

Turkish students and their experiences during a short-term summer visit to the U.S.

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This study examined the language-related experiences of Turkish students during their time in the U.S., and how these experiences related to their perceptions about learning English in an English-speaking community and interacting with host community members. The study also examined why Turkish students preferred a native speaker environment such as the U.S. as a venue for learning English. The participants of the study included 31 Turkish students who took English classes in a short-term summer study program in the U.S. The study used face-to-face interviews for data collection and content analysis to categorize students' experiences. Findings show that although the majority of the students benefited from their stay in the U.S., they faced various challenges that limited their interaction with the host community and restricted their access to language input.

Keywords: study abroad, Turkish students, linguistic experiences, language ideologies

1. Introduction

In a world where the Internet and other interactional resources have made even the most remote areas of the globe accessible and where transportation has made travel easier, knowledge of second languages (L2) has become more important than ever. Moreover, globalization of the world has influenced economies, educational systems, policies, cultures, etc. resulting in pressure to interact with more people who speak different languages and come from different cultural backgrounds. The ALTO Global Direction in Language Travel report (2008) noted that 1.3 million students study English abroad and an even larger number study other languages. The British Council report in 2004 indicated that demand for international student placement in the 'Main English-Speaking Destinations' is expected

to grow from 1 million in 2003 to 2.6 million by 2020 (Vision 2020: Forecasting international student mobility; a UK perspective, 2004). The same report also indicated that 20 million people worldwide were learning Mandarin, and this figure was expected to rise to 100 million in the next few years.

Recent numbers on the language travel market show that Turkish citizens are among those learners who visit foreign countries to learn other languages. According to a report prepared by the Institute of International Education (2015), 10,724 Turkish students visited the U.S. during the 2014–2015 academic year. Similarly, the Student Insight-Turkey report prepared by the British Council (2012) showed that between 2007 and 2012, 15,000 Turkish students visited the United Kingdom in order to take English courses. The same report indicated that the contribution of these students to the English economy amounted to 86 million pounds.

Although the Turkish educational system includes foreign language courses, and there are many private language courses in Turkey, these numbers from the Institute of International Education and the Student Insight-Turkey reports indicate that large numbers of Turkish citizens participate in study abroad (SA) in order to learn other languages. In a study conducted on 711 Turkish participants, Akalın and Zengin (2007) found that the majority of the participants considered living in the target language country, interacting with native speakers of the L2, and learning about the culture of the country in which the L2 is spoken as necessary conditions that will maximize language learning. Other studies have also shown that positive opinions about the efficacy of SA programs are common throughout the world. One of the most important reasons people choose to study a language in a country where it is spoken is the belief that they will have ample opportunities to practice the language and thus the experience will accelerate their language acquisition (Allen & Dupuy, 2012; Freed, 1998; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). According to Tanaka and Ellis (2003), “a general assumption is that natural settings involving informal learning through out-of-class contact with the L2 leads to higher levels of proficiency than educational settings where instruction is provided. Thus, SA is seen as valuable because it provides opportunities for informal learning” (p. 66). As Freed (1998) put it, SA is frequently conceptualized as a full immersion experience where students can learn naturally and with little effort simply by submerging themselves in the target language. Notwithstanding, a considerable number of SA studies dispute the popular belief that SA is the universal answer to language learning.

The popularity of SA as a research topic primarily started after Carroll’s (1967) large-scale project, which indicated that time spent abroad is one of the most powerful variables predicting language proficiency. Based on this solid claim, researchers have since examined language learning in SA using different methods

and adopting a wide variety of theoretical approaches (Kinger, 2008). However, studies investigating Carroll's (1967) claims have shown both positive and negative effects of SA. They have either shown SA to be beneficial, or minimally beneficial compared to classroom learning at home. For example, in a study with Russian students enrolled at the U.S. National Foreign Language Center, Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg (1993) found that SA resulted in greater proficiency than study at home. Gomes da Costa, Smith, and Whitely (1975) and Teichler (1994) also found that SA increased proficiency significantly. Several studies comparing SA and at home performance of L2 learners' listening skills (Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008; Dyson, 1988; Willis, Doble, Sankarayya, & Smithers, 1977), reading ability (Dewey, 2004), writing (Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2009; Sasaki, 2009), fluency (Freed, 1995; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), pronunciation (Díaz-Campos, 2004), vocabulary acquisition (Dewey, 2008; Foster, 2009), pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence (Barron, 2003; Regan, Howard & Lemée, 2009; Schauer, 2009), oral proficiency (Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Lennon, 1990; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), and grammar development (Walsh, 1994; Juan-Garau, 2014) found advantages for the SA learners.

Despite the positive findings of many investigations, the SA literature also includes studies that dispute these results. For example, Milton and Meara (1995) reported that the benefits of SA are far from universal. They found that with regard to vocabulary development, advanced level students were less likely to benefit from SA, and even reported cases of deterioration. In two consecutive studies, DeKeyser (1990, 1991) found that residence abroad had little influence on the improvement of overall grammatical skills, and that SA learners were equal to or inferior to their at home counterparts in their use of grammar. Collentine (2004) examined SA learners' acquisition of a variety of morphosyntactic features and found that SA learners did not improve as much as at home learners on the same grammatical features that many FL teachers underscore, namely, verbs and subordinate conjunctions. Mora (2008) explored phonetic perception and production in a group of participants who studied abroad for a period of three months, and found that the SA experience did not play a major role in improving their proficiency in these areas. Studies by Amuzie and Winke (2009) and Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014) reported that SA experiences resulted in decreased self-confidence and self-efficacy for learners. In a twelve-week qualitative study of 29 Japanese language learners studying in New Zealand, Tanaka (2007) found that SA in an English-speaking context did not necessarily guarantee opportunities to use the target language inside and outside the classroom. Literature reviews by Pellegrino-Aveni (1998) and Surtees (2016) and studies by Segalowitz, Freed, Collentine, Lafford, Lazar, & Díaz-Campos (2004) suggest that language learning abroad is not helpful in every respect compared to classroom learning in the home country. Students have

reported high expectations with respect to language and culture learning abroad, but these are often not met when compared to students' perceived learning progress (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009, Mendelson, 2004). Barron (2003) argues that even spending a complete year in a foreign country, foreign language learners may not have sufficient access to meaningful interactions with native speakers (even in the host family) to be able to get the input that could help acquire pragmatic norms. Moreover, SA students often interact with other L1 peers.

The contrasting findings in the SA literature underscore the role of individual differences in achievement outcomes (Kinging, 2008). In all the language areas examined in the SA literature, variables such as gender (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Polanyi, 1995), personality (DeKeyser, 1991; Kinginger, 2008; Tracy-Ventura, Dewaele, Köylü, & McManus, 2016), proficiency level (Brecht et al., 1995; Freed, 1995; Ife, Vives, & Meara, 2000; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1995; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Milton & Meara, 1995), age (Llanes & Muñoz, 2012), identity (Block, 2007; Siegal, 1996), intention and motivation (Brux & Fry, 2010; Gore, 2005; Nguyen, 2014; Park, 2012), and length of stay (Baro & Serrano, 2011) in the target language country have been acknowledged as playing an important role in L2 learning in a study abroad context. In spite of the studies that highlight the role of individual differences in achievement scores and ample evidence to disprove the belief that SA will always create beneficial outcomes, the myths associated with the SA experience still persist.

In her paper that focuses on the persistence of these myths, Surtees (2016) criticizes SA research that has typically focused on learner beliefs that depend on psychosocial frameworks, which view actions and experiences as the result of individuals' actions, knowledge, and desires. Surtees (2016) suggested that "a language ideological framework may allow us to reconceptualise these beliefs as socially and historically constituted language ideologies, and thereby move beyond the individual to examine programmatic, institutional and interactional roles in the reproduction of these beliefs" (p. 85). Ideology is defined by van Dijk (1998) as "the shared framework(s) of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members" (p. 8). As Ricento (2013) put it, "when frameworks of social beliefs are widely shared in societies, or by groups in society, they tend to be viewed as natural, normal, and common-sense, while alternative frameworks that run counter to widely shared beliefs tend to be viewed as deviant, abnormal, and irrational" (p. 528). Hence, a language ideological framework frames learners' beliefs as socially or discursively constructed rather than solely learner-internal. Any research that focuses on purely linguistic improvement measured by various assessment techniques will not draw a complete picture of SA experiences as it will not highlight what the students' pre-sojourn personal expectations were, how these expectations were created, and

whether these expectations were met by the SA experience. Although SA research has witnessed major improvements after Wilkinson's (1998) call for a shift of SA research from the 'product' or outcome of SA programs to the 'process', such as what is going on before, during and after the SA program, and Freed's (1995, 1998) encouragement to reflect critically on students' beliefs about SA experiences, more research that addresses SA from a language ideological framework is necessary. As Surtees (2016) put it:

because language ideologies are viewed as coconstructed, research from this perspective adopts a more holistic approach and takes into account more stakeholders when explaining findings. This includes not only the parties with whom students interact, but the broader media and institutional messages that frame SA in particular ways. For instance, this might include the recruitment literature displaying exotic pictures of happy students, university policies concerning internationalization, and local discourses about second language proficiency for job hunting. By adopting the understanding that language ideologies are necessarily partial, researchers are also forced to ask who benefits when SA is framed in this way: the students themselves, institutions, or perhaps a particular type of language learner? (p. 98)

The study to be presented here highlights the reasons Turkish students chose to study English in a native speaker environment. It applies the language ideological framework suggested by Surtees (2016) and explores the social and linguistic experiences that Turkish students had during a period of three months in the U.S. It also explores how these problems influenced their perceptions of learning English in an English-speaking community and interacting with the native speakers. In particular, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What were the Turkish students' beliefs about learning languages abroad prior to their visit to an English-speaking country, and did these beliefs have broader historical antecedents constructed through interactions with friends, faculty, family, media, and institutional policy?
2. In what respect has the SA experience influenced the participants' beliefs about learning languages abroad, and do these beliefs overlap with their pre-journey expectations?

2. Method

The study has a qualitative research design. It used open-ended interview questions to collect data. The data were qualitatively analyzed to describe the experiences of the participants during their time in the U.S.

2.1 Participants and their short-term summer study program

The participants of the study include 31 Turkish students (14 female and 17 male) who visited the U.S. (Los Angeles) for three months in order to take Intensive English courses in a short-term summer study program. Learners volunteered to participate in the current research. The participants were born and raised in Turkey, and they were all of Turkish ethnicity. All of them were living in highly populated major cities in Turkey prior to their visit to the U.S., and had never visited the U.S. prior to the study. The participants were from families of higher socio-economic status. While 24 participants' language proficiency level was B1, the language proficiency of the remaining seven students was A2. These levels refer to the proficiency levels specified by the Common European Framework of Reference. Students' proficiency was specified after they took the in-house placement test required by the language study program. This test included 30 grammar and vocabulary questions, 15 listening questions, and five reading questions. All of the participants were adult learners and their ages ranged from 16 to 34. There were two high school students, 26 university students, and three college graduates. While the primary motive for enrolling in an intensive English program among five of the participants was education (two high school students wanted to attend college in the U.S. and three college graduates aimed to begin graduate education in the U.S.), the remaining 26 participants believed that higher English proficiency would make them global citizens and equip them with occupational and interactional advantages in conversational encounters that require the use of English. Their choice to visit the U.S. was influenced primarily by five factors. 61.29% of them were influenced by movies, 38.70% of them contacted their friends who had been to the U.S. or knew someone from the U.S., 22.58% searched the Internet for information, 19.35% followed social media resources such as Instagram to see photos of Los Angeles and people there, and 6.45% of them contacted language course administrators to ask questions and gather information.

The short-term summer study program in which participants chose to take English courses is a private language school located in Los Angeles. The program presents information to students about language courses, facilities, key facts, accommodation, and location on its website. The web page provides several language options including Turkish, so that low English proficiency students can access the key information about the summer study program in their mother tongue. The website includes photos and videos that demonstrate the course setting and the tourist attractions in Los Angeles. Another feature of the website is the quotes that present the positive experiences of former students. These quotes focus on gaining self-confidence in speaking English, meeting new people from different cultures and countries, the high quality of the language program, extracurricular

opportunities, the friendliness of the staff and teachers in the program, the friendly classroom atmosphere, witnessing immediate English improvements, and differences between the program from courses offered in the student's home country. The 'key facts' session on the web page presents information about the average age of the students (25 years old), maximum class size (15 students), minimum age (16 years old), nationality (84 nationalities attended this school last year), public holidays, contact information, and location.

All of the participants in the current research were enrolled in the intensive English course program of the academy. The information about this program on the web page claims to improve students' English in a fast, enjoyable, and effective way, whatever their current language levels are. It gives the students the opportunity to customize their study program with specific lessons, including business English and exam preparation. The course information states that the intensive English program will allow students to quickly achieve English fluency and learn grammar and vocabulary that will be useful in everyday English. Students will improve their opportunities in future academic and professional endeavors.

The intensive English program offers 20 lessons (15 hours) of General English per week with a particular focus on reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In addition to these 20 lessons, the program includes eight Specific Skills Lessons (six hours) that focus on a range of skills such as vocabulary, business English, or local culture. Finally, the program offers seven sessions (5.25 hours) of K+ tools, K+eXtra and K+ clubs that involve self-study time with access to exclusive materials and resources along with personalized sessions for the students to study the areas they most need help with, including exam techniques and study group work.

The short-term summer study program offers two accommodation options for students. These are homestay and student residence. Homestay includes living with a local family specifically chosen by the program. Student residences are specifically selected apartments where students live together. In the current research, while 28 students preferred student residences, three of the students selected the homestay option.

During their first day, students were given early sojourn orientation training by the academy staff, as well as a tour of the language school's facilities and the surrounding area. Students were also given practical information such as where to buy a phone card or bus pass, how to use the post office, and where to find the best coffee, etc. On their first day of orientation, students performed several activities to help them get to know their fellow students. At the end of orientation students received information about their class schedule, specific skills, and the hours they were to attend class.

2.2 Data collection and data analysis

The study used face-to-face interviews for data collection. Two key questions dominated the interviews, and a follow-up sub-question allowed further development of the participants' responses to the second interview question. The data were then transcribed and translated. The interviews were done by the primary investigator of the study towards the end of the participants' visit to the U.S. The interviews were conducted in Turkish. The cited responses from students in the results section were translated from Turkish to English by the primary investigator of the study. The translated version and the original text were compared by a bilingual Turkish-English speaker.

In order to identify the reasons that motivated the participants to visit a native speaker environment to learn English, the interviewer asked the following question to the participants:

- Why did you choose to study English in a native speaker environment such as the U.S.?

The interviewer directed the following question to the participants in order to examine the experiences of the Turkish students during their time in the U.S. and how these experiences influenced their perceptions about learning English in a native speaker environment and interacting with L2 community members. The researcher examined participants' positive and negative experiences during their stay in the U.S. and identified a number of other options mentioned by the students about their experiences.

- What are your opinions about learning English in a native speaker environment after living and taking English classes in the U.S.?

During the interviews, the interviewer used a follow-up question to elaborate on various themes. Hence, for example, when several students addressed the grammar-oriented education in Turkey, the interviewer asked them to express their opinions about the reasons for the grammar-oriented language teaching in Turkey.

The investigator audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. The total number of minutes of the interviews was 622 and the average duration of each interview was 20.06 minutes. The number of words across all participants was 112,638 and the mean number of words produced by participants in the interviews was 3,633. The transcriptions were examined by using content analysis and coded by two raters (see example 1 for the coding process). The themes coded by the raters emerged from the analysis and reading of the interview data. Content analysis is "a research method for subjective interpretation of the content of the text data through the systematic classification of coding and identifying themes

or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Following the coding process, intercoder reliability was calculated. Intercoder reliability is “the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion” (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2010, p. 2). Intercoder reliability was measured by calculating Cohen’s Kappa value. Cohen’s Kappa is a measure of reliability that corrects for chance agreement (Cohen, 1960). It accounts for the fact that raters are expected to agree with each other a certain percentage of the time simply based on chance. The Cohen’s Kappa value for the current study was .95 which indicates a highly acceptable reliability value. Lombard et al. (2010) state that coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable for the index or indices to be used.

Example 1: After reading the interviews the raters coded ‘speaking improvement’ as one of the categories that motivated the participants to choose an English-speaking country as a venue to study. Before the specification of the category, the coders examined the transcripts and noticed that several parts of the texts touched upon speaking improvement (refer to the quotations below). Finally, the coders counted how many times this theme was mentioned and specified it as a category. Following this procedure, the investigator calculated Cohen’s Kappa value in order to examine the reliability of the coders’ reports.

Student 1: “I knew the grammar rules but I needed to *improve my speaking*. I learned English grammar in middle school and high school. Also my university education is in English. However, I am not satisfied with my speaking performance in English.”

Student 3: “I decided to visit the U.S. in order to create a chance to speak English. I think that is the best way to witness considerable *speaking improvement*”.

Student 7: “Speaking to others is the key reason why I am here. In Turkey I never had this opportunity. Therefore, my *speaking* did not *improve*. I came here to solve this problem.”

3. Results

3.1 Language-related reasons for choosing an English-speaking country as a venue for learning English

The first question of the interview aimed to identify the reasons that motivated the participants to visit a native speaker environment to learn English. Content analysis

of the students’ responses resulted in six categories that include language-related reasons (see Table 1).

Table 1. Language-related reasons for choosing an English-speaking country as a venue to learn English

Categories	N	%
Grammar-oriented English education in Turkey	21	67.74
Speaking improvement	19	61.29
Interaction with the native speakers	19	61.29
To improve L2 in a very short time	13	41.93
TOEFL	5	16.12
To learn language and culture simultaneously	5	16.12

‘Grammar-oriented English education in Turkey’ topped the list of reasons for choosing a native speaker environment as a venue to learn English. Thus, 67.74% ($n = 21$) of the students found the English education in Turkey inadequate and complained about its strong emphasis on grammar instruction. When students were asked about the reasons for the grammar-oriented language teaching in Turkey, they mentioned a total of seven reasons. These were ‘the educational system’ (90%), ‘testing-oriented system’ (75%), ‘lack of people to communicate in English with’ (68%), ‘teachers’ insufficient speaking proficiency’ (60%), ‘the pressure to learn and use language correctly’ (50%), ‘the simplicity of teaching and testing grammar’ (45%), and ‘crowded classrooms’ (25%). As student 8 stated, “they only teach English grammar in Turkey. I never remember any classroom activity that included listening and speaking activities. We had different English teachers but they only gave us the rules and we had to answer questions or fill in the blanks using the correct forms. I think teaching grammar is easier for English teachers in Turkey.” Student 16 who criticized the test system in Turkey stated that “the national language tests in Turkey measure grammar and reading comprehension. Teachers also know this and they want their students to have higher scores on these exams.” Student 13 complained about the lack of opportunities to use the language both inside and outside the school context and saw grammar-focused education as a by-product of the missing opportunities to use the language. As he said, “I think it is impossible to learn English in Turkey. Everybody in the classroom and society speaks Turkish. Where are you going to use English? Nowhere. Teachers know this and they think that we should teach the students grammar”. Student 6 saw grammar emphasis as an outcome of the accuracy obsession of the educational system. He reported that “I think grammar-focused language teaching is a perfect summary of the whole educational system in Turkey. Our educational

system prioritizes memorizing information and tests whether you could keep what you have memorized in your mind or not. It does not try to foster creativity, active student involvement, or productive skills of the students. Grammar is pure information and knowledge; however, speaking is about producing something.” Student 31 related grammar-oriented education to crowded classrooms and reported that “classrooms are crowded, and because of that, teachers do not have any chance to teach speaking. Grammar seems like the only option.” Student 28 focused on the simplicity of testing grammar. As she stated, “grammar knowledge is easy to measure, and I think it is easy to prepare or find grammar questions. Hence, teachers focus on grammar.”

Students marked ‘speaking improvement’ as one of the most important reasons to choose an English-speaking country. Thus, 61.29% ($n = 19$) of the students expected that staying in the U.S. would help them improve their L2 speaking skills. As student 1 reported, “I knew the grammar rules but I needed to improve my speaking. I learned the English grammar in middle school and high school. [...] That’s why I thought coming to the U.S. to take English courses would help me to speak English a lot better.” Some of these students reported that they were looking for a venue where they could actively use the language, as living in Turkey did not provide them opportunities to practice the target language. Therefore, they saw the U.S. as a place where they could speak the language every day. As student 7 stated, “...speaking to others is the key reason why I am here. In Turkey I never had this opportunity, therefore, my speaking did not improve. I came here to solve this problem.” Correspondingly, student 3 pointed out that “I decided to visit the U.S. in order to create a chance to speak English. I think that is the best way to witness considerable speaking improvement”.

A total of 61.29% ($n = 19$) of the students believed that a language could be learned best from the native speakers and thus, establishing ‘interaction with the native speakers’ of English was another reason that resulted in their preference for a native speaker environment to learn English. As student 27 reported, “...you need to talk to the native speakers to learn English best. Before I arrived in the U.S., I thought that I was going to meet native speakers of English, be friends with them, spend time with them, and learn how to speak English. I really do not believe that one can learn English from the nonnative speakers.” Similarly, student 19 stated that “I came here to meet native English speakers as I believed that nonnative speakers cannot teach it.” Student 16 who prioritized native-like pronunciation emphasized that “I want my English pronunciation to be native-like. In Turkey, my teachers were Turkish, my classmates were Turkish. I thought that if I meet native speakers of English in the U.S., I will start to pronounce English as they do.”

A total of 41.93% ($n = 13$) of the participants believed that taking English classes in an English-speaking country would help them ‘improve their L2 in a

very short time.’ Students had this impression as they thought that they would practice English in everyday encounters with native speakers of English. As student 3 put it, “I was expecting to increase my English proficiency to a very high level in a very short time. I was expecting that as I was exposed to English every day and everywhere, I would start to speak English fluently at the end of three months.” Student 30 stated that “I was hoping to witness a remarkable improvement at the end of three months. I had this impression that I would be surrounded by native speakers all the time.” Student 5 considered learning English from native speaker teachers as a superior experience and stated that “...I was expecting to progress really fast because the teachers in the language program were native speakers and I would also talk to native speakers in my daily conversations.”

Another reason that prompted 16.12% ($n = 5$) of the students to study English in the U.S. was the ‘TOEFL’ exam. Two of these students needed to pass the TOEFL exam in order to be accepted to a U.S. university, and three of these students needed a TOEFL score for graduate school in the U.S.

A total of 16.12% ($n = 5$) of the students believed that language and culture are interrelated and they preferred a native speaker environment as a venue for English ‘to learn language and culture simultaneously.’ As student 8 put it, “I think that in order to learn another language you need to learn another culture too. Here in Turkey we try to learn English, but we do not know enough about the countries where English is spoken.” Similarly, student 23 pointed out that “if a person learns culture and language simultaneously, he will learn it better. I was expecting to do this in the U.S.”

3.2 Non-linguistic reasons for choosing an English-speaking country as a venue for learning English

Students’ responses to the question “Why did you choose to study English in a native speaker environment such as the U.S.?” resulted in five non-linguistic reasons (see Table 2).

Table 2. Non-linguistic reasons for choosing an English-speaking country as a venue for learning English

Categories	<i>N</i>	%
Common sense perceptions in the Turkish society	25	81
Job market	22	71
Study abroad commercials	20	65
Friends	8	26
Family	4	13

Participants' choice of a native speaker environment was an outcome of several interacting nonlinguistic factors (see Table 2). Thus, 81% ($n = 25$) of students stated that the benefits of studying English abroad are seen as "common sense in the Turkish society." As Student 3 put it, "...people also told me not to waste my time in Turkey and visit the U.S. as they believed that if someone lives in the U.S., he can learn and speak English in a short time. After hearing these people talking very positively about learning English in the U.S., I also started to believe that I could pass the TOEFL exam in a short time, although I am a beginner English learner." Similarly, student 28 reported that "Everyone I talked to in Turkey about learning English told me that the best way to learn English is to visit a country where it is spoken." Student 12 prioritized living in a native speaker environment and learning English from native speakers of English. As he put it, "no one I have ever met in Turkey believed that one could speak native-like English without living in a country where people speak English. I also agree with that as English teachers in Turkey are Turkish and there is no one around with whom you can practice English."

The 'job market' is the second nonlinguistic reason that caused 71% ($n = 22$) of participants to choose an English-speaking environment. Participants stressed that most of the job openings in Turkey require advanced English proficiency and thus, they believed that improving their English and receiving a certificate from a language program in an English-speaking country would create positive employment outcomes. As Student 14 emphasized, "...high English proficiency opens the door to good job opportunities in Turkey. Therefore, visiting an English-speaking country to take English courses is an advantage." Student 19 reported that "by finishing this summer study program and living in the U.S. for three months I prove that I can live in an English-speaking country. I think that when I apply for jobs, the employer will pay attention to these details." Student 16 mentioned the language requirements of business companies and stated that "when I finish college, my goal is to work in a company that focuses on international business. All of the international business companies require English knowledge. I am also assuming that they would prefer to hire people who stayed in an English-speaking country."

A total of 65% ($n = 20$) of the students reported that they were influenced by 'study abroad commercials' that portrayed learning English as a simple and enjoyable process. Student 26 said that "before coming to the U.S., I gathered information about different short-term summer study programs through their web-sites. The information there persuaded me to believe that my English would be a lot better if I joined one of them." Student 21 stated that "I read the positive opinions of former students in these commercials. Their opinions and experiences really influenced me." Similarly, student 7 reported that "the commercials involved

everything that I was looking for: An international atmosphere, native speaker English teachers, intensive courses, and a beautiful city.”

‘Friends’ ($n = 8, 26\%$) and ‘family’ ($n = 4, 13\%$) were the other two reasons that influenced participants’ decisions to visit and study in an English-speaking country. As student 11 put it, “I had a friend who had been to England before. She told me that living in a country for a while where English is spoken is a lot better than taking English courses in Turkey.” Likewise, student 19 reported that “one of my friends had joined this language program before. He strongly recommended that I attend it.” Student 10 pointed out the influence of family on her decision to visit an English-speaking country and stated that “my father told me that someone’s son lived in the U.S. for a very short time, and he got a very high TOEFL score.”

3.3 Positive opinions and perceived L2 gains

The second question aimed to identify what the students thought about learning English in a native speaker environment after living and taking English classes in the U.S. The content analysis revealed eleven statements that reflect their opinions and experiences about their visit to the U.S. to take English courses. Three of these statements reflected positive opinions of the students about learning English in the U.S. (see Table 3).

Table 3. Positive opinions and L2 gains

Statements/Categories	N	%
I find learning L2 in the U.S. more advantageous than learning it in Turkey.	20	64.51
Living in the U.S. gave me more self-confidence	13	41.93
My speaking and listening skills improved	11	35.48

A total of 64.51% ($n = 20$) of the students stated that ‘they found learning English in the U.S. more advantageous than learning English in Turkey’, as living in the U.S. gave them the opportunity to practice the language in real social encounters. These students also said that although they enjoyed their time in the language program, it was the social environment and learning the culture and language simultaneously that made the difference rather than the language program that they were enrolled in. As student 29 reported, “living in the U.S. helped me learn the culture and language simultaneously and practice English in different, meaningful contexts.” Similarly, student 2 stated that “living here actually helps you learn simple details through experience. For example, yesterday I learned what ‘pickle’ means. I was at Subway and the guy asked me if I want pickles on my sandwich. I did not understand him and asked him what ‘pickles’ means. He showed them to

me and I have learned what they are.” Student 9 said that “I had more motivation to learn English here as I was supposed to use it every day. I also saw this as a great opportunity and tried to make use of it as much as I could. In Turkey, I have really low motivation to learn or use English.”

‘Gaining self-confidence’ was another category that 41.93% ($n = 13$) of the students mentioned positively about learning English in a native speaker environment. These students stated that initially they had less self-confidence about speaking English in a native speaker environment and they were afraid of making mistakes while speaking. As a result of their SA experience, however, they learned how to handle communication breakdowns and have more self-confidence than they did when they first arrived in the U.S. As student 8 reported, “living in the U.S. gave me remarkable self-confidence. I actually really needed that self-confidence, and it was more important for me than the quality of the U.S. language program in which I was enrolled. I solved all my problems in English. Maybe my sentences were not 100 percent correct, but who cares, I managed to use the language to solve all these problems.” Student 11 mentioned the positive attitude of native speakers while he was speaking English and reported that it helped him gain more self-confidence. As he reported, “Americans do not make fun of you even if you make mistakes or mispronounce a word. They are very positive about people trying to speak their language. This started when I was at the airport. I said something to the police and apologized for my broken English. But the police told me that my English was good and he understood what I was trying to say. No one here behaved badly towards me or criticized me for my English. These experiences gave me more self-confidence.” Student 26 stated that seeing so many foreigners and hearing foreign accents in Los Angeles made her feel more comfortable about her English and gave her self-confidence about using the language. As she said, “the moment I arrived in LA, I noticed foreigners and foreign accents everywhere. When I saw that these people could communicate even though their English was not perfect, I asked myself, why not me?”

A total of 35.48% ($n = 11$) of the students reported that their ‘speaking and listening skills improved’ at the end of three months. But the students stressed that these improvements were related to the daily language use in different contexts (such as restaurants, supermarkets, coffee shops) and they still experienced difficulty when they had to talk about complicated topics. As student 22 reported, “I actually learned the daily language used here. When I came to the U.S., I could not even order a pizza or understand if the barista asked me something at Starbucks. But as you perform these daily routines, you know what questions you will hear and you practice how to respond to them.” Similarly, student 4 stated that “I started to understand the daily routines better[...] I feel like my speaking performance got better here.” Student 6 said that “my listening skills improved as I overheard

the language spoken in different contexts. I also feel like I speak better than when I arrived. However, I still cannot talk about complex topics, and I cannot make very long sentences.”

3.4 The linguistic and interactional problems and disappointments

The participants made six statements about the linguistic and interactional problems and disappointments they experienced during their stay in the U.S. (see Table 4).

Table 4. The linguistic and interactional problems and disappointments

Statements/Categories	N	%
I had comprehension problems	14	45.16
I experienced language shock	13	41.93
I was not able to make native speaker friends (only short conversations)	12	38.70
High number of Turkish students in the language course caused me to use Turkish often	12	38.70
I experienced language anxiety	9	29.03
I had nonnative speaker friends but did not find it beneficial for my English development	8	25.80

A total of 45.16% ($n = 14$) of the students reported that they frequently experienced conversational encounters in which they could not comprehend native speakers of English. The majority of these students reported that they had these ‘comprehension problems,’ especially while ordering food or beverages in restaurants or coffee shops, etc., and some of these problems made them anxious. The students also put the blame on the grammar-oriented L2 education in Turkey and stressed that these problems occurred as they were trying to use the L2 for the first time. As student 12 reported:

especially while ordering food in restaurants sometimes I couldn’t understand what the waiter asked me. In Turkey everything is mentioned on the menu and the waiter does not ask you further questions. But here, you order something and the waiter asks so many additional questions. [...] They never teach us these kinds of things in Turkey. All the questions I am asked here are common and if they are that common why don’t they teach us these things in schools? They only teach grammar but grammar does not help in these kinds of situations. These experiences did influence me in a negative way sometimes and I was afraid of ordering something and talking to other people.

Similarly, student 21 stated that “in my first month, I had a hard time trying to understand what native speakers said. This reached extreme levels in restaurants. Because of this I preferred to eat at McDonalds for a while as I was familiar with the food menu.” Student 20 reported that “I think native speakers speak really fast. I thought I could understand English, but now that I have lived in the U.S. my opinions have changed.”

The content analysis results show that 41.93% ($n = 13$) of students experienced ‘language shock’ when they were in the U.S. Student 17 who experienced language shock at extreme levels even thought about going back to Turkey as her ego was negatively affected. She refrained from talking to the native speakers due to the language shock. As she stated, “I came to the U.S. to pass the TOEFL exam as I wanted to enroll in a graduate program. But during my first day at the airport, I decided not to live in the U.S. I literally could not understand anything that the police and other people told me. I heard announcements, but they sounded like a language that I had never heard before. I knew my English was not perfect, but I thought that I could at least understand what people would say. I thought speaking was the only problem. But my experience at the airport was a complete shock. I seriously reconsidered the idea of living in the U.S.” Correspondingly, student 18 reported that “I was at least hoping to comprehend what people would say to me. But once I tried to talk to native speakers, I understood how incompetent I was and this literally shocked me. In my first encounter with a native speaker, I literally couldn’t open my mouth.”

Most participants reported “befriending native speakers” as the primary reason for being in an English-speaking country. Participants thought it would enable them to learn the language from them. However, 38.70% ($n = 12$) of the students stressed that although they found Americans to be friendly, they could only have short conversations with them. Thus, they were not able to form strong friendships with native speakers or spend time with them as much as they had planned. One reason that stands out for hindering strong friendships was the low proficiency of the students. As student 30 stated, “I couldn’t make American friends and this was because of my English. My English is not good, and sometimes I felt shy trying to talk to the Americans. They are friendly, but to have longer conversations and to be good friends, both people have to talk.” Other students also stated that as they spent most of their time in the language course, the only Americans they knew were the teachers, and all of their friends were from other countries or from Turkey. As student 31 reported, “there is no one from the U.S. in the language program. Only the teachers are American. So, all of our friends are either Turkish or from other countries. I only talk to the Americans in supermarkets, restaurants or bars. But these conversations are short conversations. I was expecting that I would be able to make American friends in the U.S., but I actually have no close

American friend here.” Similarly, student 13 stated that “Although living in the U.S. gave me more chances to practice English than living in Turkey did, it was not as intense as I had expected. I was hoping to meet more native speakers, but this is not as easy as I had thought.”

Another point that 38.70% ($n = 12$) of the students mentioned was the ‘high number of Turkish students’ in the language program. As a consequence, students would use Turkish almost every day, which they thought was a disadvantage for English improvement. As student 5 put it, “there are so many Turkish students in the language course. I seriously was not expecting that. I thought there would be foreigners, and I would at least speak in English to them. This does not mean that I do not like Turkish people, or the Turkish guys I have met here. They are all nice people, but seeing them every day causes me to speak in Turkish to them. [...] So before I came to the U.S., I had thought that I would only use English. However, I have been here for the last three months and there is not even one single day that I have not spoken Turkish.” Student 14 said that “I was not expecting to see so many Turkish students in the language program. This actually made me use Turkish more and it was a disadvantage.” Accordingly, student 20 pointed out that “although there are students from other nations, I cannot underestimate the number of Turkish students in the language program.”

The study findings show that a total of 29.03% ($n = 9$) of the students experienced ‘language anxiety’ during the first weeks of their stay in the U.S. as a result of their inability to speak and comprehend the L2. As student 25 stated, “I experienced language anxiety here during my first month. For example, I needed a phone line and I went to T-Mobile. However, I could not understand what the sales agent told me. I also could not tell him what I wanted exactly. I started to get anxious and as my anxiety increased everything became worse. My brain went numb, and I seriously couldn’t even pay attention to one thing that the sales agent told me. I said yes to everything. I ended up with a very expensive plan. It was a really bad experience.” Student 24, who witnessed comprehension issues, reported that “one thing I understood was my English is not good enough to talk to native speakers. Because anytime I tried to use it, I felt so anxious, since I couldn’t get what they said, and I was really afraid of making mistakes while talking.” Student 23 stressed the anxiety caused by time pressure during conversations: “speaking to a native speaker sometimes made me very anxious. It was different from the other language-related experiences that I had. It was not like reading something in English or answering grammar questions. I knew that I had little time to make sentences and this made my heart beat faster.”

A total of 25.80% ($n = 8$) of the students reported that although ‘they made nonnative speaker friends, they did not find it beneficial for language improvement.’ As student 24 said, “there are people from various countries in the language

course but none of them are native speakers of English. I hang out with them, but I do not think this helps me improve my English. Their English is broken, and my English is broken too. Okay we have communication, but it is full of mistakes. I think if an American listened to what we were saying, we would sound funny to him. To learn English correctly, it is very important to talk to the native speakers but in the language course we did not have this opportunity.” Student 27 reported that she was disappointed with the language program as she thought the proficiency of her classmates was very low. As she reported, “okay, I talk to the people in the classroom but I think this makes my English even worse. Their proficiency is very low, and talking to them teaches me nothing. I may even be learning things wrong when I talk to them. I am very disappointed.”

3.5 Final opinions about learning English in an English-speaking environment

The participants mentioned two final opinions with regard to learning English in an English speaking environment. These opinions stress important outcomes of their SA experiences (see Table 5).

Table 5. Final opinions about learning English in an English-speaking environment

Statements/Categories	N	%
One needs to live in a native speaker environment longer in order to witness major improvements	18	58.06
One needs to have a background knowledge in English in order to get the maximum benefit	13	41.93

A total of 58.06% ($n = 18$) of the students emphasized “the need to live in a native speaker environment longer in order to witness major improvements in English.” Some of the students in this category had high expectations about making great improvements in a short time; however, after living in the U.S., they stated that although they witnessed some improvements in the L2, the progress they made was still slower than they had expected. As student 3 stated, “as I told you before, I came here to pass the TOEFL exam. I thought that I could pass it in a very short time even though I was a beginning learner of English. My parents and the people around me also expected me to pass it in a very short time. [...] I think people just exaggerate everything. [...] I think I need to stay here at least 1.5 years to speak English fluently and get a good score on the TOEFL exam. But when I told this to my father, he thought that I was not skilled enough to learn another language.” Student 25 mentioned that he spent the first weeks of his stay in the U.S. adapting to a new culture and environment, and language became the secondary purpose

for him. He thought this made him lose time. As he stated, “everyone spends the first couple of weeks adapting. It is a different country, different people, different system, etc. Everything looks different at first. I also did not know where to eat, which bus to take, etc. So, I spent the first couple of weeks solving the problems I faced. Adaptation took longer than I expected, and with all these problems you have, it is hard to focus on language. People should be ready for the problems I had. They should always keep in mind that the first weeks will be spent adapting, and they should not expect their English to improve really fast.” Similarly, student 31 reported that “I would like to stay in the U.S. longer because after living here for three months, I started to believe that three months is too short to witness major improvements.”

Students also believed that ‘one needs to have a background knowledge in English in order to get the maximum benefit’ from taking classes in an English-speaking country. They also considered this background knowledge necessary in order to initiate socializing and interaction with the English speakers. A total of 41.93% ($n = 13$) of the students stated that low levels of English knowledge will minimize the benefit that one can get from living in the U.S., and thus, one should at least have good grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Student 30 reported that:

if you come to the U.S. with zero English knowledge, you will leave it with zero English knowledge at the end of three months. I think one needs to at least learn the grammar and some basic vocabulary before coming to the U.S. Okay, you can take English courses here, but you will not be able practice the language with the native speakers and socialize with them. Your English learning will be limited to the language courses you are taking. When you socialize, you hear new words, phrases; you hear that person’s accent. You ask him questions, and he gives you information, he helps you learn the culture and language. You also learn the language spoken on the streets. It is authentic language. You could still survive here with no English. You could go to a restaurant and show what you want. But does that really mean that you are living in the U.S.? Absolutely not. Living here is learning from the people who were born here. You may be physically in the U.S. but if you cannot socialize with the natives this physicality will be meaningless. You could take English courses in Turkey instead of being here.

Correspondingly, student 18 said that “my English level was elementary. I wish I had at least made it intermediate before coming to the U.S.” Student 21 stated that “I think one can benefit from living in an English-speaking country more if one’s English proficiency is at least upper intermediate. Mine was elementary, and I don’t think I benefited as much as I had hoped because of my English proficiency.”

4. Discussion

This study examined the reasons for Turkish students choosing to study English in a native speaker environment. It also reported on the social and linguistic experiences that Turkish students encountered during their time in the U.S., and how these experiences related to their perceptions of learning English in a native speaker environment and interacting with the host community members. Participants' decisions to study in a native speaker environment, and the persistence of the language ideology that depicted SA as the key way to learn an L2, were products of several interrelated factors. Students' language ideologies were co-constructed as they were influenced by the parties and social circles with which the students interacted, their educational experiences, local discourses about second language proficiency, employment opportunities, recruitment literature that portrayed studying English abroad as the most efficient way to make considerable L2 progress, and learners' approval of these common sense beliefs. The study's findings show that although the participants' reported several benefits of their SA experience, they also witnessed unexpected outcomes such as language shock, language anxiety, a large number of Turkish students which meant a reliance on speaking Turkish rather than English, and lack of native speaker contact, which did not overlap with their pre-sojourn expectations. These findings overlap with Surtees' (2016) arguments which stress that students' attitudes about learning languages abroad have broader historical antecedents constructed through interactions with friends, faculty, family, media, and institutional policy. Hence, further research that focuses on the persistence of SA myths needs to focus on how language ideologies are co-constructed, rather than considering them as products of purely learner beliefs.

The student interviews showed that low language proficiency was a major factor that curtailed some of the participants' contact with the target-language community. These students stressed that although they found Americans welcoming, they could only have short conversations with them because of their poor English. Despite the fact that they were open to exploring the target culture and people, they were not able to construct strong relationships with native speakers and spend time with them as much as they had initially intended. This finding is similar to the one found by Conacher (2008) who reported that Irish students studying German in Germany were frustrated that they could not break into German acquaintance circles as much as they had expected at the beginning of SA, although they found Germans welcoming and helpful.

Although low proficiency level was a major factor in the current research, and it limited some of the students' contact with native speakers of English, several studies that focused particularly on language acquisition rather than contact with

the target-language community showed higher rates of linguistic improvement during SA for learners at lower proficiency levels compared with advanced proficiency levels (see e.g., Freed, 1995, 1998; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Martinsen, 2010; Milton & Meara, 1995). Ife et al. (2000) argued that measuring language development can be problematic at the upper levels if improvement in the L2 is analyzed as the percentage of items acquired (for instance, in the case of vocabulary): the more knowledge students have, the more difficult it will be for them to make proportionate gains. In the current research, none of the participants had advanced English proficiency. There were seven A2 level and 24 B1 level students. The student reports showed that students marked certain L2 knowledge as necessary to achieve interaction with the native speakers of English. Some of the learners' pre-journey expectations did not agree with what they experienced in the U.S. as they were hoping to have more social interaction with native speakers, but could not achieve it as a result of low language proficiency. Although these low proficiency students might have benefited linguistically from staying in an English-speaking environment, the student reports reveal that focusing only on the language acquisition of learners might be problematic in terms of measuring the efficiency of SA experiences. The reports of low proficiency learners in the current research showed dissatisfaction about accomplishing the interactional goals. As Baro and Serrano (2011) put it "it seems to be generally agreed that the students who benefit the most from an SA experience are those who already have a certain command of the L2 but are not advanced learners" (p. 100). Contrary to the dominant SA research that examined the relationship between proficiency level and linguistic achievement, the current research provides novel findings about the students' perceived gains in relation to their interactional goals, as lower proficiency students were hoping to establish more social interaction with English native speakers, but were mostly less successful in achieving it compared to higher proficiency students.

Additionally, the students in the current study reported that there were more Turkish students than they had expected in the language program. These students spent more time with their friends in the language program or other foreign students which minimized their contact with the target language community. Hence, the percentage of students who reported improvements in their speaking and listening skills were relatively low compared to the other studies. This finding is similar to what Tanaka and Ellis (2003) found in their study that focused on Japanese students studying abroad. In their study, the high number of Japanese students in the SA program resulted in modest gains as the learners constituted a linguistically and culturally homogeneous group who had little need to use English outside the classroom. These findings support Barron (2003) who argued that even living for a full year in a foreign country, L2 learners may not have sufficient access to meaningful interactions with native speakers, and consequently, they often spend

time with other L1 peers. Other studies by Amuzie and Winke (2009), Miller and Ginsberg (1995), Segalowitz et al. (2004), and Wilkinson (1998) which suggest that language learning abroad is not fundamentally, or in every respect, useful, also provide similar results. The fact that many of the learners fail to advance in the target language is related to their separation and lack of social contact and interaction with the host population. Hence, the study findings show that living in a native speaker environment for a short period of time does not guarantee constant interaction or establishing friendship with native speakers.

Some of the learners in the current research also stressed the importance of time needed for cultural adaptation and how this period made their L2 learning a secondary process. The exploration of Turkish and American cultures from the 6D perspective of Hofstede's (1997, 2001, 2011) model shows that the two countries display some major differences in terms of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence (see Hofstede, 2016 for a more comprehensive comparison). Friedmen and Aziz (2012) define the categories of Hofstede's 6D model as follows: *Power Distance* is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power be distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. *Uncertainty Avoidance* deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. *Individualism* on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side, we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose. *Masculinity* versus its opposite, femininity, refers to the distribution of emotional roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found. The assertive pole is 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole is 'feminine'. *Long-Term Orientation* societies foster pragmatic virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular, saving, persistence, and adapting to changing circumstances. Short-term oriented societies foster virtues related to the past and present such as national pride, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face' and fulfilling social obligations. *Indulgence* versus Restraint whereby Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms. According to the comparison between the U.S. and Turkey in Hofstede's 6D model, while the U.S. is low in Power Distance, high in Individualism, and low in Uncertainty Avoidance, Turkey is high in Power Distance, low in Individualism, and high in Uncertainty Avoidance. Considering these cultural norm differences and the demand of several participants for more

time to culturally adapt, it is important for institutions or language programs to draw students' attention to these differences instead of portraying SA as a miraculous experience that does not involve any problems in adapting.

The majority of the participants reported that before coming to a native speaker environment, having background L2 knowledge was essential as they saw that background knowledge as a means to integrate into the host community and establish interaction with its members. Similarly, a study on the cultural adaptation of the Turkish graduates in the U.S. found that the students who had better English reading and writing skills struggled less adjusting to the host culture than the ones who had lower English proficiency in those skills (Poyrazlı, Arbona, Bullington, & Pisecco, 2001). In a follow-up study of 227 Turkish students studying in 17 universities throughout the U.S., Duru and Poyrazlı (2007) found that low English competence was a significant predictor of acculturative stress which was positively correlated with adjustment difficulties and was negatively correlated with social connectedness. Correspondingly, Yeh and Inose (2003) found that lower level English language ability resulted in problems of acculturation for the international students. L2 interactional skills and L2 proficiency are key factors that accelerate the process of establishing contact with the target language community and ease adapting to the new culture (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Lewthwaite, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). These findings and the student interviews underscore the notion that L2 students, who plan to visit a foreign country for a short period of time to improve their L2, should increase their L2 proficiency beforehand if they want to socialize with the target language speakers.

Another point that the interviews revealed was the language shock that was triggered by L2 comprehension and speaking problems that the students experienced. Language shock led to language anxiety and avoidance of contact with the L2 community for several learners. This finding overlaps with the findings of the studies by Amuzie & Winke (2009) and Kaypak & Ortaçtepe (2014). These researchers found that contact with native speakers sometimes resulted in decreased confidence in language abilities. This finding also supports what Schumann (1978) argues in his Acculturation Model. In his model, Schumann considers language shock which leaves the learner feeling ashamed, anxious, and inadequate as a component of psychological distance that results in less contact with the target language community and endorses isolation. In the current research, the majority of these students had these problems especially while ordering food or beverages in restaurants or coffee shops, etc. These problems resulted in language shock for several students that triggered language anxiety and avoidance of social contact with the L2 community. Only the students who have learned how to handle these communication breakdowns and comprehension problems were able to create self-confidence using the L2. However, the ones who experienced anxiety as a result of

language shock had to deal with negative consequences. According to the student reports, these problems were the result of structure and accuracy oriented L2 education in Turkey that did not prepare them to use the target language in various real life contexts.

A high percentage of students criticized the grammar-oriented L2 education in Turkey and stated that their language education did not include communicative activities and introduction of authentic materials that could prepare them to interact using the L2. These criticisms by the Turkish students on structure-focused education show that no remarkable progress has been made in Turkey in terms of integrating a more communicatively oriented focus in L2 teaching despite innovative proposals introduced by the new curriculum in Turkey. As Kırkgöz (2008) stressed, the new curriculum was introduced in 1997 and it aimed to foster student-centered learning and advocated developing learners' communicative performance in English. The curriculum relates to all parts of education in Turkey. However, the findings of the current research and former studies show that L2 education in Turkey still puts the emphasis on accuracy and grammar rather than fostering the communicative skills of the students. For example, Ozsevik (2010) found that although Turkish teachers saw communicative methodology as necessary, they were not optimistic about its use because of the difficulties that stem from four directions, namely, the teacher, the students, the educational system, and communicative language teaching itself. Bal (2006) conducted a study at five different Turkish Public Primary Schools with twenty English teachers. He found that even though teachers had knowledge of communicative language teaching and had positive beliefs about it, they did not put communicative activities into practice in their classrooms. The common constraints that those teachers reported were the insufficient use of authentic materials, teachers lacking practical knowledge, grammar-based national syllabi, and large classroom sizes. Consequently, the findings of the current study show that when students are not prepared for real communicative encounters in the target language, and when they are exposed to accuracy-oriented grammar teaching, they may experience language shock when they are required to use language for the first time in real encounters. Moreover, this shock will lead to anxiety, which will minimize contact with the target language group and make acculturation unfeasible.

An additional point that could be related to the grammar-oriented L2 education in Turkey is the low value that several students assigned to the interactions they had with other non-native English speakers. Although several students enjoyed the multicultural environment in Los Angeles, an important number of students prioritized interacting with the native speakers as they considered them as the resources of accurate L2 input. They saw the input they could get from non-native speakers as potentially incorrect, which resulted in some of these students

avoiding interaction with their non-native classmates. These students did not recognize the interactional value of any conversational encounter that would push them to use the target language and negotiate meaning. Contrary to these student perceptions, L2 research shows that any type of interaction in the L2 can promote L2 acquisition as interlocutors negotiate meaning (Long, 1980, 1996) and produce language which leads them to discover the gaps in their knowledge, test hypotheses, and create metalinguistic awareness (Swain, 1985, 1995). Research on cultural adaptation also shows that interactions between international students lessen the difficulty they have in adapting to the host culture as establishing friendships destresses their psychology and inhibits the feelings of homesickness and social isolation (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Thus, any L2 teaching program should inform students about these interactional benefits and create an awareness of how interactions between non-native speakers could be useful for L2 learning and cultural adaptation instead of prioritizing accuracy in every aspect of L2 instruction.

5. Conclusion

The study findings in general show that although the majority of the students benefited from their stay in the U.S., they also faced various problematic experiences that limited their interaction with the host community, hindered their access to L2 input, and created several psychological problems such as language shock and anxiety. Students' pre-sojourn expectations about the outcomes of SA were high and these expectations were products of multiple interrelated factors such as the social circles in which students interacted, their educational life, local discourses about second language proficiency, employment chances, recruitment literature that portrayed studying English abroad as the most efficient way to make considerable L2 progress, and learners' approval of these common sense perceptions. The discrepancy between their pre-sojourn expectations and real SA experiences shows that what students need is professional help or guidance that will correctly portray the life they will experience in the host culture and prepare them for potential contextual linguistic encounters. Badstübner and Ecke (2009) recommended helping students to create more realistic expectations before embarking on SA. This may help reduce the disappointment of students with regard to their lack of contact and communication with native speakers at the end of the program. They also recommended that SA program organizers in the host culture should help students establish contact with native speakers. In this way, students can minimize the adaptation period, and both mentally and psychologically prepare themselves for potential contextual and language-related complications they

may have to cope with in the host culture. Hence, the findings presented serve to uncover the difficulties experienced in the host community and SA program that did not preexist in the students' language ideologies and how these experiences related to their perceptions of learning English in a native speaker environment and interacting with the host community members. The limitations of the study were the small number of students and its focus on only one SA program in Los Angeles. Further research that involves more participants in other SA contexts and longitudinally examines how students' SA expectations are shaped and how SA experiences shape students' language ideologies might be useful.

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