

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF POPULATION STUDIES

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN USING FOCUS
GROUP TO STUDY HETEROGENEOUS AND
HOMOGENEOUS GROUPS**

Mihretab Solomon GEBRU

Department of Social Research Methodology

Master's Thesis

Ankara

August, 2019

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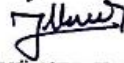
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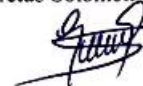
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ABSTRACT

Focus group discussion is one of the commonly used qualitative research methods. In focus group discussions it is argued that having homogenous participants in terms of social characteristics like gender, race, age etc. is beneficial. Despite such argument little is done to explore the impact of having heterogeneous participants in terms of ethnicity and gender for focus group discussions. Therefore, this study discusses methodological issues and challenges in using focus group discussion with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. The methodological issues include, but are not limited to sensitive issues, group interaction, power relations, non-verbal cues, depth and breadth of data, degree of comfort between participants. To understand these issues, five focus group discussions were conducted with international students on adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey. Groups were set as homogeneous and heterogeneous based on social characteristics i.e. ethnicity and gender. The homogeneous groups consisted of participants of the same gender and same ethnicity, while the heterogeneous groups consisted of mixed nationalities and gender. Findings of this study revealed that group composition has an impact on the discussion flow, data generated, and process of focus group discussion. Both homogeneous and heterogeneous group compositions can work well in specific situations depending on the purpose of the research. I argue that instead of turning back on heterogeneous group composition it is worthwhile to consider using it depending on the purpose of the study.

Keywords: focus group discussion, group composition, group homogeneity, group heterogeneity

ÖZET

Odak grup tartışması, yaygın olarak kullanılan nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden biridir. Odak grup tartışmalarında homojen katılımcıların “sosyal özellikler” olarak değerlendirilmesinin yararlı olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Ancak, tartışmalara rağmen, odak grup tartışmaları için heterojen katılımcıların cinsiyet ve milliyet açısından etkilerini araştırmak için çok az şey yapılır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma homojen ve heterojen gruplarla odak grup tartışmasının kullanılmasında metodolojik sorunları ve zorlukları tartışmaktadır. Metodolojik konular arasında, bunlarla sınırlı olmamak üzere, hassas konular, grup etkileşimi, güç ilişkileri, sözel olmayan ipuçları, verilerin derinliği ve genişliği, tartışma akışı ve katılımcılar arasındaki rahatlık derecesi yer alır. Bu konuları anlamak için, uluslararası öğrencilerle Türkiye’de uyum sağlama zorlukları konusunda uluslararası öğrencilerle beş odak grup tartışması yapılmıştır. Topluluklar milliyet ve cinsiyete göre daha homojen ve daha heterojen olarak belirlenmiştir. Daha homojen gruplar aynı cinsiyetten ve aynı milletten katılımcılardan, daha heterojen gruplar karışık milletlerden ve cinsiyetten oluşuyordu. Bulgular, grup kompozisyonunun tartışma akışı, üretilen veriler ve odak grup tartışması süreci üzerinde bir etkisi olduğunu ortaya koydu. Hem homojen hem de heterojen grup kompozisyonları, araştırmanın amacına bağlı olarak spesifik durumlarda iyi çalışabilir. Heterojen grup kompozisyonunu göz ardı etmek yerine, çalışmanın amacına bağlı olarak kullanmayı düşünmenin faydalı olacağını savunuyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: odak grup tartışması, grup bileşimi, grup homojenliği, grup heterojenliği

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

EEOC: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the United States

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Focus group discussion (FGD) is one of the widely used qualitative research methods. According to Krueger & Casey “a focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (R A Krueger & Casey, 2000). So, according to the above definition focus group is not merely the gathering of people talking with each other, it rather is a special kind of group in terms of procedures, purpose and group composition.

The interactive nature of focus group discussion is its typical feature where issues are explored and discussed among a group of participants and a moderator (Cooper, Jorgensen, & Merritt, 2003). It is this feature of using group interaction for the purpose of generating data and as a research data what differentiates focus groups from other qualitative research methods (Merton, Fisk, & Kendall, 1956). Apart from their usage as qualitative research method focus groups are also used in the business sector by market researchers to assess consumer views on household products, develop brand identity, design product packaging, and gauge marketing strategies (M. M. Hennink, 2014).

In focus group discussions it is suggested that having a demographically homogenous participants is beneficial. Many authors in literature suggested and argued for a homogeneous participants in a group (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; D. L. Morgan, 1997; M. M. Hennink, 2014; Hughes & DuMont, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Homogeneity in, for example, sex, age and ethnicity is often recommended (Greenwood, Ellmers, & Holley, 2014). Homogeneous group composition is advantageous in a sense that it allows for a free flowing discussion and this similarity increases participant compatibility making them feel comfortable with each other and to say what they feel. This allows them to speak more openly which makes conversation more free-flowing than in heterogeneous groups (Greenwood et al., 2014). On the other

hand having mixed or heterogeneous participants has the likelihood of making the discussion not only uncomfortable but also quarrelsome (D. L. Morgan, 1997). Morgan argue that heterogeneity in social background can create an atmosphere where participants feel uncomfortable to talk to each other (D. L. Morgan, 1997). However despite such assumptions and arguments little is done to explore the impact of having heterogeneous participants in terms of ethnicity and gender for focus group discussions.

Many researchers who studied focus group discussions as research method focused on the general strengths and weaknesses of using the method. For instance, the following studies were conducted on focus group as a qualitative research method. For example Peek & Fothergill, explored some of the strengths and limitations of the FGD as a qualitative method by examining three different research projects (Peek & Fothergill, 2009). Fallon & Brown, focused on applying advices written in books and research articles on how to run focus groups, and discussed the understandings and knowledge generated from using focus groups in the study of an ethnic community in Bangladesh (Fallon & Brown, 2002).

Jenny Kitzinger did a methodological study of focus group discussion (Kitzinger, 1994). She concentrated solely on the ‘interaction between participants’ aspect of the method and argues for the utmost exploration and usage of the interaction in research process. In another study Smithson, examined methodological issues related to the use and analysis of focus groups in qualitative social research (Smithson, 2000). Unlike the aforementioned studies Smithson, discussed the importance of how to analyze focus group data in a way which takes account of issues like having dominant voices and construction of the other.

Fern, in his attempt to test assumptions about focus group discussion assessed the effects of group size, acquaintanceship, and moderator on response quantity and quality (Fern, 1982). Despite his efforts to cover as many focus group research issues as possible his research failed to cover group composition.

This means group composition and group heterogeneity has often been left out in discussions or is only given little consideration despite its importance. Therefore, this study discusses methodological issues and challenges encountered in using focus group discussion with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. The methodological issues include, but are not limited to: group interaction, power relations, non-verbal cues, sensitive issues, depth and breadth of data, degree of comfort between participants. Even though several scholars and researchers insist on using homogeneous participants in focus group discussion research backed evidences are limited. In this regard this study contributes to the existing understanding of using focus group discussion with homogeneous and heterogeneous group compositions and the methodological issues and challenges in using homogeneous and heterogeneous groups in focus group.

I chose the discussion topic, adaptation challenges for international students and target population due to the advantageous positions to understand the methodological issues in using homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Characteristically, international students as a group provide the diversity and homogeneity that are necessary for the purpose of the study. Moreover, focus groups are being highly recommended as a good method for researches in cultural variations and differences (Smithson, 2008). Thus, international students of differing nationals were part of the study. Focus group as methodology is discussed in relation to research into adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey. In addition to the methodological objective the research can also help to understand the adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey.

1.2.Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to understand the methodological issues and challenges of using focus group in the study of heterogeneous and homogeneous participants. In spite of its vitality in focus group discussion discourse the issue of group composition and particularly methodological issues and challenges in using focus group with homogenous and heterogeneous groups has not been well discussed. The researcher

strongly believes that findings of the research can add some insights to the existing literature and understanding on group heterogeneity and homogeneity. On top of that findings of the study can pave the way for other researchers who are interested to conduct further studies. In addition to the methodological significance, assessing “international students adaptation challenges” is important as the findings can give international students insights on possible challenges and prepare themselves accordingly and, concerned bodies can make an intervention to help students adapt to challenges.

Focus group discussion as one of the methods of qualitative research has many aspects worthy of conducting a research. Methodological issues in focus group discussion research are vast and complex. They range from group composition to interaction between participants, from role of the moderator to analyzing focus group data, from technological aspects to group size, from degree of structure to power play etc. So, owing to financial and time resources available the study was limited to exploring the methodological issues and challenges in using focus group with homogenous and heterogeneous groups.

This thesis consists of six major chapters. The first chapter deals with general background of the study with brief introduction about focus group discussion and the contributions of the research. The second chapter reviews related empirical literatures: definition, characteristics, types, and origin of FGD, review of previous studies on FGD as a research method, group composition, degree of structure, moderator involvement and technology and FGD. The third chapter presents the research methodology: methods of data generation, participant recruitment, data analysis and ethical issues in conducting the research. The fourth chapter deals with presentation and analysis of the transcribed data. In this chapter excerpts from the transcripts are used to discuss the main adaptation challenges for international students and the methodological issues relevant to the purpose of the research. Chapter five deals with the findings of the research where the main results of the research are presented. The sixth and final chapter is the discussion part where the importance of the findings is described and discussed taking the broader literature in to consideration.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section existing literature on focus group as qualitative research method is presented. Previous researches which studied focus group as a method were reviewed and summed up here. I started with defining focus group, its origin, disciplines with which it is mostly associated, research areas typically related to focus group, conditions for using focus group, group composition, participant recruitment strategies, discussion setting and so on.

Initially developed in the marketing field, today focus groups are widely used in social science research and various other fields including education, public health, media and communication and political studies. A wide range of topics and issues are being studied using focus group research methods, for example: people's views and experiences of contraception (Barker & Rich, 1992), in a research study involving small business and entrepreneurship (Fallon & Brown, 2002) work-family matters in the workplace (Brannen & Pattman, 2005), in feminist qualitative research (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006), in nursing research (Clark, Maben, & Jones, 1996), for researching online populations (Stewart & Williams, 2005), in researching children (M. Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002), in studies of abortion and contraception (Otoide, Oronsaye, & Okonofua, 2001).

2.1. Definition and Origin

Focus group discussion is one of the widely used qualitative research methods. Morgan defined focus group as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (D. L. Morgan, 1996a). His definition has three essential components. First, it clearly states that focus groups are a research method devoted to generating data either as the main source of data or as supplementary source in researches employing other primary data source. Second, it locates the interaction among participants and a moderator in a group discussion as the source of the

data. Third, it acknowledges the researcher's active role in facilitating and guiding the group discussion for data collection purposes (D. L. Morgan, 1996a).

Researchers Hughes & DuMont characterize focus groups as group interviews and defined it as: "Focus groups are in-depth group interviews employing relatively homogenous groups to provide information around topics specified by the researchers" (Hughes & DuMont, 2002).

Hennink & Hutter gave a summative definition of focus group describing it as "an interactive discussion between six to eight pre-selected participants, led by a trained moderator and focusing on a specific set of issues. The aim of a focus group discussion is to gain a broad range of views on the research topic over a 60-90 minute period, and to create an environment where participants feel comfortable to express their views" (M. H. Hennink & Hutter, 2011).

Focus group discussion's early appearance in social science research is associated with the work of Bogardus 'The Group Interview' (Bogardus, 1926). However despite sporadic mentions and usage of focus group discussion and group interview by social scientists it was in the marketing research where it was popularly used. In the 1950s focus group discussions were widely used in the business sector by market researchers to assess consumer views on household products, develop brand identity, design product packaging, and gauge marketing strategies (M. M. Hennink, 2014). "Since this time focus group research has become a backbone in market research as it enables companies to stay in tune with consumers and provides highly valuable information from which to develop marketing strategies. Since market research is highly client focused, the approach to focus group discussions evolved from its original academic origins to suit commercial purposes" (M. M. Hennink, 2014).

In the 1980s focus group started to appear in social science researches. A review of online database by Morgan revealed that the number of studies employing focus groups was increasing every year with more than a 100 articles being published each year (D. L.

Morgan, 1996b). Morgan attributed this reemergence of focus group discussion in social research for two main reasons. The first is social scientists' ability to borrow from marketing studies where focus group was widely used and the second is the innovations and remodeling of focus group in a way that fits their own purposes (D. L. Morgan, 1997). On the same issue Hennink wrote that "in the early 1980s, focus group discussions gained a resurgence in academic research. Scholars initially adopted the market research approach to using focus groups, but realized that the commercial adaptations of the method were not well suited to academic research and they returned to the original intention of the method as devised by Merton and colleagues" (M. M. Hennink, 2014).

Another factor accredited for focus group research's popularity in the 1980s and 1990s was the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, to explore sexual behavior and sexual risk-taking in the context of HIV/AIDS (Liamputtong, 2011).

Focus group research is now extensively used across numerous disciplines, predominantly in the social and health sciences, the growing number of books and research articles on the method are supporting evidences. For example according to Wilkinson, "in the 5 years before 2011 there were almost 6,000 focus group studies published across the social sciences, with more than a quarter of these published in 2009 alone" (Wilkinson, 2011).

Hennink, argue that focus group discussions emerged because researchers were looking for alternative new interviewing methods to overcome the deficiencies of the traditional in-depth interviews (M. M. Hennink, 2014). He wrote "in particular, they sought to overcome the artificial nature of in-depth interviews with predetermined, closed-ended questioning, which could restrain participants' responses or lead them to respond in a particular way". Rice in 1931 summarized these concerns as follows:

"A defect of the interview for the purposes of fact-finding in scientific research, then, is that the questioner takes the lead. That is, the subject plays a more or less passive role. Information or points of view of the

highest value may not be disclosed because the direction given the interview by the questioner leads away from them. In short, data obtained from an interview are as likely to embody the preconceived ideas of the interviewer as the attitudes of the subject interviewed. (Rice, 1931, p. 561, cited in(M. M. Hennink, 2014)).”

These and other limitations of the traditional one to one in depth interview technique made the emergence of focus group as an alternative method inevitable. The dominance of the interviewer in the traditional interviewing is replaced by flow of discussion among the participants. Hennink pointed that “the discussion element of the method gives participants greater control of the issues raised in the dialogue, because they are essentially discussing the issues among themselves rather than directly with an interviewer (M. M. Hennink, 2014). It is important to recognize that it is the creation of a group dynamic that enables spontaneous issues to arise from the discussion and for participants to highlight issues that are of importance to themselves”. Ritchie & et al supported this argument by stating “in a sense, the group participants take over some of the ‘interviewing’ role, and the researcher is at times more in the position of listening in” (Ritchie et al., 2013).

2.2.Characteristics of Focus Group Discussion

Focus groups are different from other qualitative research methods in terms of their aim, group composition and specific tools. (M. M. Hennink, 2007) in his handbook ‘international focus group research’, he provided some characteristics that distinguish focus group discussion from other qualitative methods:

- Focus groups are generally composed of 6 to 8 participants, however they can be anywhere between 5 and 10 based on the objective of the study or the interest of the research.

- Participants are preselected and have similar backgrounds or shared experiences related to the research issues (e.g., experience of an illness, multiple birth, divorce, and so forth).
- The discussion is focused on a specific topic or limited number of issues, to allow sufficient time to discuss each issue in detail.
- The aim is not to reach consensus on the issues discussed, but to uncover a range of perspectives and experiences.
- Discussion between participants is essential to gather the type of data unique to this method of data collection.
- The group is led by a trained moderator who facilitates the discussion to gain breadth and depth from participants' responses.
- Questions asked by the moderator are carefully designed to stimulate discussion, and moderators are trained to effectively probe group participants to identify a broad range of views.
- A permissive, non-threatening group environment is essential so that participants feel comfortable to share their views without the fear of judgment from others.

2.3.Types and Uses of Focus Group Discussion

In contemporary social science research focus group discussion is being used for different purposes depending on the interest of the researcher, questions and objectives of a research, budget and time issues. According to Morgan there are three basic uses of focus group discussion in contemporary social research tradition (D. L. Morgan, 1997). The first is using focus group as self-contained method where focus groups are used as the sole and main source of data generation. Second, focus groups serve as supplementary source of data in researches that employ other research methods as their principal means of data collection.

In their role as supplementing another principal method, focus groups are helpful for exploring and provoking general ideas which can be used to inform the design of upcoming bigger research projects (Smithson, 2008). This is especially true in quantitative researches where survey questionnaire is used as primary data collection method. Third, focus groups are used in combination with other methods in multi method researches where more than one data collection techniques are used. Using focus groups in conjunction with other qualitative methods like observation or individual interview serves the aim of each method adding something new and assisting the researcher's effort in understanding the subject being studied (D. L. Morgan, 1997).

Focus group discussion is being used in different disciplines and sectors for a lot of purposes. This resulted in the emergence of different styles in conducting focus groups. According to Krueger, there are four different types of focus group discussion; "the academic application, the market research approach, use by non-profit organizations and participatory approaches" (Richard A Krueger, 2014). In describing the academic research approach Hennink has noted that "the academic research approach to focus group discussions is much more focused on the careful application of a research method, the generation of quality data and detailed, rigorous analysis of the information; therefore this approach takes considerable time" (M. M. Hennink, 2007). As with pure research, academic focus group results' audience is the scientific community; via academic journals or reports. Hennink noted that the academic approach involves conducting focus groups in community settings, such as the homes of study participants, community meeting halls, or in outdoor spaces. Moreover, he added that monetary incentives for participants are less common and trained moderators use a cautiously planned questioning route as a guide to lead the discussion on specific topics of interest (M. M. Hennink, 2007).

Whereas on the other hand the market research approach employs focus group for practical reasons. Market researchers use focus group to solve a problem, to assess consumer satisfaction and for the improvement of products and services. "The approach is not concerned with the application of a methodology, but is based on seeking practical

information, fast results and economic benefits” (M. M. Hennink, 2007). Business people who are mostly clients of market researchers are the general audiences of findings from market approach.

The non-profit approach to focus group discussion focuses on public services. “The public/non-profit approach is generally used for applied research, often to inform decisions, determine the effectiveness of services and be responsive to public users of services and amenities” (M. M. Hennink, 2007).

The participatory approach as its name indicates is peculiar for it involves the parties who will make use of the research findings (typically community members or groups) in the actual process of conducting the group discussions. “In the participatory approach, the purpose of focus groups is determined by community members themselves, because they directly use the outcomes” (M. M. Hennink, 2014). “It involves training, co-operation and willingness on behalf of policy and programme personnel to be involved in the process of seeking information and applying the findings to practice” (Richard A Krueger, 2014).

2.4.Focus Groups as a Qualitative Method

Qualitative approach incorporate various research methods for generating data from different sources. Participant observation and in-depth individual interview are considered to be the dominant methods in the qualitative research tradition (Colucci, 2007; D. L. Morgan, 1997). Participant observation takes place in a group context, while in-depth interview is associated with individuals. Focus group discussion lies in between the above two methods in a way that it possesses features of both methods (D. L. Morgan, 1997). However, Morgan argued that focus groups has a unique advantage over the aforementioned predominant methods in a sense that they give access to data that are not obtainable using either participant observation or individual interviews. Like any other research method focus groups have their own strengths and limitations. The interactive nature of the method is mentioned to be as the prior advantage of focus groups. According

to Hennink focus group discussions have three major strengths: “the socially oriented nature of the research procedure, the variety of applications of the method and the group environment of data collection” (M. M. Hennink, 2007). First, focus group discussions reproduce the natural social setting of communication unlike the non-natural settings of quantitative experimental researches. This natural research setting makes participants more relaxed and increasing the likely of their involvement in the discussion. Second, the flexible application nature of the method makes it suitable and easier to use it along with other methods in multi method research designs. Hence, focus group has an extensive applications from less structured exploratory research, to explanatory research that pinpoints drives for certain behaviors or attitudes, and evaluative research to evaluate aspects of a service or social work. Third, according to Hennink the ultimate strength of focus group method is from “the group nature” of the data generation (M. M. Hennink, 2007). For other authors like Morgan the main feature of a focus group is “the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insight that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (D. L. Morgan, 1988). Focus group discussion creates the atmosphere for group participants to develop accounts together, adding on each other’s ideas (Smithson, 2008). Focus groups enable us to generate large volume of information in a relatively shorter period of time. Compared to in-depth individual interviews focus groups are time saving and help generate a range of perspectives from different participants. Fern supported this by evidence and claimed that a focus group discussion produced close to seventy percent of the original ideas that were generated from various in-depth individual interviews with the same participant number (Fern, 1982). According to this example focus groups not only help generate a range of ideas but also similar content as of interviews with same number of people. For Morgan “the reliance on the researcher's focus and the group's interaction” are the two sources of strength for focus group discussion(D. L. Morgan, 1997).

On the other hand focus group discussions has got a set of limitations that should be considered. Hennink summarized three main limitations of the method: “the skills

required to conduct the groups, potential problems with the group dynamics and limitations related to the data and analysis” (M. M. Hennink, 2007). Firstly, creating a suitable and free flowing discussion environment requires a skilled and well experienced moderator. Finding a skilled moderators especially for large scale research projects can be quite challenging. Second limitation is associated with group dynamics. There is the problem of some participants dominating the discussion process. This can force other participants to be unheard and agree to the ideas of the dominant participants. Finally there are limitations with the data generation and analysis. The group nature of the method is not suitable for sensitive topics. Further limitation is related to difficulty in transcribing, analyzing and handling data from focus group discussions as it can be complex and time consuming (Pini, 2002).

2.5.Review of Studies on Focus Group as a Research Method

In this section studies pertaining to focus group as a research method are reviewed and discussed. Several researchers tried to discuss strengths and limitations of focus group discussion as qualitative research method. Fallon & Brown examined the main issues and challenges related with the use of the focus group method in a research study with Bangladesh community (Fallon & Brown, 2002). They concluded that focus group discussions should be carried on in a shared culture context, recruiting homogeneous participants. This is because, they reasoned homogeneity in composition of the group increases the amount and quality of data generated. Their findings also highlighted the advantage of focus groups for generating “rich qualitative data” in the business sector in general and entrepreneurship in particular.

In his study ‘the use of focus groups for idea generation’ Edward Fern tested widely accepted assumptions about focus group. He even used an experiment to compare one to one interviews and focus groups. His research focused on the effects of group size, acquaintanceship, and moderator on response quality and quantity.

Greenwood et al., assessed the influence of ethnic group composition on focus group discussions (Greenwood et al., 2014). Analysis of their findings revealed that “participants in the more homogenous groups were more likely to make potentially controversial comments relating to ethnic differences. Additionally, they appeared to be more at ease with each other discussing the topic”. Data generated from homogenous groups supplement data from heterogeneous groups giving different viewpoints. Contingent on the emphasis of the study, sharing social characteristics like being a carer can supersede other differences.

Peek & Fothergill analyzed focus groups using data from researching daycare centers, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina (Peek & Fothergill, 2009). They discussed on the importance of focus group for increasing sample size and on the breadth of information as well as concentrated data on a specific area of interest.

Smithson discussed limitations and possibilities of using focus group (Smithson, 2000). According to findings of the study focus groups are settings for a wide-ranging ideas and experiences but also they provide different kinds of interaction, including but not limited to direct and indirect challenges to others ideas, and the “collective voice” strategy. The wide range of argumentative interchanges common in focus groups result in a depth of dialogue which is not common in the in-depth one to one interviews. A particular strength of the methodology is the possibility for research participants to develop ideas collectively, bringing forward their own priorities and perspectives. On the other hand, limitations of focus groups include the tendency for certain types of socially acceptable opinion to emerge, and for certain types of participant to dominate the research process.

In critical reviews of researches conducted on the focus group as a research method Wibeck et al., find out that “even though the interaction between focus group participants is considered to be a hallmark of such research, the interaction itself has seldom been evaluated, analyzed or discussed in research based on empirical material collected through

focus groups method (Wibeck et al., 2007). Hence, the particular strength of focus groups, i.e. the interaction between participants, has rarely been explored in and of itself’.

2.6. Conducting Focus Group Discussion

2.6.1. Group Size

There is no consensus as to the ideal size of focus group. Different scholars suggest different sizes ranging from four participants to twelve participants. Many factors come to play in determining the size of focus group discussion. For Morgan the expected amount each discussant should contribute to the discussion and the degree of detail the research team want to achieve from each discussant are the main factors in determining the size of the group (D. L. Morgan, 1997). Accordingly both large group size and small group size have applicability depending on the purpose of the research and practical situations. In a groups with less than 6 participants difficult or complex topics may not facilitate an active conversation to generate enough information, on the other hand in groups with 12 and more participants there is a chance for some participants’ viewpoints to be ignored or left unsaid (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981). In addition to that larger group size might also pose difficulties for the moderator. According to Krueger & Casey group size should be “small enough for everyone to have an opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions” (R A Krueger & Casey, 2000). Fallon and Brown elaborated this statement as they discussed: “if groups are too small, the likelihood of a lively debate taking place will diminish, and intra-group dynamics are likely to exercise a disproportionately large effect on their running and the findings obtained. If groups are too large, however, they can become unwieldy and problematic to manage. Taking these considerations into account, suggestions about group size range from between four and twelve members to between four and eight people, with eight being suggested as the optimal number of group participants” (Fallon & Brown, 2002).

For authors like Hennink purpose of the study, topic of the study and participants’ characteristics are important factors that influence the size of the group (M. M. Hennink,

2014). He indicated that ‘a group of six participants may be suitable if the research topic is intense or participants have much experience on the topic, whereby each participant is likely to have a lot to contribute to the discussion.’ However having a small group has its own drawbacks. The limited diversity of experience shared and lack of the interactive dynamics of a group discussion are some of the limitations of small size groups. On the contrary, larger focus groups of eight participants or more are more common and are suitable where the topic of discussion is broad, or where participants may have less specific experience on the research topic (M. M. Hennink, 2014).

2.6.2. Group Composition

Group composition means the “social characteristics” of participants in a focus group. As group composition can have an important impact on the dynamics and flow of the discussion it needs a great deal of consideration. The composition of the group should be arranged in a way it ensures that the participants have a knowledge on the subject and at the same time feel comfortable sharing it in the group setting (D. L. Morgan, 1997).

Hennink noted two aspects of group composition that are important for developing a positive group environment: homogeneity between participants and their level of acquaintance (M. M. Hennink, 2014). Researchers suggest that group participants be homogenous for successful and free flowing discussions. Supporting the above argument Hennink argued that “homogeneity is desired because participants are more likely to share their opinions and experiences with others who they perceive are similar to them, whereas they will be reluctant to contribute if they believe others in the group differ from them” (M. M. Hennink, 2014). Flowerdew & Martin state that group homogeneity involves “bringing together people who have enough in common to allow the development of a productive conversational dynamic”(Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). Group homogeneity is generally sought in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds of participants or their level of experience with the study topic; for example segmenting by gender, age group, socioeconomic groups, life stages, levels of authority and sharing similar experiences (M.

M. Hennink, 2014). And for other authors like Morgan the most commonly considered “social characteristics” in determining group composition are age, race, sex and social class (D. L. Morgan, 1997).

Other researchers like Bloor et al., take the argument to the extreme and believe that groups that are too heterogeneous may result in conflict and the repression of views of certain individuals (Bloor et al., 2001). They provide a scenario to support their argument: “you are unlikely to have a successful group if you bring together groups of people with strong allegiance to different political parties, or a group consisting of abortion clinicians and individuals belonging to a pro-life movement”. In situations like this conflict is highly likely to occur as participants might hold strong and opposing stances. Bloor et al., further added that in conducting a focus group discussion with heterogeneous participants entitled to conflicting views may result in high levels of conflict which can spoil the flow of the discussion and constrain debate and indeed may also become quite stressful for the participants. In groups where participants are heterogeneous in terms of power and status some participants views can be silenced, while the powerful ones dominating the discussion. In a focus group research adolescent smokers in schools Michell & Amos found that some views were being omitted from the focus group discussion (Michell & Amos, 1997). According to the research findings this was because of the hierarchical differences among the adolescents. The researchers indicated that during the focus group discussions the views of the students in lower status were silenced, while the students from the higher status dominated the discussion.

Bloor et al., concluded that characteristics like sex, ethnicity or race, religion and age as well as background in shared experiences of participants as being necessary to have a homogeneous and productive group (Bloor et al., 2001).

The level of acquaintance or familiarity between participants can also have an impact on focus group discussion. Accordingly focus group can be held among participants who know each other or among participants who are strangers to each other

(M. M. Hennink, 2014). Both have their own strengths and limitations. There is greater anonymity among strangers, which in turn may increase a participant's willingness to contribute to the discussion. On the other hand a group of people who are familiar with one another may already know a participant's viewpoint and reasoning on certain issues, and therefore less detail is given. The advantage of recruiting a group of acquaintances is that less time needed to build group rapport because participants are already familiar to one another and greater group attendance because participants may know others attending the group discussion so there may be less attrition (M. M. Hennink, 2014). However, the lack of anonymity among acquaintance groups may reduce the depth of information provided compared with a group of strangers.

Hydén and Bülow discussed three different perspectives for understanding the composition of a group: “1) as an aggregation of individuals sharing some common experiences or social features, 2) as a small group in which the members share values, norms, roles and goals, or 3) as a focused gathering in which participants share a temporary situation with a common focus” (Hydén and Bülow (2003) as cited in (Wibeck et al., 2007).

2.6.3. Participant Recruitment

Participant recruitment is different between the two major social research designs. In quantitative research participants are recruited using probability sampling technique with the purpose of representing many other cases that the researcher cannot directly examine. According to Neuman in a probability sampling strategy, the researcher tries to create a precise representative sample that has mathematically predictable errors to (Neuman, 2013). Some authors like Hennink added that quantitative research characteristically seeks to measure issues and generalize the research results to the general population; hence, a large sample size and simple random sampling of participants is required (M. M. Hennink, 2014). However the purpose of qualitative research is completely different from its quantitative counterpart. In qualitative research in general

and focus group discussions in particular the aim is “not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people in the groups perceive a situation” (Richard A Krueger & Casey, 2009). Accordingly qualitative research generally necessitates small number of research participants so that issues can be studied in detail, but also requires selecting participants with specific characteristics in relation to the research objectives rather than selecting them randomly as it is in quantitative sampling (M. M. Hennink, 2014).

In’ qualitative research study participants are selected “on purpose” as they possess certain features or life experiences in relation to the research questions. These are often referred to as “information rich” participants (M. M. Hennink, 2014). For example, a study on the experiences of single mothers may seek to select single mothers because they are “information rich” on the experience being studied. It is usually worthwhile to over recruit participants to avoid for any possible attrition.

Hennink in his book ‘*Focus Group Discussion*’ came up with many strategies for purposive recruitment of participants in focus group discussions like (M. M. Hennink, 2014). He summarized five effective strategies for recruiting focus group participants, those are through:

- I. *Community gatekeepers*: Community gatekeepers facilitate access to the study population. They may be social or religious leaders, service providers, or familiar and respected members of the study community.
- II. *Formal services*: Identify whether the study population regularly uses any formal services or networks (e.g., health services, religious groups, or support groups) from which they may be recruited.
- III. *Informal networks*: Identify whether the study population is associated with any informal networks, such as social or recreation groups (e.g., sports clubs, youth groups, language classes).

- IV. *Advertisements:* Develop an advertisement about the study to place in newspapers, magazines, community bulletin boards, or other prominent locations likely to be viewed by the study population.
- V. *Research based:* In mixed-methods research, participants for a focus group could be able to be recruited from the pool of group discussants recruited for another part of the study.

2.6.4. The Role of The Moderator

Moderator plays a crucial role in the success or failure of focus group discussions for he or she is responsible for conducting the discussion. Effective moderator can be a leading factor for good research outcomes in terms of data generated. Hennink analogizes the role of the moderator to that of an interviewer in an in-depth interview in that they are responsible for developing rapport, collecting detailed data, pacing the session, and remaining focused on the research agenda like (M. M. Hennink, 2014). However, he added, “moderating a focus group discussion can be much more challenging because the moderator needs to manage a group of participants, which means greater skills and attention are needed in questioning and probing a whole group, fostering group cohesion, and managing the group dynamics, while remaining focused on the research objectives and facilitating the flow of an interactive discussion” (M. M. Hennink, 2014).

Moderator is expected to be well prepared and well informed of the topic of discussion, however he or she should be careful of leading the discussion. Fallon & Brown discussed this issue in their article stating “moderators should be aware of, and fully understand, the issues being discussed but should avoid creating an air of omniscience. (Fallon & Brown, 2002). Participants might react to ‘all-knowing’ moderators by becoming deferential and inhibited, with the result that discussion is stifled and the quantity and quality of the findings are impoverished. Focus group interviews differ from other methods of qualitative data collection in that it is important to maintain an emphasis on the whole group (rather than on individuals within it) as the unit of analysis”.

Along a moderator a note taker is required to conduct successful focus group discussion. The primary responsibility of a note taker is to write down the main ideas and points raised during the discussion.

2.6.5. The Number of Focus Groups

There is no predetermined set of focus groups to include in a research project. If the number of groups is too few the study might miss important things or might lead to premature closure; whereas on the other hand if the groups are too large it can be wasting time and resources. Even though a thorough planning ahead can be helpful, flexibility is far better when it comes to deciding on the number of groups. Fallon & Brown argue that “Four or five groups may be a perfectly adequate number where overall population size is low (Fallon & Brown, 2002). One group will be insufficient, as the researcher will have difficulty in knowing whether the findings are unique and incapable of generalization”. Similar to Fallon and Brown’s argument Morgan explained that the typical number of groups is three to five. However Morgan emphasized on the importance of response diversity for determining the total number of groups to set up for a single study. He added that there is a decreasing return for each new group conducted. “When the groups become repetitive, you have reached a point of theoretical saturation, and there is little to be gained by doing more groups” (D. L. Morgan & Krueger, 1997). Both large number of focus groups and small number of focus groups have their own advantages. Having relatively large number of groups is necessary when the participants have a wide range of experiences and responses to share. Jenny Ktzinger’s study on generating content for a media project on AIDS is good example of using more groups. The researchers conducted 52 focus group discussions with 352 participants. The reason for that very large number of groups was the complexity of the topic and the prevalence of a wide range of perspectives throughout the project country. While fewer groups are appropriate when there is no diversity in the responses. In other words when the focus groups have already

reached the saturation point and started to be repetitive after two or three groups, there is little to be generated by conducting additional groups (D. L. Morgan & Krueger, 1997).

2.6.6. Degree of Structure

Making a decision about the degree of structure of a focus group discussion is an important part of the group planning process. According to Morgan the degree of structure influences all aspects of the study including the nature of the data, question format, moderator's interaction with the participants and the final analysis. Interview standardization and moderator involvement are the two choices that determine a focus group's degree of structure. Interview standardization as defined by Morgan refers to "whether the same questions are asked of every group", where as moderator involvement indicates whether the moderator controls the discussion or allows for a relatively free discussion (D. L. Morgan, 1997). There are three degrees of structure in focus group discussions. These are more structured groups, less structured groups and moderately structured groups. More structured groups as the name indicates emphasizes sticking with a predetermined structure of questioning, moderating and topics. Therefore, more structured groups emphasizes the researcher's interests, focus and questions. In more structured groups the discussion is guided by the discussion guide, uses a lot of specifically designed questions and the moderator plays more of controlling and directive role. On the other hand the less structured groups are important for "exploratory purposes". Unlike the more structured groups less structured groups give participants more freedom as the goal is to learn their perspectives. In addition discussion questions are written in a general focused way, being open ended for participants to contribute more. Moderately structured groups lie in between the continuum. They are "most appropriate when the research project calls for learning about both the research's focus and the participants' interests" (D. L. Morgan & Krueger, 1997). All said understanding research's objectives is an important task to accomplish before making any decisions regarding degree of structure.

2.7. Technology and Focus Group Research

The advancements in technology have their impact on qualitative research process in general and focus group discussions in particular. With the rapid advancements in telephone, video conference, the internet technology stands to be the future of focus group discussions. Technology is being immersed to assist in all the stages of focus group. For example it can be helpful during the recruitment process, during the actual discussion and during data analysis phase. Interestingly, the past two decades has witnessed “the emergence of virtual focus groups”. Hennink in his book ‘Focus Group Discussions’ says “in recent years increased technology has seen the emergence of virtual focus groups using telephone and internet facilities to conduct remote group discussions where participants do not actually meet face-to-face” (M. M. Hennink, 2014). In the beginning, virtual focus groups were widely used by market researchers but gradually they are being more and more used in other disciplines including social science, health, and educational research (Liamputtong, 2011).

The two main types of ‘virtual focus groups’ are: via telephone and the internet. Tele-conferencing technology made it easier to conduct focus groups using telephone with participants in different locations at the same time (M. M. Hennink, 2014; Smithson, 2008). Cooper et al., made an empirical assessment of telephone focus group by reviewing 16 publications that used telephone focus groups (Cooper et al., 2003). They concluded that: “the telephone focus group method may be especially useful in studies involving populations that do not have adequate representation in any single region and studies investigating sensitive topics”. In addition to tele-conferencing “video conferencing technology may be used so that participants are able to see each other during the discussion” (M. M. Hennink, 2014). Online focus group can also be used for working with people with disabilities or illnesses. For example, Kralik et al., used email group discussions to understand the consequences of illness that people with chronic illness face in their lives (Kralik, Price, Warren, & Koch, 2006). Online focus group also provide an

anonymous atmosphere for participants to share and talk openly about sensitive issues (Edmunds, 1999).

Both telephone and online focus groups have similar benefits over the traditional face to face focus group. The first advantage is the fact that these technologies made it possible to cover participants in a dispersed and inaccessible geographic locations. For example, telephone focus groups were used in Australia to access speech pathologists located in remote rural areas (Atherton, Bellis-Smith, Chichero, & Suter, 2007 as cited in (M. M. Hennink, 2014)), and similarly in the United States this format was used in a national study of physicians located across 17 states (Cooper et al., 2005). Other advantages include cost effectiveness, better comfort for participants and convenience.

Despite their increased use in the social science, health and marketing researches 'virtual focus groups' or online focus groups are not far from limitations. The main drawback associated with 'virtual focus groups' as with any internet based conversations is the likelihood for fake participants (with false information) taking part in the discussions (Smithson, 2008). Moderating is particularly challenging in 'virtual focus groups' as lack of visual contact hinders the observation of non verbal communication (M. M. Hennink, 2014). Interruption, lack of focus, or disengagement with the discussion are also other disadvantages of 'virtual focus groups'.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research method used in the study. It began with a discussion of the data generation method of the study, followed by sampling strategy, group composition and number of focus groups, data analysis methods, ethical concerns and the discussion guide. Furthermore, it gives an explanation of how the participants were recruited, instruments prepared, how the data was generated, and the methods by which the collected information was analyzed.

3.1.Data Generation

The subject of discussion for the focus groups is adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey. I (the researcher) being an international student at Hacettepe University is one of my motivations for choosing the study subject. I have been living in Turkey since October 2016. During the first months of my stay I had to go through new experiences: of adapting to a totally new environment, new language, new food etc. I was a stranger and literally I had to start my life from zero. So, I had my own experiences of living as international student in the Turkish capital, Ankara. In addition to this, international students as a group provide the variety and homogeneity in terms of social characteristics necessary for the research.

The ontological position is based on the assumption that individuals (international students in this case) face adaptation challenges in their stay in Turkey. The epistemological position on the other hand is based on the assumption that the adaptation challenges can be known and understood. Evidences about the adaptation challenges can be generated from the accounts and experiences of international students using focus group discussion.

The focus group discussions were facilitated by me (the researcher). The research adopted a moderately structured approach. Interview standardization as used by Morgan refers to whether the same questions are asked of every group, where as moderator

involvement refers to the management of the group dynamics- that is, the extent to which the moderator either controls the discussion or allows relatively free participation (Morgan, 1997). In this study the aim is to assess the methodological issues and challenges of using focus group in the study of heterogeneous and homogeneous participants on the adaptation challenges for international students. Accordingly, it was important to ask similar questions and apply similar moderator involvement or degree of structure for both homogenous and heterogeneous groups and observe how the discussions flow and to record the methodological issues and challenges in using each. This is particularly important in order to compare the challenges and opportunities of both group compositions (i.e. homogeneous and heterogeneous). Therefore the study adopted a moderately structured degree of structure where a semi structured discussion guide was used in all the groups. The guide had three major adaptation challenge categories and the researcher's role was to make sure all of the issues were addressed by asking in between. In the same time participants were given the freedom to share their experiences as long as they didn't go out of the guiding topic. Thus, in this research the interaction between group members including non-verbal cues during the discussion are very important, therefore apart from the moderator an observer or note taker with research knowledge attended all the sessions. Major responsibilities of the note taker or observer included writing down the key points raised in the discussion, writing down the initial names and the initial phrases of speakers, operating the recorder and helping the moderator with other tasks that arise during the actual discussion.

A semi structured focus group guide was prepared prior to the discussion. It served the function to remind the moderator of the topics and questions that need to be addressed to meet the research objectives while at the same time giving participants a moderate set of freedom to discuss and interact freely. As Morgan puts it "the moderator uses the guide as a resource to maintain the balance between the researchers focus and the group's discussion" (Morgan David, 1997). Therefore, a semi-structured focus group guide using a sample template from Hennink's 2014 book 'Focus Group Discussions' was prepared to

guide the discussion process and to make sure relevant topics of the research are covered. Prior to the discussion informed consent was taken from participants to audio-record the discussion. Accordingly tape recorder was used to record the sessions.

3.2.Participant Recruitment

According to Richard and Casey in qualitative research in general and focus group discussions in particular the aim is “not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people in the groups perceive a situation” (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

In this regard the study adopted purposive sampling where ‘information rich’ participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research subject were selected. Purposive or judgmental sampling is as its name indicates is the deliberate recruitment of a respondent as a result of the special qualities he or she possesses (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The characteristics that are considered for participant recruitment are being international student in Turkey, gender and ability to speak English. Those characteristics are important factors influencing the group composition as homogenous and heterogeneous ones. The strategies for purposive recruitment of participants were using contacts from formal services and informal networks. Formal services include contacts through Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities and International Students’ Offices in universities; while informal networks consists of the researcher’s own social network as international student in Turkey. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and no incentive was provided for participants.

I initially planned to conduct five focus group discussions with each group having 6 to 8 participants. However the number of participants and groups may increase depending on whether adequate and quality data are collected to support the study. Therefore, sampling and discussions were set to go on until the researcher reaches a saturation point where no new information is obtained from further data. This being the

case it was found worthwhile to over recruit participants to avoid for any possible attrition and to have enough reserves for possible new groups.

3.3.Group Composition and Total Number of Focus Groups

Regarding the ‘ideal number’ of focus groups to conduct, most scholars agree that three to five groups are usually adequate, as more groups seldom provide new insights (Morgan, 1997). For the purpose of this study five focus group discussions were conducted. In two of the discussions participants were more homogenous as they were same gender and same ethnicity. The other three were on the other extreme consisting of participants who are heterogeneous as they are mixed in terms of gender and ethnicity.

Table: 1: Characteristics of the participants		
Focus group	Participant characteristics	Nature of group composition
Focus Group - 1	Female, Same ethnicity Six female international students from Ethiopia	Homogenous in sex and ethnicity
Focus Group – 2	Male, Same ethnicity Six male international students from Kenya	Homogenous in sex and ethnicity
Focus Group – 3	Male, Mixed ethnicity Seven male international students from: Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Kirgizstan.	Heterogeneous in ethnicity
Focus Group – 4	Female, Mixed ethnicity Five female international students from: Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, China, Kenya	Heterogeneous in ethnicity
Focus Group - 5	Mixed Gender, Mixed ethnicity Three female and four male international students from: Syria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Algeria, Columbia, Georgia	Heterogeneous in gender and ethnicity

3.4.Data Analysis

Data analysis started by verbatim transcription of the audio recorded group discussions. The raw data (transcriptions and discussion notes) then were organized and reviewed by the researcher to check mistakes or missing information. Data was coded manually.

Analysis of both the content and the interaction process was carried out. Transcribed data was coded using sentence by sentence coding. Code list was prepared and codes were organized under categories. Interaction process includes verbal and non-verbal aspects. Non-verbal cues like laughter, pauses, body language and so on are important parts of the interaction process as they enable to understand the interaction between participants. Therefore by including both verbal and non-verbal data transcription was a combination of what is said, how it is said, and how other respondents reacted. After coding and organization of the data, extracts from the focus group transcripts and discussion notes were used to discuss the methodological issues that are important for the study.

3.5.Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are of a great importance in social science researches. They are a set of moral principles that researchers should abide by in order to protect research participants from physical, psychological, economical or any other harm by researchers or the research process. According to The Declaration of Helsinki codes of research ethics are comprised of informed consent, self-determination, minimization of harm, anonymity, and confidentiality. I firmly believe that ethical concerns should be considered not only in planning phase but also throughout the research process. Therefore, the following measures were taken to safeguard the rights of all research participants;

- Before participant recruitment and the actual data generation the research was reviewed and approved by Hacettepe University Ethics Committee and the researcher

requested for supportive letter from Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies.

- Through informed consent participants determined whether they wish to participate in the study and their right to refuse participation. Participants were provided with enough and accurate information about the study, so that they can make an informed decision on whether or not to participate in the group discussion. This was done first during the recruitment phase and was restated again by the moderator before the actual discussions.
- It is the responsibility of the researcher to minimize any potential harm for participants because of the study. One of the potential consequences for taking part in this study may be missing classes or exams. In order to minimize this harm discussions were conducted in the weekends or in participants' free times.
- At last but not least the researcher has the responsibility to keep the information discussed in the focus groups confidential and to maintain anonymity of group participants. Confidentiality was ensured by restricting who accesses the recording and by securely storing the data. In addition, to ensure anonymity of participants any information about them was given a code name on it instead of their actual names. This was stated to the participants along with informed consent.

3.6.Homogeneity and Heterogeneity

Homogeneity as used in this research refers to the “social characteristics” of participants entailing similarity in terms of gender and ethnicity (nationality). Accordingly two groups with similar social characteristics were conducted in this study. The first group is homogeneous male group. Participants were international students who came from the same country i.e. Kenya. The age range of participants was between 22 and 26 years old. The second homogeneous group was consisted of female international students from Ethiopia with age range between 20 and 24 years old.

Heterogeneity on the other hand refers to the group participants' variance according to the "social characteristics" mentioned above i.e. gender, ethnicity (nationality). Accordingly three of the five focus groups were designed to reflect all or at least one of the so called social characteristics which are important for this study. The first heterogeneous group consists of male participants from seven different nationalities with age ranging between 19 and 33 years old. The second heterogeneous group was a group of female participants from five different countries with age range of 20 to 30 years. The last heterogeneous group was made up of male and female participants from six different countries with age ranging between 19 and 29 years.

3.7.The Research

A total of 5 focus groups were conducted for the purpose of this study. Group sizes range from five to seven. The group with the least number of participants (five participants) was the heterogeneous female group, whereas the groups with highest number of participants were the heterogeneous male group and mixed group with seven participants each. The remaining two groups had six participants each. Prior to the discussions I recruited a minimum of eight and a maximum of ten participants for each group. The recruitment phase was however quite challenging. Firstly, unlike individual interview where you can meet and interview the person anytime and anywhere he or she wants, in focus groups you have to convince a group of people to come together at the same place and discuss. Secondly, even if you convince them you have to find a suitable time that works for all the participants. It was particularly challenging as the participants were scattered in different universities. As a strategy I first researched events and organizations where international students come together. I found Turkey Scholarship Hamamonu office best fit for this purpose. They have several events and programs involving international students every week. I went there and gave information about the research to potential participants. I then took the phone number of participants who were willing to take part in the research. On top of that my network from Turkish Tomer course

was also a valuable asset to recruit more participants. I then categorized the participants based on the homogeneity and heterogeneity which are the important focus points of the research. A great caution was made not to include acquaintances in a group. To participate in the study participants had to be international student in Turkey, and be able to make discussion in English. The sampling method was purposive in the sense that participants were selected based on predetermined criteria in accordance with the objectives of the research. For the homogeneous groups in addition to being an international student, participants should all be same gender and should come from the same country.

All the focus groups were moderated by myself. An experienced PhD candidate from Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University assisted me as an observer in all the focus groups. A semi-structured focus group guide using a sample template from Hennink's 2014 book 'Focus Group Discussions' was prepared and used in all groups as a guide for the discussions. The guide was a reminder for the researcher to make sure if all the important questions were covered and answered. In all the focus group discussions, the moderator followed the guideline to ensure that similar procedure is applied in all discussions and all of the groups regardless of their composition as homogeneous and heterogeneous, are comparable. Generally the discussions started with small talks between the participants, between the participants and the researchers. This was because the participants don't usually arrive at the same time, some arrive earlier than the others. This small talk was necessary for creating a friendly environment among the participants. The actual discussions started with a welcome speech introducing of the focus groups by the researcher, followed by all participants introducing themselves. After the opening introduction the following issues were covered in the discussions: adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey, language adaptation challenges, socio-cultural adaptation challenges, and academic related challenges. At the end summary and closing questions were asked to make sure important points were not missed. The note taker jotted down notes based on a list of themes relevant to the research. At the same time the note taker also wrote the initials of the participants and the first sentence or phrase they said

whenever they started talking in order to differentiate who said what during the data transcription. Following each focus group the research team (both the moderator and the note taker) made reflections on each discussion, the researcher kept those reflection notes separately for each group.

Participants were given an informed consent both in the recruitment phase and right before the actual discussions. They all gave their informed consent to participate voluntarily. An additional consent was also taken for the discussions to be audio recorded. In return the researcher assured the confidentiality of the research and for participants to remain anonymous throughout the research process.

No payments or incentives of any form were given for the participants, they took part in the research for free. For all the discussions the researcher provided refreshments.

The discussions lasted between 70 and 142 minutes. The shortest being the heterogeneous male group with 70 minutes, and the longest the homogeneous female group (lasting for 142 minutes) which is two times greater than the former.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This chapter includes two parts. In the first part, the analysis of the five focus groups on adaptation challenges for international students are explained in order to give information about the study topic. In the second part, the methodological challenges and opportunities are discussed in both homogeneous and heterogeneous focus group compositions.

4.1. Analysis of the Focus Groups On Adaptation Challenges for International

Students

In this section the main results from the focus group discussions are discussed. Results from the five focus group discussions showed that international students face various adaptation challenges in Turkey. The challenges range from socio-cultural differences to academic barriers; from weather to language barriers. The results were discussed under three categories: 1) socio-cultural barriers; 2) Language barriers; and 3) Academic barriers. Even though language can be categorized under the broad term of culture it is analyzed as a category by itself because of its intensiveness.

4.1.1. Socio-Cultural Adaptation Challenges

International students from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, Far East, and Latin America took part in the research making the focus group participants diverse in terms of socio cultural backgrounds. Therefore coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds international students face a variety of challenges when adapting to Turkish culture. Participants had to deal with a new way of life i.e. culture: from dressing to cuisine; from religion to language; from norms and values to beliefs etc. When talking about socio-cultural barriers the respondents mentioned about cultural differences between Turkey and their home countries. The major socio cultural adaptation challenges faced by international students are:

Norm and value differences (differences in norms or values between international students' home countries and Turkey). Example of differences in norms and values are discussed below. Participants reported that talking and laughing in group in public spaces were considered rude in Turkish culture, and people reacted in unfavorable way to international students laughing and talking loudly especially in a language other than Turkish.

AL: There are sometimes when using the bus to go somewhere and we are talking like as a friends. And sometimes someone would interrupt us and tell us to shut up. They say that we are too loud or what that we are shouting on the other hand when they are talking we don't ask them to shut up. So this happens for example if we are using our own language or English and language apart from Turkish or someone would come and tell us to shut up. (AL: Male, Kenya, 24 years old, 2 years in Turkey)

.....

MN: and also when we are with other Africans in the bus or in the Metro usually we laughed harder in our conversations we talked and we laugh. I have observed that the Turkish people don't like it when we are having such kind of times, when we are talking and laughing together. (MN: Female, Ethiopia, 20 years old, 2 years in Turkey)

Asking questions (asking a person): Most of the participants mentioned that they had difficulty adapting to Turks' culture of asking questions to strangers about everything in a first time meeting. Participants reported that even though most of the questions were asked out of curiosity it made them feel uncomfortable opening up in such detail to strangers.

LC: I have noticed that people really like asking questions here, and to be honest some of the questions are very funny and kind of weird (chuckles). Initially such questions were very weird and very difficult to understand since I was wondering if it was just for me or for everyone else. At first I would be going around and answering their questions, sometimes I was laughing alone. And gradually when I start making foreign friends I realized that it is for all foreigners. Some questions were funny and silly (laughing) while others were very detailed questions which I don't want to share with someone I met for the first time. (LC: Male, Columbia, 28 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

One of the things participants unanimously agreed to is the smoking culture in Turkey where people smoking everywhere and every time. Smoking pattern is one of the biggest culture shocks experienced by international students in Turkey. The following are some of the extracts of participants reacting to the smoking pattern in Turkey.

YS: And then about another huge difference for me probably the smoking I would say. Because in my country ummm of course there are people who do smoke but they do it in secret should I say, you don't see them smoking everywhere you go like in the bus stop waiting in the line smoking. Because personally I have been affected so much by this, I do not smoke but I become a second hand smoker since I came here. I don't know the damage that is creating for my system which I don't appreciate quite frankly. (YS: Female, Nigeria, 24 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

.....

JY: And also alcohol is somehow prohibited I mean drinking in public. That was very new for me because at the same time smoking is very normal, like everyone smokes here and they are kind of strict in alcohol. (JY: Male, South Africa, 23 years old, 4 years in Turkey)

Differences in food and cuisine culture is another adaptation challenge for international students in Turkey. Many international students have difficulties getting used to Turkish food. They said that they were forced to rely on fast foods until they get used to the Turkish meals. Participants noted that food different from their respective home countries made adaptation difficult especially in the first few months.

HR: Talking about the socio cultural adaptation challenges I can't go without talking about the food. The food I used to eat back home and the food in Turkey is completely different and it was really hard for me to adjust. Oh my god it is amazing, it is tasteless. So it was very difficult for me to adjust and in my first few months or I can say my first one year I remember I was having those junk foods that of the fast foods on a regular basis. (HR: Female, Malaysia, 26 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

.....

YS: Also about food ummm, the food is very different from where I come from. Their food lacks spicy, and me as an African I like spicy foods a lot. (YS: Female, Nigeria, 24 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

Female international students in particular discussed about the differences in dormitory culture i.e. way of behaving and living in a dormitory different from their home countries e.g. sleeping time, use of the light etc. Participants reported incidents of misunderstandings in dormitory. For example one participant (a Masters student) who completed her undergraduate studies back in her home country compared the dormitory culture and commented on the differences in the sleeping patterns.

NW: related with the sleeping pattern in Ethiopian universities or dormitories there is a different dormitory culture. After sometime in the evening we turn off the light and everyone goes to sleep. If anyone wants to study she should go to the library. And in the morning the person who wake

up early should complete her preparation and makeup and stuff without making any noise. That is the dormitory culture in Ethiopia for example. But here in Turkey all these kind of things are non-existent. Someone can turn on and off the light anytime she wants and they spray perfume while you are asleep ... (NW: Female, Ethiopia, 25 years old, 5 years in Turkey)

One participant from Somaliland commented on clothing differences and his experience. He said that a particular clothing common in his culture was considered as homo sexual.

MK: and another thing in our culture there is some cloth which is famous in even in Ethiopia (looking at ID) we call it Mawis. You can wear it in outside or even in your house, but in here you can't go outside wearing it because people think another thing (laughing) they think of you as homosexual or something like that. (MK: Male, Somaliland, 29 years old, 4 years in Turkey)

Nonverbal cues: differences in nonverbal cues differences between Turkish culture and international students' home culture is also another challenge. Participants recalled funny and incidents because of the differences in nonverbal cues and gestures.

FR: I had problems with certain actions that we do back home that apparently here means something bad. Like I really had a problem with this thing (clapping with one hand folded). For us it means a lot. So I literally like umm, you know as I told you it's an innocent gesture for me when I do it okay. But then again I found it the hard way inside a minibus. At that moment everyone was like shocked. And I did it again and then everyone was like Allah Allah (laughing). (FR: Female, Kenya, 29 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

.....

BT: Another thing related with sign language is nodding your head up and down they have the opposite meaning from our country. For example nodding your head up like this it means no in Turkey (laughing). Actually one day we get on into a bus and ended up in a wrong station because me and my friend thought the driver was saying yes. (BT: Female, Ethiopia, 22 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

While the aforementioned indicates that international students encountered a variety of socio-cultural adaptation challenges, as time passes the challenges seemed to decrease. Despite the above mentioned socio-cultural adaptation challenges the respondents acknowledged the helpfulness and friendliness of the Turks and the Turkish culture.

4.1.2. Language Barriers

Language barrier is the most severe challenge faced by international students in Turkey. Participants in all groups spent a great deal of time discussing about the language barriers. In this regard the respondents faced challenges starting from their first day in Turkey. Language barrier made adaptation to Turkey very difficult. The first thing about language barrier to which the respondents unanimously agreed to was inaccessibility of English speakers in Ankara. Language barrier follows everywhere: at school, dormitory, and in everyday life.

TH: I think the main problem is language as they said. The fact that the Turks do not speak other languages other than Turkish made it hard for foreigners in general and international students in particular. Because if you cannot speak the language, you will obviously miss a lot of things. Maybe we can say it will be hard for you to have social life in the first place, and moreover you will struggle to adapt. So, as for my knowledge and experience language is the most challenging part, and I believe if I knew the language before coming here my life and adaptation to Turkish culture

would have been much easier. (TH: Male, Algeria, 24 years old, 4 years in Turkey)

Most of the participants mentioned about the challenge they faced in the airport in their first day in Turkey. Many participants reported incidents like missing flight and losing their cargo in the airport mainly because of the language barrier.

ID: okay when I first came at the airport I lost my flight and I had to pay \$100. You know what because of the transfer from Istanbul to Ankara I was waiting just in the line with someone to get my documents authenticated. Passport control or something. I go around and then when I reach at the gate the plane had already taken off. So when I ask them nobody knows. I just walked around for about 2 hours. Nobody speaks English and finally I have to pay \$100. (ID: Male, Ethiopia, 33 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

Miscommunications and misunderstandings: most of the international students come to Turkey without prior knowledge of Turkish language and in Turkey most people don't speak English. Because of this miscommunications and misunderstandings between the locals and international students occur on their way to get the right information in everyday life, airport, shopping and university etc. Many participants reported incidents of getting lost, going to a wrong direction, challenges in shopping, restaurant and so on. Some examples are reproduced below.

KN: actually almost all of us have a story to share about language. When we first came we get lost with my friend, we didn't know that we can come to Sihhiye using the Metro. We came walking and it took me and my friend it took us 2 hours. From Sihhiye to Kizlay, we were getting lost just looking for the bus that take us back to our dormitory in Cubuk. We just wasted 2 hours it was because of the language. (KN: Male, Kenya, 22 years old, 4 years in Turkey)

.....

SM: me for example I don't eat salad. But I didn't know how to say I don't like salad so I was eating doner with salad for like long time until I learned how to say it. (Laughing) just because I didn't know how to say don't put salad in my doner (Laughing). (SM: Male, Kenya, 22 years old, 4 years in Turkey)

.....

LC: yeah I have actually, a kind of funny one. In my first year when I came to Turkey in my first year here. I wanted to go to Istanbul, however I ended up going to Bursa (laughing) all because of the misunderstandings I had with the driver. So I had to take another bus to go to Istanbul from there. I had my ticket and then I went to the gate and asked the driver if the bus was going to Istanbul, he nodded his head and I thought he said yes and I got into the bus. (LC: Male, Columbia, 28 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

Speech handicap (international students feel frustrations because of their inability to explain their feelings in their everyday life, dormitory life, hospitals, schools and so on). This was especially true for female international students. Participants of the focus group discussions regardless of their racial and cultural backgrounds reported on incidences of frustrations because of the language barrier.

.....

YS: you can never be able to explain your frustration because sometimes I wanted to really scream out when I leave my room but there's no language. What do I say I mean incapability of explaining yourself it's like I don't know like being a handicap. Whenever I have to go to a place like a hospital school or something I need to bring someone along who understands the Turkish language. That's very frustrating because when you are translating

information gets missing definitely. You are speaking some way and the person is translating it the other way doesn't really capture what I'm trying to say and that frustrates me. (YS: Female, Nigeria, 24 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

.....

SG: Explaining yourself is the number one reason that you should understand Turkish, because you feel like you want to defend yourself when you are in argument or a kind of fight with someone. It happens always you encounter mean people and they say something to you, you have to say something back or you have to defend yourself so this kind of things happens usually. You want to fight back, like you want to say something back. But you cannot deliver your message completely or in a way that you wanted. So at the end they win. (SG: Female, Georgia, 24 years old, 2 years in Turkey)

Turkish is the only institutional working language in most of the institutions in Turkey. International students face challenges in service giving institutions like hospitals and banks. Moreover banners, directions, warning notices and guides written on machines are in Turkish adding to the language barrier they face. The following extracts are examples of the challenges they face.

.....

FR: I have one experience which I found very hilarious. I went to the hospital to see a psychiatrist, you know in psychiatrist you have to explain yourself you have to talk a lot. For a doctor you can say for example 'basim agriyor' I got a headache or I got a stomach aches and something like that. But for a psychiatrist you have to talk you have to explain, so one day I went to the psychiatrist's office and then I sat down and immediately I

started talking in English. And then the psychiatrist looked at me and said I can't speak English. And then I said I can't speak much Turkish either, and then he said try. I cannot explain like my heart very well, but he insisted and I said I cannot sleep. He asked it why and then I said because I cannot speak Turkish. You know I wanted to go and finish it faster because I cannot explain why I cannot sleep or other things in Turkish so I want to finish and go back to my dormitory. So this was too much and I cannot explain all this things or all my feelings in Turkish. (FR: Female, Kenya, 29 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

.....

TH: For me also the main problem was the language, until today I still cannot go to some government offices to finish some papers or something else I have to take a translator with me. Even in the bank, I still do not have the mobile banking service for example. Last time I went to the bank to activate mobile banking service, it was one week ago it was like I don't understand what are you saying, and I was like I don't understand what are you saying too and that he said this is Turkey you need to speak Turkish. So the language problem is a problem I am facing until now (laughing). (TH: Male, Algeria, 24 years old, 4 years in Turkey)

4.1.3. Academic Challenges

International students face different academic challenges in their studies in Turkey. Many of the academic related challenges discussed by the respondents stemmed from the previously discussed language barrier. The following are the main academic related challenges:

Language barrier: language barrier hinders international students from realizing their full potential in their academic life. Most of the participants stressed on medium of instruction discrepancy as the main challenge in their academic life. Most programs in

most of the universities are in Turkish. However there are some programs and courses which are offered in English or in both English and Turkish. This being the case participants noted that in reality there is discrepancy between the proposed medium of instruction and the actual language of instruction. So the participants reported that courses or programs which were supposed to be in English are being taught in Turkish. For example one participant who enrolled in a hundred percent English program shared her experience as posted in the first excerpt below. Moreover, international students enrolled in Turkish taught programs reported that even though they take a one year preparatory Turkish course prior to their actual studies it is not sufficient to succeed in their respective programs. One participant as reproduced in the second excerpt below said that language barrier hindered him from using his full potential.

KW: So for me my department is supposed to be a hundred percent in English. But apparently it is not. Even in the labs they speak in Turkish and they want me I don't know to completely understand and perform like the Turks. And I feel dumb because they make me feel dumb. Because apparently they don't try to help me I mean they don't try to explain something at least for me in English. And in the lectures they don't want me to go to the lectures because they will have to speak in English instead of Turkish. And then at the same time the students also complain that they should explain to them in Turkish instead of English whereas I cannot understand Turkish. So yeah it has been tough. (KW: Female, Pakistan, 23 years old, 4 years Turkey)

.....

AP: Well, I don't know but when we talk about the academic success the language barrier is the biggest obstacle I think. Ummm so for me I had had the problem of not understanding everything the teacher is saying and also when I read the materials or the lectures or books it was really difficult for

me to grasp the whole concept or idea. This challenge really limited my academic success my grades and my performance was less than I expected or less than I planned. (AP: Male, Syria, 24 years old, 5 years in Turkey)

Other language related academic challenges include lack of publicity where by events, programs, notifications, rules and regulations in universities are written in Turkish and international students missing many opportunities. Additionally language barrier limits international students from actively engaging in campus social life, festivals, events etc. Turkish history course a course which is initially designed for Turkish students and international undergraduate students are forced to take this course along with the Turkish students, which the participants referred as being difficult.

Isolation from classmates: international students face exclusion in their academic life. Participants noted that they faced difficulty in integrating with their Turkish classmates even after spending year or more together. Both female and male participants, irrespective of their racial and cultural backgrounds said that they faced exclusion from classroom networks which are important for sharing information and notes. For example one participant as reproduced below in excerpt 24 said that it is difficult integrating with Turkish students as a foreign student. Another participant said that lack of close friends and classmates to share the loads of assignments and the tensions together made her struggle hard in her academic life (see the excerpt below). And the reason for the non-interaction between international students and Turkish students according to the participants is lack of get together events and language barrier. The students suggested that real and all-inclusive get together events should be organized in the universities where the students (both international and Turkish) and the teachers can be present.

.....

AP: Ummm apart from that being unable to integrate with Turkish students is also another problem in my academic life. So in universities especially when you are studying undergraduate there is this kind of networks

between students and in this networks they share notes and they also share previous exams umm exams from previous years. So if you are not well integrated in this kind of groups or if you don't have good friends I mean Turkish friends you cannot get this kind of resources. They don't like sharing actually (chuckles) my Turkish classmates or Turkish students they don't like sharing for example if they get some information or some questions they just keep it for themselves. Not all of them actually there are some exceptional of course but most of them they don't share like everything. So me being like a foreigner makes that more difficult, and also it is difficult for some Turkish students too because some of them they don't get these things like me. But me being a foreigner is more difficult. (AP: Male, Syria, 24 years old, 5 years in Turkey)

.....

BT: I am the only foreigner and African in our class and literally I have no one to talk to and to interact in the class. I am struggling a lot with my assignments, projects and home works. I'm studying Computer Engineering and we have this a lot of projects so it's really hard to do them alone, but since I have no friends and no classmates who can interact with me I do it alone and I know the real struggle. And sometimes I miss important information from teachers and from senior students because of this non-interaction. And even in my dormitory there is no one from my department, I went to class alone, I attend my lessons and I came back to my dormitory alone that's how it is. (BT: Female, Ethiopia, 22 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

Black international students from Africa reported that they face additional challenges and stereotypes because of their race. As the extracts reproduced below show participants reported that they face tension because of the constant attention exerted on

them. More over students from Africa are also subject to stereotypes adding more pressure in their studies. One participant for example said that as a black student he is the center of attention whereby the teacher easily notices him and asks him questions is giving him hard time in his studies as shown in the next excerpt.

MH: I was worried anyways I ended up... by the way in my class I am the only black one and everyone pays attention to what I have to say. So that's how it is, I don't know, I don't know what to do actually. And then I'm tired of being the center of focus. And in exam times I don't even want to go and see my papers. (YS: Male, Kenya, 23 years old, 2 years in Turkey)

.....

SM: I understand like most of the lesson I mean like 80% but I miss a few things and sometimes there are things I don't understand, and I don't ask. Because I am the only black student in my classroom and imagine like being in a class full of students and the black guy raises his hand to ask question in Turkish. Everybody is like always paying attention to you so you always like. I've been together with these students for like 3 years, I've been learning with these students for 3 years and to this day I feel like a foreigner. (SM: Male, Kenya, 23 years old, 3 years in Turkey)

More or less, most of the academic barriers are because of the language barrier. If the departments in English medium of instruction were in English as they should be most of the academic challenges would have been reduced if not eliminated.

4.2. Analysis of the Homogeneous and Heterogeneous FG Discussions

Methodologically

Data analysis started by verbatim transcription of the audio recorded group discussions. After coding and organization of the data, extracts from the focus group transcripts and discussion notes were used to discuss the methodological issues that are important for the study. Therefore in this part I use some extracts from the transcripts of the discussions to discuss the methodological issues. The methodological issues discussed here mainly relate to the purpose and objectives of the research. I would like to note that these may not be the only issues, and they are just one of the many ways of seeing and analyzing the data. The content of the discussion (the audio taped discussion and its respective transcription) is the primary source of analysis. In addition the interaction among the participants constitute important aspect of the analysis. Interaction may include: the way they talk, listen, reply, agree or disagree, and all other non-verbal cues. Moments of silence in the discussions are indicated in (...) symbol. Last but not least the reflective notes from each groups written by both me and the observer are also valuable inputs of the data analysis procedure. Therefore analysis incorporates both the content of the discussion and interaction between participants and between the moderator and the participants. The methodology of the homogeneous and heterogeneous FGs are discussed and analyzed under the following topics: sensitive topics, group interaction, power relations, non-verbal cues, degree of comfort between participants and data breadth and depth.

4.2.1. Sensitive Topics

Sensitive issues are issues that should be approached with great caution because of their sensitive nature. In defining “sensitive issues” Lee, highlighted “the inherent threat to those involved, stemming from the private or personal nature of the issues under investigation as well as the potential for embarrassment, offense and/or social censure on

disclosure of associated attitudes and/or behaviors” (Lee, 1993). Those could include issues like race, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, domestic violence, health issues, death, hygiene, and religion among other things. There is no general consensus on the usage of focus groups for sensitive issues. Authors for example like Kitzinger claim that focus group discussions can make the discussion of some sensitive issues very high for it can arouse memory or set a sense of communality among the participants. On the other hand other authors argued that a focus group setting can make discussion of sensitive issues less likely because disclosing might intimidate participants’ comfort, wellbeing or self-image (Wellings, Branigan, & Mitchell, 2000). The subject of the focus group discussions – adaptation challenges for international students is not a sensitive topic by itself. However, it is highly likely for participants to talk about sensitive issues like racism, sexual harassment, discrimination etc. depending on their socio cultural and racial backgrounds and their experiences. In this section I discuss the homogeneous and the heterogeneous groups in terms of their suitability for letting participants disclose and discuss sensitive issues.

According to Morgan, homogeneity in group composition facilitates the discussion of a more sensitive issues (D. L. Morgan, 1995). He said that “it is important that the participants have enough in common to speak and share freely. An active discussion may be facilitated by similarities in background characteristics such as age, gender, class, and ethnicity or culture”. His argument for more homogeneity for sensitive topics is not only confined to the participants. He further suggested that moderators “who shares similar characteristics with the group participants promoting rapport, trust, or both” is important requirement for sensitive topics (D. L. Morgan, 1995). Evidences from the homogeneous groups support Morgan’s suggestions. In the homogeneous groups¹ participants were more open and willing to talk and share sensitive issues. Issues like sexual harassment,

¹ Homogeneity as used in this research refers to the “social characteristics” of participants entailing similarity in terms of gender, nationality (social identity), and age.

race, hygiene and health were raised and discussed by participants in the homogeneous groups.

In the homogeneous male group², the composition of the group facilitated the discussion of sensitive issues. For example, one participant started sharing his experience of people giving unwanted sexual remarks about African guys' manhood. Unwanted sexual remark is a behavior categorized as an act of sexual harassment by the EEOC of the United States. EEOC included unwanted sexual remark in its list of sexual harassment behaviors as follows: "unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions" (EEOC, n.d.). Once the issue was raised other participants were encouraged to share their experiences. The discussion was free flowing and accompanied by laughter and agreements. AL: Male, Kenya, 24 years old, 2 years in Turkey started the discussion as follows:

AL: and one more thing guys there is this perception I don't know if, I'm sure you all have this kind of experience is there is this kind of perception among some of the Turk guys and they believe that black guys have bigger tools. And sometimes they would come to you and say 'kac cm'? How many cm is your thing?

Everyone: laughing in the background

TK: yeah, yeah oh my God (laughing).

KN: yeah yeah actually this happens to me many times.

AL: one day I was in Asti, and someone directly comes to me and he asked me 'kac cm'?

² The homogeneous male group was a group of six male participants between 22 and 26 years old. All of them are from Kenya.

The discussion on this subject was full of mumblings and laughter.

YS: (talking with laughter) same thing happened to me one day someone asking me 'ucuncu bacak var mi? Do you have a third leg?

It should be noted here that not only the group participants but also both the moderator and the note taker were black Africans. Additionally both the moderator and the note taker were male. In a nutshell, the discussion was being conducted in a social context where all of the attendants were black African male students. So, these similarities between participants and the research team can also be another factor facilitating the discussion about the sexual harassment incidents. These evidences from the homogeneous group supports Morgan's statement about moderators with similar characteristics with that of the participants promoting the discussion on sensitive issues. This is true not only for the discussion on sexuality subject but also for discussions about race and racism as discussed below.

Another example on the discussion of sensitive topic is race. The issue of race was raised and discussed among the homogeneous male group participants. In the homogeneous male group where all of the participants were from Africa – Kenya the issue of being black and the additional adaptation challenges they faced were discussed. Whenever someone raised a sensitive issue it was usually followed by general consensus and empathy. Because of the common background and shared experience as a 'black' everyone was actively engaged in the conversation every time a participant was sharing his experience. Participants shared their experiences, frustrations continuously in a free flowing and comfortable manner. As the following examples of quotations from the homogeneous male group show discussion about race was easy for the participants. The participants shared their experiences about being black in Turkey without hesitation.

TK: my friend one time told me that a black guy was traveling in a metro, when he spoke to his friend sitting next to him a child who was sitting in front of them said 'anne anne, bak konustu, konustu' 'mom mom look he spoke'.

(...)

KN: one of the problems is guys, have you ever noticed in the Metro like it used to happen somehow there is an empty seat beside you but somebody's standing, even if they just want to stand but you know what normally as it happens in America you always think I mean or wonder if they are not sitting beside you because maybe because you are black or something. Are they just avoiding to sit next to me because of my or because I am black....

AL: (interrupted) maybe, but guys this....

YS: one day I was with a friend he was from Nigeria I think so we were traveling to Kizlay using the Metro. There was a small child in the Metro and I remember his reaction when his saw us I could tell from his reaction that he was very scared of us. The reaction of this child....

Everyone: mumbling

SM: Actually you can't blame them, to be honest the same thing will happen if a white guy goes to our country.

KN: yeah, yeah my younger sister fears a white, you know guys she cries she actually cries. I don't really remember

when I was a child but I think it's something that comes and goes with age.

When someone started talking about sensitive issue for example racism, sexual harassment, other participants either agree with the speaker or they empathize and add on what he or she said. In another example a participant in the homogeneous female group gave a detailed account of the sexual harassment she encountered. She was talking about men following her, giving unwanted sexual remarks and even touching her in different occasions. She was emotional as she was talking about it and everyone was listening attentively empathizing with her. Similarly participant from the homogeneous male group also shared an account of sexual harassment experienced by themselves (reproduced above) and second hand experiences of their friends. When one participant shared the experience of his friend who is a girl another participant nodded in agreement and added his own friend's experience.

AL: So sometimes I've got a friend she's from Africa and you know what happened there was a guy who was following them. Say we're sitting in some like optavia and then they were trying to leave as they took their jacket he was like he started following them. And then they sit down and they said let's see what he's going to do after that he also sit down. So he was looking at them like or as if he wanted to take something or do something to them. It's not the first time one day she was even followed from Kizilay to her dormitory in Besevler.....

KN: yeah I heard similar stories about from my friends, female friends that they have been followed by guys they don't know.

At one time AL from Kenya, one of the participants from the homogeneous male group raised the issues of drug and race as follows:

AL: I feel the same thing. I want to expand on what you have said. The first thing I don't like about the Turkish people is, what I meant is it is not about the people themselves but it's about the issue of smoking, guys. I really hate it so much. Of course in our country too people do smoke, but they don't smoke in public you see especially in the streets. Here everywhere, everywhere you go they can just blow and puff on your face. You see that's how it is in turkey. And the other issue the other day we were hanging out with my friends and this guys came to us and they asked us if we smoke. They were not talking about cigarette they were asking us if we smoke weed....

Everyone: hmmmmm

AL: so you see, I don't I said I don't smoke. And he said do you want to smoke. I don't want to smoke for example me, so he thinks that when he saw me as a black person from Africa he related me with drugs. Because I remember that person was not normal I mean his eyes were red, I was actually fearing for my life. Because it was not easy there were three or four guys. And then usually time in such people walk in quiet places. So it's something that I couldn't get used to until now so whenever I see some people like that I still feel something not good.

Compared to the homogeneous groups in the heterogeneous groups discussion about sensitive issues i.e. race/racism, sexuality/sexual harassment was less emphasized. It seems as participants were very cautious not to raise sensitive issues. In the first

heterogeneous group where all of the participants were male students from 7 different countries no comment was made on sensitive issues. In the second heterogeneous group where all of the participants were female students from different countries some participants tried to initiate discussion on issues like race. While discussions on sensitive issues in the homogeneous groups were followed by general consensus and empathy, in the heterogeneous groups sensitive issues were approached with skepticism. Generally speaking discussions on sensitive issues were followed by silences and in most cases participants refrained from reacting and contributing to the discussion. In some cases raising sensitive issues was a risk that was challenged and questioned by the other participants.

In the heterogeneous female group³, discussion on the issue of race and racism was met with strong challenge from other participants. For example in one instance YS a participant from Nigeria started talking about racism and it was met with questions to verify its actuality from participants. YS started sharing about racism she and her friend had encountered in the metro. She was talking about a woman who made racist remarks towards her and black Africans as a whole. As she was talking about it two other participants, HR from Malaysia and FR from Kenya tried to challenge her in a way of verifying the actuality of the incidence. They were asking her questions one by one, and the conversation got intense. YS was looking for mutual support and validation of her experience which she didn't manage to find in the group. And then she seemed irritated by the questions. Finally HR, the other participant who was challenging YS to verify saw her became emotional and gave up on the conversation.

*YS: in that case you might also say don't get in the Metro
and in the bus (laughing), because one day for example I*

³ The heterogeneous female group was a group of female participants from five different countries with age range of 20 to 30 years.

was in the bus and this lady came to me and told me go back to your country.

HR: really?

YS: yes, she told me go back to your country why are you people here. Now everywhere we go we see black people you people are wandering everywhere here, literally. She also added that you guys are ugly.

KW: ohhh what?

FR: was she saying them in English though?

YS: no in Turkish.

HR: how did you understand if it was in Turkish then?

YS: of course I understand.

HR: what were the words she used?

YS: what do you mean the words?

HR: I mean ummm okay, okay.

YS: yeah yeah it was me and my other friend. That was the kind of thing that she was saying at that time.

Discussions on sensitive issues were generally accompanied by silences. In most cases participants in the heterogeneous groups were not reacting to the issue raised. Following a participant's comment on a sensitive issue it was either the researcher who fills the gap by asking a question or another participant talking about something else. Taking the quotation below as an example in the heterogeneous female group at the beginning of the discussion one participant mentioned the added challenges she faced as

a black person. She talked about it for a relatively long while and then when she stopped the group entered into long silence. Another participant broke the silence by sharing her own experience of adaptation challenges which was not related to the previous speaker's account. However this time her remark was followed by a reaction, affirmation of her experience from another participant unlike the first participant who talked about race and no one reacted.

YS: And then what else let me see, ummm, most definitely the culture. I don't know about other people's experiences I mean other foreigners but for me as a black person I feel like it's a kind of added challenge. They look at you as some sort of alien, because they are like how is your skin black and things like that which are very disturbing things to me. You know umm what can I say that's how it is here.

Long silence (.....)

RK: actually I didn't face any challenge here in Turkey. The only thing I can say is the food, yeah. I cannot think of other challenges. Because I am also one of the Turkish ethnic group. So the culture and the language is similar. So I don't have any problems with this. The only problem is food.

FR: I think you have it a little bit easier because your language is similar.

RK: Yeah

The third heterogeneous group's participants were female and male students from different nationalities. In this group there were sporadic mentions of sensitive issues like

racism. Even though some participants tried to use words like ‘racism’, participants were generally cautious not to talk about race and other sensitive issues. For example SG a female participant from Georgia tried to share about what happened in her dormitory, where foreigners and Turkish students were separated and made to stay in different floors. When talking about it she mentioned the word ‘racism’ laughing. It was followed by short silence, other participants neither showing agreement nor disagreement.

SG: Well yeah, (laughing) I used to stay in a dormitory last year. In the dormitory where I was staying actually they did something which was good but racist. They put all these foreign students in one floor separating them from the Turkish students. It was good actually foreigners liked it that way because when you stay with Turkish students in the same dormitory, Turkish students fight a lot in the dormitory, girls especially.

(...)

In another instance AP a male participant from Syria was talking about the socio-cultural adaptation challenges and he emphasized on the similarities between Turkish and Syrian culture. As he was talking JM a female participant from Syria interrupted him and wanted to disagree with him and add some things. However her comment was not complete and she seemed as she didn’t want to talk about it. As seen in the extract reproduced below she was stuttering as she was talking and this was also followed by silence, and the next speaker started talking about another thing.

AP: as for me when it comes to Syria and Turkey we have almost similar culture in many ways. Maybe the only difference is the food. The food is the biggest problem when it comes to a culture that we face here. That the things you mentioned like norms and values, religion and

most of these cultural things we do have the same culture I can say. So as a Syrian community living in Turkey ummm we do have a lot of similarities.

JM: (Interrupted) actually umm there are many reasons, ummm there are many challenges, when we come to Turkey and as a Syrian studying in Turkey umm about the, the system I don't know. They have a really big problem when it comes to the ummm system here.

(...)

Another example AP, a 25 years old male participant from Syria shared the difficulties he faced because of the attitudes of some people at his work place. He worked as an intern dentist in the previous year in a specialized clinic in Turkey. When talking about it he was pausing awkwardly between words. He was stuttering and was talking with continued involuntary repetition of words. And sometimes he was seen struggling in order to choose the right word or the appropriate word, he said 'I don't know how to say it'. One of the participants JM, a female participant from Syria interrupted him when he was stuttering and tried to help him find the word, however he didn't accept it. And his comment was followed by silence again.

AP: Ummm I worked with a lot of patients since last year,..... When you ask them something they also ask you some things and when they learn that I am Syrian, some of them they get happy. They would say things like we are brothers and sisters, but like others I don't know ummm how to say it ummm they get maybe like upset, they would say like hmmm okay umm (pause) they don't like it actually. But I try like for every patient ummmm I always say that I am Syrian I don't change it I don't say other

thing or pretend as if I am from another country. Because I saw some people saying something else some other nationality. Because of this kind of expressions and experiences. But like for me I always say I am Syrian and also when I say I am Syrian I also do my best in my job so that they ummm

JM: (interrupted) change their views?

AP: no not change their views, but like for them to be comfortable for them like to see that it's ok for someone to be Syrian and to do good work and like be ummm because there is this point of view of Turkish people about Syrians ummm. So yeah like from last year until now I have like a big improvement in my like Turkish language skills also like with Turkish people. Ummm I found it now much easier talking to them, I know how they think I know how to talk to them and the best way to interact with them and to make them comfortable. Yeah for me it was very great experience.

(...)

In the mixed heterogeneous group⁴ participants were generally refrained from talking about and reacting to someone's account on sensitive issues. It is as if they were avoiding discussing on the subject or they were clearly uncomfortable to talk about sensitive topics. As example extracts discussed above showed even in the moments when someone raised a sensitive issue it was full of involuntary repetition of words, involuntary pauses, struggle for appropriate words, and general silences. What happened at the end of

⁴ The mixed heterogeneous group was made up of male and female participants from six different countries with age ranging between 19 and 29 years.

the discussion is a clear indicator of this. At the end of the discussion one of the participants, TH a male participant from Algeria came to us and said he wanted to share some more things. He said he wanted to share his own and his friends' experiences regarding racism against Syrians in particular and Arabs in general. He said he didn't want to talk about it in the group. He forwarded two reasons for why he chose to talk about it in private with the researcher. Firstly he feared that the Syrians in the discussion might feel bad about it and secondly he said that he didn't feel comfortable to raise the issue in the group. He said:

TH: I didn't want to talk about this in the group because I didn't want to make the Syrians feel bad talking about it and also umm actually I didn't want to talk about it in the group. Well I am from Algeria, in my time here in Turkey I have seen people who are racist towards Syrians and Arabs to be general.....

4.2.2. Group Interaction

Group interaction or the interaction between participants is regarded as the chief advantage and typical feature of focus group research. In focus group discussion, the aim is to create a suitable environment where participants feel comfortable to share their experiences, to comment and add on each other's experiences, and ask and answer questions. As with all other social research methods, focus groups occur within a given social context. As Hollander wrote, "participants interact with each other, with the facilitator, and with others who are not present but whose imagined presence affects the participant" (Hollander, 2004). Interaction between participants is important part of a focus group research data. However it is not usually reported on, with researchers focusing on extracts of single individual participants from the group. In this section interaction between participants in both group compositions, homogeneous and heterogeneous is

discussed. The group interaction data is derived from the audio recordings of the discussions, transcriptions of the discussions, and field notes by the observer.

The homogeneous groups were generally characterized by more agreements and less disagreements. Participants showed their agreements using words and phrases like ‘yes, I agree with you, yeah, ohhh you are right’ and affirmative body languages. And at times whenever someone is talking about something they agree about they constantly gave each other affirmative nods and ‘yeah’.

In the homogeneous female group⁵ participants were emotionally involved whenever someone was talking. As the following extract shows, participants were talking about the adaptation challenges they faced in Turkey. For example NW was talking about language problem and then as she started talking about problems about talking on the phone in dormitories, one other participant, BT interrupted her immediately to show her agreement.

NW: That is how it is around dormitory, I remember something. They don't like it when you are talking on the phone.

BT: (interrupted) Ohhhhh thank you I suffered a lot. (Emotionally)

NW: I think the biggest problem when living with Turks is this telephone problem. They do it themselves they called their mom and they tell their mom every detail everything they do. I did this at this I went to this place blah blah blah. But for us we meet our families and

⁵ The homogeneous female group was consisted of female international students from Ethiopia with age range between 20 and 24 years old.

friends once in a while and when we do this they don't tolerate us.

BT: (interrupted) yes, yes you are speaking my mind (laughing)

The later participant, BT was very emotional⁶ based on her body language and the way she reacted to the speaker and she thanked the former for raising the issue. She was glad her problem is validated and someone other than herself shared the problem. As seen in the above quotation she couldn't help but interrupt the other speaker twice to show her agreement.

At times some participants were looking for support and validation of their ideas from the rest of the group. As seen in the extract below NW was talking about a misunderstanding that happened in her dormitory as she was chatting with her Turk dormitory friends in the cafeteria. What happened was she told her friends that where she came from people eat 'bulgur pilav' (a wheat like rice staple in Turkey) only in times of funerals. Some of her friends were offended and even one of them told the manager of the dormitory about it. When she was sharing this in the group discussion she related the issue to the general culture of the group and asked them to validate it, which they positively responded.

NW:actually I was joking saying it. And the next time when the manager of our dormitory came to visit us my friends told her about it. And then the manager came and asked me about it. I told her that I was joking. You know that we make jokes with our friends, right?

Everyone: yes, yes

⁶ (Of a person) having feelings, reactions that are easily excited and openly displayed. (Google Dictionary)

NW: and then my friend came to me and said why did you lie to the manager, she was very annoyed at me. It was like a big misunderstanding I don't know how to tell her so it was very difficult.....

Similar to the above extract another participant in the homogeneous female group tried to get support and validation from the group by putting the incident in to the common shared culture of the group. She was talking about in group favoritism that happened to herself and her friend in a hospital. She was emotional as she was talking about it and wanted for the other participants to empathize with her. She then turned to them asking 'you guys know the feeling right?'

FV: However when we get at the hospital before the official exit time the office working on medical report was closed. And then we went back to our dormitory we told them that finished with our medical examination and that we are waiting for the results and we will bring it tomorrow. You know it was very irritating moment, you guys know the feeling right? (Speaking emotionally)

Everyone: yes, yes (in agreement)

FV: the kind of feeling hmmm this is all because this is not my country. In the next day we went back again in the morning, for our surprise the woman working with lines she was going to do the same thing like the previous day. I think she is crazy.

NW: hmmm maybe she doesn't like foreigners.

In another incident when BT a participant in the homogeneous female group started talking about a guy making fun of her country and giving negative comments the rest of the participants reacted in an emotional way.

BT: So he started comparing turkey and Ethiopia, and then he started shouting in the library 'bu ne ya, baya fakir, baya fakir'.

Everyone: ohhhhh no oh no (emotional)

BT: I was shocked I don't even know what to say and do.

Interrupting each other to show and express agreements was also common in the homogeneous groups. The homogeneity of the group composition might have affected participants' by eliciting their commonalities of cultural background and the concomitant shared experiences and adaptation challenges. This was evident in the way participants expressed agreement by interrupting each other frequently. Below is a quotation from the homogeneous female group. Participants were discussing about the socio-cultural adaptation challenges. As one participant started talking about the smoking culture in Turkey, another participant interrupted her to express her agreement and to add more on what the previous speaker said. And then another two participants joined the dialogue interrupting each other.

ST: Another cultural difference which was hard to adopt for me was just smoking culture...

FV: (interrupted) yes, everywhere you go every time you go out and every place people are smoking.

ST: (interrupted) that was very challenging part, even in Ethiopia people smoke I didn't mean that people don't smoke in Ethiopia.

MN: (interrupted) and also when we are with other Africans or with other Ethiopians in the bus or in the Metro usually we laughed harder in our conversations we talked and we laugh. I have observed that the Turkish people don't like it when we are having such kind of times, when we are talking and laughing together.

TT: (interrupted) actually yes even in our dormitory and in the bus I have seen people reacting in a negative way when we are having this kind of things

NW: And sometimes for example some people they think that a woman should be silent and quite, and as a woman if you are laughing and if you are louder and laughing in any public space like the bus or the Metro they don't like it.

ST: (interrupted and laughing) and we are the number one in laughing (laughing)

Everyone: (nodded in agreement and laughing)

Similarly in another instance the participants in the homogeneous male group participants were also frequently interrupting each other. As with the homogeneous female group interruptions in the male group were mostly to show agreement, relate themselves with the story being told, to help develop the speaker's account by contributing to the story. Developing a story by supporting each other is mainly because of the shared culture and identity and the similar socio-cultural adaptation challenges that come with it. As the example quotation below shows one participant was talking about the challenges he faces in his class as a foreigner and as a black person in particular. Other participants were frequently interrupting him to help develop his story as if they were in his shoes or

something similar has happened to them. This was interesting because it seems as the participants already knew what the speaker is going to say and tell the same thing.

YS:I am the only foreigner, I am the only black in my class. Even if you miss class the teacher will immediately realize that you are not there. Because you know my Turkish classmates and friends they miss classes even some of them they may not come to class for a week in some cases. A student can make up a week without entering the class his or her friend can can....

KN: sign for him

YS: sign for him of course. But for you....

Everyone: (interrupted) laughing harder

YS: But for you if you for example ask a Turkish friend to sign for you (laughing) it would say no no no no no. and another problem of course the teacher can explain and explain can even spend more time for explaining. And then he will ask you, he only asks me actually (speaking with high intonation)....

YS: And then of course I have to say that....

Someone together with YS: yes

YS: in order to save time. But the teacher again asks me what have you understood?

Everyone: woooo woooo and still laughing

YS: so that's how it is, I don't know, I don't know what to do actually. And then I'm tired of being the center of focus. And in exam times I don't even want to go and see my papers.

KN: Of course yours is harder.

Similarly in the homogeneous male group, general consensus was evident. Participants were supporting each other and showing agreements by relating themselves to the story being told. As the example of extract reproduced below shows participants were using words like 'yeah, yes man, of course'.

SM: me for example I don't eat salad. But I didn't know how to say I don't like salad so I was eating doner with salad for like long time until I learned how to say it. (Laughing) just because I didn't know how to say don't put salad in my doner (Laughing).

AL: yeah language language language

YS: of course language is the biggest problem.

AL: I have to say this other time when I was with my friends. When you apply for residence permit you face tons of problems.

KN: yes man, that's the biggest problem.

AL: man you face a hell of problems there because you know an immigration office in any country it's not on office that turns around you.

Group interaction in focus group discussion is not only characterized by the consensus and agreements among the participants it is also characterized by moments of disagreements. Arguments or disagreements emanate from individual differences of experiences, beliefs and background. According to Kitzinger, “participants do not just agree with each other they also misunderstand one another, question one another, try to persuade each other of the justice of their own point of view and sometimes they vehemently disagree”. Compared to the homogeneous groups the heterogeneous groups were characterized by moments of arguments and disagreements. This might be because of the discussion topic being adaptation challenges, and homogeneous participants sharing a lot of challenges in common due to the shared culture. While the heterogeneous ones having different experiences because of the diversity of background and culture in the groups.

Participants can held opposing stances and differing viewpoints regarding an issue. In such cases participants try to convince each other of their respective beliefs and experiences. They try to attract other participants to their viewpoint by giving a detailed account of their experience, more evidences to support their claim, and so on. In one example from the heterogeneous female group two participants held a different viewpoint about how to deal with the locals in their adaptation challenge. FR a participant from Kenya held the idea that it is futile to try to enlighten people who are close minded about foreigners, HR a participant from Malaysia opposed this by claiming that it is possible to engage with such people. Soon their exchange turned in to a heated debate and two other participants joined them. They were trying to convince each other by bringing evidences to support their arguments. Even more, each speaker was giving a comparative account. Participants were interrupting each other to challenge and question their opponent. However the participants systematically closed the argument by making a transition in to another subject with none of them changing their minds.

YS: because I feel like that I have seen it all, from people laughing at you, pointing at you in the Metro,

talking at you, asking you very dumb questions, so whenever something happens we tend to ignore it.....

HR: Umm as for me I tried my best to mingle around with them. But again different experiences because me as an Asian perhaps is different from someone who is from Africa I don't know that's how I see it.

YS: I would have to argue with that. I literally had opportunities where I addressed people had conversations with Turkish people, I literally asked them like why don't you want to learn English, why don't you want to learn about any other countries.

FR: to a certain extent you can find people who you can engage with but maybe I am hanging in the wrong crowd. Literally someone asked me in Africa if we eat people, and I'm like where do I start in enlightening this person for example.

Everyone: laughing in background

FR: literally I looked into him and I told him yes we do but we wanted to be modern so we don't do it in the big cities we do it in the village and small areas, that's what I told him.....

(...)

HR: Ummmm well okay I bet to differ on the point of ignorance I think it is there in every society and every country that you go to. Even when I was in the United

States my American friends would come and ask me the first question is like where are you from I am from Malaysia, and you know the second question that they ask are you still living on trees. So honestly, honestly I don't think it's just Turkish Society but I have a feeling that it is everywhere you go.....

YS: (interrupted) okay what about the people who are older than you?

HR: that's a good question, for older people I don't usually engage with them, it is like I don't know how to explain to them.

YS: (interrupted) we are talking about the society as a whole.

HR: I don't know for other people then that's another thing. But yeah it's true though even in the train the older ones can be racist. But I'm talking about the young generation the ones that we have to deal with in the dorm, our school friends.... So the only thing I can do I suppose is try to engage with them.

FR: (interrupted) we are in the capital city like if it is not a village okay, they must have seen foreigners, and they must have dealt with foreigners. They have TVs, they have internet, and they could read really it's not a village.

HR: true, true but even when I was in the states, you know it's in the state you don't expect to encounter people with such kind of ignorance isn't it?

RK: I agree with HR because when I was in China studying in university, Chinese people used to ask me a lot of similar questions.

(...)

FR: me I expect this kind of things in the village not in the cities.

RK: yes for me such things happened in China in big cities where there are a lot of universities and stuff.

Participants in the heterogeneous female group questioned one another to verify the actuality of experiences shared. For example in one instance one participant started talking about race and it was followed by questions to verify its actuality from participants. YS, a participant from Nigeria started sharing about racism she and her friend had encountered. She was talking about a woman who said racist word to her and her friend while they were in a bus. Another participant HR, a Malaysian tried to challenge her in a way of verifying the actuality of the incidence by asking her probing questions. (*See the excerpt reproduced in the sensitive topics part*).

Unlike in the homogeneous groups where participants interrupted each other to support each other and show agreements interruptions in the heterogeneous groups were more of for showing disagreements. In the heterogeneous female group for example one participant was commenting on materializing of African women as sex objects. Another participant KW who is a non-African interrupted her disagreed with her on African women being the only victims of sexual harassment. The first speaker YS simply agreed to the later. The discussion was followed by silence with nobody taking it further or commenting about it.

YS: what, really that's really disturbing okay, because I feel like they literally take ummm or materialize African

women to be like a kind of sex symbol in a way and I'm not comfortable with that.

KW: (interrupted) actually it happens for me as well, so it's kind of happens for other foreigners too. I don't think it's only for women from Africa.

YS: okay it's for every foreigner apparently not just Africans.

(...)

In the example below a participant interrupted the speaker just to show her disagreement. Unlike in the homogeneous groups where participants interrupt each other to show agreements and support, in the heterogeneous groups participants interrupt each other to show disagreements.

FR: I think like the only advice I would give them is to learn the language as much as you can because that is the only saving way. There is no other way and there is no other thing you can do, if you know the language and you are fluent with it as other things would be smooth for you not only in campus but also like in the outside world.

HR: (interrupted) No, no not really, I beg to differ, I mean for example if you look different you will end up facing the challenges.

FR: (interrupted) learning the language would make it easy for you the hospital, in the market and things like that. And if someone says something nasty in the street

you have the language power to say something back to them.

4.2.3. Power Relations

During a focus group discussion one or more participant might dominate the process of the discussion. Power relations present in the social dynamics of the group can have an impact on what the participants share and not share in the discussion. In the course of the discussion some participants might voice their ideas more strongly than others so that their opinion emerges as the group's opinion. On the other hand some participants can be reluctant to state their opinions, or they might hesitate to challenge the dominant participants. In this section both group compositions will be explored in terms of the power play between participants.

There were dominant and passive participants in both group compositions. However there were some differences in the power relations between participants in the homogeneous and the heterogeneous groups. In the homogeneous groups all participants were actively participating in terms of sharing their opinions, reacting to some one's story (mostly in agreement), laughing, and interrupting each other. However in spite of all participants' active engagement there were dominant participants who were more active and try to influence the rest of other participants throughout the discussions. In the homogeneous female group for example two of the participants who would dominate the discussion gave some hints about their personalities of being dominant in the beginning of the discussion and during the closing of the discussion. One participant (ST, a 24 years old female student, who would become one of the dominant participants) rushed to be the ice breaker of the discussion as soon as it started. When the moderator opened the discussion with introduction and invited the participants to introduce themselves, she (ST) was the one who started the discussion with the question "Okay should I start?" and continued.

ST: Okay should I start? My name is ST, I've been in Turkey for like three years now. I am student of Economics Department.

Similarly NW a 25 years old female student, who would also become the dominant participant of the group discussion, mentioned her seniority when introducing herself in the outset of the discussion. She said she is their senior laughing, though it was just one year difference.

NW: Okay my name is NW, I am a student of Social Work. I've been in Turkey for 4 years. I am your senior (laughing)

As a reaction to and effect of the above statement by NW another participant FV a 21 years old female participant, who has been in Turkey for two years suggested for the discussion to start with the seniors. When the moderator commenced the actual discussion after the initial introduction FV recommended the seniors to begin.

Moderator: Okay let's start the discussion with the general adaptation challenges. What challenges do you face as international students in Turkey?

FV: I think it's better to start with the seniors. (Laughing)

Those kinds of involvement from the dominant participants were not only in the beginning of the discussion it was also at the end of the discussion. As the following reproduced quotation shows when the moderator asked the closing question it was both of the dominant participants who closed the discussion.

Moderator: are there any things about adaptation challenges that you would like to share before we finish?

NW: I think we have said everything that was in our mind, we were complaining to you as if you are going to come up with solution. (Laughing)

ST: I guess that's it then.

BT: yeah

The dominant participants in the homogeneous groups were playing the role of a moderator at some points. They were encouraging the relatively passive participants to talk more by asking questions and serving the refreshments. In the homogeneous female group for example whenever the moderator asked quiet participants if they had something to say it was NW and ST the two participants who dominated the discussion who came up with probing specific questions. Below are examples of moments when the dominant participants encouraged the silent participants to take part in the discussion by asking them questions or motivating them.

ST: And you girls say something it's only us who are talking (laughing, referring to the silent participants).

Moderator: yes we would like to hear from you too.

ST: (interrupted) what about in the first day you went to Tomer class?

.....

Moderator: FV and MN do you have anything to say?

NW: yes what problems did you face related with the cultural differences?

ST: what about food like 'kuru fasulye'? (Laughing)

.....

*ST: you are so quiet you have to say something at least
(laughing)*

*MN: I don't know actually (Chuckles), I can say I have a
particular strategy for improving my language what I do
is just following my instructors and the lectures given in
class and the textbooks that's it.*

.....

An extension of dominant participants playing the role of a moderator in the discussion NW was serving the other participants with the refreshments on the table.

NW: Help yourselves with the cookies.

Another important aspect of the power relations in the homogeneous groups is summarizing the opinions and ideas of the group. Dominant participants were giving summaries, extended explanations and lengthy answers on the issues raised. As the example of extracts shows after someone started talking on an issue it was always one of the two dominant participants who gave the summary of the group idea. Their summaries and explanations were always followed by general consensus from the group members. For example in the homogeneous female group two participants mentioned about their lack of interest in learning Turkish language and how it affected them negatively in learning the language. Following that it was NW one of the dominant participants who gave the summary on the issue. Her comment was followed by general agreement.

*NW: regarding the interest you you've been talking about
before I think it is the most important factor for learning
a language. If you are not interested in learning the*

language you will never ever be able to master it, you will close yourself from getting what you want to do or what you want to achieve. In addition to that there is something I like about the Turks, if you are a foreigner and trying to learn Turkish language and if you have a Turk friend they will never get tired of teaching you. They will use a lot of ways to teach you, to help you improve your language using simple words, simple sentences or whatever.

Everyone: yeah (in agreement)

Dominant participants were trying to present their account as being more valid and worth of a much better attention than ideas of the others. In an example from the homogeneous male group participants were talking about how the closeness of some words in pronunciation was affecting them in their conversations in everyday life. One participant, TK a male participant from Kenya, who was one of the silent participants shared the experience of his friends and then one of the dominant participants, AL shared his own friend's experience as being more important and gave summary of the dialogue on that issue.

TK: I have something like with my friends. You know ummmmm he wanted to buy bread which is ekmek in Turkish (laughing) and he asked it to the shopkeeper to give him erkek (laughter).

AL: I think in your case that's easy. It was a guy who was asking this question. I got a friend and she wanted to buy a bread (ekmek) she went to the bakery and she said not a he but she (started laughing) and she said erkek istiyorum.

Everyone: (laughter) long laughter

AL: So sometimes the closeness of the word like the examples above, sometimes it's a bit of challenge when you find yourself in a place like this.

In another example three of the other participants were talking about a Turkish history course which was compulsory for all students and how difficult it was. She said she failed in the first exam and that failure affected her immensely. Two other participants joined the dialogue expressing their frustrations. At the end it was the dominant participant who gave the summary explanation about the psychology of Ethiopians and exams, which was followed by agreement.

*MN: (Interrupted) do I need to take that course too?
(Asking BT)*

BT: don't worry in our university they have it in English for foreigners. It is it hard to take that course in Turkish, so now they have prepared it in English for foreigners in our university.

ST: and then before final exam the teacher took the ID cards of the foreign students and he helped us pass the exam.

NW: For Turkish students if they fail in one course it's not a big deal they keep taking it one time twice or more. However, for Ethiopians failing in a course is a big deal.

Everyone: yeah, you are right

FV: you are right, I think that psychology is deeply engraved in us. The psychology of hating defeat and failure.

Power relations in the heterogeneous groups took a different form. Similar to the homogeneous groups there were dominant and passive participants in the heterogeneous groups. However the role of the dominant participants was different from the homogeneous groups. In addition the silent participants in the heterogeneous groups were very silent and they barely talked. There were incidences of social inhibition among the passive participants of the heterogeneous groups. Social inhibition as Psychologists use it and defined by Wikipedia is “a conscious or subconscious avoidance of a situation or social interaction”. Psychologists argue that with a high level of social inhibition, situations are avoided because of the possibility of others disapproving of their feelings or expressions. Passive participants in the heterogeneous groups seemed disinterested throughout the discussion. Those participants seemed as if they were uncomfortable based on the replies they were giving and the non-verbal reactions throughout the discussion. They gave short answers whenever the moderator asked them, and for the remaining time they were quiet. They only spoke whenever the moderator turned his face towards them or some other participant asked them.

They were times when passive participants lost track of the discussion. It took the reminder of either the researcher or another participant to help them came back to the discussion. For example in the heterogeneous male group⁷ AH a participant from Yemen who was one of the passive participants seemed bored and uninterested throughout the discussion. And at one point I, the moderator asked him his opinion on the previously asked question and he lost track of the discussion topic and I reminded him the question again.

⁷ The heterogeneous male group consists of male participants from seven different nationalities with age ranging between 19 and 33 years old.

AR: me too I have a lot of Turkish friends.

Moderator: okay and what about you AH?

AH: what? (He lost track of the discussion)

*Moderator: do you have any organization or Association
Yemeni organization or Association, networks or groups
in Turkey?*

AH: there are groups I mean Yemeni groups.

In the heterogeneous mixed group a participant JM a 20 years old participant from Syria also lost track of the discussion and another participant reminded her the question.

JM: what was the question about I forgot?

LC: culture, cultural challenges.

RK is a 23 years old participant from China. She was in the heterogeneous female group. She was very quiet throughout the discussion, she was trying to avoid the conversation with other participants. At one point when the moderator asked a question to the group she was the one who started by giving short answer but in a way that will not allow for further probing questions. Her answers were like “this is all I know and I don’t want to talk more”.

*Moderator: alright so ummm now let's talk about the
academic challenge tell us about the academic challenge
you faced in Turkey as international student?*

*RK: My program is in Turkish, I know Turkish, I can
understand Turkish, I can write in Turkish so I don't have
any problem in my academic life.*

And in another incident the moderator asked her a question in a way inviting her to take part in the ongoing discussion and thereby altering the vacuum created because of the silence. FR a 29 years old masters student from Kenya who was the dominant participant in the group tried to engage her in the discussion by asking her a probing question. Her reaction was trying not to talk more as much as possible and finishing the conversation with the shortest answer possible.

Moderator: what about you RK, do you have something to say?

RK: I don't have social life and campus life, first of all I don't like social life I don't want to socialize with other people. I like to stay in my dorm alone. I like to spend time alone like watching movies or watching videos whatever it is. I like to do everything alone.

FR: wow you don't feel like you want to go out and do something with others?

RK: no, not at all.

FR: you know why I'm asking this all of us talking here we have a problem with the Turkish language, but you as you said before you don't have a problem with the Turkish language, you knew Turkish before you even came to Turkey. And as we have been saying language is of the biggest barriers that is hindering us from doing a lot of things in the university and in our social life.

RK: yeah but for me it's because I don't want to.

In the homogeneous groups as discussed above the dominant participants were playing the role of giving summaries of ideas discussed and encouraging silent participants. However the role of dominant participants in the heterogeneous groups was different. Dominant participants were challenging other participants.

Whereas dominant participants in the homogeneous groups took a more of collaborative approach, the dominant participants in the heterogeneous groups were challenging and making arguments.

YS is a 24 years old from Nigeria and HR is a 26 years old participant from Malaysia. Both of them were dominant participants in the heterogeneous female group discussion. During the discussion both of them were trying to challenge one another by questioning each other's account and experiences. As extracts reproduced in the group interaction section show dominant participants interrupt other speakers to show their disagreements and to challenge the speaker.

4.2.4. Non-verbal Cues

Interaction is the peculiar feature of focus groups, and interaction includes not only the words shared but also the non-verbal communication like facial expression, laughter, gestures and symbols, silence and eye contact. Therefore it is important to pay attention not only to what the participants say but also how they say it. Laughter for example is an essential part of human social life. Laughter is generally taken to be the reaction to or product of funniness or humor. However authors like Scott et al., put laughter in a social context and define it as "a social emotion, occurring most often in interactions, where it is associated with bonding, agreement, affection and emotional regulation" (Scott, Lavan, Chen, & McGettigan, 2014). In focus group discussions where individuals make interactions, laughter and other non-verbal communication gestures are produced as a result of the interaction. In this section the non-verbal communication in both the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups are discussed.

The homogeneous group discussions were characterized by shared laughter and humor. In most cases whenever someone shares a story or tells his or her experience it was accompanied by big laughs. Looking at the example extract from the homogeneous male group below as one participant was sharing his classroom experiences the rest of the participants were constantly interrupting him laughing. The speaker YS was also constantly laughing as he was talking.

YS: and you know one day I was in class and the teacher asking me about banana. Of course they like to ask more about Africa. I knew that verb but the problem was how to pronounce it (laughing). I knew 'sıkmak' is for squeezing but the problem was the pronunciation because it resembles 'sıkmek'.

Everyone: laughing

YS: I was worried anyways I ended up... by the way in my class I am the only black one and everyone pays attention to what I have to say (with a strong intonation and emotion)...

Everyone: laughing

YS: they are extremely attentive and so I said the word you know (laughing)

Everyone: still laughing (long laughter)

YS: talking indistinctly (laughing)

KN: ohhhhh that is bad (laughing)

YS: of course man I'm still facing some problems, but not so much.

For the homogeneous groups the shared culture gave them similar reference points and background to create humor and share the laughter. A lot of the hilarious moments were based on humor about their shared identity and culture. The following are some of the example extracts from the discussions.

TT: (interrupted) actually yes even in our dormitory and in the bus I have seen people reacting in a negative way when we are having this kind of things. They told us one day even that we are talking louder and we have to keep quiet. They don't like it when we are in a group and we are having hot conversation and laughing they really don't like it.

NW: They could have understood it this way for example these people are from the same country that's their way of life that their way of communication so we have to understand them. And sometimes for example some people they think that a woman should be silent and quite, and as a woman if you are laughing and if you are louder and laughing in any public space like the bus or the Metro they don't like it.

ST: (interrupted and laughing) and we are the number one in laughing (laughing)

Everyone: (nodded in agreement and laughing)

Humor and laughter were playing the role of making every one engaged, keeping the flow of the conversation, a means of showing support and agreement. In all the

discussions where there were a great deal of laughter everyone seemed to be active and engaged, at least by reacting to the story of others. This made the flow of the discussion smooth as laughter was serving as transition from one idea to the next or from one speaker to the next. And interestingly in all of the groups where there were a great deal of laughter silence gaps were very less. Moreover in the homogeneous groups laughter was a means of validating someone's ideas and there by supporting and agreeing his or her statement.

Laughter and humor can also be used to create intimacy between participants there by facilitating discussions on sensitive issues. In her study of laughter using focus groups to discuss smoking and motherhood in low income areas in the UK Robinson found that "through laughter, the women defined their common ground and shared experiences, and connected with one another by creating intimacy" (Robinson, 2009). According to her laughter was a facilitator for the participants to talk about 'dark secrets' in the context of the group. Laughter and humor facilitated the necessary comfort between participants to share more of their experiences. The following are some example extracts from the homogeneous groups where participants shared their accounts on socio cultural challenges in a joking manner and others' reaction in laughter.

YS: then we are very surprised. Most of the students were looking at me. I was just introducing myself boasting in an African way. And I was like this (clapping with his right hand against his folded left hand).

Everyone: laughing

.....

MF: we can't use Google in Africa, do you mean like putting all the trees in Google (laughing)

Everyone: laughing

.....

BT: Actually the same thing happen to me. When I came to Turkey my mom packed me some 'kolo' (Ethiopian snack) and when I opened it here my roommates were laughing at me and they said it was something for the birds not for people (laughing).

Everyone: laughing

NW: so they were always serving us this Bulgur food in our dormitory. And most of the time I didn't feel like to eating it and when they ask me I told them that it's a food that we eat in funerals.

Everyone: laughing

Silence was an important aspect of the focus group discussions. Silence, the non-speech gap during the discussions is defined by Damron as “the occurrence of quiet that precedes, interrupts, punctuates, or follows a communicative engagement” (Damron, 2009). There were significant amounts of silence in the heterogeneous groups. On the other hand in the homogeneous groups which were characterized by more laughter, the amount of silence was very low. Silence in the heterogeneous groups occurred following an argumentative conversation, a question from the moderator and after someone shared his or her account. As a result long pauses and awkward silences were common in the heterogeneous groups. In such moments it was the moderator who filled the gap by moving on to the next question, asking a probing question, or asking particular participants their opinion by mentioning their names. Consequently moderator involvement in those groups was higher than the homogeneous ones. For example the homogeneous female group was a 2 hours and 20 minutes long discussion while the heterogeneous male group was a 1 hour and 10 minutes long discussion. The former was consisted of six participants

while the later had seven participants. Moderator involving in terms of asking questions and probing was quite different in both groups. In the homogeneous female group despite being the longest discussion moderator involved for only 11 times. On the other hand in the heterogeneous male group the moderator involved for 75 times. This shows how interaction and conversation flow in the homogeneous groups was smooth. Below are example extracts to show the silence gaps in the heterogeneous groups.

(...)

*Moderator: alright do you have anything to add?
Experiences or things you've faced in your everyday life
or dormitory life?*

(...)

*Moderator: you want to say something I guess (referring
to JM)*

*JM: regarding the language barrier actually like there
are some Turkish students who do not accept foreign
students actually. Even if you are in the same class with
them they don't accept you. Actually I didn't face this
problem personally but I heard from a lot of my friends
facing this kind of problems.*

(...)

*Moderator: what about in your dormitory life what
challenges did you face because of the language barrier?
Especially girls I suppose you must have a lot of
experiences in this aspect.*

DN: Actually I really had hard times to get used to the thing ummm of people staring at me. I remember there were times when I was really annoyed, until I get used to it finally. And ummm I think that's it.

(...)

In some points silence was a 'no' answer to a moderator's question. For example in the heterogeneous female group the moderator asked the group if they had something to add following a silence after one of the participant's finished sharing her account about the language barrier. The group then went in to a silent mode again which the moderator interpreted as a 'no' and moved to his next question.

YS: If I point out something wrong they will end up scolding me which is completely absurd to begin with. Yeah so I don't know I am going round and round but direction, language it's pretty much everything about the language barriers.

(...)

Moderator: do you have anything to add?

(...)

Moderator: ummm okay I want to ask you if you had any strategy for improving your language skill. What strategies did you use in order to improve your Turkish?

Silence was also used as a disagreement to someone's controversial account. For example in the heterogeneous female group FR a participant from Kenya was sharing her account about a person who asked her if they eat people in Africa. She then talked about her reaction and how she engage with such kind of people. Two other participants HR and

RK from Malaysia and China respectively would argue with her. But initially the group went in to silence and HR started stating her argument.

FR: literally I looked into him and I told him yes we do but we wanted to be modern so we don't do it in the big cities we do it in the village and small areas, that's what I told him. I might take you to our village you better be scared because we might make a meal out of you. So because like how do you, how do you start we are in 2019 and how do you start enlightening such person. Like I cannot and I promised myself that I'm not going to do it. If you want to be ignorant you can be ignorant in your own I'm done.

(...)

HR: Ummmm well okay I bet to differ on the point of ignorance I think it is there in every society and every country that you go to. Even when I was in the United States my American friends would come and ask me the first question is like where are you from I am from Malaysia, and you know the second question that they ask are you still living on trees.

RK: I agree with HR because when I was in China studying in university, Chinese people used to ask me a lot of similar questions. Questions like if we ride a camel to school, if we live on a tree, if we have shampoos in our region, if we live in a desert and things like these.

(...)

FR: me I expect this kind of things in the village not in the cities.

RK: yes for me such things happened in China in big cities where there are a lot of universities and stuff.

4.2.5. Degree of Comfort between Participants

Being comfortable can mean one or more of the following: feeling relaxed, feeling free from stress or worry, being relaxed enough to be yourself around people. In focus group discussion degree of comfort between participants can mean participants' willingness and relaxation when sharing their experiences, when reacting to someone's account, and all the verbal and non-verbal engagements throughout the discussion. Degree of comfort between participants is very important for the success of a focus group research.

Compared to the heterogeneous groups, participants in the homogeneous groups were more comfortable with each other. Willingness to talk about sensitive issues, active engagement throughout the discussion, sharing longer and detailed experiences, the use of humor and laughter, smooth discussion flow and less pauses in between each speaker are all indicators of the high degree of comfort between the participants in the homogeneous groups. On the other hand with participants refraining from talking about sensitive issues, longer portions of silences, with silent participants giving short answers and losing track of the discussion, and less humor and laughter the heterogeneous groups were characterized by lesser degree of comfort between the participants.

4.2.6. Data depth and data breadth

All of the five focus groups were conducted in a similar procedure to ensure they are comparable. This was achieved through: same person moderating all of the groups, same person observing all of the discussions and same questioning route was prepared and used in all groups as a guide for the discussions. The questioning route was prepared

containing four main categories in addition to the introduction and closing parts: adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey, language adaptation challenges, socio-cultural adaptation challenges, and academic related challenges. However despite the use and application of similar procedure for all of the groups there were some differences in the flow and length the discussions and in the final data generated. The discussions lasted between 70 and 142 minutes. The shortest being the heterogeneous male group with 70 minutes, and the longest the homogeneous female group lasting for 142 minutes, which is two times greater than the former. The heterogeneous groups averaged 75 minutes whereas the homogeneous groups averaged 118 minutes.

The differences in the data generation can be classified as data variety and the depth of data generated. The homogeneous groups were characterized by depth of data generated. The amount of time spent in a single topic, the breadth of experiences shared by each of the participants, collaboration among participants in developing stories or accounts are indication of the breadth of data generated by the homogeneous groups. Looking at the time spent in talking about language challenge (one of the challenges discussed in the focus groups) there is a great variation between the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. For example the homogeneous female and male groups spent 52 and 40 minutes discussing the language topic respectively. While the heterogeneous female and male groups spent 27 and 21 minutes respectively. Participants in the homogeneous groups spent a considerable time talking about each topic sharing a detailed account of their experiences. The discussion was a safe place for them to talk about their challenges, as a result each participant shared his or her experiences openly. Whenever someone was sharing his or her experiences the rest of the participants were listening attentively, empathizing with the speaker. Moreover because of the common socio cultural background participants were collaborating in developing someone's story and adding at each other's accounts. However with detail came the repetition of ideas. As the example extract from the homogeneous male group reproduced below shows the participants were

working together in developing the idea raised by the speaker. AL a male participant from Kenya started talking about the food challenge he faced and other participants joined in adding on to his experience. And then YS another participant from Kenya, started sharing his own version of food challenge, similarly other participants engaged in his story telling.

AL: the main challenge that affect me directly since I landed in Turkey is food oh my God!

Everyone: hmmmmmm

AL: (speaking emotionally) oh guys you know the kind of food we eat in our country like to 'fufu' you see...

KN: (interrupted) 'posho' 'ugali' ⁸

AL: 'ugali' those foods of our country I missed them really. The first time I came here man, I was given an Ayran. Imagine ayran for the first time oh my God! You know Ayran a sort of milk did they put some salt in it I don't know. So it was very difficult for me to adapt. My stomach was like really (laughing) trust me much of the problems I faced were because of this. Gradually I started getting used to the food anyways.

YS: actually all of us we are facing the same problems. Even me my first time I came here they give me corba with s strange flavor oh my God!

Everyone: laughing

⁸ Local food names

YS: so my friends as you know for us we used you know this porridge. So oh my God I took it (the corba) and I taste it...

Everyone: laughing in the background

YS: so at that time I ate the corba and went to sleep. But at night I didn't sleep. I couldn't sleep. Actually most of my time I spent it in the toilet. (Laughing)

Everyone: laughing

YS: I was trying to ease myself. Another problem is.....

Everyone: still laughing in the background

YS: you know these Turkish people they use this (pointing to the plastic cups in the table)...

AL: small smaller cups

Everyone: laughing

YS: yes small, smaller cups, and you know for us we use those big cups that we call them 'gama'⁹.....

The heterogeneous groups on the other hand were characterized by diversity of the data generated. Despite the discussions being shorter with 75 minutes average and lack of depth participants in the heterogeneous groups covered a great deal of topics. Their accounts on each topic were short yet diverse with each talking about something else instead of continuing on the previous speaker's idea. For example in the discussion on the socio cultural challenges and food specifically one participant in the heterogeneous male

⁹ Local drinking cup

group gave a short account of his experience and following him was another participant talking about the weather challenge.

AB: food is another challenge. Especially when you eating in the dormitory it is something else. (Laughter) it is completely different. When they said Turkish food is the best one, I mean in the world what we see is the food we are eating in the dormitory. It is very bad.

Everyone: laughing

AB: which is very challenging for me.

MK: when international students are coming to Turkey on September something like that the weather is so cold. Especially those from Africa since it is so hot in all countries especially like Somalia the weather is so hot. The weather is one of the challenges I faced. Because it is hot in our country and in here it is very cold in September to December.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

The ultimate goal of this study was to explore the challenges and opportunities in using focus group discussion with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. In focus group discussions it is suggested that having a demographically homogenous participants is beneficial. However little is done to explore the impact of having heterogeneous participants in terms of gender and nationality for focus group discussions.

In this research I explored focus group as a method in relation to research into adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey. The methodological issues analyzed and discussed in this research include: sensitive issues, group interaction, power relations, non-verbal cues, discussion flow and degree of comfort between participants and depth and breadth of data.

Homogeneity as used in this research refers to the “social characteristics” of participants entailing similarity in terms of gender, race/nationality, and age. Heterogeneity on the other hand refers to the group participants’ variance according to the “social characteristics” mentioned above (i.e. gender, race/nationality, and age).

In the homogeneous groups participants were more open and willing to talk and share sensitive issues. Issues like sexual harassment, race, hygiene and health were raised and discussed by participants in the homogeneous groups. Whenever someone raised a sensitive issue it was usually followed by general consensus and empathy.

Compared to the homogeneous groups in the heterogeneous groups discussion about sensitive issues was less emphasized. It seems as participants were very cautious not to raise sensitive issues. While discussions on sensitive issues in the homogeneous groups were followed by general consensus and empathy, in the heterogeneous groups sensitive issues were approached with skepticism. Generally speaking discussions on sensitive issues were followed by silences and in most cases participants refrained from reacting and contributing to the discussion. In some cases raising sensitive issues was a risk that was challenged and questioned by the other participants. In most cases

participants in the heterogeneous groups were not reacting to the issue raised. Following a participant's comment on a sensitive issue it was either the researcher who fills the gap by asking a question or another participant talking about something else. In the moments when someone raised a sensitive issue it was full of involuntary repetition of words, involuntary pauses, struggle for appropriate words, and general silences.

The homogeneous groups were generally characterized by more agreements and less disagreements. Participants showed their agreements using words and phrases like 'yes, I agree with you, yeah'. And at times whenever someone is talking they constantly gave each other affirmative nods and 'yeah'. Participants were looking for support and validation of their ideas from the rest of the group. Interrupting each other to show and express agreements was also common in the homogeneous groups. The homogeneity of the group composition might have affected participants' by eliciting their commonalities of cultural background and the concomitant shared experiences and adaptation challenges. Interruptions in the homogeneous groups were mostly to show agreement, relate themselves with the story being told, to help develop the speaker's story by contributing words or phrases. Developing a story by supporting each other is mainly because of the shared culture and identity and the similar socio-cultural adaptation challenges that come with it.

In the heterogeneous groups participants can held opposing stances and differing viewpoints regarding an issue. In such cases participants try to convince each other of their respective beliefs and experiences. They try to attract other participants to their viewpoint by giving a detailed account of their experience, more evidences to support their claim, and so on. Participants in the heterogeneous groups questioned one another to verify the actuality of experiences shared. Unlike in the homogeneous groups where participants interrupt each other to show agreements and support, in the heterogeneous groups participants interrupt each other to show disagreements.

The homogeneous group discussions were characterized by shared laughter and humor. In most cases whenever someone shares a story or tells his or her experience it was accompanied by big laughs. For the homogeneous groups the shared culture gave them similar reference points and background to create humor and share the laughter. A lot of the hilarious moments were based on humor about their shared identity and culture. Humor and laughter were playing the role of making every one engaged, keeping the flow of the conversation smooth, a means of showing support and agreement. In all the discussions where there were a great deal of laughter everyone seemed to be active and engaged (at least by reacting to the story of others). This made the flow of the discussion smooth as laughter was serving as transition from one idea to the next or from one speaker to the next. And interestingly in all of the groups where there were a great deal of laughter silence gaps were very less. In the homogeneous groups laughter was a means of validating someone's ideas and there by supporting and agreeing with his or her statement.

There were dominant and passive participants in both group compositions. However there were some differences in the power relations between participants in the homogeneous and the heterogeneous groups. In the homogeneous groups all participants were actively participating in terms of sharing their opinions, reacting to some one's story (mostly in agreement), laughing, and interrupting each other. However in spite of all participants' active engagement there were dominant participants who were more active and try to influence the rest of other participants throughout the discussions. The dominant participants in the homogeneous groups were playing the role of a moderator at some points. They were encouraging the relatively passive participants to talk more by asking questions and serving the refreshments. Another important aspect of the power relations in the homogeneous groups is that the dominant participants were giving summaries, extended explanations and lengthy answers on the issues raised.

Dominant participants' role in the heterogeneous groups was challenging the opinions and experiences of others. The share of each individual to the discussion was very uneven. Passive participants lose track of the discussion and it was either the

researcher or someone from the participants who reminds the topic of the discussion at the moment.

Unlike in the homogeneous groups where participants interrupted each other to support each other and show agreements interruptions in the heterogeneous groups were more of for showing disagreements.

There were significant amounts of silence in the heterogeneous groups. On the other hand in the homogeneous groups which were characterized by more laughter, the amount of silence was very low. Silence in the heterogeneous groups occurred following an argumentative conversation, a question from the moderator and after someone shared his or her account. As a result long pauses and awkward silences were common in the heterogeneous groups. In such moments it was the moderator who filled, or asking particular participants their opinion by mentioning their names. Consequently moderator involvement to fill the gaps by moving on to the next question, asking a probing question and by directing a question to a specific participant was higher in those groups than the homogeneous ones.

Silence in the heterogeneous groups is used as a way to show disagreement to someone's controversial account and as a 'no' answer to a moderator's question. In the heterogeneous groups the silent participants were very silent and they barely talked. There were incidences of social inhibition among the passive participants of the heterogeneous groups. The silent participants were trying to avoid interacting with others and losing track of the discussion.

While the dominant participants in the homogeneous groups took a more collaborative approach, the dominant participants in the heterogeneous groups were challenging and making arguments.

Compared to the heterogeneous groups, participants in the homogeneous groups were more comfortable with each other. Willingness to talk about sensitive issues, active engagement throughout the discussion, sharing longer and detailed experiences, the use of humor and laughter, smooth discussion flow and less pauses in between each speaker are

all indicators of the high degree of comfort between the participants in the homogeneous groups. On the other hand with participants refraining from talking about sensitive issues, longer portions of silences, with silent participants giving short answers and losing track of the discussion, and less humor and laughter the heterogeneous groups were characterized by lesser degree of comfort between the participants.

Despite efforts to use and apply similar procedure for all of the groups there were some differences in the flow and length of the discussions and in the final data generated. The discussions lasted between 70 and 142 minutes. The shortest being the heterogeneous male group with 70 minutes, and the longest the homogeneous female group (lasting for 142 minutes) which is two times greater than the former. The heterogeneous groups averaged 75 minutes whereas the homogeneous groups averaged 118 minutes.

Data generated from the homogeneous groups was more detailed and in depth. The amount of time spent in a single topic, the detail of experiences shared by each of the participants, collaboration among participants in developing stories or accounts are indications of the depth of data generated by the homogeneous groups. Moreover, because of the common socio cultural background participants were collaborating in developing someone's story and adding at each other's accounts. However with detail came the repetition of ideas.

The heterogeneous groups on the other hand were characterized by diversity of experiences instead of detailed experiences. Despite the discussions being shorter (with 75 minutes average) and lacking detail participants in the heterogeneous groups covered a great deal of topics.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

In this study, I tried to examine methodological issues and challenges in using focus group discussion with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Sensitive issues, group interaction, power relations, non-verbal cues, discussion flow and degree of comfort between participants and depth and breadth of data are methodological issues I discussed in homogeneous and heterogeneous group compositions. As the examples discussed in this research show group composition have an impact on the data, flow and process of focus group discussion. I found some differences comparing both group compositions.

The homogeneous groups facilitated discussions on sensitive issues like racism, sexual harassment etc. On the other hand the heterogeneous groups inhibited discussions on sensitive issues and participants who raise a point on a sensitive issue were interrogated and challenged by other participants. This supports the arguments by authors like Bloor et al that heterogeneous groups may actually result in disagreements and the suppression of the ideas of certain participants (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001: 20). This is an important finding in the understanding of the influence of group composition on the discussion of sensitive issues.

Humor and laughter play an important role in the flow of focus group discussion. Group homogeneity creates the platform for laughter and humor to take place. Shared identity and culture was a source of humor and laughter in homogeneous groups. Robinson has argued that laughter enables participants to talk about sensitive issues and “dark secrets” in the group context (Robinson, 2009:267). The experiences from the homogeneous groups of this study are consistent with her findings, where laughter and humor used to create intimacy between participants there by facilitating discussions on sensitive issues. In addition, humor and laughter can play the role of making everyone engaged and as a means of showing support and agreement. A similar conclusion was reached by Brannen and Pattman where they argued the importance of laughter for gaining

support and creating bond in a group context (Brannen & Pattman, 2005:539). There was significant amount of silence in the heterogeneous groups. On the other hand in the homogeneous groups which were characterized by more laughter, the amount of silence was very low. Silence in the heterogeneous groups occurred following an argumentative conversation, a question from the moderator and after someone shared his or her account. As a result, long pauses and awkward silences were common in the heterogeneous groups.

It is common to have both dominant and passive participants in focus group discussions. Careful comparisons of the discussions revealed that there are some differences in the power relations between participants in the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. The dominant participants in homogeneous groups encourage silent participants, give summaries, and at times they play the role of a moderator by asking questions and even serving the refreshments. However, dominant participants in heterogeneous groups challenge and interrogate other participants in a discussion.

General consensus and agreements were the hallmarks of the homogeneous groups. Interrupting each other to show and express agreements was common in the homogeneous groups. Compared to the homogeneous groups, the heterogeneous groups were characterized by moments of arguments and disagreements. Unlike in the homogeneous groups, where participants interrupted each other to support each other and show agreements, interruptions in the heterogeneous groups were more of for showing disagreements.

Participants in homogeneous groups spent a lot of time in a single topic collaborating and developing each other's stories. From the results, it is clear that data from homogeneous groups are characterized by depth and detail. In comparison, the heterogeneous groups are characterized by diversity of the data generated. These findings on group heterogeneity, at least, hint that heterogeneous groups are suitable for generating

a wide variety of data despite lacking depth. This can be an evidence for Bloor et al presumption that setting too heterogeneous group can result in a wide range of views and experiences (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001: 2). The experiences from this research suggest that heterogeneous groups work well when the purpose of the research is to explore a wide variety of ideas and perspectives in brief. Whereas homogeneous groups are for a research with a purpose of gaining a deeper and detailed experiences.

When it comes to limitations, the homogeneous groups have the following drawbacks: drifting from the topic of discussion and difficulty to control, repetition of ideas, few dominant participants dominating the flow of the discussion, and a tendency for participants to agree with the dominant participants without questioning and challenging them. The heterogeneous groups on the other hand, has the following limitations: hindering discussion on sensitive issues, lacking depth of discussion, and in between silences.

However, the study is not without limitations. I focused on participants' social characteristics mainly in terms of racial/ethnic backgrounds and gender, as a result the impact of other characteristics like seniority, age, religion and faculties enrolled were not included. A further research including all those characteristics could be helpful. Even though efforts were made not to include acquaintances in the groups, two friends were included in the homogeneous female group which I believe could have impacted the flow of the discussion. Even though there was an improvements in each group discussion lack of experience from the moderator side can also be another limitation of the study. The major challenges I encountered as a moderator includes, but are not limited to: engaging with silent participants, directing when the group goes out of the discussion topic and recruitment of participants. In spite of its importance in focus group discussion, literature on group homogeneity and heterogeneity is limited. I believe this limitation in literature affected the development of arguments in this study as well.

Researchers generally rely on homogeneous participants for focus group discussion. However, both group compositions have their own strengths and weaknesses. Based on the experiences from the five focus groups and understanding and observation of myself as a researcher I suggest heterogeneous group composition if the aim of the research is to explore a diversity of ideas in a short period of time and for argumentative discussions. I argue that instead of turning back on heterogeneous group composition, it is worthwhile to consider using it depending on the purpose of the study.

For researchers working on socio-cultural differences and socio-cultural adaptation challenges, I suggest the recruitment of homogeneous participants based on the racial/ethnic backgrounds. Researchers can make use of dominant participants in homogeneous groups for their own purpose, as they can help in encouraging and engaging with passive participants. On the other hand, I suggest for a high moderator involvement in the heterogeneous groups, the absence of it could create awkward silences in the discussion.

For qualitative researchers who wants to work on adaptation challenges of international students in Turkey, I suggest first to split the research in to separate parts of socio-cultural adaptation challenges and academic challenges. It is important to recruit different set of participants for each part. For the socio-cultural adaptation challenges I strongly suggest the recruitment of homogeneous participants based on nationality and gender. Moreover moderators with similar characteristics to that of the participants should be assigned. Heterogeneous group of participants work well if the topic is related to academic challenges.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX - A

Consent for Participation in Focus Group Discussion

Hello, I am Mihretab Gebru. I am conducting my masters thesis in the department of social research methodology, institute of population studies. I am conducting a research on adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey. I aimed to understand the challenges related to language, culture and academics international students from different countries face in Turkey. I am being advised by Assoc. Prof Ilknur Yuksel-Kaptanoglu.

I would like to learn the adaptation challenges you faced during your stay here in Turkey as international student. Your response is extremely valuable for this study. I hope that the findings will be valuable input for further studies and will help upcoming international students to adapt easily to possible challenges.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you feel uncomfortable in any way during the group discussion, you have the right to decline to answer any question.

The discussion will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Between 5 to 7 participants will attend the group discussion. In addition to the participants the discussion will be attended by a researcher and an assistant. The discussion will be audio taped and notes will be written. The information that will be collected from this research will be kept confidential. Information about you that will be collected during the research will be put away and no-one but the researcher will be able to see it. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by Hacettepe University Ethics Committee. If you have any questions at any moment including after the study you are welcome.

I the participant have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX- B

Discussion Guide

Introduction

Thank you all for coming today. My name is Mihretab and this is (note-taker). I am Masters Student in the department of social research methodology, institute of population studies. I am conducting a research on adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey.

In our discussion today we would like to learn the adaptation challenges you faced during your stay here in Turkey as international students. Please don't feel shy, we want to hear from all of you about your experiences. There are no right or wrong answers we simply want to hear your thoughts and suggestions. I have some questions for you but also feel free to add other things you feel are important as we go along.

During our discussion (note-taker) will be taking notes and reminding me if I forget to ask something, but he cannot write down every word we say so we would like to record the discussion so that we don't miss anything that is said. Please don't be concerned about this, our discussion will stay confidential and only the research team will listen to the recording.

During our discussion please let everyone share their views, but only one person should speak at a time so that the recording will be clear. Just join in when you have something to say, we will not be going around the group for every question. Remember we want to hear all your views. It's OK to disagree with others if you have a different opinion but please also respect other people's views. Also, everything that you hear today should be confidential and not shared with people who are outside the group. This discussion will last about one hour. **Are there any questions before we start?**

Questioning Route

Opening

Let's start by introducing ourselves....

Tell us your:

- Names
- Level of study
- Departments
- Country of origin
- Duration of stay in Turkey

Introductory

In our discussion today we would like to learn the adaptation challenges you faced during your stay here in Turkey as international students. What challenges do you face as international students in Turkey?

Language Barriers

First, we would like to hear in detail about language barriers. What are the difficulties that you have faced or you are still facing because of language barriers as international student here in Turkey?

(Probes: Medium of instruction, everyday life, dormitory life, academic life, strategies used, networks or organizations affiliated with)

Cultural Adaptation Challenges

Now let's talk about cultural adaptation challenges. Can you tell us the cultural adaptation challenges that you faced in your stay here in Turkey?

(Probes: norms and values, religion, food, social barriers, strategies used)

Academic Barriers

Now let's talk about challenges you faced in your academic life. What are the academic barriers you faced as international student in Turkey?

(Probes: Campus life, Medium of instruction, Reading Materials, strategies used)

Summary and Closing

I just have a few last questions...

Are there any other things about adaptation challenges that you would like to share before we finish?

What do you recommend for upcoming international students?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us today.

APPENDIX - C



T.C.
HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Rektörlük



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Konu : Mihretab Solomon GEBRU Hk.

NÜFUS ETÜTLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

İlgi : 07.03.2019 tarihli ve 85844849-300/00000495600 sayılı yazı.

Enstitünüz Sosyal Araştırma Yöntemleri Anabilim Dalı Tezli Yüksek Lisans programı öğrencilerinden Mihretab Solomon GEBRU'nun Doç. Dr. İlknur YÜKSEL-KAPTANOĞLU danışmanlığında yürüttüğü "Heterojen ve Homojen Gruplar Özelinde Odak Grup Çalışmalarının Sunduğu Fırsatlar ve Zorluklar (Challenges and Opportunities in Using Focus Group to Study Heterogeneous and Homogeneous Groups)" başlıklı tez çalışması Üniversitemiz Senatosu Etik Komisyonunun 02 Nisan 2019 tarihinde yapmış olduğu toplantıda incelenmiş olup, etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.

Bilgilerinizi ve gereğini saygılarımla rica ederim.

e-İmzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Rahime Meral NOHUTCU
Rektör Yardımcısı

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