



## Free Time and Leisure Activities of West African International Students in Turkey: Between Integration and Identity Withdrawal

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### **Abstract**

Leisure occupies a prominent place in the practices of daily life. Especially for international students who have a routine in their own country, their daily life habits may change or be interrupted due to economic, psychological, social and cultural reasons when they travel to other countries. It's in this perspective, the present study focused on how West African international students spend their free time and the effect of free time on their cultural interaction in Turkish cities. Thus, within the framework of the present study, the individual qualities of the international students, group membership and environmental factors were analyzed, on the other hand, cultural interaction, cultural differences, cultural conflicts, solidarity social, cultural recognition, adaptation and social exclusion were mentioned. The fact that there are a minority of studies in the literature that address leisure practices of international students from the perspective of cultural interaction makes this study unique and aims to contribute to the literature. This study, which has a phenomenological approach centered on the experiences of individuals in daily life, was conducted using qualitative research methods. The maximum diversity sampling method was preferred and the students were reached with the snowball method. Nineteen international students from West Africa were contacted and in-depth interviews were conducted in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. Students between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-nine, of different socio-economic levels, preparing master's and doctorate were affected. The data collected using the descriptive analysis technique was interpreted within the framework of predetermined themes/titles. As a result of the study, it was found that international students spend their free time chatting with African friends who share a common culture, traveling occasionally and mostly studying. It has been observed that some international students socialize by playing sports and taking Turkish language courses. Due to the common language, space and culture within this network of relationships, West African students spend more time with students of African descent and feel closeness creating a sense of belonging. Due to cultural differences, they may come into conflict with other groups, be excluded and encounter various problems.

**Keywords:** *Free Time and Leisure Activities; West African; Turkey*

## ***I. Introduction***

Free time is part of leisure and activities outside working life (Demir and Demir, 2006, 36). Leisure activities satisfy important psychological needs such as a sense of belonging, personal development, self-expression and sensitivity, and have important effects on the development of individuals' social behaviors, identity formation social, elimination of stress from working life and psychological well-being (Binbaşıoğlu & Tuna, 2014, 76). Especially for international students coming to our country, leisure activities occupy an important place in daily life. This study focuses on the leisure practices of West African international students studying in Turkey. We try to make sense of how students value their free time and its effect on cultural interaction.

The scholarship opportunities offered by the Republic of Turkey to foreign communities have started to make Turkey an important center of attraction for certain regions and countries of the world regarding exchange programs (İncekaya, 2017). In this context, it is known that after since 2005, Turkey was seen as a center of attraction, especially for African students in their education programs. However, the fact that no study in the literature specifically addresses the leisure practices of international students in terms of cultural interaction reveals a unique aspect and importance of this study.

This is an important point of view to understand the leisure practices, which constitute a certain aspect of the daily life activities of African students who come to Turkey under exchange programs, in terms of cultural interaction dimensions, that these students experience during their stay in Turkey. Moreover, it offers the opportunity to develop a more precise approach to the cultural interaction of these practices, their understanding and their meanings for international students. With these aspects of the study, it is believed that it can contribute to the literature on this subject in Turkey and to educational policies and projects on student exchange programs.

This study seeks answers to two fundamental questions in light of the issues above. The first is how African international students spend their free time while in Turkey, and the second is the effect of free time on cultural interaction. In our first problem, the evaluation of free time is analyzed through the individual qualities of the international students, their belonging to the group and the environmental factors. In our second issue, cultural differences, cultural conflicts, social solidarity, cultural recognition/acknowledgment, adaptation, social exclusion, which are sub-dimensions of cultural interaction, were assessed within the framework leisure activities.

## ***II. Literature***

In Turkey, it is difficult to come across a study that specifically focuses on the leisure activities of international students and the determination of the share of these activities in cultural interaction, harmony, social participation, and the meaning of leisure activities for students. However, studies in the literature on leisure activities in particular have focused on the attitudes of (domestic) university students towards leisure activities, the effects of environmental factors and opportunities on leisure activities.

In this context, in the studies of Demirel and Harmandar (2009) based on quantitative data, the subject of leisure activities was discussed in terms of the obstacles in front of the time that university students allocate to these activities. According to the study, the obstacles in front of university students' participation in leisure activities were generally determined as social environment and lack of information, facility/service/transportation and individual psychology. In another study on leisure activities, Akyüz and Türkmen's (2016) studies based on quantitative data examined the attitudes of university students towards leisure activities and found that female students' attitudes were more positive than male students. In addition, according to the findings in the study, it was concluded that leisure activities affect academic achievement positively. Aslan and Aslan (2001), on the other hand, focused on

“how the leisure time behaviors of university students are affected by opportunities and environmental determinants” in their study. In a study conducted by Patel (2016) in Australia on the leisure activities of international students, it was stated that there was a decrease in the leisure activities of the students who came to Australia from overseas, compared to the countries they came from, and the leisure activities were generally expressed as the time spent talking with friends.

Akgül (2001) focused on the attitudes of university students towards leisure activities in his study and, unlike the studies mentioned above, included university students studying in London and Ankara comparatively, and examined the effects of cultural difference on leisure activities.

Arslan's (2014) quantitative study on the leisure time preferences of undergraduate and associate degree students at Çankırı Karatekin University concluded that students generally do not have a purposeful choice of leisure time, and they prefer activities to pass time too much. In Sabbağ and Aksoy's (2011) study titled Leisure Activities of University Students and Employees: The Case of Adıyaman, it was concluded that the majority of students and employees were able to find free time, but they had different levels of difficulty in making use of this free time. At the beginning of these problems; social life areas consisting of sports and recreational facilities, and lack of hand skills or vocational training courses.

### **III. Method**

In this study, using a qualitative approach, how West African students studying in Turkey spend their free time and its effect on cultural interaction was carried out within the framework of a phenomenological research. Phenomenological research generally focuses on the experiences of individuals in daily life. The main purpose is to put forth the meaning that an individual or a certain group attribute to such life experiences in a concrete way and/or to try to make sense of these experiences. These experiences, as phenomena, "can appear in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts and situations in the world we live in" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, 72). Within the scope of these phenomena/phenomenon's, which are counted within the scope of this study, it is aimed to interpret the leisure time practices of West African students within the framework of cultural interaction.

#### **➤ Sample Selection**

In order to understand the leisure time practices of West African international students in Turkey, the maximum diversity sampling method was preferred among the sampling. The students in the sample group were reached with the snowball sampling technique (Neuman, 2008:324), a technique in which the researcher starts with a specific person or case and other similar situations or individuals related to them are reached through the networks or connections, between them. The reason why West African students were chosen in our universe is that, in addition to its ease of access, Turkey has been increasingly preferred by students in the region. In this context, 19 West African international students between the ages of 24-39, from different socio-economic levels, from different countries of West Africa such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo were reached.

The sample unit consists of African international students studying at master's and doctorate levels. Since it was seen in the pilot interviews that the way and interpretation of the leisure time of undergraduate and graduate students differed, only West African students studying at graduate school were chosen as the sample unit in the study. However, it is possible to overcome the limitation of this issue by expanding this study to include undergraduate students in the future or by similar studies that can be carried out in the field. The gender, age, marital status and education levels of the international students in the sample group are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample Group

Surnom	Sex	Age	Marital status	Educational Level
Nicknamed S	M	32	Single	Master
Nicknamed M	M	34	Married	PhD
Nicknamed I	M	25	Single	Master
Nicknamed O	M	31	Married/ with children	PhD
Nicknamed A	M	24	Single	Master
Nicknamed M	M	36	Married/ with children	PhD
Nicknamed A	F	26	Single	Master
Nicknamed M	F	28	Single	Master
Nicknamed B	M	33	Married	Master
Nicknamed H	M	33	Single	PhD
Nicknamed M	M	25	Single	Master
Nicknamed Z	M	29	Married	Master
Nicknamed M	F	24	Single	Master
Nicknamed A	M	28	Single	Master
Nicknamed M	M	29	Single	PhD
Nicknamed A	M	39	Married/ with children	PhD
Nicknamed A	M	30	Married/ with children	Master
Nicknamed O	M	27	Single	Master
Nicknamed S	F	30	Married	Master

The nineteen interviewees in the sample group gave similar answers to the questions asked about the evaluation of leisure time and cultural interaction, indicating that the saturation point was reached. A saturation point is when new knowledge, insight, or understanding no longer emerges. The interviewees, who spend their free time chatting with friends, traveling occasionally and studying in general, generally have similar daily life practices. Therefore, it is possible to say that there is a sufficient group of interviewees in terms of phenomenological research designs, in which 5-25 interviewees are ideally met.

### ➤ Data Collection Technique and Process of Analysis Data

In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool and in-depth interviews were conducted through this interview form. The data obtained during the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder or by taking notes. In the analysis, the "descriptive analysis" technique, which is frequently used in qualitative research, was used. This type of analysis is based on the principle of summarizing and interpreting the collected data within the framework of predetermined themes/titles (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; Coşkun et al. 2015). In this context, the themes and subcategories used in the study are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Themes and Categories Determined for Data Analysis

Themes	Categories
Key Variables in Leisure Time	Individual Qualities, Group Dynamics, Physical/Environmental Opportunities
Socio-Cultural Interaction	Cultural Differences, Social Exclusion, Exposure to Disturbing Attention, Cultural Conflict, Social Solidarity, Cultural Recognition/Recognition, Adaptation

One of the basic assumptions in qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, constantly variable and not singular, fixed, unchanging, and is not an objective phenomenon that can be observed, discovered and awaited measurement under the same conditions (Merriam, 2015, 203). Therefore, the measurement of reliability and validity in qualitative research involves some difficulties. Despite this, there are various strategies for measuring reliability and validity in the study. For example, the triangulation analyst strategy was used to ensure the internal validity of the research. According to this strategy, two or three people take part in the analysis process and analyze the qualitative data independently of each other, and then compare the findings (Merriam, 2015, 206). Thus, it has been tried to ensure a desired level of validity by minimizing the impact of data analysis from personal interpretation and prejudice and trying to prevent possible deviations from the main purpose of the research. Another strategy used in the study is maximum diversity. In our sample, the differentiation of marital status, education level, age and socio-economic structure provided diversity in the group.

## ***Iv. Finding***

### **4.1. Key Variables in Leisure Time**

It is possible to count many factors in the participation of individuals in leisure activities. These factors can be classified according to the individual's age, gender, financial situation, environment and context. As a matter of fact, Torkildsen (2005) counted 3 different factors covering these issues in leisure time evaluation. These, individual, societal and opportunity factors. However, in the light of the data obtained from the sample group interviewed in depth within the scope of this study, the main variables in leisure time were evaluated within the framework of two themes, individual qualities and physical/environmental opportunities (opportunity factors).

#### **4.1.1. Individual Qualifications**

Aydoğan and Aral (2007) emphasized the importance of factors such as race, social and personal characteristics, age and gender in leisure time behaviors of individuals. At the stage of coding the data obtained from the field, it was thought that it was necessary to emphasize the place of some emotional states in order to highlight individual qualities. In this framework, first of all, the focus will be on the issue of individual qualities.

As one of the points that draw attention during in-depth interviews, the individual qualities of international students appear as an important indicator. Within the framework of the category of individual qualifications, although it is considered to be a preliminary finding, 3 distinctive coding; that is, it is possible to talk about the existence of codes of "sincerity", "shyness" and "devotion to family". In the statements of international students evaluated in the context of these three codes, a search for the concept of sincerity was observed behind the actions of socializing, being a member of a student club, developing friendships or ending friendships.

*"Another... There is one. I loved him very, very, very much. But over time I left. Why, if sometimes he did you a favor, he wants to use that favor on you. That's why I don't accept it." (Participant Nicknamed I, M.Sc., 25)*

In terms of establishing a friendship or ending an existing friendship, this example points to a concrete reality in the context of a search for intimacy. However, it would be wrong to say that seeking sincerity in friendship is unique to African students. On the other hand, culture, language, belief etc. It is possible to say that the existence of differences such as intimacy is less important in interpersonal relations than a phenomenon such as sincerity. During the interview with the Participant with Nicknamed I, it is possible to talk about the existence of another concern in their expectations of being a member of a student club and participating in its activities.

*“Here, apart from education, there are clubs. But I don't want to participate in it. (...) Because I sometimes appear in clubs. It bothers him. That's why I don't follow him. For example, there are these young clubs. But sometimes I think “this is African, that is foreigner, maybe he wants something else”. (...) interests, for example. And in money. That's it. They are thinking. That's why there is no such closeness with young people.” (Participant Nicknamed I, M.Sc., 25).*

In summary, it is possible to say that behind our interviewer's refusal to participate in student club activities, there are prejudices/thoughts that he thinks have developed on the other side, that he is there for his own benefit. Here, it is possible to say that the individual's inward withdrawal from the other side is effective. In addition, it is possible to talk about the existence of a stance against the “image of Africanism” in Turkey on the basis of this shyness.

It is possible to say that African students, who are almost all separate and far away from their families, have another important individual quality regarding the activities carried out to evaluate their free time. When considered together with advanced communication opportunities, it is possible to say that African students use internet and mobile phones whenever they have the opportunity to satisfy their longing for their homeland, to speak with their family members.

*“Indeed, the internet is taking too much time for me. Because in my country... I mean, we talk all the time, whatsapp takes my free time. Whatsupp...” (Participant Nicknamed S, M.Sc., 32).*

#### 4.1.2. Physical/Environmental Facilities

It is also possible to talk about the various physical/environmental opportunities where leisure activities of African students in the sample take place or which can be seen as an obstacle to the realization of these activities according to the interests of the individuals. In this context, it was seen that a few of the participants emphasized that the opportunities offered by their life in Turkey were substantially different from the opportunities they had for socializing and leisure activities in their hometowns.

*“In my country, even 24 hours are few for me. Yes, because I teach there. Commerce as well. Sometimes people need me. So relatives, so many, many things. I travel sometimes. For example, neighboring countries. Sometimes I go to Gambia, Senegal, Mali.” (Participant Nicknamed A, Ph.D, 39).*

It was observed that this participant, who was understood to be a very extroverted and social individual in his country and lived a full day, complained that he could not spend his time in Turkey in the same way. Another participant stated that he could not acquire new leisure time activities in Turkey and implied that he wanted to use this time usefully, but could not:

*“There is no new activity that I did after coming to Turkey. I wish I had the opportunity to teach in Turkey as I do in my own country. For example, giving a French lesson... If they want to learn, I can do this in French...” (Participant Nicknamed H, Ph.D., 33).*

However, as can be seen in the examples below, it becomes possible to say that the facilities provided by the school or the dormitory have a diversifying and facilitating effect in terms of activities that African students can do to make use of their spare time.

*“I play football here. One day per week. in Hacettepe. TÖMER was doing it last year. There is Hacettepe Football tournament at the end of this month, I will participate. I could not attend Yıldırım Beyazıt University team because there is no football. Even if I didn't go to TÖMER in Hacettepe, I would have known. I would have known about the country. There are different dormitories and they are competing and promoting among themselves. There are other activities in Hacettepe, swimming, but I do not participate. You join for a low one-time fee. Yıldırım*

*Beyazit does not have it, so there is only chess. It will be held, but it is not clear when...”*  
(Participant Nicknamed O, M.Sc., 27).

Considering the benefit of any opportunity offered to the individual in revealing a certain potential in him, the presence or absence of opportunities for such leisure activities offered to African students throughout their education life in Turkey can be considered as an important variable in terms of cultural interaction. If many aspects such as individuals' abilities, interests, and value judgments are taken into account, it may be possible to increase the effectiveness of such opportunities. In this sense, in the last example above, it is seen that an important opportunity that has been evaluated before has been complained about.

Finally, it should be noted that the relationships established through shared spaces can enable individuals to get closer on the basis of their interests and to do leisure time activities together. However, although it can be mentioned that common spaces have a facilitating effect in terms of establishing relationships, it can be said that the interests, values, beliefs and cultures of the individual play a more dominant role. When asked about how he was accepted to this team, to a participant who learned that he was included in a team formed in the student dormitory to play football on the football field, the participant replied, “We formed a team because we are brothers and close friends.” (Participant Nicknamed M, Ph.D, 29). Despite the emphasis on staying in the same dormitory, the same participant did not hesitate to express his discomfort about the dormitory.

*“And sometimes, I want to sit in restaurants, I mean, we chat with friends. Because the country is a problem. So we're going outside. So we're sitting in the restaurant, chatting.”* (Participant Nicknamed A, M.Sc., 26).

Therefore, it seems more acceptable to consider the common space as a facilitating opportunity, an environmental factor for the realization of a situation largely determined by interests, values and beliefs, rather than being a fundamental variable.

## 4.2. Socio-Cultural Interaction

Culture, which includes what we think, how we act and what we own, also includes “accepted and shared values, beliefs, objects and rules” (Macionis, 2012: 58; Newman, 2013: 49). The culture that guides people's lives shows us both the connection with the past and how to follow the path for the future.

The cultural elements that West African students bring with them in their leisure time practices, which emerge in contact with the culture in the new settlement; cultural differences, cultural conflict, cultural solidarity, cultural recognition/recognition, adaptation, social exclusion and exposure to disturbing attention will be examined under this title.

### 4.2.1. Cultural Differences

The situation that a student who goes from his country to another country will face first is the cultural differences between his country and the host country (Ercan, 2012: 14). A student's new city, neighborhood, campus, food culture, clothing, lifestyle, climate, etc. adaptation changes depending on the meaning (positive or negative) attributed to the differences encountered in the new culture. West African students express the cultural differences that they find different in the culture they encounter and that they attribute positive meaning to as follows:

*“Turkish people are generally hospitable. He is important. The word guest is important for Turks. When you say guest, it means a lot. He even gives you tea if there is nothing. You are a guest. 'No, I don't want it, no, don't bring tea'. He likes to sit down and talk”* (Participant Nicknamed M, M.Sc., 28).

*“Other Turks, if you want to do a disservice to the foreigner, another Turk comes and says, ‘No, they are our guests’” (Participant with the Nicknamed M, Ph.D, 29).*

West African students state that Turkish people are hospitable, insistent on food/drink offerings, and attach importance to it.

The students stated that there are differences between the two cultures in some aspects such as addressing the other person, tone of voice, asking where they are from without greeting.

*“Africa is very different. In Africa, we call the great people you. In some countries, you don't exist, everyone is called you. We speak loudly, we Africans” (Participant Nicknamed M, M.Sc., 28).*

*“The point that differs from our Turkish friends is this. When we see a person, we say hello, but the people here ask us where are you from when they see you for the first time. In our country, it is necessary to greet before asking anything. This is making me a little uncomfortable. There is no such thing in our culture.” (Participant Nicknamed M, Ph.D., 29).*

Clothing styles also change according to the climate and cultural characteristics of the region. Our interviewee pointed out this situation by saying "Africa is very hot, we don't dress like that". Our interviewee states that "sometimes I wear traditional clothes, I go out, everyone says "oh look" (with sarcasm). Maybe they will understand better as time passes, and states that cultural difference leads to exclusion.

The fact that the cultures are different affects the students' perception of time and the practices they can do. The interviewee, who says that he spends all his time in his own country to the fullest, says that there is not much to do in Turkey, therefore he has a lot of free time.

*“There is a lot of free time here. Because cultures are different. And not many relatives. There are friends, but there is no time.” (Participant Nicknamed A, M.Sc., 24).*

African students state that there are differences between the two cultures regarding the experience of Islam.

*“What I saw differently in people in Turkey was this. It's about the life of Islam. We are all Muslims. But when the adhan is called in the Dormitory, the mosque is empty. I think about it. 99% of Turkey is Muslim, but mosques are also empty. All male Muslims in Niger go to the mosque at prayer times” (Participant Nicknamed M, Ph.D., 29).*

Among the cultural differences that are evident between the two cultures; The meaning and hospitality given to the guests, the way of speaking, the way of dressing, the perception of time and the way of living of Islam are included.

#### **4.2.2. Cultural Conflict**

Cultural conflict is a situation of severe disagreement between more than one person or group due to cultural differences (Asunakutlu and Safran, 2004: 36). In this study, the concept of cultural conflict is used in the sense of “problems and incompatibilities arising from the coexistence of students from different countries and with different cultural values”. The interviewee expressed one of the cultural conflicts experienced by West African students as follows:

*“My Iraqi friend always makes bad jokes. This is breaking me. It's annoying when he jokes about it when there is a problem. We don't joke about it when there is a problem, but the friend makes fun of it. Talking loudly also bothers me” (Participant Nicknamed S, M.Sc., 30).*



The gathering of people speaking different languages, the fact that these people do not know a common language and they do not understand each other adequately also cause some problems.

*“The only border between me and these friends is language. Other than that, we don't have a limit (problem). They speak little English and I know little Turkish. Then I get very angry, we can't get along. We get along, but not much” (Participant Nicknamed A, M.Sc., 28).*

#### 4.2.3. Social Solidarity

Solidarity is expressed as “the mutual bonding of people who make up a community with each other in their feelings, thoughts and common values”. Social solidarity, on the other hand, is “the situation that arises when individuals in the group enter into harmonious relations with other individuals” (Milli Eğitim Kanunu, 2011). Sharing the same life, the same purpose and a common space is the leading factor that ensures social solidarity. Shared common spaces such as housing, education, and courses that enable individuals to be included in the group can be a determining factor. It is Tömer and the relations established here that ensure the social solidarity of West African students.

*“At Tömer, we build relationships differently. Because we are in the same situation. We are all foreigners. When it comes, love comes easily to us. He comes with the Turks at the university, everyone is a student and everyone is dealing with it. It has a purpose, everyone should read it, get a diploma. But in Tömer, we both read and are a group with a sincere relationship and conversation. Country, group collectively that way” (Participant Nicknamed A, M.Sc., 28).*

West African students state that the solidarity experienced in Tömer is stronger, while there are groupings as Turks and foreigners at the university. One of our interviewees answered the question of whether there is a grouping between countries as follows.

*“Yes, but the difference is; That's not the case with Tömer. As it is with different countries, I mean, we came from different countries, but it is not affected that much. So we're all students. (...) The situation at the university is somewhat, there are Turks and there are foreigners. That's the way it is” (Participant Nicknamed M, Ph.D., 36).*

Do you have friends from other countries besides Niger? Our interviewer said, “For example, there is Cameroon, there is Burkina Faso. There is Mali (...) mainly French-speaking countries. And it is Niger's neighbor, in general,” he replied. This situation shows us that the common language is effective in establishing solidarity (friendship) between people. Common cultural characteristics, shared common space, having a similar world of life and belonging provide solidarity among students.

The pseudonymous interviewee states that he usually spends his spare time in Turkey with African students and gets along better with them:

*“I hang out with African friends. I met in these chat environments. I have a friend from Niger in the dorm and I hang out with him. There are friends from different countries from school, but we only greet. So we don't talk that long. Everyone has their own job. That's why there are schools, lessons. I'm not very friendly with them. I don't spend much time together. So I am not very interested... I have not had a problem here with people from my own country. We get along better with African students here, we meet like a family.” (Participant Nicknamed B, Ph.D., 33).*

#### 4.2.4. Cultural Recognition/ Recognition

In the era of globalization, people from different cultures are encountered more. In this encounter situation, individuals want both to know others and to be recognized by others. “The effort to recognize individuals or societies has always been dealt with together with the problem of identity. There is hardly an individual who does not need this when the relationship between me and the other or how the other

sees us determines our identity. In other words, 'recognition' stands before us as an ontological need" (Hazır, 2012: 16). West African students need recognition/recognition. In the interviews, international students stated that Turks are trying to get to know themselves as follows.

*"They are trying to get to know. He's trying to evaluate. What a man, he came from outside. Azerbaijan, so they are used to them. But he evaluates it slowly for us, then one month and two months" (Participant Nicknamed B, M.Sc., 33).*

The general discomfort of West African international students is that people perceive all African countries as poor and poor by generalizing information and photos about some poor African countries that they see on television, newspapers and the Internet. African-origin students want this false image to be changed and their cultural richness to be recognized by others. Asked to the interviewees on this subject, "How do you think Africa is known in Turkey?" Our participant answered the question as follows:

*"So the TV way. Really, that African issue doesn't explain much. Maybe foundations, associations share videos and photos, and children show children who are in trouble, in that situation. It's so in your head. When it comes to Africa, it's always like that. We say that we have a culture, there are people living there. Maybe you will see and visit all of them when you come like this, you will see, there are beautiful cities, there are beautiful people. There are some very nice ones. That way. Nature is beautiful, so everything is there. Because we organize sometimes African days. For example, we organized African days at my university. There are stands. African dresses, African dishes, African countries always have stands. We invited the Turks, so they don't know much in general. So. We are coming, stands, what is this, what is this asking. What animal is that photo? It is said that the food is good, the dress is beautiful, he takes pictures. So it's like new, not like on TV. Then he says 'it's so beautiful' as if we don't know" (Participant Nicknamed B, M.Sc., 33).*

Another issue that West African students are uncomfortable with and want this situation to change is that Turks use the term "black". Although the students are uncomfortable with this situation, the meaning given by the person using this expression is not the same as the meaning given by the students. Aware of this situation, African students want to introduce themselves to others.

*"They call me black. For example, you know black, the real meaning of black is bad... But it has spread in Turkey. They don't use it in that sense, he says. But the same bad word, for example, makes us a little uncomfortable... They don't know. Therefore, my friend, if the people I meet say that, they say me, do you know what it means? Then it stays like this. "Oh really? I didn't know either," he says. Maybe in universities, articles, such, in newspapers" (Participant Nicknamed Z, M.Sc., 29).*

To summarize; International West African students want to introduce themselves to the society they live in and to change the stereotypes formed against them.

#### **4.3. Accommodate Oneself**

The concept of harmony is explained as "the ability of the individual to establish healthy communication with himself and his environment, to maintain the relationships he has established, to cope with the problems he encounters while establishing a relationship" (Özçetin, 2013: 6). In short, adaptation refers to the individual's adaptation to the environment he lives in (Ercan, 2012: 13). International students leave their home country for their education (having a good job or status) and go to another country, and they may experience various difficulties in adapting to the environment. In this process, there are some factors that make it easier for students to adapt to the new cultural environment.

The presence of other students from their countries in Turkey is one of the most effective factors in the adaptation of postgraduate West African students studying in Ankara to the environment they live

in. Namely, West African students living in Turkey do not feel lonely if other students from their own countries are here, the problems they experience are shared, and in this case, the adaptation process of these students to their environment becomes easier. In addition, the fact that West African students make new friends at school contributes to their learning new things about the environment they live in and accelerates the adaptation process.

An African student, who is aware of cultural, social and ideological differences, but thinks that these are instructive elements, can spend his spare time with his Turkish friends in line with this awareness. One of the interviewees expressed how they adapted to the different socio-cultural environment in Turkey as follows:

*“For example, if I stay among the only Nigerians, the things I know I just keep going. But if I stay with the Turks, I learn new things, exchange ideas with each other. Schoolmates also help, and we establish a relationship” (Participant Nicknamed M, Ph.D., 34).*

As can be seen, communication plays a central role in adapting to the socio-cultural environment. The social-cultural environment of the students is effective in their new practices. The situation of our interviewer points to this situation.

*“I don't normally smoke, but because people smoke here, sometimes I do too. While they are drinking, they want me to drink” (Participant Nicknamed M, M.Sc., 25).*

Factors such as similar behavior patterns, shared common space and common values, and sharing a similar life world make it easier for students to adapt to their environment.

*“I have a Turkish, Somali, Niger and Nigerian friends. We met these people at TÖMER, I am friends with these people because we share the same life. I met my Turkish friend in the dormitory. We get along well with these people as we share similar common values. But some of these people are not Muslims. My friend who is Nigerian is Christian. Its culture is similar to ours. Only religion is different. We have similar lives in other subjects” (Participant Nicknamed M, M.Sc., 25).*

#### 4.3.1. Social Exclusion

Exclusion is defined as “the breaking of the social bond between the society and the individual and the disruption of relations” (Sapancali, 2005). In this study, the concept of social exclusion is used in the opposite sense of the concept of integration, which means being a part of the society. In order to understand the dimensions of social exclusion that African-origin students face in Turkey, “Did there be things that you couldn't get along with while spending time with your Turkish friends? Can you give an example of this situation?” question was posed. One of the biggest problems for West African students is that all African countries are perceived as poor. Our interviewee expressed this situation as follows:

*“Yes, the biggest problem is, what does it mean, for those who do not know Turkish Africa, they do not recognize all Africa as a poor continent or country. Maybe he knows it as a continent. There is such a shape. For example, I say Niger, the country, but all Africa does not matter. You are you, you came from Niger, you came from Mali, you came from Nigeria. It doesn't matter. “He came from Africa”. How does Africa know? That's all he's watched TV. He never went” (Participant Nicknamed S, M.Sc., 32).*

Another situation in which students from West African countries are exposed to exclusion is that Turks talk about them in a contemptuous way, thinking that they do not understand them.

*“Friends in the room are joking below the waist. They think they don't understand us in Turkish, they are talking about us. They say bad words, but I hear them, I always pretend I didn't hear them.*

*So, they go too far. Then look, stop and I hear you, but I pretend not to hear, but they say 'disgraceful' or something, but I don't do anything because I know that life is like this, I have to be patient. Look, look, it doesn't even know that word. But I'm not actually Turkish. Normally you can encourage me. But that's not how you behave. Of course, I say I'm uncomfortable. I say enough is enough, do what you want" (Participant Nicknamed M, Ph.D., 34).*

Another problem African students face is that other people treat them differently (sarcastic/derogatory) because of their skin color.

*"Someone of them is looking at you, he is laughing, because I am black. Yes, it is a very, very big problem, if I do this to someone in Turkey. I even think sometimes (um) that I will go back. Because that's not the case in my country. But they come here sometimes, nigga, so you nigga? So they say. My heart is very hot (in the sense of anger) it even wants to hit. But I remember, you guys, there are rules here. Hitting, I mean, I don't do anything like "calm down, calm down". Yes, but this is my biggest stress in Turkey, these things." (Participant Nicknamed O, M.Sc., 27).*

#### 4.3.2. Exposure to Disturbing Attention

This concept is used to mean that the behaviors of Turks with the aim of helping or taking care of people of African descent, unwittingly offend, hurt or disturb the people (African students) in front of them. In other words, this concept is used in the sense that the behavior of the Turks towards African students by giving a positive meaning disturbs these students.

The most important behavior that bothers West African students is to give money when they see them. An act done in the name of doing good causes the other person to think that he is seen as "poor" from the outside. Our interviewees expressed this situation as follows:

*"One day I went to the mosque. When I came out, a man gave me 5 TL. I said to that man I am not poor. I am not that poor. According to Turks, Africans are poor. That's what they think. It's not like that. This is also a negative situation" (Participant Nicknamed H, Ph.D., 33) and "I went to the mosque on Friday. There was a beggar there. I was passing, a man says that he is rich, that is, I is poor. He wanted to give money. So I just laughed" (Nicknamed O, PhD, 31)*

#### V. Conclusion

When the leisure time activities of West African international students are looked at from the perspective of "individual quality", it is seen that the codes of "sincerity", "shyness" and "devotion to family" affect the attitudes of the students. "Sincerity" and "shyness" are the characteristics of students' being a member of a club, socializing, making friends and ending friendships. While establishing friendships, he refrains from establishing relationships with individuals whose sincerity he does not trust and acts cautiously. While being a member of a club, students may not participate because they are afraid of prejudiced thoughts about themselves. Due to the loyalty to the family, it is tried to satisfy the longing with the families through the internet or the telephone in their spare time whenever they find time.

Some international students, who spend their free time more productively in their countries, complained that they could not use it in the same way in Turkey due to "physical/environmental opportunities". Students who teach in their own countries, spend time with relatives, and engage in business such as trade emphasized that they cannot use their free time efficiently in Turkey. On the other hand, the activities provided by the university and the dormitory constitute the environmental opportunity that provides the socialization and cultural interaction of the students.

In our study, which focused on the leisure time activities of West African international students, it was observed that the students generally had the same daily life practices. The fact that the interviewees

had a master's degree or higher was effective in choosing leisure time activities. While the majority of students spend their time studying and participating in activities aimed at improving themselves, it has been observed that the area where they socialize the most is chatting with friends. The majority of these friends, on the other hand, are preferred by African origin friends. The fact that there are no language problems with African-origin friends and that there are cultural commonalities brings individuals closer to each other and establishes social solidarity networks. On the other hand, it has been observed that they communicate with non-African friends through places such as dormitories, clubs and courses within the scope of the university course, and sometimes they are exposed to exclusion and conflict while adapting. Cultural interaction in these environments, on the one hand, provides the recognition of cultural difference, information exchange between cultures, and social solidarity, on the other hand, it can cause cultural conflict and social exclusion. Especially the language problem experienced by international students, the way of dressing and speaking, the perception of time and the way of living of Islam create cultural differences.

International students may encounter various problems not only in the university, dormitory, course environment, but also in every aspect of daily life. For example, stereotypes about Africans in society disturb students. The judgment that Africans are quite poor through the media is generalized to all African countries and individuals in our society. For example, being treated like a beggar after leaving the mosque and wanting to give money, or using the word "black" without knowing its meaning, generalizing all the countries in the African continent in one pan, and not having enough information about natural and historical beauties upsets and offends students.

As a result, in our study, leisure activities of West African international students may vary according to individual and physical factors. While students' social relations provide social solidarity, belonging and harmony at the rate of cultural similarity, cultural differences cause cultural conflict and exclusion. In order for students to spend their free time more productively and to integrate with the society, universities and other institutions should be helped them to adapt to our country by organizing various activities and activities according to the interests of international students. Public service announcements, documentaries and programs should be organized to correct the judgments that the society takes for granted. Thus, it is foreseen that social exclusion and cultural conflict will be reduced by increasing the ties of respect and love towards African countries.

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