigrants trying to become equal to the established population.” Viewing this integration as a one-way process means accepting immigrants as “individuals trying to rise within the established society.” Therefore, expecting immigrants to adapt to the existing unequal system is not an appropriate approach [51].

2. Research Design

This subsection covers the research problem, objectives, significance, limitations, and methodological information.

While immigrants generally maintain their unique values and attitudes, they require both time and appropriate environmental conditions to socialize within the new society they have arrived in [62] [63]. Increasing and sustaining this harmony is possible, above all, through communication and interaction and sociali-

zation environments where both parties can get to know each other. Unfortunately, like most immigrants, international students are often subjected to exclusion by the wider society. Exclusion can naturally lead to closure and, consequently, isolation from society. In this regard, there are studies demonstrating the formation of “ethnic urban islands,” particularly in Ankara. It should be noted that ethnic islands are used interchangeably with “ghettoization.” For example, Syrians are concentrated in specific neighborhoods of Ankara, such as Altındağ and Önder, while Africans are clustered in the Eserler neighborhood of Keçiören [65]. The problem focused on in this research is that immigrants in general, and international students in particular, such as African students, have very limited opportunities to integrate into society.

Research Questions:

Based on this, the sub-problems of this research are as follows:

- 1) What are the reasons students choose Türkiye?
- 2) What are the main problems students experience?
- 3) What are the students’ future plans?
- 4) Can the relational integration model be an alternative for students’ inclusion and integration into society?

3. Significance and Limitations

It should also be noted that the study was conducted in light of the researcher’s experience gained from previous international student studies [65] [66].

This article, as part of a larger study, relies solely on qualitative data obtained from African higher education students living in Ankara. Furthermore, no comparisons were made based on gender or other ethnic characteristics of the participants. The primary rationale for this is the study’s attempt to adhere to the principles of a relational sociological approach, which rejects essentialism and dichotomies, focuses on ambiguities, and prioritizes liminal situations and turning points [67] [68].

This study is based on information obtained from African students who came to Türkiye voluntarily as students but were subjected to discrimination and exclusion, rather than from Africans working in Istanbul, most of whom came to Türkiye illegally.

4. Methodology

This study has several methodological features. The first is that it is a qualitative research [69]-[72]. It should also be noted that the qualitative data analyses were conducted according to the principles of “grounded theory methodology” [73]-[76].

Grounded theory methodology is a modeling study in which theory generation is attempted by understanding and explaining a number of previously unknown phenomena by considering their interrelationships based on data collected from the field. In grounded theory, categories are created by systematically coding the

data first through “open” and then through “axial” coding. Furthermore, one of the most important principles is that analysis and synthesis are planned concurrently to avoid missing data. Because grounded theory relies on data collected from the field, unlike the classical theory approach, it makes participants’ preferences and experiences more visible, starting from the bottom up. Then, by making constant comparisons, the collected data is presented through figures. This makes the participants’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to the problem under investigation more understandable and interpretable during the research process. Furthermore, writing a narrative is a preferred method for understanding the participants’ cultures through metaphors.

Because communication is crucial for participants from different cultures, especially languages, to understand each other, the research was conducted in a relational sociological approach, also known in the literature as the “sociology of translation” [68] [77] [78]. In other words, the emergence of metaphors used to describe similar topics and problems through grounded theory is particularly important in this research, as it enhances communication and, undoubtedly, sustainability between the parties.

A total of 10 African students from different countries (Nigeria, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Rwanda, Sudan) and different gender (female and male) participated in the study. While most of the students study social and administrative sciences, only one of them studies pharmacy. The fact that the sample was selected “intersectionally” [79], representing students with diverse backgrounds, is considered important because it enhances its representativeness. This is also consistent with the theoretical framework of relational sociology, which is based on translation. Similarly, efforts were made to overcome macro-micro dichotomies such as structure and individual [80] [81]. Reflexiveness was also employed. In particular, the researcher tried to understand the problems experienced by the students she interviewed by empathizing. Since she was working on a project to reduce the exclusions they were exposed to for various reasons, she considered it important to increase the number of environments that would create opportunities for both the local people and the students to get to know each other better. It should also be emphasized that this study was conducted in accordance with the principles of “Relational Sociology.” In this context, some of the most frequently used concepts in relational sociological research, such as “uncertainties,” “turning points,” and “liminalities,” were also occasionally used [67] [68].

In the study, students were selected using “purposive” and “theoretical” sampling [75] using “snowball” sampling. Despite having a broader dataset of African students, the article reports on interviews with 10 students who provided a variety of responses. In other words, after the saturation point was reached, when unique and diverse responses were no longer forthcoming, data from only 10 students was included.

The study, which was conducted with the approval of the Başkent University Ethics Committee, involved interviews with African students studying at various

universities in Ankara. One-third of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the other half via email. It should be noted that although some email data were more detailed and comprehensive, they were not different in content and all students participated in the research sincerely.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Open Coding (Analysis)

In this section, open coding was first conducted in four subsections, followed by axial coding. As previously mentioned, data were collected using grounded theory methodology, while also attempting to analyze the data through constant comparisons. In fact, as part of the analysis, both field notes and figures were continuously drawn to fill in missing information. Furthermore, because open coding facilitated analysis and axial coding facilitated synthesis, executing both simultaneously provided significant advantages. Similarly, just as tables contribute to the reader's understanding of quantitative research, presentation through figures is invaluable in qualitative research, as they serve to meticulously present data.

The research questions were discussed under four main headings in the order specified in the research questions.

5.1.1. Reasons for Coming to Türkiye

The primary reasons for coming to Türkiye for the interviewed African students were the war in their country, political and ideological oppression, longing for democracy, scholarship opportunities provided by the Republic of Türkiye, better education and professional development, the opportunity to serve as a transit zone for some European countries, not being a colonial country like France and the US, the experience and solidarity of previous arrivals, a shared Islamic culture, and the reduction of distances thanks to artificial intelligence, the internet, and smartphones (see **Figure 1**).

P1. "The conditions in my country are very poor; in other words, my needs for food, clothing, shelter, employment, and security are almost completely unmet."

P2. "The quality of education in my country is very low. Teachers do not come to school. They work in four or five schools simultaneously. Education in my country is constantly protested because the state does not value education."

P3. "There are government scholarships from the Republic of Türkiye. We also find opportunities to work illegally. We manage both."

P4. "I'm in Türkiye to get to know a new country and people and gain new experiences."

P5. "I came here thanks to social networks, namely, acquaintances who had previously immigrated to Türkiye. I'm in Türkiye because I didn't have any housing problems at the beginning."

P6. "Because it's a Muslim country, my family felt more comfortable sending me. They sent me safely to Türkiye, especially to prevent me from getting into alcohol, drugs, and bad habits."

P7. “After arriving as a tourist and becoming illegally employed, the opportunity to work and earn money also led us to Türkiye.”

P8. “Immigrating to Türkiye raises our status, and I can say I’ve become a hero in my country. Because Türkiye isn’t a colonialist country like Europe and America.”

P9. “I chose Türkiye because my applications to other countries were rejected. It’s a privilege to study at high-quality, well-established, and highly qualified higher education institutions.”

P10. “Artificial intelligence and Android phones, I can say, shorten distances.”



Figure 1. Reasons for choosing Türkiye.

5.1.2. Problems Experienced in Türkiye

Problems experienced in Türkiye include cultural issues such as language and dietary habits, geographical issues such as climate differences, economic issues such as scholarships, employment, and livelihoods, political issues such as housing and xenophobia, labeling and social exclusion, alienation from the education system, police oppression, living in enclaves of ethnic minorities, and social isolation. The inability to frequently visit one’s homeland leads to homesickness. Many of these problems largely parallel previous research findings, with the exception of academic achievement [35] [45]-[47] [49] [50]. It should be noted that our study did not yield any significant findings regarding student academic failure. This may be due primarily to the quality of educational institutions in the capital, Ankara. As a metropolitan city, Ankara’s problems manifest as social exclusion and security pressures, as well as economic ones (see **Figure 2**).

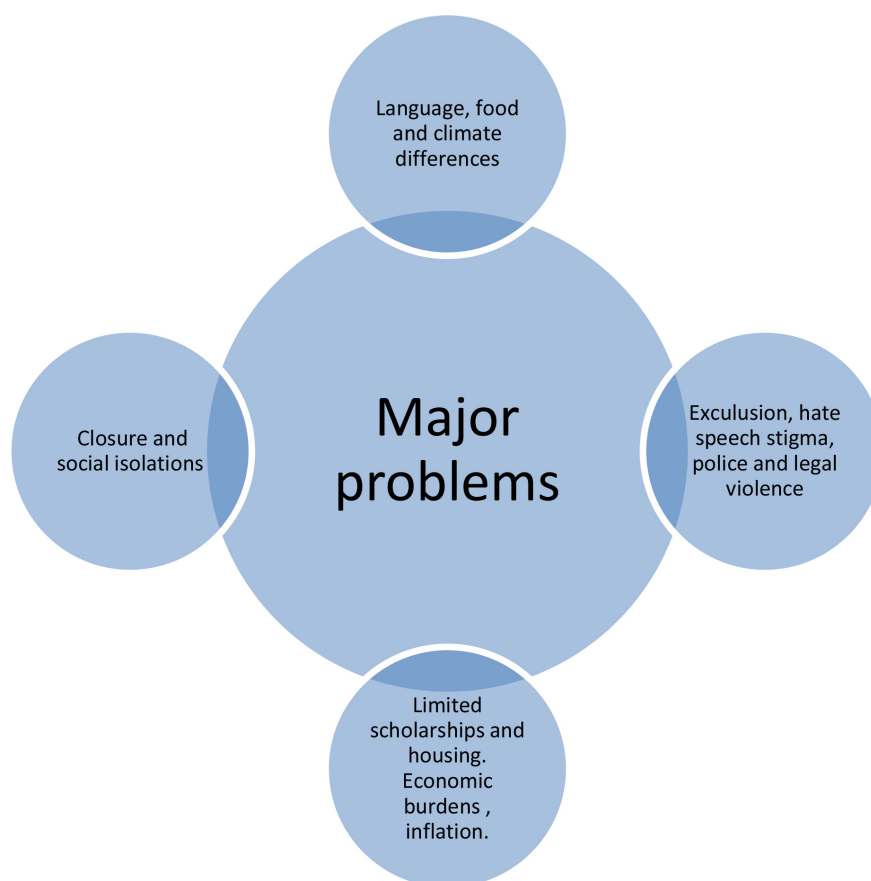


Figure 2. Major problems experienced by immigrant students in Türkiye.

P1. "High inflation and the economic crisis make student life difficult. Many students struggle to cover housing, food, and transportation expenses."

P2. "Finding affordable housing is a major challenge, especially in major cities like Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Public dormitories are limited, and rents for private dormitories are generally very high."

P3. "Insecurity after internships and graduation: As a foreign student, finding an internship is difficult, and there's also uncertainty about finding a job after graduation."

P4. "The most significant problems I've experienced in Türkiye are the language, food, and weather. I come from a tropical country, so we don't experience winter. The food is also very different, and learning the language was a bit challenging."

P5. "One of the biggest challenges I faced when I first arrived in Türkiye was the language barrier. Understanding and expressing myself in Turkish was quite difficult at first. Although I've tried to improve my language skills over time, I still struggle with some complex issues."

P6. "Discrimination, racism. Hate speech, and labels. Nicknames given based on skin color, such as "Arab sister," "Arab nanny," "Arab girl." Labels like "n-gro," "black," "slave," and "daylight lantern." While not always, it happens occa-

sionally, and it really bothers me.”

P7. “The most significant problem I’ve experienced in Türkiye is discrimination.” Discrimination, in particular, has profound negative effects on students’ development, adaptation, health, psychosocial life, educational and academic standing.”

P8: “I’ve lived in Türkiye for four years, and one of the most significant problems I’ve experienced so far has been the disrespectful police stopping me on the street. Of course, we know that security measures must be taken for the security of the country. However, when police check the identity of foreigners, I believe they should treat them like human beings, not as if every foreigner were a fugitive. Police actions, in particular, negatively impact the perception of many foreigners about Turks.”

5.1.3. Strategies Developed to Solve Problems

1) Relevant institutions should organize awareness training programs for citizens about international students, especially African students. 2) Misinformation about international African students should be corrected. 3) Accurate information about international African students should be disseminated on social media to break down prejudices (see **Figure 3**).

P8. “I’ve started avoiding police stations to solve this problem because sometimes they’d stop me and steal 30 minutes of my time, and even once, even when I showed my ID, they took me to the police station. They took me away because they didn’t have a device to check foreigners’ IDs. I’m a student here, and my documents are completely legal, and I study here. Even though I’m subjected to this kind of treatment, I get a bad impression and feel upset. However, we’re still trying to strengthen our resilience by sharing our problems through social media.”

P1. “To overcome the language barrier, I tried to make Turkish friends and practiced understanding everyday conversations better. I also expanded my social circle by participating in social activities and university clubs. This allowed me to become more familiar with Turkish culture and express myself more easily.

P2. “During bureaucratic processes, I received support from the university’s international student office and my friends. Asking for help from people around me online, instead of trying to solve problems on my own, made my job easier.” At the same time, I tried to turn the challenges I faced into opportunities. Living in a different country gave me both independence and problem-solving skills. In fact, we all benefit greatly from digital networks and social media here.

P3: “I think the solution to the economic problem is to get a scholarship and, on top of that, to work or receive support. Working without permission is prohibited. As for the solution to the second problem, you need to improve yourself, because these language courses don’t teach you everything; they teach most of the basics and a few things. The rest you have to figure out yourself, through reading, watching movies, and practicing. Thanks to the internet, I can keep in touch with my family and not only not forget my native language but also learn Turkish.”

P5. “As for the racism problem, I think it’s necessary to raise some awareness among the Turkish people on this issue.

P6. “Solving the discrimination problem can be possible through collaboration across various fields. These areas are: health, social services, media, education, cultural services, and economic services.”

P7. “I always make sure I’m properly covered to cope with the weather, which is very cold compared to Africa. I have my favorite foods and my favorite foods, so when I don’t want to eat dormitory food, I order food from American or Asian restaurants. I learned the language at a Turkish language school, but I still try to practice it with my roommates and some classmates.”

P8. “If universities could help international students find internships after graduation, it would be very advantageous for them.”

P9. “If international students had access to state dormitories, I think it would solve a lot of their financial problems.”

P10. “I talk to my family very often thanks to my mobile phones. I can say that we use communication networks here very extensively through WhatsApp groups, and this makes us feel better.”

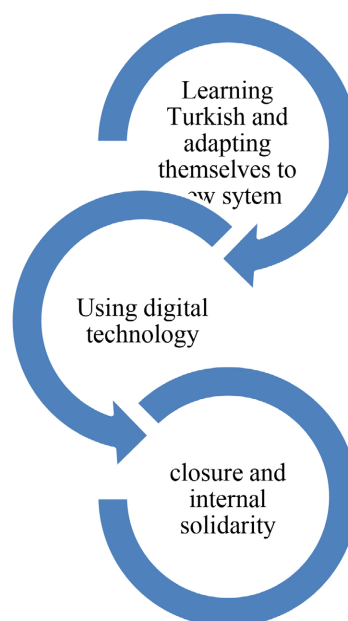


Figure 3. Process of coping strategies.

5.1.4. Future Plans

It can be said that students differ in their future plans. However, the important thing is that they do not feel a radical separation from their country. While they desire self-improvement and prosperity in the short term, they always plan to return to their country to serve in the long term. They undoubtedly desire to return to their homeland when the conditions that led to their departure improve (see **Figure 4**).

P1. “I want to return to my country and do good work. I learned many things

here, and I want to apply them to my country.”

P2. “Actually, my education in Türkiye ended in 2022. Afterward, I returned to my country and continued my work life. However, with the outbreak of war in 2023, I returned here because Türkiye was my second homeland. After returning, I enrolled in university to improve myself and am currently continuing my education. I plan to return to my country after the war ends.”

P3. “I’m currently studying administration and want to work in international trade or humanitarian aid after graduation. I believe the experience I gained in Türkiye will greatly contribute to my career. In the future, I aim to participate in projects that can build bridges between Africa and the Middle East. I want to work in areas where both trade and humanitarian aid are intertwined because I believe these two fields can benefit people.”

P5. “After graduation, I’m planning to start my career in Türkiye or another country. In the long run, I want to pursue entrepreneurship in my own country and establish an internationally operating business. This way, I can contribute to my country and utilize the international experience I’ve gained.”

P6. “Right now, I’m trying to take it one step at a time. Hopefully, I’ll finish my undergraduate degree this semester, and then I’m planning to pursue a master’s degree. I’ll apply to a few universities, including those abroad. Then I’ll see which one is more suitable. But I don’t plan to study in those countries without a scholarship. After my master’s degree, I’m thinking of returning to my home country and starting my own business.”

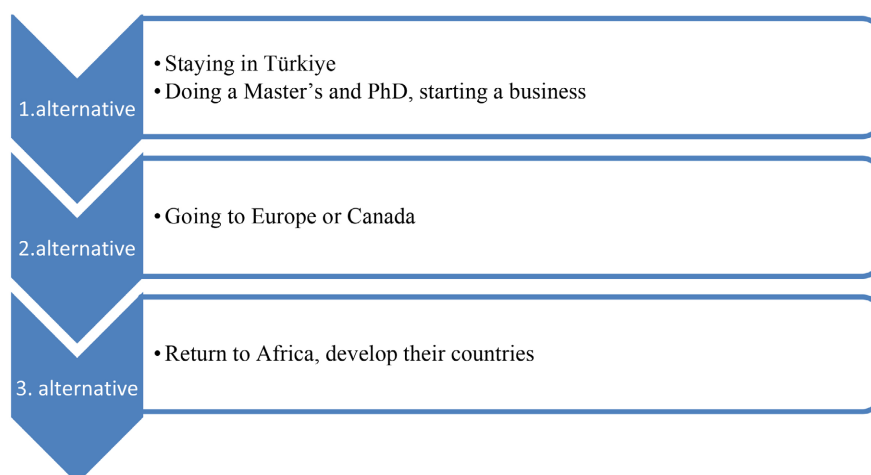


Figure 4. Future plans of students.

5.2. Axial Coding

In the study, time and space were analyzed together in a relational sociological way. Africa represents the pre-immigration period, Türkiye represents the current period, and migration to a third country represents the future. These axes were designed to align with the research objectives. The students’ home environment (past), the problems they currently face in Türkiye (present), and their future

plans are all interconnected. Furthermore, because relational integration aims to increase the well-being and happiness of both students and the local population, it crosses all axes diagonally (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Axial coding (past-present-future).

Africa (past)	Türkiye (present)	Third Country (Future)
The poor	Population is crowded	Finding a job
Insufficient educational opportunities	Unemployment and poverty are high	Rights, freedoms, democracy.
War and terror	Xenophobia is high. Labelling is common: Arabnanny, Arab sister, black, daylight etc.	Social security
Democracy and freedoms are limited	Türkiye receives a lot of migration.	Economic security
They have different languages	Health system is inadequate.	Selective acceptance of educated and professional immigrations. (there is discrimination among immigrants)
They have different climates	Education system is politicalall wasted	High risk immigration (high deaths rates).
They have traditional extended family structure	One-man regime, no democracy.	Unqualified immigrants to Türkiye to be sent back. Acceptance Agreement was made.
They have Islamic cultural heritage (Mulim identity)	No rights, justice and law.	The bottlenecks of world economies are increasing.
Kolonyal geçmişlere They have colonial paste. With this past memory they do not want to go USA and France.	Legal violence (police pressure) is high.	There are racist immigration policies. While accepting white women immigrants from Ukraine, they reject Syrians.
They have different eating habits	Corruption is high.	The USA is increasing sanctions. They are sending illegal immigrants the prison island.
They have different future expectations.	Gender inequality is high	Borders are tightly protected.

This study reached two core concepts, as shown at the ends of the axes in the axial table. This isn't always the case, and generally, if a negative core concept is reached, it's sufficient. However, in this study, two core concepts, one positive and one negative, emerged, increasing the depth of the research. This is because advancing technological opportunities have inevitably begun to make a difference in students' lives. Mobile phones and social media platforms positively impact students' lives. This situation is, in fact, an undeniable reality for everyone:

- 1) Exclusion (negative)
- 2) Utilizing digital opportunities (positive)

Unlike positivist methods, grounded theory methodology allows for the creation of a narrative using cultural motifs, or metaphors, as a result of the research.

The story of this study is that student immigrants are, in general, the rare and valuable “black pearls” of the African continent. They are also Türkiye’s misunderstood guests. Metaphors such as “innocent children” who are currently crawling but will soon stand up and walk can be used to describe them.

6. Conclusions

As mentioned in previous sections, this study has demonstrated that the uncertainties and liminal situations demonstrated in numerous studies by White [68] and Kasapoglu [69] are also commonly experienced by African students. The findings can be summarized in three groups:

- 1) Liminal situations and their examples (both students and immigrants, voluntary and forced migration are simultaneously present. (Figure 5 and Figure 6).
- 2) Analysis as a process (students observe a process leading to closure and solidarity among themselves) (Figure 3).
- 3) Uncertainties (Africa-Türkiye-migration to a third country; Table 1).

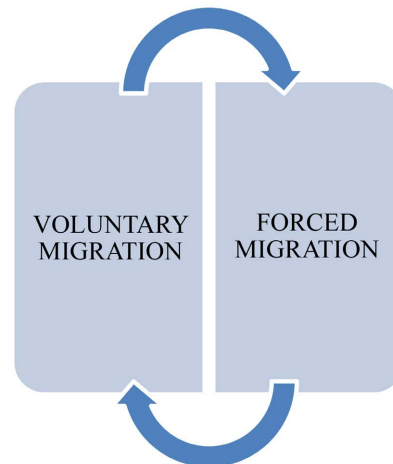


Figure 5. Liminality samples.

Suggestions:



Figure 6. Suggestions for relational integration.

As is well known, addressing integration problems within the framework of relational inequality is not just about distributive equality [51]. It’s more about how these goods and services are distributed, who is included in the distribution process, and who is excluded. Relational inequality arises when certain individuals or groups are placed in higher or lower positions within society and can increase over

time. This discrimination, particularly among African and Syrian immigrant students, is experienced by many of them as a form of relational inequality. Unfortunately, they can actually be defined within the framework of Young's [79] five basic forms of oppression (see **Table 2**).

Table 2. Forms of oppression.

Five basic forms of oppression	Explanations
Exploitation	Resources distributed unequally
Marginalization	Some groups are excluded from the system and decision making processes
Demeaning	Certain groups are viewed as culturally or socially inferior
Dominance	One group controls another
Violence	Oppression is exerted through physical or symbolic violence

Relational integration is a concept that reveals whether inequalities arising in the context of immigration create higher and lower status groups. These inequalities aren't merely mental concepts; rather, they're embodied through social boundaries constructed by society. As Klarenbeek [51] points out, these social boundaries also determine individuals' access to opportunities and their positioning within society. The concept of relational integration is important because it deals not only with whether immigrants resemble the majority society but also with how relations of oppression and domination operate within society. This is actually closely related to the issues emphasized by African students living in Türkiye. They are not entirely wrong in their demand that Turkish society be educated to be more aware of foreigners. In fact, the real problem is undoubtedly the high structural inequalities within Türkiye's own population.

Suggestions that ensure relational integration are extremely important, as clearly illustrated in **Figure 7**. This process calls for both society itself and all those subsequently included through migration to stand closer together and respect one another (see **Figure 7**).

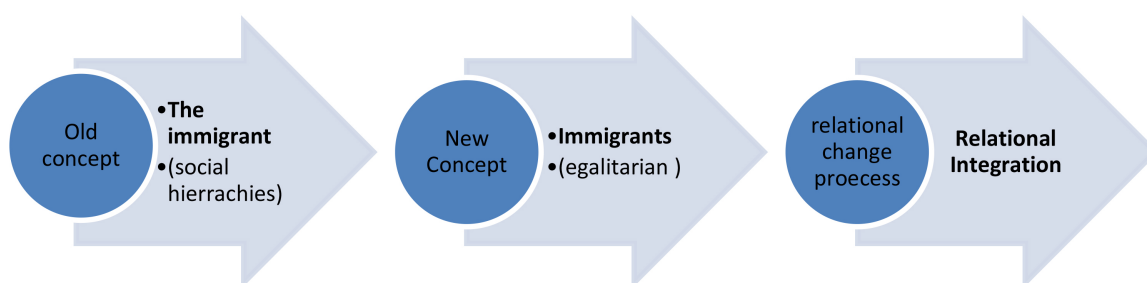


Figure 7. Conceptual transformation process [51].

1) All members of society should have equal social status. 2) All individuals should have equal opportunities. 3) Political participation should be equal. 4) All individuals should have the right to criticize the system. 5) Legal citizenship is necessary but not sufficient for integration.

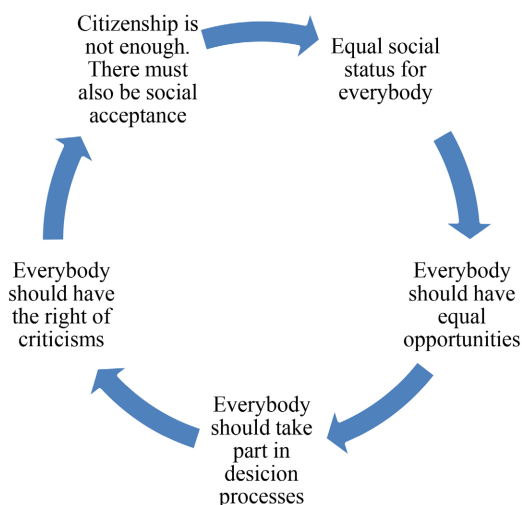


Figure 8. Suggestions for relational integration.

In summary, although there are some studies on the integration of students in higher education [80] [81], “relational integration” should be achieved not only for immigrant students but for the entire population living in Türkiye. While this may seem utopian at the moment, unless it is achieved, inequalities will deepen in all areas and negatively impact the prosperity, happiness, and development of everyone who wants to live together (see **Figure 8**).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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