# UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENT-ADVISOR RELATIONSHIPS IN TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

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| Aim/Purpose | This phenomenological study investigates cross-cultural relationships between international doctoral students and their academic advisors in Turkish universities. |
| Background | Through in-depth interviews with 12 international doctoral students from diverse backgrounds in Istanbul and Ankara, this paper explores how Turkish academia's blend of hierarchical structures and interpersonal warmth influences advising dynamics. |
| Methodology | Phenomenological design using semi-structured interviews with 12 international doctoral students from various countries and disciplines studying in Türkiye. |
| Contribution | Advances understanding of international doctoral education by examining non-Western academic contexts and revealing how cultural-educational frameworks shape advisor-student relationships. |
| Findings | Major findings include: (i) meaning-making processes involve transformation of expectations and identity formation, (ii) challenges encompass communication difficulties and academic expectation misalignments, (iii) effective coping strategies include peer networks and proactive skill development, (iv) successful advising relationships transcend cultural accommodation to create intellectual synergies beneficial for both parties. |
| Recommendations for Practitioners | Engage in mutual cultural learning, establish trust through consistent communication, and adopt transformative guidance approaches that balance hierarchical respect with collaboration. |
| Recommendations for Researchers | Explore longitudinal outcomes, examine institutional support policies, and develop frameworks for cross-cultural mentoring beyond Western models. |

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| Impact on Society | Enhances global academic mobility, improves international student retention, and promotes inclusive higher education systems that leverage cultural diversity. |
| Future Research | Investigate applications across different national contexts, examine technology's role in cross-cultural advising, and develop targeted training programs for international student advisors. |
| Keywords | international doctoral students, advisor-student relationships, cross-cultural advising, Turkish higher education, academic adaptation, cultural dynamics |

# INTRODUCTION

International students represent a growing and significant population in higher education worldwide, contributing to academic diversity, cultural exchange, and knowledge transfer across borders (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Egron-Polak et al., 2015; Marginson, 2014). According to UNESCO (2022), over 6 million students were studying outside their home countries in 2019, a figure that has more than tripled since 2000. The experiences of these students, particularly at the doctoral level, are shaped by numerous factors, including their relationships with academic advisors who play crucial roles in their educational journey and professional development (Becerra et al., 2021; Curtin et al., 2013; Rice et al., 2009). Research has consistently demonstrated that advisor-student relationships significantly impact international students' academic success, psychological well-being, and overall satisfaction with their educational experience (Burt et al., 2021; Knox et al., 2013; Omar et al., 2016). Recent studies highlight how the quality of these relationships affects doctoral students' mental health and persistence. Higher satisfaction with faculty advisors correlates with better psychological well-being, including higher positive affect, lower negative affect, and better sleep quality (Becerra et al., 2021; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Similarly, patterns in negative doctoral advising relationships show they either gradually deteriorate or shift suddenly due to singular events, with profound implications for students' persistence and academic experience (Breen & McCain, 2023).

While a substantial body of research has examined international students' experiences in Western contexts (Lee & Rice, 2007; Tuma et al., 2021; Wallace & Ford, 2021), less attention has been given to their experiences in non-Western settings such as Türkiye (Kondakci, 2011; Titrek et al., 2016). Türkiye has emerged as an increasingly significant destination for international students, with numbers rising from approximately 16,000 in 2000 to over 350,000 in 2024, according to the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK, 2024). This dramatic growth reflects Türkiye's strategic efforts to internationalize its higher education system and its unique position as a bridge between Eastern and Western academic traditions (Bulut-Sahin & Kondakci, 2023; Çetinsaya, 2014; Özoğlu et al., 2015). The Turkish academic context offers a particularly valuable case study for examining cross-cultural advising relationships, characterized by a distinctive blend of hierarchical academic structures, interpersonal warmth in professional relationships, and hybrid educational practices that incorporate both traditional Turkish approaches and international standards. This unique combination creates an educational environment that differs significantly from both Western universities and other non-Western academic systems.

Research on advisor-student relationships in Turkish universities has primarily focused on domestic students, with limited attention to the experiences of international students, revealing a significant gap in the literature. The few studies that have addressed this topic suggest that international students' relationships with Turkish advisors are influenced by factors such as language barriers, differing expectations regarding supervision styles, and varying levels of cultural understanding (Kılınç et al., 2020; Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). Studies examining graduate students' experiences with academic advising have identified differences between domestic and international students' expectations and satisfaction, though additional research is needed to understand these dynamics across various cultural contexts fully (Lin & Liu, 2019; Omar et al., 2016; T. Wang & Li, 2011). Existing studies have

typically employed quantitative approaches or focused on general aspects of international students' experiences rather than the specific dynamics of advisor-student relationships (Alpaydin, 2018; Cennetkuşu, 2017; Lin & Liu, 2019). A phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate for addressing this gap because it allows for deep exploration of lived experiences and meaning-making processes that cannot be captured through quantitative methods (Giorgi et al., 2017). The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring international doctoral students' experiences with their advisors in Turkish universities, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural advising relationships in non-Western academic contexts.

This research contributes to our understanding of international doctoral students' advising relationships within the Turkish higher education context, offering insights that complement the existing literature on cross-cultural academic experiences. Expanding research beyond Western contexts is essential for developing more culturally inclusive frameworks that recognize the diversity of academic traditions worldwide (Glass et al., 2015; McCain & Roksa, 2023). Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in cross-cultural advising relationships can help institutions develop targeted interventions to better support both international students and their advisors (Griffin et al., 2023). This study aims to explore the lived experiences of international doctoral students in Turkish universities regarding their relationships with academic advisors. Using a phenomenological approach, the research seeks to understand how these students experience, interpret, and navigate advisor-student relationships within a cross-cultural academic context. To explore these issues in depth, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do international doctoral students experience and make meaning of their relationships with academic advisors in the Turkish academic context?

2. What challenges do international students face in their relationships with Turkish advisors, and what strategies do they develop to navigate these challenges?

3. From the perspective of international students, what are the essential elements of effective advisor-student relationships in a cross-cultural academic context?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes three complementary theoretical approaches to examine international graduate students' experiences of advisor-student relationships in Türkiye: Berry's Acculturation Theory, Relational-Cultural Theory, and Academic Resilience Theory. Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for understanding the complex nature of advisor-student relationships in a cross-cultural academic context. Berry's (1997, 2005) Acculturation Theory explains the adaptation strategies individuals develop when encountering a new cultural context. Berry conceptualizes acculturation around two fundamental dimensions: the degree to which individuals maintain their original cultural identity and the degree to which they engage with the new culture. These dimensions lead to four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. In the context of this study, Berry's theory provides a framework for understanding how international doctoral students navigate between their original academic culture and the Turkish academic culture in their relationships with advisors, and how these navigation strategies shape their experiences (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; R. A. Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhou et al., 2008). While Berry's theory offers valuable insights into cultural adaptation processes, it is important to acknowledge its limitations in fully capturing the complexities of academic acculturation in a Turkish context. The theory was primarily developed in Western multicultural settings and may not fully account for the unique dynamics of Türkiye's position at the intersection of multiple cultural traditions. This study, therefore, applies the theory critically, recognizing that adaptation in Turkish academic contexts may manifest in ways that do not align perfectly with Berry's four-strategy model.

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), developed by Miller and Stiver (1997) and expanded by Jordan (2018), emphasizes the centrality of relationships in human development and well-being. RCT proposes that growth occurs through connection and that disconnection leads to psychological distress. The theory focuses on concepts such as mutual empathy, authenticity, and growth-fostering relationships characterized by increased zest, empowerment, clarity, sense of worth, and desire for more connection (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2018). While Berry's theory addresses cultural adaptation broadly, RCT provides a complementary lens specifically for examining the relational dynamics between international doctoral students and their Turkish advisors. The theory is particularly valuable for understanding how power differentials and cultural differences in academic relationships affect student development. Studies show that doctoral advising relationships exist on a spectrum of strength, with relationship quality significantly influenced by how advisors demonstrate genuine care for their advisees across cultural boundaries (Friedensen et al., 2024; Omar et al., 2016; L. Wang & Byram, 2019). Academic Resilience Theory focuses on students' capacity to overcome adversities that threaten their educational development (Elemo & Türküm, 2019; Martin & Marsh, 2009; Walker et al., 2006). In the context of international students, academic resilience encompasses the protective factors and adaptive strategies that enable students to persist and succeed despite language barriers, cultural adjustment challenges, and academic differences (Gu & Day, 2007; K. T. Wang et al., 2015). This theory helps to understand how international doctoral students develop coping mechanisms to navigate challenges in their advisor-student relationships and how supportive advising can serve as a protective factor, enhancing students' resilience.

These three theoretical perspectives complement each other by addressing different aspects of international students' experiences with their advisors. Berry's Acculturation Theory provides the cultural adaptation context, highlighting how students navigate cultural differences in academic expectations and relational norms. Relational-Cultural Theory focuses on the interpersonal dynamics and connection-disconnection patterns within advisor-student relationships, which are particularly relevant in understanding power differentials in cross-cultural contexts. Academic Resilience Theory addresses how students develop coping mechanisms and leverage protective factors when facing challenges in these relationships. The integration of these theories creates a comprehensive analytical framework that moves beyond single-theory approaches to capture the multidimensional nature of cross-cultural advising relationships in Turkish higher education. This integrated approach represents an original conceptual contribution that can potentially be applied to understand international doctoral student experiences in other non-Western academic contexts.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The landscape of international higher education has expanded dramatically in recent decades, with student mobility becoming a defining feature of the global academic environment. The distribution of international students is uneven, with the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and China hosting approximately 50% of all international students, though emerging destinations in Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe have shown significant growth (OECD, 2022). This global movement has been driven by various factors, including the quest for quality education, career enhancement opportunities, cultural experiences, and internationalization strategies of higher education institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Egron-Polak et al., 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The growing number of international students worldwide reflects the increasing importance of global educational mobility and the value placed on international academic experiences in today's interconnected world.

International students face unique challenges compared to their domestic counterparts, which significantly impact their academic journeys and overall well-being. Research consistently identifies language barriers, cultural adjustment difficulties, academic differences, social isolation, and psychological stress as common issues experienced by this population (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). The mental health challenges faced by international doctoral students

have received increased attention, with studies documenting higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among this population (Cetinkaya-Yildiz et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018). These challenges often manifest differently across disciplines, with students in social sciences and humanities frequently reporting greater difficulties with language and writing expectations, while those in STEM fields may experience more challenges related to laboratory cultures and technical communication (Curtin et al., 2013; Gardner, 2010; Posselt, 2018). Such discipline-specific differences highlight the complex nature of international student adjustment.

The process of academic and social integration is particularly crucial for international students' success and well-being, though this integration is often complicated by cultural differences, language barriers, and unfamiliar educational systems (Alpaydin, 2018; Lee & Rice, 2007; Wallace & Ford, 2021). Recent studies have highlighted the role of institutional support structures, including academic advising, in facilitating successful integration and addressing the unique needs of international students (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Burt et al., 2021; Glass et al., 2015). Beyond institutional support, recent research has increasingly recognized the agency and resilience of international students in navigating academic challenges. Rather than viewing them merely as passive recipients of support, studies highlight how international students actively develop coping strategies, build support networks, and negotiate their identities across cultural boundaries (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; Cao et al., 2018; Marginson, 2014). This perspective acknowledges the transformative potential of international education and the complex ways in which students construct meaning from their cross-cultural experiences, often resulting in hybrid academic identities that integrate elements from both home and host cultures (Li & Zizzi, 2018; McCain & Roksa, 2023; Montgomery, 2010).

## ADVISOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

The advisor-student relationship represents one of the most critical factors in doctoral student success and satisfaction, particularly for international students navigating unfamiliar academic environments. This relationship serves multiple functions, including academic guidance, professional socialization, emotional support, and career development (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Becerra et al., 2021; Schlosser et al., 2003). Research consistently demonstrates that effective advising significantly influences students' academic progress, research productivity, professional identity development, and overall well-being (Curtin et al., 2013; Tuma et al., 2021; L. Wang & Byram, 2019). The quality of this relationship can have profound effects on students' psychological health and academic persistence. Notably, Becerra et al. (2021) found that positive advisor relationships correlate with better psychological and physical well-being among doctoral students, including improved affect, sleep quality, and stress resilience.

Cultural differences significantly shape advisor-student interactions in international contexts, creating varied expectations and potential misunderstandings. Studies have identified various dimensions along which academic advising cultures may differ, including expectations regarding advisor availability, formality in interactions, directness of feedback, and autonomy granted to students (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007; Leong, 2015; Lin & Liu, 2019). In high power distance cultures, students may expect more directive guidance from advisors and may be less comfortable expressing disagreement. Conversely, in low power-distance cultures, students may expect more collaborative relationships and greater autonomy (Chan, 2008; T. Wang & Li, 2011). These differing expectations can lead to misunderstandings if not explicitly addressed (Kwon, 2013; Najjar, 2015). Research suggests that advisors who demonstrate intercultural sensitivity, clear communication, and flexibility in adapting to different cultural expectations are more effective in working with international students (Griffin et al., 2023; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Rice et al., 2009).

Power dynamics significantly influence cross-cultural advising relationships, with important implications for student agency and voice. The inherent power differential in advisor-student relationships due to differences in status, expertise, and institutional authority (Knox et al., 2006) is often amplified in cross-cultural contexts, where linguistic advantages, cultural familiarity, and implicit biases further

privilege advisors (Friedensen et al., 2024; Manathunga, 2014). Critical studies have examined how these power imbalances affect international students' agency, voice, and sense of belonging within academic communities (Cotterall, 2015; Kidman et al., 2017). Building on this understanding of power dynamics, Breen and McCain (2023) examined how negative doctoral advising relationships develop through mismatched expectations, gatekeeping behaviors, lack of personal interest, and hostile interactions. They identified gradual deterioration patterns and sudden shifts triggered by singular events, significantly impacting student persistence and academic experience. Effective cross-cultural advising practices identified in the literature include establishing clear expectations, providing structured support while fostering autonomy, offering both academic and psychosocial mentoring, and demonstrating cultural sensitivity (Omar et al., 2016; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014).

## ACADEMIC CULTURE IN TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Turkish higher education represents a unique synthesis where Ottoman scholarly traditions, European academic modernization, and contemporary internationalization create distinctive cross-cultural advising dynamics absent in purely Western or Eastern academic systems. The Ottoman medrese system's hierarchical knowledge transmission patterns, combined with the transformative 1933 University Reform that introduced German academic structures, produced a distinctive academic culture where formal respect for authority coexists with genuine interpersonal engagement (Çetinsaya, 2014; Gürüz, 2011). This synthesis creates advising relationships where formal academic authority coexists with interpersonal warmth, distinguishing Turkish academia from purely hierarchical or egalitarian models (Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). Contemporary Turkish academic institutions operate through centralized frameworks that create complex linguistic landscapes where advisors and international students navigate Turkish institutional discourse, international English academic conventions, and discipline-specific terminologies (Kondakci et al., 2018; Özer, 2016). Türkiye's geopolitical bridge function creates unprecedented opportunities for international students, particularly from Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and African regions, to access familiar cultural values within modern academic frameworks while simultaneously engaging European scholarly networks (Kondakci, 2011; Özoğlu et al., 2015).

Turkish academic communication employs distinctive feedback patterns that combine honest critique with relationship-preserving strategies, creating a cultural middle path between Western directness and Eastern harmony maintenance (Cennetkuşu, 2017; Kılınç et al., 2020). Within this context, cross-cultural mentoring in Turkish higher education generates novel challenges and opportunities that cannot be understood through Western-centric frameworks (Meriç et al., 2021). Turkish academic culture's distinctive elements – formal authority structures, interpersonal engagement, institutional intimacy, and multilingual academic socialization – create transformative bicultural learning experiences unavailable in purely Western universities or other non-Western academic systems. The resulting cultural matrix requires international doctoral students to simultaneously manage collective identity formation within individualistic scholarly development while integrating multiple cultural traditions within single advising relationships (Marginson et al., 2010). This unique positioning necessitates a culturally grounded analysis of how Türkiye's hybrid educational landscape shapes cross-cultural academic experiences fundamentally different from global higher education norms.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

Türkiye has emerged as an increasingly significant destination for international students, particularly from neighboring regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. According to the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK), the number of international students in Türkiye experienced approximately a 20-fold growth from 2000 to 2024 (YÖK, 2024). This dramatic growth reflects Türkiye's strategic efforts to internationalize its higher education system through initiatives such as the "Türkiye Scholarships" program and the expansion of English-medium instruction programs (Çetinsaya, 2014; Deniz, 2022; Kondakci et al., 2018). The growing presence of international

students in Türkiye represents a significant shift in the global landscape of higher education, positioning Türkiye as an emerging educational hub that bridges different cultural and academic traditions.

The Turkish academic environment presents distinctive characteristics that significantly influence international students' experiences. Türkiye's position as a bridge between Europe and Asia offers a unique cultural and geopolitical context for international education, providing students with exposure to both Eastern and Western academic traditions while maintaining distinctive features of Turkish academic culture (Kondakci, 2011; Titrek et al., 2016). The hierarchical structure of Turkish academia creates a distinct advising environment characterized by formal relationships between professors and students (Çetinsaya, 2014; Kireçci et al., 2016; Yükselir, 2018). While this structure may align with expectations of students from similarly hierarchical academic cultures, it can create tension for those from more egalitarian educational backgrounds (Alpaydin, 2018; Kurum & Erdemli, 2021; Titrek et al., 2016). Studies on international students in Türkiye have identified several challenges unique to the Turkish context, including complex bureaucratic procedures, cultural expectations regarding professor-student interactions, and the dual-language nature of many academic environments (Cetinkaya-Yildiz et al., 2011; Elemo & Türküm, 2019; Titrek et al., 2016). However, research also highlights positive aspects of studying in Türkiye, such as cultural familiarity for students from regions with historical connections to Türkiye, relatively affordable education, and opportunities for bridge-building between different cultural traditions (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; Kondakci, 2011; Özoğlu et al., 2015).

# METHOD

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students regarding their relationships with academic advisors in Turkish universities. Phenomenology is particularly suitable for understanding how individuals make meaning of their experiences with a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study adopts interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which emphasizes both participants' meaning-making and the researcher's interpretative role (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This approach aligns with the study's aim to understand how international doctoral students experience and navigate their relationships with Turkish academic advisors in a cross-cultural context.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study was conducted at five universities in Istanbul and Ankara, Türkiye's two largest cities, with the highest concentration of international students. Istanbul, as Türkiye's cultural and economic center, hosts approximately 38% of all international students in the country, while Ankara, as the capital, hosts about 15% (YÖK, 2024). The selected universities include both public and private institutions with established international student programs and diverse academic disciplines. These universities differ in their academic traditions, organizational structures, and approaches to internationalization, providing a diverse research context. While some have adopted more Western-oriented academic practices, others maintain stronger traditional Turkish academic structures, creating varied environments for international students (Kondakci et al., 2018). The research context is particularly relevant because Turkish higher education has experienced significant internationalization in recent years, with the number of international students increasing. This rapid growth has created a dynamic environment where traditional Turkish academic practices intersect with international educational standards, making it an ideal setting for examining cross-cultural advisor-student relationships.

## PARTICIPANTS

Twelve international doctoral students (six females and six males) were selected using a maximum variation sampling strategy appropriate for phenomenological studies seeking to capture diverse man-

ifestations of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). This purposeful sampling approach ensured representation of varied experiences across different cultural backgrounds, academic disciplines, and lengths of stay in Türkiye. Participants were recruited through international student offices at the selected universities and through snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to be (i) international doctoral students enrolled at one of the selected Turkish universities, (ii) have worked with a Turkish academic advisor for at least one semester, and (iii) be able to communicate fluently in English or Turkish. Students with Turkish citizenship or dual citizenship were excluded to ensure the focus remained on the international student experience. The final sample included students from six different regions: the Middle East (3), Africa (2), Central Asia (2), Europe (2), South Asia (2), and East Asia (1). Participants represented diverse disciplines, including engineering, social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, business, and health sciences. The length of stay in Türkiye ranged from one to five years, providing perspectives from different stages of cultural adaptation and academic socialization. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants, using pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**Table 1. Participant demographics**

| Pseudonym | Gender | Region of origin | Academic field | Years in Türkiye | Stage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ahmed | Male | Middle East | Engineering | 3.5 | Research |
| Noor | Female | Middle East | Social Sciences | 2.5 | Research |
| Omar | Male | Middle East | Business | 5 | Writing |
| Grace | Female | Africa | Health Sciences | 4 | Writing |
| Daniel | Male | Africa | Engineering | 3 | Research |
| Gülnara | Female | Central Asia | Humanities | 5 | Writing |
| Bakyt | Male | Central Asia | Natural Sciences | 2.5 | Research |
| Elena | Female | Europe | Social Sciences | 3 | Research |
| Viktor | Male | Europe | Business | 2 | Research |
| Priya | Female | South Asia | Natural Sciences | 4 | Writing |
| Raj | Male | South Asia | Engineering | 3 | Writing |
| Lin | Female | East Asia | Health | 1.5 | Writing |

The research stage column indicates participants' current phase in their doctoral journey, which is particularly relevant as advisor-student relationships often evolve through different stages of doctoral education (Gardner, 2008; McAlpine et al., 2020). Participants were specifically selected to represent two critical phases of doctoral study: the research phase, where students develop their proposals and begin data collection, and the writing phase, where students are actively engaged in dissertation writing. These stages represent significant transitions in the doctoral experience that dramatically shape the nature and intensity of advising relationships. The focus on these particular stages was deliberate, as these periods typically involve the most substantial and meaningful interactions between students and advisors, from developing research frameworks to collaborative interpretation of findings and navigating the complexities of scholarly writing (Becerra et al., 2021; L. Wang & Byram, 2019).

## DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews between February and April 2024. The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions and theoretical framework, covering topics such as initial expectations, everyday interactions with advisors, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and perceptions of effective advising relationships. The protocol was reviewed by two experts in international education and qualitative research methodology and refined based on their feedback. A pilot interview was conducted with an international doctoral student who met the inclusion criteria but was not included in the final sample. This pilot helped refine the inter-

view questions and approach, ensuring clarity and cultural sensitivity. Following the pilot, minor adjustments were made to the sequencing and wording of questions. All interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms. Interviews were conducted in English or Turkish, lasted between 55 and 80 minutes, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in exploring emerging themes while maintaining consistency across interviews. Throughout the interviews, the researcher maintained a reflexive approach, acknowledging her positionality as a Turkish academic with insider knowledge of the local academic context. This dual position – understanding Turkish academic culture while researching international students' experiences – offered both insights and challenges in data collection and analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis followed J. A. Smith et al.'s (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, which emphasizes both the participants' meaning-making and the researcher's interpretative engagement with the data. This six-stage process allowed for a systematic yet flexible approach to developing themes from the data. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. Each transcript was read multiple times to gain familiarity with the content, with initial notes made on descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual aspects of the data. Second, emergent themes were identified by examining the detailed notes and identifying patterns of meaning. Third, connections between emergent themes were explored for each individual transcript, and related themes were grouped and superordinate themes identified. The fourth stage involved moving to the next case and repeating the first three stages, treating each case on its own terms to uphold IPA's idiographic commitment. In the fifth stage, patterns across cases were identified, looking for shared themes and unique variations, resulting in a set of master themes that represented the essence of participants' experiences. Finally, the sixth stage involved a deeper level of interpretation, connecting the themes to the theoretical framework and existing literature. The analysis was iterative, involving movement between individual cases and the dataset as a whole. To enhance analytical rigor, the coding process incorporated both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-informed) approaches. The theoretical framework comprising Berry's Acculturation Theory, Relational-Cultural Theory, and Academic Resilience Theory provided sensitizing concepts while allowing unexpected themes to emerge from the data. MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software was used to organize and manage the coding process, facilitating the identification of patterns across the dataset while maintaining connections to the original context of excerpts.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative research. Credibility was established through member checking, where preliminary interpretations were shared with participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Peer debriefing was conducted with two colleagues familiar with qualitative research but not involved in the study, providing external perspectives on the data analysis process. Transferability was addressed through a thick description of the research context and participant characteristics, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of findings to other settings. Dependability was enhanced through a detailed audit trail documenting methodological decisions, coding processes, and analytical insights. Confirmability was supported through researcher reflexivity, acknowledging potential biases and how they might influence the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews, with clear explanations of the research purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw. Pseudonyms were used in all research documents and publications to protect participants' identities, and potentially identifying information was removed or altered. As the researcher is an academic with experience in international education, particular attention was paid to power dynamics and cultural sensitivity throughout the research process. Regular reflective journaling helped maintain awareness of how the researcher's positionality might influence interactions with participants and interpretations of the data.

## LIMITATIONS

Despite careful methodological planning, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study's focus on Istanbul and Ankara universities may not capture the experiences of international students in other regions of Türkiye, particularly smaller cities where the academic and cultural context might differ significantly. Second, conducting interviews in English or Turkish, while necessary for consistency, may have limited the nuance and depth of expression for participants whose first language is not English or Turkish. However, all participants demonstrated sufficient English or Turkish proficiency. The cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of participants' experiences rather than capturing changes over time, which might be important given the developmental nature of advisor-student relationships. Additionally, while efforts were made to include diverse perspectives, the experiences of certain nationalities or disciplines may be underrepresented in the sample. The reliance on self-reported experiences without triangulation from advisor perspectives or observational data means that findings reflect participants' perceptions rather than a comprehensive view of these advising relationships. The researcher's positionality, while acknowledged through reflexivity, may have influenced both data collection and interpretation in ways that cannot be fully mitigated. Finally, data saturation determinations were based on no new themes emerging after the tenth interview, but it is possible that additional interviews might have revealed further nuances to the identified themes.

# FINDINGS

## THEME 1: MEANING-MAKING IN CROSS-CULTURAL ADVISING

International doctoral students in Turkish universities described a complex process of understanding and interpreting their relationships with academic advisors across cultural boundaries. This meaning-making process involved negotiating expectations, decoding cultural norms, and developing new academic identities. Participants entered their doctoral programs with expectations shaped by previous academic experiences in their home countries. These expectations from the home country often clashed with the realities of Turkish academia, creating initial dissonance. Ahmed explained:

> When I first came to Türkiye, I expected my advisor to guide me step by step as my professors did back home. I was waiting for him to tell me exactly what to read, what to write. But after our first meeting, I realized that Turkish professors expect more independence. It was confusing at first because nobody told me this explicitly. I had to figure it out through trial and error.

The first encounters with Turkish academia were described as pivotal moments that shaped subsequent relationships. Several participants noted significant differences in formality, hierarchy, and communication styles, with Grace finding Turkish academic culture more hierarchical than expected, yet "surprisingly warm once you understand the unspoken rules." As students progressed in their programs, they experienced a transformation of expectations over time. Raj initially thought his advisor was being distant, but later realized that giving space was her way of respecting his autonomy, leading to a complete change in his expectations after the first year. This cultural adaptation process involved learning through observation and guidance from more experienced international students, with participants identifying numerous unwritten rules of academia that were particularly challenging to navigate without explicit guidance.

Participants described various cultural dimensions that shaped their interactions with advisors. **Perceptions of hierarchy and authority** emerged as a significant aspect, with students from different cultural backgrounds interpreting their advisors' behavior through different lenses. Viktor explained:

> In my country, professors are respected but approachable. Here, I noticed that some Turkish professors expect a certain level of formality that I wasn't used to. For example, my advisor rarely uses my first name, and I learned that addressing professors with their

titles is very important. But at the same time, my advisor invites students for tea and asks about our families, which creates this interesting mix of formality and personal connection that I've had to learn to navigate.

Cultural communication patterns often led to misunderstandings, particularly regarding directness in feedback and expectations. Many participants described how their understanding of feedback differed from their advisor's approach. Lin noted that criticism is often indirect to save face in her culture, making her advisor's direct feedback initially feel harsh. The impact of gender dynamics added another layer of complexity, particularly for female students working with male advisors and vice versa. Priya described feeling uncomfortable in one-on-one meetings with her male advisor due to her conservative background. Her advisor sensed this discomfort and suggested meeting in the department's conference room rather than his office for their first few meetings, helping her feel more at ease as they developed a professional relationship. Discipline-based cultural differences emerged as an important factor, with participants in STEM fields reporting different experiences than those in social sciences and humanities due to differences in daily interaction patterns and research approaches. These disciplinary differences often intersected with cultural backgrounds in complex ways. For instance, international students in humanities reported greater challenges with Turkish academic writing conventions, while STEM students experienced more difficulties with laboratory hierarchies and collaborative research expectations.

Through their relationships with advisors, participants underwent significant identity transformations. Positioning oneself as an international student involved negotiating multiple identities and expectations, with some participants feeling that their advisors saw them primarily as "international students" rather than recognizing their individual academic capabilities. The transformation of academic identity was described as challenging and enriching, with several participants noting how their professional identities evolved to incorporate aspects of their home and host academic cultures. Many participants described developing a sense of acceptance in the academic community through their advisor's efforts to introduce them to broader networks. Noor shared:

> My advisor's introduction of me to his colleagues at conferences was a turning point. Before that, I felt like an outsider, always the foreign student who didn't quite belong. But when he would say, "This is Noor, my doctoral student working on [research topic]," emphasizing my work rather than my nationality, I began to feel recognized for my intellectual contribution. These moments helped me feel part of the Turkish academic community while still maintaining my cultural identity.

Some participants embraced their **role as cross-cultural mediators**, using their unique position to bridge different academic traditions. Omar explained that his advisor "encouraged me to use my cultural background as a strength in my research, not something to overcome." The **balance between preserving and changing cultural identity** was an ongoing negotiation for most participants, influencing how they interpreted and responded to advisor expectations. Throughout these processes of meaning-making, international doctoral students demonstrated remarkable awareness of cultural differences and the ability to develop nuanced understandings of their relationships with Turkish advisors. While initial challenges were common, many described eventually finding productive ways to navigate the cross-cultural advising relationship.

## THEME 2: CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

Participants faced numerous challenges in their relationships with Turkish advisors and developed various strategies to navigate these difficulties. These challenges ranged from basic communication issues to complex cultural misunderstandings, while coping strategies reflected both individual resourcefulness and collective support systems. The academic language barrier presented significant difficulties for most participants, extending beyond basic communication to include discipline-specific terminology and academic discourse conventions. Daniel explained:

> The language issue wasn't just about speaking English or Turkish. It was about under-
> standing the specific academic language in my field. My advisor would use specialized
> terms that weren't in any dictionary, and I'd have to guess the meaning from context.
> Sometimes I would spend hours after our meetings looking up terms or asking other
> students what they meant. The most frustrating part was when I couldn't express my
> complex research ideas clearly, and I felt my advisor might think I didn't understand the
> concepts, when really it was just a language limitation.

Difficulties in receiving and interpreting feedback were commonly reported, with cultural differences affecting how criticism was delivered and perceived. Fatima shared: "In my culture, negative feedback is usually cushioned with positive comments. My advisor's direct critique style initially felt harsh, but I've learned not to take it personally." Participants frequently struggled with implicit academic expectations that were never clearly articulated, describing the process of understanding unspoken rules about meeting frequency, independence, and help-seeking as particularly frustrating. The socio-psychological effects of a language barrier extended beyond academic performance to impact students' confidence and well-being. Grace reported feeling "intellectually diminished when I can't express complex ideas as eloquently as I could in my native language." Cultural misunderstandings occurred regularly, particularly regarding nonverbal communication and academic traditions. Raj described a situation where his advisor misinterpreted his avoiding eye contact (a sign of respect in his culture) as disinterest, highlighting how easily cultural differences in body language could lead to misunderstandings. Participants reported significant disagreements on research approaches with their advisors, often stemming from different academic traditions. Ahmed explained, "My approach to methodology was based on what I learned in my home country, but my advisor expected different standards and techniques. We had several tense discussions before finding common ground." Academic writing and publication challenges were particularly difficult for many participants. Elena shared:

> When my advisor returned my first draft with extensive revisions, I was devastated. The
> paper was completely rewritten in a style that didn't sound like me at all. I felt like my
> voice was being erased. We had a challenging conversation where I tried to explain that
> while I appreciated the guidance on structure and argument, I wanted to maintain my
> own academic voice. Eventually, we developed a process where he would comment on
> content and argument first, and only later address writing style.

These writing challenges were particularly pronounced for students from educational systems with different rhetorical traditions. Several participants noted that Turkish academic writing tends to be more formal and structured than what they were accustomed to, with different expectations regarding literature reviews, theoretical framing, and the presentation of findings. These differences created tensions beyond simple language issues to touch on deeper questions of academic identity and voice. Finding the appropriate balance between autonomy and guidance was a common struggle, with participants describing tensions between needing direction and wanting independence. Bakyt noted: "Sometimes I needed more direction, but asking for help felt like admitting weakness. Other times, I wanted independence, but my advisor kept checking on my progress." Financial support issues created significant stress for many participants, affecting the advisor-student relationship when expectations about funding were unclear. Advising during dissertation writing was identified as a particularly critical period that could either strengthen or strain the relationship. Participants demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness in developing strategies to navigate challenges. Creating peer support networks emerged as a crucial strategy, with many participants relying on other international students for guidance and emotional support. Omar explained:

> I formed a small group with three other international doctoral students from different
> countries. We meet every two weeks to discuss our challenges with our advisors. It's in-
> credibly helpful because we can compare experiences and strategies. One student might

say, "My advisor expects weekly progress reports," and another might say, "Mine prefers monthly meetings with more comprehensive updates." Sharing these insights helped me understand that there's no single "Turkish way" of advising – each professor has their own style. The group has been my lifeline through difficult periods.

Many participants described developing proactive communication skills to bridge cultural gaps, learning to explicitly ask for clarification rather than pretending to understand. Priya shared: "I learned to explicitly ask for clarification rather than pretending to understand. This was uncomfortable at first, but prevented many misunderstandings." Cultural behavioral adaptation involved learning and implementing new academic norms while maintaining personal integrity, with several participants describing how they developed professional personas for academic settings that incorporated Turkish academic formalities while still feeling authentic. Academic self-advocacy became an important skill for many participants, who learned to respectfully assert their needs and remind advisors about deadlines or request feedback in culturally appropriate ways. Participants utilized various formal and informal support systems to navigate challenges. Institutional support systems such as international offices provided valuable assistance, though participants noted significant variation in quality and accessibility across universities. International student communities served as crucial sources of information and emotional support, with Gülnara explaining: "The unofficial WhatsApp group for international students in my department taught me more about navigating Turkish academia than any official resource." Several participants described seeking alternative mentors when their primary advisor relationships proved challenging, finding informal guidance from other professors with international experience. Online resources and networks provided additional support, particularly for specific academic tasks that local advisors couldn't assist with. Participants demonstrated significant resilience and adaptability through these various challenges and coping strategies. Most described a gradual improvement in their ability to navigate the advisor-student relationship as they gained experience and developed effective strategies. Rather than viewing challenges merely as obstacles, many participants came to see them as opportunities for personal and professional growth that prepared them for future cross-cultural academic collaborations.

## THEME 3: EFFECTIVE CROSS-CULTURAL ADVISING

Participants identified key elements that contributed to successful advisor-student relationships across cultural boundaries. These elements centered around mutual understanding, trust-building, and transformative guidance approaches that acknowledged cultural differences while focusing on shared academic goals. Openness to cultural differences emerged as a fundamental characteristic of effective cross-cultural advising relationships. Participants valued advisors who demonstrated curiosity about their cultural backgrounds and academic traditions, with Ahmed noting that his advisor's genuine interest in his country's educational system made him feel valued. Explicitly discussing expectations was identified as crucial for preventing misunderstandings. Grace shared:

> The turning point in my relationship with my advisor came when we had an open conversation about our expectations. I explained how professors interact with students in my country, and she explained the typical advisor-student relationship in Türkiye. We then discussed what would work best for us, creating our own approach that borrowed from both cultures. This explicit conversation saved us from countless misunderstandings and allowed us to develop clear guidelines for working together.

Participants appreciated advisors who questioned stereotypes about international students and Turkish academic culture, creating space for students to be seen as individuals rather than representatives of their countries. Elena noted: "My advisor was willing to challenge his own biases about students from my background, creating space for him to see me as an individual with my own characteristics." Mutual cultural learning was described as a rewarding aspect of successful cross-cultural advising relationships, with several participants noting that their advisors acknowledged learning from them about global academic perspectives. Sensitivity to interdisciplinary differences complemented cultural

awareness, with effective advisors recognizing how disciplinary traditions interact with cultural backgrounds. Participants also valued relationships where cultural intellectual synergies were actively cultivated, with advisors encouraging them to bring their cultural perspectives into their research. This synergistic approach was particularly evident in research on comparative or global topics, where advisors explicitly recognized the intellectual value of diverse cultural perspectives and methodological approaches rather than insisting on exclusively Turkish academic conventions. Participants valued a thoughtful balance between academic and personal interest from their advisors, appreciating those who showed interest in their well-being without being intrusive, and understood that their personal circumstances as international students affected their academic work. Viktor shared: "My advisor shows interest in my well-being without being intrusive. He understands that my personal circumstances as an international student affect my academic work." Advisor consistency and reliability were identified as essential trust-building factors. Gülnara explained:

> Trust developed slowly with my advisor, built through consistent actions rather than words. When she said she would review my draft by Friday, the draft was returned on Friday with thoughtful comments. When I was struggling with bureaucratic issues, she followed through on her promises to help. This reliability was especially important for me as an international student because I had few other support systems in Türkiye. After experiencing this consistency for several months, I began to feel secure in the relationship, which allowed me to take more risks in my research.

Showing mutual respect was described as fundamental to effective relationships, with participants emphasizing the importance of advisors who respected their previous academic training even when it differed from Turkish approaches. Participants also appreciated flexibility during challenges, particularly regarding cultural adjustments and personal circumstances, such as when advisors adapted deadlines for family emergencies or cultural events. Effective digital advising practices became especially important during periods when face-to-face meetings were impossible, with several participants describing how their advisors developed clear protocols for online meetings and digital feedback. Participants described how effective advisors facilitated academic integration through intentional inclusion in departmental activities and research communities, introducing them to key researchers and helping them understand how to participate appropriately in Turkish academic events. Bakyt noted: "My advisor introduced me to key researchers in our field and helped me understand how to participate appropriately in Turkish academic events." Valuing cultural enrichment involved advisors who recognized the unique contributions international students could make, encouraging them to incorporate comparative perspectives from their home countries as enriching rather than deviating from Turkish academic traditions. Lin explained: "My advisor encourages me to incorporate comparative perspectives from my home country, seeing this as enriching our field rather than deviating from Turkish academic traditions." Participants valued advisors who provided support tailored to doctoral stages, recognizing that different phases require different types of guidance. Noor explained: "During coursework, my advisor was more directive, but as I progressed to independent research, she adjusted her approach to give me more autonomy while still providing structure." Sensitivity to individual needs and pace was highlighted as crucial for international students navigating multiple transitions. Priya shared:

> My advisor's awareness of my individual circumstances made all the difference. When he noticed I was struggling with a particular research method, he didn't just offer the same explanation again. Instead, he arranged to connect me with another student who had mastered the technique. He recognized that my background prepared me differently, and rather than seeing this as a deficit, he helped me find alternative pathways to develop the necessary skills at my own pace.

While individual advisors were crucial, participants also highlighted the importance of improving institutional policies to support cross-cultural advising relationships. Several noted that when depart-

ments created clear guidelines for advisor-student relationships that acknowledged cultural differences, it legitimized discussions about cultural expectations. Some participants specifically cited the need for institutional recognition of the additional time and resources required for effective cross-cultural advising, suggesting that academic departments could better support this work through adjusted workload models, faculty development opportunities, and formal recognition in promotion criteria. Mutual growth between advisor and student characterized the most successful relationships, with participants noting that their advisors often acknowledged how mentoring international students had changed their teaching and research approaches. Those who experienced effective cross-cultural advising often described gaining a bicultural academic perspective that they viewed as a competitive advantage, developing the ability to work effectively in Turkish and international academic contexts. The elements of effective cross-cultural advising identified by participants suggest that successful relationships go beyond mere accommodation of differences to create transformative learning experiences for both students and advisors. These relationships were characterized by deliberate communication, cultural humility, and mutual commitment to academic excellence through cross-cultural collaboration.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored how international doctoral students make meaning of their relationships with academic advisors in Turkish universities, what challenges they face and strategies they employ, and what elements contribute to effective cross-cultural advising. The findings reveal a complex interplay of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and relational dynamics that significantly impact students' academic experiences and development. The process of meaning-making in cross-cultural advising relationships emerged as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by students' prior expectations, cultural backgrounds, and ongoing experiences in Turkish academia (Alpaydin, 2018; Titrek et al., 2016). Participants' narratives revealed a journey from initial cultural dissonance to gradual adaptation and identity transformation that extends beyond Berry's (1997, 2005) traditional acculturation framework, as students must simultaneously navigate Ottoman hierarchical traditions, European modernization legacies, and contemporary internationalization pressures within single advising relationships. While previous research has identified expectation gaps in international education (Glass et al., 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007), the findings extend beyond mere cultural adjustment to demonstrate how international students actively construct meaning through cultural code interpretation and academic identity negotiation. This active meaning-making process reveals what can be characterized as "hybrid identity construction," where students create new academic identities that synthesize multiple cultural traditions rather than simply adopting or maintaining discrete cultural frameworks. This process resonates with Marginson's (2014) concept of international students as self-forming agents rather than passive recipients of host culture norms, while also revealing how Türkiye's unique position between Eastern and Western academic traditions creates distinctive spaces for identity formation not fully captured in Western-centric models (Bulut-Sahin & Kondakci, 2023; Kondakci, 2011).

The challenges faced by international doctoral students reveal complex interactions between individual agency and structural constraints within Türkiye's distinctive academic environment. Language barriers extended beyond basic communication to include discipline-specific terminology and academic discourse conventions, affecting students' confidence and academic identity in ways that align with research on language as deeply connected to academic power relations (Cennetkuşu, 2017; Cotterall, 2015; Phan, 2017). However, the findings reveal that traditional conceptualizations of language barriers in international education fail to account for the trilingual complexity encountered in Turkish higher education. Students must simultaneously navigate Turkish institutional discourse, international English academic conventions, and discipline-specific terminologies – a multilingual challenge that existing theoretical models inadequately address. The tensions around feedback styles and autonomy-guidance balance reflect cultural differences in educational philosophies documented by Adrian-Tay-

lor et al. (2007) and T. Wang and Li (2011), yet manifest uniquely in the Turkish context where formality blends with interpersonal warmth. This distinctive combination challenges binary cultural conceptualizations of high versus low power distance, as Turkish academic relationships demonstrate that hierarchical respect and interpersonal intimacy can coexist productively within single advising relationships. Similarly, the resourcefulness shown by students in developing coping strategies – particularly peer support networks and academic self-advocacy – demonstrates the development of transcultural competencies that prepare them for globalized academic careers (Cao et al., 2018; McCain & Roksa, 2023), while also revealing how individual resilience interacts with institutional structures in shaping international student experiences (Burt et al., 2021; Glass et al., 2015; Marginson, 2014).

The third major finding illuminates elements of effective cross-cultural advising that create transformative learning experiences when cultural differences are successfully bridged. Mutual understanding, trust-building, and transformative guidance emerged as central to productive cross-cultural advising relationships, directly supporting Relational-Cultural Theory's emphasis on growth-fostering relationships characterized by mutual empathy and authenticity (Jordan, 2018; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Particularly significant was the finding that effective cross-cultural advising creates intellectual synergies at the intersection of different academic traditions, extending Griffin et al.'s (2023) work on culturally responsive mentoring by demonstrating how cultural differences can become valuable intellectual resources rather than merely challenges to overcome. Within Türkiye's evolving academic landscape, where international student support systems vary considerably across institutions (Kılınç et al., 2020; Özoğlu et al., 2015), individual advisor-student relationships often compensate for systemic gaps through practices such as explicit expectation-setting and cultural openness. This finding challenges deficit-oriented approaches to cross-cultural mentoring by revealing how Turkish academic culture's synthesis of formal authority with interpersonal engagement creates opportunities for mutual development where both advisors and students undergo growth through cross-cultural intellectual exchange. This aligns with research on culturally responsive mentoring approaches (Omar et al., 2016; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014) while extending these frameworks to international doctoral education in Türkiye's unique context, which blends hierarchical academic structures with interpersonal warmth in ways not fully captured in Western-centric literature.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by integrating Berry's acculturation framework, Relational-Cultural Theory, and Academic Resilience Theory into a comprehensive model that captures the complex dynamics of international doctoral student experiences in non-Western contexts. This integrated approach illuminates how cultural adaptation processes, relational dynamics, and resilience mechanisms work in concert to shape international students' academic experiences in ways that single-theory approaches cannot fully address. The findings extend our understanding of acculturation theory by demonstrating how Berry's four strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) manifest uniquely in advising relationships within academic settings. In this context, successful integration requires more explicit negotiation and communication than in broader social settings, while the inherent power dynamics between advisors and students create constraints and opportunities not fully captured in Berry's original framework (e.g., Berry, 2005; Elemo & Türküm, 2019; Zhou et al., 2008). Furthermore, this study applies Relational-Cultural Theory to cross-cultural academic relationships, revealing how connection and disconnection patterns manifest differently across cultural boundaries and how power differentials affect relationship development in cross-cultural advising contexts.

For Turkish higher education, these findings highlight how Türkiye's bridging position between academic traditions could become a strategic advantage in attracting international talent, though this potential remains partially unrealized due to limited institutional support for cross-cultural advising (Alpaydin, 2018; Bulut-Sahin & Kondakci, 2023; Deniz, 2022). The study has significant implications

for practice and policy in international doctoral education. Advisors should develop cultural awareness in their approaches, explicitly discussing expectations and recognizing the intellectual contributions diverse cultural perspectives can bring (Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). Institutions should provide professional development for faculty, recognizing their role as cultural mediators who impact students' academic identity formation. Based on the study's findings, several practical interventions can address the identified challenges. Primary recommendations include mandatory structured cultural orientation programs during the first month of enrollment that facilitate initial advisor-student meetings to establish clear expectations and communication strategies. Additionally, institutions should implement formal peer mentoring systems pairing new international students with experienced peers, semester-based cross-cultural training workshops for faculty, and multilingual academic writing centers staffed with personnel experienced in Turkish, English, and discipline-specific discourse. Further recommendations include departmental guidelines for cross-cultural advising, regular check-in protocols during critical doctoral phases, and recognition systems for faculty excellence in cross-cultural mentoring.

Future research should broaden the investigation of international student experiences across diverse geographical contexts, particularly in emerging educational hubs underrepresented in the literature. Comparative studies examining advising relationships across different national contexts would enhance understanding of how cultural, institutional, and historical factors uniquely shape these relationships. Longitudinal research is needed to capture the developmental trajectory of advisor-student relationships throughout the doctoral journey, illuminating how expectations, challenges, and adaptations evolve over time. The advisor perspective represents a critical yet underexplored dimension that merits thorough investigation to understand faculty experiences, adaptations, and insights when mentoring international doctoral students. Equally important is research examining the intersection of discipline-specific academic cultures with national cultural differences, as disciplinary traditions create distinct contexts for cross-cultural advising relationships. Participatory approaches involving both students and advisors in research design could generate contextualized knowledge and practical interventions to enhance cross-cultural mentoring. Finally, as international education increasingly incorporates digital dimensions, research exploring technology's impact on cross-cultural advising relationships would address evolving supervisory practices in globalized academic environments.

## CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of international doctoral students regarding their relationships with Turkish academic advisors, revealing a complex interplay of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and relational dynamics. The findings illuminate how these students actively construct meaning from cross-cultural advising experiences, develop sophisticated coping strategies to navigate challenges, and identify transformative elements of effective advising relationships. By integrating Berry's Acculturation Theory, Relational-Cultural Theory, and Academic Resilience Theory, this study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding these experiences beyond Western-centric paradigms. Türkiye's position as a bridge between Eastern and Western academic traditions creates a distinctive environment where advisor-student dynamics blend hierarchical structures with interpersonal warmth, creating unique spaces for negotiating hybrid academic identities. Significantly, the analysis demonstrates that successful cross-cultural advising relationships transcend cultural accommodation to foster intellectual synergies that mutually enrich students and advisors. This research makes a substantial contribution to international higher education scholarship by centering non-Western contexts, challenging deficit perspectives of international students, and highlighting how cross-cultural academic relationships can become sites of transformative learning when cultural differences are bridged through mutual understanding, consistent support, and recognition of diverse intellectual traditions – insights that carry important implications for advising practices and institutional policies in increasingly diverse academic environments worldwide.

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