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## Opinion of Black African Students at Sakarya University on Its Education System and Socio-Cultural Life

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### **Abstract:**

*From 2009, Sakarya University has started hosting an increasing number of black African students for its various academic programs. Most of these students come from developing countries or underprivileged families and socio-economic backgrounds. Once in Sakarya, numerous are the socio-cultural, academic, financial, environmental and psychological challenges faced by those students and also huge are the different advantages they benefit from this new area and its dynamic social and educational system. The main objective of this study is to find out and analyze these students' views and opinions on the education system of Sakarya University and their social and inter-cultural experiences in and outside the university environment while interacting with people. To achieve it, a survey was applied to a sample group made of 35 black African students from different countries, departments and programs (bachelor, master, PhD) studying from 2012 to 2017 at Sakarya University. Besides, some isolated and informal interviews have been made to shape the area of investigation and dig up some aspects of the topic for a better understanding. The data have been processed and analyzed with relevant computer software. And it comes out as result that the targeted students have in general a positive view on Sakarya University educational system even if they were not used to it with the additional linguistic difficulty. Besides, some inter-cultural problems that influence their state of mind have been raised and are relevant to be discussed.*

**Keywords:** Black African students, education, Sakarya University, socio-cultural

### **1. Introduction**

Sakarya University, frequently referred to simply as SAU, is a public research university located in the city of Adapazari, the capital of the Turkish province of Sakarya. Established according to the Law No. 3837 dated July 3, 1992, it has formerly been known as School of Engineering and Architecture founded (1970) affiliated with Istanbul Technical University. In 1971 it has turned into the State Academy of Engineering and Architecture and served as a faculty from 1982 to 1992. As a modern university, SAU forced admiration with its success in completion of academic units and technical infrastructures and its advances in laboratories, educational and social services, Internet infrastructures and informatics. SAU is the first and only state university receiving the ISO-2002 Quality Certificate and "the EFQM Excellence Quality Certificate of Competency Level". Up to date, SAU is proud of its 18 faculties, 5 institutes, a great number of Schools,

vocational Schools and departments of studies, and a total enrollment of 89,908 students in 2017<sup>1</sup>. From 2009, Sakarya University has started hosting an increasing number of black African students in its various academic programs. Up to

date, there are around 246 black African students at SAU<sup>2</sup>. Most of these students come from developing countries of Africa. Once in Sakarya, numerous are the socio-cultural, academic, financial, environmental and psychological challenges faced by those students and also huge are the different advantages they benefit from this new area and its dynamic social and educational system.

We have decided to carry out this study with the purpose of finding and analyze these students' views and opinions on the education system of Sakarya University and their social and inter-cultural experiences in the University environment while interacting with people (Teachers, Staff, Turkish mates...). To achieve our goal, a questionnaire survey has been done as well as some interviews and documentary researches on related topics. The survey has been done on a sample made of 35 black African students from different countries, departments and programs (bachelor, master, PhD) studying from 2012 to 2017 at Sakarya University. The questions were mainly oriented on their opinions on how good was

<sup>1</sup> According to the official website of Sakarya University consulted on December, 8, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> According to statistics from AfroKarya, the association of African students at the University of Sakarya

the education system, how pleased they were to be here, how were their relations with Turkish and comparing Sakarya University to their home town university in term of facilities and performance.

## 2. Methodology

Every scientific research cannot be validated without at least a minimum respect of a rigorous methodology in the process of data collection and assessment. In our case, our methodology was comprised of Interviews made in order to shape the area of investigation and define exactly which axes deserve to be investigated on. Then questionnaire survey was applied to a sample group made of 35 black African students from different countries, departments and programs (bachelor, master, PhD) studying from 2012 to 2017 at Sakarya University. The respond rate to the survey was 100%. This helped us to get a lot of relevant information directly coming from the students and related to our topic. It is noteworthy to remind that all these were preceded by a documentary research so as to be aware of other researches made by scholars on the topic or related topics and theirs findings. The information from interviews and survey was collected with the consent the students in absolute confidentiality, and made anonymous and coded. The data have been processed and analyzed with relevant computer software.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

Our sample made of 35 students studying at Sakarya University and all coming from Sub-Saharan Africa is comprised of 25 males and 10 females. They are stratified in the following way as showed in the Table 1: 16 undergraduate students, 13 master students and 6 PhD students.

Sex Program	Male	Female	Total
Bachelor	12	4	16
Master	9	4	13
PhD	4	2	6
Total	25	10	35

Table 1: Sample for the Survey

In table 2 we tried to understand the motivations that made the students to choose Turkey in general and Sakarya University in particular as their destination for their education. The results show that been awarded scholarship by the Turkish government is the major reason (33 of them) that brought them here. Followed by the desire of meetings new people and after come closely career plans, cultural experience and living abroad. It is obvious that discovering a new area and interacting with people has always motivated human being who is by nature curious. Turkish education system and higher education infrastructures have also given good echo during the last years all around the world. All these combined with the opportunity of a scholarship is irresistible and can justify the above cited factors been the first motivators for coming to Sakarya university. Besides learning a new language and religious reasons motivated less our subjects,



Figure 1

Indicators	Rate
Scholarship	33
Meeting new people	13
Career Plans	12
Cultural experience	11
Living abroad	10
Better education system	7
Learning a foreign language	4
Religious reasons	2
Others	0

Table 2: Motivations for Coming to Sakarya Universit

While questioning them on how they heard about Sakarya University (Table 3) and chosen it, the majority of 57,14% (20/35) asserted that it has been assigned to them by the scholarship office. But it is interesting that some almost 29% (10/35) of them have been positively advised by friend about Sakarya University before coming here. And only 20% knew about it from the internet.

Indicators	Rate
Scholarship choice	20
Advised by from a friend	10
From internet	7
No ideas before	4
Personal choice	2
Others	0

Table 3: How Did You Hear About Sakarya University?

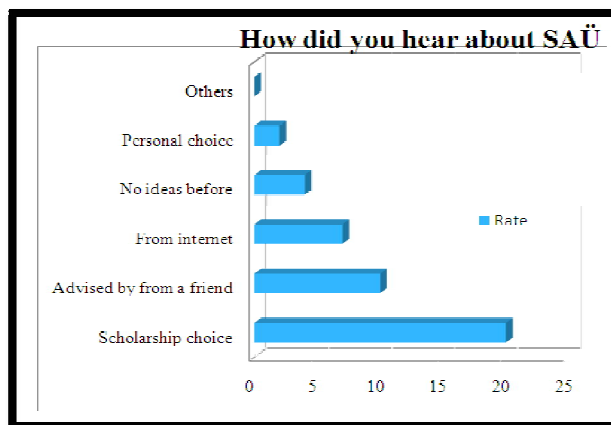


Figure 2

We assessed the general satisfaction of the students by rating the question on “pleased”, “quite pleased” and “not pleased”. The results show that 82, 86% were pleased, 14, 28% were quite pleased and only 2, 86% were not pleased.

Indicators	Rate
Pleased	29
Quite please	5
Not please	1

Table 4: General Satisfaction of Students about Sakarya University

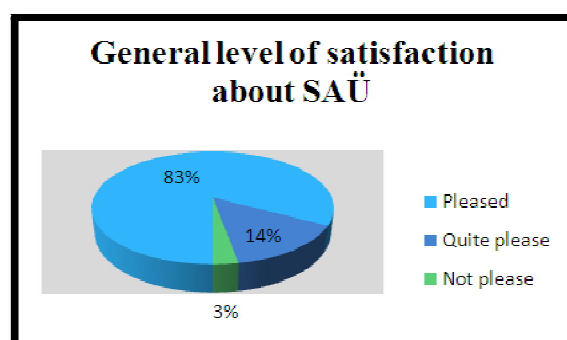


Figure 3

When asked to compare Sakarya University to their hometown Universities (Table 5) in general terms of education system and other facilities and services offered, around 66, 67% find Sakarya University better than their hometown university. Almost 7% assert that it is worse and around 28 % stay neutral on this important question.

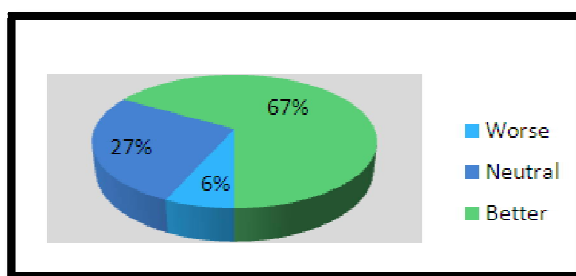


Figure 4

General Comparison between SAU and Hometown University				
	Worse	Neutral	Better	
	7	28	70	

Table 5: General Comparison between Sakarya University and Hometown University

Let's now have a deeper look at their opinions on the quality of the education system and its impacts. As presented in the table 6 below, Teachers and Staff's qualification is not questioned (0% of negative response). Nobody said the diploma are not recognized in their home countries and even their professional insertion back home is not a big deal (only 2, 85 % of negative answer). However, it is noteworthy to point out that 48, 57% answers are neutral on the examination/evaluation system while 14, 28%state that it is not a good one. This is possibly related to the fact that some of the students claim the multiple choice questions during exams are not applicable to a lot of subjects and courses where students should normally be put in a thinking position. This means dissertation, essays and others in order to oblige and allow them to exert their critical thinking abilities.

	Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive
Courses content, variety and relevancy	4,3	7,14	8,57	64,28	15,71
Examination system	5,71	8,57	48,57	31,42	5,71
Knowledge and skills improvement	0	5,71	20	54,28	22,85
Teachers and staff qualification	0	0	14,28	62,85	22,85
Diploma are recognised in your country	0	0	28,57	51,42	22,85
Easy professional insertion	0	2,85	45,71	31,42	17,14

Table 6: Quality of Education System and Its Impacts

As far as the socio cultural adaptation of these students is concerned, questions have been directed on their interpersonal relations with human resources at Sakarya University (Table 7). Fortunately, the general opinion is positive on the teachers, Staff and classmates kindness and helpfulness towards black African students (88, 57% and 65, 70%). But even if racism and discrimination cases are faced by only 11, 42% of them it is still a lot when considering that we are in an intellectual environment full of scholars and educated persons who are supposed to be above the common people manners and way of thinking and behaving.

	Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive
Staff and teachers are understanding and helpful	0	2,8	8,57	60	28,57
Classmates are understanding and helpful	0	5,71	28,57	42,85	22,85
You faced racism or discrimination cases from teachers or staff		88,57		11,42	

Table 7: Interpersonal Relations with Human Resources

We have also been through their opinions on other facilities at Sakarya University such as library services, internet, medical services, security, and foods. It comes out that the campus is secured for them (0% negative response), the internet services are appreciated by 60% of them, library services are said to be appreciated by almost 77% and 11,42% have a negative impression on foods and restaurants services. The details are presented in the following table

	Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive
Housing/ hostels conditions are good	0	8,57	17,14	60	14,28
Library services are good	2,8	2,8	14,28	68,57	8,57
Internet services are good	11,42	14,28	14,28	40	20
Medical services are good	2,8	2,8	45,71	37,14	11,42
Security inside the campus is assured	0	0	11,42	60	28,57
Socio-cultural activities impact on students emancipation	2,8	11,42	48,57	40	2,8
Restaurants and food services are good	0	11,42	34,28	40	11,42

Table 8: Other Facilities and Services

The big issue concerns the Turkish language both the learning process at the language center and the fact that university programs are in Turkish. In fact Sakarya university students must have a proficiency (at least B1 level) in Turkish language before getting registration at the faculty. Therefore, at their arrival, black African students should study at Sakarya Tömer the Turkish language center for a period of one year. They all pass by there and complain about some features. All the students state that Turkish language is a big issue to deal with for them and this reduce their capacity and potential in research, while in Tömer the methodology of learning is questioned at 31,42%. During the interviews, they suggest that:

- Students at the beginning should be separated according to their departments.
- Turkish language teachers should be encouraged to learn English at least to allow exchanges between them and new students.
- Too much time (9 months) should not be spent only on general Turkish.
- The university should insert a kind of continuous program of learning academic Turkish in faculties (being like a subject)
- Different language skills ( speaking, reading, writing, listening) should be taught by different teachers
- Language in function programs should be organized outside the Tömer (in real life situation like restaurant, companies, markets...

	Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive
Quality of methodology	8,57	22,85	28,57	31,42	8,57
Teachers qualification	2,8	5,71	28,57	48,57	14,28
Teachers level of understanding foreign students and aid in solving their difficulties	0	8,57	28,57	42,85	20
Tomer staff level of understanding foreign students and aid in solving their difficulties	0	8,57	40	42,85	8,57

Table 9: Opinion about Turkish Language Learning

#### 4. Conclusion

We carried out this research entitled "Education and socio-cultural view of black African foreign students at Sakarya University" with the main purpose of finding out what black African students learning at Sakarya University think about the education system, the socio-cultural environment and other facilities and services offered by the University. We hope by doing so to help the persons in charge to take decisions and actions that will improve the whole system and make the university one of the best in Turkey and the world and a better destination for foreign students. In order to achieve this, we conducted interviews, and surveys on a sample of 35 students. Our analysis of the results, led us to the following recommendations in addition to the above mentioned:

- More programs in English language should be implemented because of its universalism and also because it will allow Turkish students and teachers to benefit from foreign students knowledge and experience
- Multiple choice system is to be reduced in the profit of full expression exams because it limits student's productivity especially in some departments.
- Facing the racism cases, Sakarya University through communication means should inform and sensitize staff, teachers and Turkish students on the fact that we are all equal and organize cultural activities to open up Turkish people mind to tolerance
- And finally make it possible for students to report such cases if they happen and take relevant actions against the authors.

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