Why Student Retention Matters for Turkish EMI Universities?

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Abstract Students entering English-medium Instruction (EMI) universities and programs must demonstrate English language proficiency before proceeding to their academic program. Approximately 20% of incoming students are able to pass a proficiency exam and begin academic studies straight away. This leaves a significant percentage of students needing to successfully complete an intensive language program before progressing to their academic departments. The majority of these students require 1 year (or more) to achieve this goal. Because of the rigorous demands of the intensive language program, all such students are at risk for not completing the program and leaving the university. There are distinct sub-populations within the language program that have an even higher propensity for attrition. For those who leave, there may be immense psychological, social, and financial ramifications. Likewise for the institution – failing to retain students may have significant implications for finances and reputation. EMI universities and intensive language programs may establish student retention initiatives to minimize attrition. This chapter makes the case for such initiatives, briefly exploring student retention, then through the lens of vulnerable sub-populations, explores best-practices that may strengthen retention in the intensive language program, while having a long-term impact on the students and the institution.

Keywords Student retention · Student attrition · English-medium instruction · Intensive English program

1 The Challenge of Student Retention

Student retention and student attrition are opposing sides of the same coin, with radically different outcomes, depending on which side the coin lands. Student retention suggests that a student remains at an institution until graduation. An earned

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diploma or certificate opens the door to a vast landscape of economic, professional, and self-fulfilling possibilities. Conversely, attrition amounts to a student making a conscious choice to leave a higher education institution. Departure comes in different degrees. There is departure from the initial program in which a student is enrolled, with a student making a lateral transfer to a different program within the same institution. There is departure from the institution in which a student is enrolled (i.e., transfer to another institution[1]). There is the most dramatic form whereby a student leaves the higher education system completely. Any of these choices has repercussions for all stakeholders; the latter imparting the most severe and long-lasting outcomes (i.e., financial and emotional) on the individual and his or her family. For these reasons, it is the social and economic[2] responsibility of the higher education institution to maintain a keen focus on student retention.

Turkey, similar to many other emerging economies, has experienced remarkable growth in its higher education sector over the last two or three decades. Since 1990, nearly 175 public and private universities have opened their doors. On one hand, this is certainly a welcome development in equity through increased access to higher education. Since the 2013–2014 academic year, new undergraduate enrollments at Turkish universities have increased by 19% (Higher Education Information Management System, 2020). The unfortunate reality is that a tight bottleneck remains when it comes to gaining admittance to a 4-year higher education institution. The rigorous university entrance exam and its point system for placements is the gatekeeper to tertiary education, and specific institutions and programs in particular. Therefore, the high school experience in Turkey – especially junior and senior years – becomes an exhausting period characterized by a student's sole commitment to achieving a university entrance exam score that meets family expectations. This reality is integral to the issue of retention in the form of two costs. The first being that in order to achieve the goal of university admission, families are required to dedicate considerable money and time, as well as emotions. This may ramp up in high school, but for many families, the investment in *education* – cynics may argue that it is more an investment in test preparation given that education itself is a public good – begins as early as primary school, with young children spending weekends in test-prep courses, and the support of a so-called shadow economy in private tutoring (e.g., Ristow, 2019; Schneider & Enste, 2013).

A second, and arguably greater cost, is the diminished opportunity to develop the non-cognitive skills that will help students succeed in higher education and beyond. Ironically, the singular focus on the cognitively demanding university entrance exam comes at a critical period when adolescents should also be developing the non-cognitive abilities that have been linked to college, career, and lifelong success; e.g. self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Dymnicki et al., 2013) and self-regulated learning, self-efficacy, coping and

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[1] Under the rubric of transfer student there are sub-classifications such as reverse transfer (Townsend & Dever, 1999) and double-dipping and swirling (McCormick, 2003).

[2] For revenue-generating institutions, it is also an internal financial responsibility.

resilience (Rosen et al., 2010). The end result is that students may gain access to a university, but they arrive on campus lacking the tools to effectively adapt to the new environment, as well as to succeed over the long term at the school and in their careers. In the end, the cost of achieving the very goal that students and their families have had their eyes on for years (i.e. university entrance) may indeed pose a threat to the much larger outcome of persistence to graduation.

1.1 Student Retention

Historically, the origins of student retention research focused on the individual student, rather than the relationship between the student and the institution. Spady's groundbreaking work in the early 1970s (1970, 1971) was the first to look at attrition and retention as an interaction between the student and the collegiate environment. Spady's research on attrition (1970), represented a shift from a psychological perspective (i.e., the individual) to one that saw the academic and social systems of the university as important frameworks through which "the dropout process must be examined" (p. 64). Tinto subsequently building on Spady's foundation, introduced his Student Integration Model (1975), where he saw that retention relied on the student's integration into the collegial environment, particularly within the first year. The Student Integration Model would undergo numerous iterations, driven by the work of Cabrera et al. (1992), Pascarella and Terenzini (1979), and Tinto himself (1988). In the resulting Institutional Departure Model (1993), Tinto argued that students progress through critical stages on the way to either integration or separation. One of the stages being that of separation, where the student needs to distance him or herself from previous social contexts such as family and high school where values, norms, and behaviors are markedly different from the college environment. The degree to which that separation occurs impacts a student's academic and social integration, and ultimately persistence. Subsequently, Bean's Student Attrition Model (1980) drew parallels between employee and student retention, viewing the organization as playing a more significant role in retention than postulated in Tinto's model.

The study of student persistence at the university has been most notably attributed to Tinto (1975) whose interactionist theory (Braxton et al., 2004) has shaped the way that researchers and practitioners have looked for solutions to the persistent challenge of student retention. Tinto was, as he put it, attempting to explain rather than merely describe student departure from higher education institutions. In doing so, he posited social and academic *integration* – which he emphasizes as more essential to persistence than mere interaction – as the broad underlying phenomena impacting student retention. Assuming that external conditions remain stable (e.g., no family or employment issues), a student elects to stay or leave depending on interactions within the school (e.g. faculty, peers) that lead to, or impede, academic and social integration. Academic integration is seen as a combination of actual academic performance, or "meeting certain explicit standards of the academic system"

(i.e. earning grades), as well as intellectual development, or the individual's identification with the norms of the academic system (Tinto, 1975, p. 104). Social integration occurs primarily through informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and administrative personnel within the college (p. 107). This sense of belonging, or "fit" – academically and socially – with an institution may help a student to determine whether to stay or leave.

It should be acknowledged that student retention theories and models have by and large emerged from traditional higher education environments in the U.S., such as 4-year residential universities. This is understandable, given that completion rates in U.S. higher education have perennially been viewed as a threat to the national economy as well as to individual well-being. Although widespread recognition and examination of the problem gained traction some 50 years ago, even today the National Center for Education Statistics reports that approximately 60% of 4-year-college students in the U.S. reach graduation within 6 years. The situation is considerably more dire at 2-year colleges, with an average of 33% of students attaining their education goal (Hussar et al., 2020).

Turning specifically to Turkey, the issue of student retention and success in higher education is slowly drawing attention. This may be due in part to a historical focus on access rather than student success (Aypay et al., 2012). One can also speculate that the reason for this is that, as the saying goes, what gets measured gets done, and in this case, retention does not get measured.[3] This seems to be the case in Turkey where persistence is seen as an "invisible problem" (p. 99). This is a bit ironic, given that student retention should be a key performance indicator at any educational institution. The researchers further posit that it remains unnoticed at public institutions because of limited competition and accountability. Conversely, at private universities, it should arguably be of major concern as considerable sums are invested to recruit students, and any student who leaves before graduation is revenue lost (not to mention the other losses incurred by the individual and institution).

2   The Challenge of Retention in EMI

There is little doubt that EMI continues its unabated growth globally (Bjarnason et al., 2009), and that private institutions are a larger slice of the EMI pie than state institutions (i.e., 91% vs. 78%) (Dearden, 2014). In part, this can be framed as an access issue, with private institutions serving an important and demand-absorbing function (Levy, 2008, 2016). However, as the number of private institutions increases

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[3] As an academician and administrator who was Director of Student Retention for 5 years at a higher education institution in the U.S., it is quite clear to me that there is a sharp distinction between awareness of student retention in the U.S. and Turkey, and just how much it is measured and done (cf. *The Journal of College Student Retention,* the Annual Conference on the First Year Experience, or the NACADA Annual Conference).

within a country, so does competition – this is particularly the case in Turkey (Mızıkacı, 2011). Which gets to why effective recruitment *and* retention of students is crucial.

Student recruitment efforts require substantial institutional expenditures (e.g., hiring of staff, marketing costs). In contrast, retention initiatives designed to manage student enrollment are estimated to be 3–5 times more cost-effective than recruitment efforts, i.e., it takes 3–5 times as much money to recruit a new student than it does to retain an already enrolled student (Bean & Hossler, 1990; Cuseo, 2010; Noel et al., 1985). The Noel Levitz (n.d.) student success and retention consulting firm in the U.S. has long promoted its Return on Investment Estimator as a means for higher education institutions to examine this question themselves.

Research that directly examines student retention in the EMI context is rather narrow. Perhaps due in part to research on the broader field of EMI itself being relatively new but rapidly growing (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 45). A small body of literature exists around the challenge of EMI in Nursing education (e.g., Carter & Xu, 2007; Klisch, 2000; Smith & Demjanenko, 2011). The team of Evans and Morrison examined challenges in EMI in Hong Kong (2011a, b, c, 2012). Their research focused primarily on the student experience as it relates to the linguistic difficulties encountered in this context. While student persistence is directly identified in one study (2011b), it is not presented as a "major concern" (p. 200) as the "vast majority" of students successfully complete their programs. More recently, Aljohani (2014) directly examined student retention in the ESL context, concluding that organizational factors such as "rules and administrative system" and the attitude of the administrative staff were influential in student departure. The point to be highlighted here is that there remains limited research on the intersection of student retention and the EMI context.

Specifically, in the EMI literature there is a dance around the theme of retention, generally framed as "challenges." However, there is virtually no mention of retention, attrition, or persistence across works that discuss challenges in EMI. Rather, the implication is that attrition is an indirect outcome. In their meta-analysis on EMI research, Macaro et al. (2018) examined 83 studies on EMI in higher education. While they did find affirmation of the EMI approach – in Turkey, Başıbek et al. (2014) concluded that EMI brought academic and career-oriented benefits – a number of studies reported downsides to EMI, most notably the "language proficiency" [the researchers point out a clear lack of consistency in defining this term (p. 52)] of both students and instructors. Again in Turkey, Kırkgoz (2014) found a "cause for concern" (p. 452) in that students struggled with English language learning, leading to memorization, rather than internalization of content for exams (see also Kırkgöz, 2018). Overall, while the meta-analysis revealed that lecturers were "deeply concerned about their students' inability to survive, or better still thrive, when taught through English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 52), this most likely refers to linguistic and content-related challenges. That is, while instructors may be inherently concerned about student persistence, they did not go so far as to explicitly identify it as an outcome of the inability to survive. The authors do edge closer to the issue of retention through a proposed future research question about challenges that students

face as they transition from high school to higher education. To this point, they ask, "Is there a gradual progression in student competence to thrive in an EMI environment or is it a sudden shock with permanently negative consequences?" (p. 67).

What is noteworthy is that while only very few researchers have drawn a direct line between EMI and student retention (e.g., Ahmadi, 2017; Aljohani, 2014), a number have pointed to policy in EMI and its link with challenges. Coleman (2006) saw the inexorable spread across Europe of English as a *lingua franca* being driven by academia, and policy makers playing a role in the expansion of the language's prevalence globally – what he referred to as the Microsoft effect: "Once a medium obtains a dominant market share, it becomes less and less practical to opt for another medium, and the dominance is thus enhanced" (p. 4). Coleman (citing Smith, 2004) observed that one "predictable problem" (p. 6) associated with this phenomenon of widespread English-medium teaching was students struggling linguistically and experiencing both a loss of confidence and a failure to adapt among local students. Gulf Coast countries "unwilling learners" were left out of the policy development process, leading to negative attitudes towards EFL: "The more bitter the students, the more challenges in student retention" (Ahmadi, 2017, p. 14). Likewise, Başıbek and colleagues found that despite students' desire to learn academic content in their mother tongue, "authorities at universities" were intransigent toward a policy shift away from EMI as it may negatively impact enrollments or "they may lose their 'tool' which makes their university an 'elite one'" (2014, p. 1824). Bradford (2016) in proposing her three-category framework of EMI challenges – linguistic, cultural, and structural – echoes this point, raising the concern that enthusiasm for EMI "leads to unrealistic expectations regarding positive outcomes and a less than vigorous deliberation of the implementation processes and potential unintended consequences involved" (p. 340).

Regardless of how the issue is framed, the challenge of student retention is arguably very real among EMI institutions in Turkey. Perhaps the most obvious portal through which to view and examine student retention and attrition is any EMI university's intensive English program (IEP), known generally in Turkey as the Preparatory (Prep) program. In any EMI school, this is the point of entry for some 80% of all newly matriculated students; a smaller percentage have the language skills to proceed directly into their academic programs. These *service* programs (i.e., non-credit), are intensive in that students may spend up to 30 h per week in a focused language program that is designed to raise the student to a CEFR B1 or B2 level (depending on the university's determined exit level) within a specified time – such programs may range in length from nine to 12 months, with a second year available for those who cannot reach the exit level in the first year.

The reason why the Prep program becomes an ideal observatory and laboratory for student retention is primarily because it is situated in the critical first year of a student's university experience. Whether a student is transitioning directly from high school to their university academic program, or they are required to spend a year in an intensive language program, any student is a candidate for dropping out during the crucial, yet tumultuous first year at the university. In the U.S., the import of this time period is perhaps best illustrated through the existence and success of

the 40-year-old National Resource Center for the First Year Experience, housed at the University of South Carolina. The case may somewhat easily be made that students in Prep programs are particularly vulnerable, not only because it is their first year of university, but also due to the extremely stressful (i.e. high-stakes) nature of the Prep program.

While all university academic programs, and the courses within their given curricula, may be considered difficult and rigorous, there are very few that are defined by high-stakes, *do-or-die* scenarios that may very well shape the rest of a student's life. Programs such as law and those in the health sciences may fall into this category, albeit, it may be argued that it is not the same in that bar and board exams follow a program and not precede. The Prep program, in contrast, is defined by its binomial nature (i.e., pass and proceed, or fail and depart; sink or swim) and its conceptual name: Intensive. This means that in order to succeed, a student must commit to long hours each week of seat-time (often longer than regular academic programs), along with equal amounts of time and energy dedicated to after-class studies.

Students must adapt to this new lifestyle on day-one of their university life. Further, regulations set by the Turkish Council on Higher Education state that a student must achieve the university's established language proficiency level (e.g. CEFR B2) within a 2-year period, or the student cannot enroll in the English medium program for which they enrolled at the school in the first place. To add one more layer to the stress sandwich, students at private universities in Turkey – most of which are EMI – are most likely paying tuition for these non-credit programs. This brings the family and its financial situation into the picture, placing added duress on the student who, theoretically, should have Krashen's low affective filter in order to effectively focus on language learning. Finally, under this extra blanket of pressure, students, like any other new university students, are struggling to find their way in this new, and perhaps incredibly foreign environment. A counter-productive, vicious cycle is never far away from Prep students. In brief, focusing on student retention in an EMI institution is essential at any level – first year or last. However, it is the first-year Prep student who is most vulnerable and warrants the most attention and resources.

2.1   The Most Vulnerable

In reality, all students arriving for the first time on any university campus are at risk of dropping out. Newly matriculated students are at-risk students because they are in a novel and quite possibly foreign environment (even if they are still in their home country). Students are, perhaps for the first time in their lives, separated for an extended period from family, friends, and the social structures that they have been swimming in since they were children. They may be thrust into a small dorm room with someone whom they have never met before, and possibly from a different culture – internationally or domestically. They may also find themselves immersed in

an academic and organizational context that it is completely unique to their frame of reference. Further, they may be a so-called *first-generation* student, meaning that neither parent has post-secondary education, significantly handicapping (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 275), such students and placing them at higher risk of departure from a tertiary education (e.g., Ishitani, 2006, p. 880). In Turkey, what may exacerbate these factors is that while access to higher education continuously increases in Turkey, students are increasingly heading off to the university lacking the critical non-cognitive skills (e.g., perseverance or grit, self-control, social skills, and so on) that actually facilitate academic and career success, not to mention personal well-being (Staub, 2017). This is due in large part to the arduous, long-term process that students endure to prepare for the university entrance exam. During high school – particularly junior and senior years – students become singular in focus, dramatically curtailing, if not completely avoiding the types of social and extracurricular activities that develop and strengthen non-cognitive skills.

Even still, there are admittedly more vulnerable sub-populations found within the Prep program at the EMI university. Most notably are the absolute beginners, the second year or repeat students, and so-called vertical transfer students. Absolute beginners are at greatest risk in terms of sheer numbers; they may comprise 40% or more of a new cohort of students; this group may literally number in the hundreds. According to the secondary schools English language education curriculum (MEB, 2020) "learners are expected to graduate from high school with a minimum CEFR B2+ and/or beyond level of English language proficiency depending on whether students had preparatory class English education or not" (p. 7). And yet, a study of Turkish state school English language education, conducted by the British Council and the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), found that more than 95% of students in Government schools across Turkey cannot speak or respond to normal, or slowly-spoken English at the end of Grade 10; an estimated minimum of 920 class-hours delivered over 7 school years (Özen et al., 2013, p. 56).

This naturally creates two major challenges for incoming language learners and Prep programs. The first being that despite the substantial number of hours of English language education the students were exposed to in secondary school, a significant percentage of them appear to have acquired very little or no language (a far cry from B2+). The second complicating factor is related to the first in that following hundreds of hours of language education with little to show for it, students question themselves and their own ability to learn a language (within 12 months), resulting in diminished motivation to study in a Prep program. This population largely sees the road to a B1 or B2 as demoralizing and, to some degree, too long to travel. They liken it to a race where the slowest runners must start from the back of the pack. The aforementioned British Council report acknowledges that most students who come to the 4-year IEP at the beginner level (e.g. CEFR[4] A1) have a tendency to lose motivation and become mired in the IEP. Prep programs are therefore tasked with ensuring linguistic progress, while keeping students motivated

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[4] Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

enough to keep their end goal in sight. It should be kept in mind that many of these students lack the non-cognitive skills (e.g., time management, collaborative learning) that would be of great benefit during this challenging year. These factors all add up to an extremely vulnerable population.

At the other end of the academic year lie the repeat, or support students. These are students who have simply not had the wherewithal to successfully complete the Prep program in a single year. By and large, they represent the 20-or-so-percent of last year's beginners who were not able to successfully cross the finish line within 12 months. Indeed, to the point that many beginners see the road as too long, many repeat students are those who immediately stopped coming to class – either mentally or physically. When they come to the second year of the Prep program, they may not realize it, but they are at a significant disadvantage. To begin, their time to successful completion of the Prep program is now compressed, increasing the pressure to learn the language that they had so much difficulty with last year. Further, depending on the philosophy of the Prep program, they are sometimes integrated into classes with newly matriculated students, but some schools are not in favor of this approach, seeing repeat students as a threat to the motivation of the new students. More likely, they are placed in repeat or support classes so that they can be presented with a unique curriculum that more closely resembles a test-prep course than a traditional Prep language class. After a year of virtually no progress – linguistically or academically – this population has low morale, low motivation, and high rates of attrition.

A third vulnerable sub-population found in the Prep program is the vertical transfer student, who transfers from a 2-year vocational school to a university; in contrast to the horizontal transfer student who is moving from university to university. In Turkey, structural changes enacted by the centralized governing body the Council of Higher Education have resulted in significantly greater numbers of vocational students passing the associated exam for transfer students and taking an important step toward the goal of earning a university diploma. This also means that it is not an insignificantly small group of students each year. Greater access to higher education for this population is certainly a positive development. However, transferring has also proven to be a double-edged sword (Bahr et al., 2013; Chrystal et al., 2013; Laanan et al., 2010; Townsend, & Wilson, 2009; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

The score the student earns on the transfer exam determines the university where she or he may continue their studies. This often means that students are more likely to gain eligibility to transfer to one of Turkeys 100-plus private universities. That is, to study in an EMI program, which most probably means starting off in a Prep program. The transfer student examination and placement system does not run in parallel with the university exam and matriculation system; there is an approximate two-month gap between the two. This translates into transfer students – who most likely have not studied the English language for 2 years – entering a university and its Prep program 1 or 2 months behind new students. Disadvantages abound. Transfer students are not socialized to the university and their peers at the same time and in the same manner as the newcomers, this sets them back socially. When they arrive, they may be integrated into an existing section in the Prep program, where

they may be ignored or marginalized due their age and the fact that social networks have already been established. Further, these students are one or 2 months behind in an extremely intensive program. This linguistic lag also places them at considerable risk. In sum, these factors make vertical transfer students an especially vulnerable population.

3 Responding to the Challenge of Student Retention in EMI

The first step in addressing student attrition is for the EMI university – which generally means the Prep program – to acknowledge that it warrants attention. This is often the most difficult step because higher education institutions, particularly private ones, are reluctant to admit to "flaws" such as student departure. Or, at least admit that students may be departing for reasons that are under the control of the university. If the university genuinely wants to improve its retention rate, then there must be an admission that students are hindered by deficiencies that the institution itself can do something about. What must follow is the establishment of systems and structures to quantify, qualify, and respond to barriers that impede student success. An additional, essential step in this process is involvement in the broader discourse around student retention in EMI institutions, leading to sharing of best practices and collaborative projects. The progression from acknowledgement to action to collaboration requires a great deal of commitment and effort, but the end result is that the Prep program, and further the university, becomes more student-centered and focused on success and retention.

3.1 Leadership

Leadership is paramount in the student retention endeavor. Those who are responsible for the success of the program and institution must be willing to acknowledge that student departure is a critical issue. While in general this would refer to the rector, such responsibility is more likely to fall in the lap of the Prep program leadership, as it is an issue that manifests itself most prominently here. In either case, it requires at least one person with a voice in the organization who sees the need to, at least, explore the issue. This leader can understand the threats to both individual and institution when a student departs, and this leader has the capacity to ask for data, pull together a committee, even assign resources to the effort. It is the ideal landscape for Distributed Leadership (e.g., Spillane et al., 2001, 2004), which views leadership not as the actions of an individual, rather the distribution of a vision across an organization, that in turn becomes the actions of a dedicated group of individuals working in collaboration. Retention initiatives certainly require the vision and support of an individual leader, but to be broad-based and effective, a concerted effort is mandatory.

3.2 Data

As we have mentioned before: What gets measured gets done. Data plays many roles in the retention endeavor. Baseline data unveils an attrition problem. For Retention, it is a very simple equation: The number of enrollees in any given fall semester minus the number of program completers – after 2 years in the case of a Prep program. This data should be examined over at least three 2-year cycles; the more the better to reveal actual trends. However, this is only a symptom, describing the big picture; it provides very little in the way of explanation. Thus, the next step is to begin gathering, disaggregating, and analyzing data that pinpoints at-risk sub-populations. This may be demographic data (e.g. parental educational background; type of high school attended; high school GPA) or it may be attitudinal or behavioral self-reported data [e.g., Work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002); Time management (Britton & Tesser, 1991); Self-efficacy (Sherer, et al., 1982)]. There is also performance and behavioral data, such as assessments, homework, attendance, participation in extra-curricular activities, as well as instructor input on in-class behavior and attitudes. These various forms of data, collected systematically over time, help provide a more distinct profile of at-risk students. The data may not provide a definitive explanation as to why students choose to leave the institution, but it may reveal patterns in attitudes, backgrounds, and behaviors that can inform the development of action plans.

3.3 Structure

Back to leadership. There is too much relevant data to be gathered and analyzed, and too many actions to be taken by any one individual simply as a hobby. Retention requires structure, which comprises two key components. There is the human resource side of the equation. At the least, a retention initiative requires a committee that will meet on a regular basis to analyze data, discuss findings, propose solutions, and devise action plans; and perhaps enact those plans. Ideally, an individual is tasked with the responsibility of serving as a *Student Success Advisor*, or some other aptly named title that suggests to both students and other stakeholders that student success is the focus. Conversely, the purpose of a so-called *Retention Specialist* may not be immediately apparent, leading to either confusion or indifference among stakeholders. The point to be underlined here is that such an individual must be student-centered not only in title, but in personal philosophy and action, as well. This individual should be adept at data analysis and critical thinking, while also exhibiting a facility for developing a healthy rapport with students. Although there may be initiatives directed toward sub-populations, this individual will still expend considerable time having one-on-one conversations with students who come on the radar.

Likewise, a data miner is a plus. This may be one and the same with the student success advisor, although such diamonds in the rough are a rarity. The Prep program, if large enough, may have an individual dedicated to data aggregation, disaggregation, and analysis. If not, the success advisor would be well-served to develop a healthy rapport with the university's data analyst. The success advisor and the data miner do not nullify the Retention Committee – which helps analyze data, devise action plans, keeps the issue of retention front-and-center, and perhaps most importantly, under the framework of distributed leadership, serve as ambassadors for the Student Success unit. The essential point here being that effective student retention requires a team-based approach so that vulnerable students can be identified and action plans implemented. There are far too many at-risk students in any higher education institution for a single individual to address.

The action side of the structure equation becomes the research-based activities that address the needs identified by the data. The most prevalent activities, and perhaps the most sensible as a starting point for retention initiatives are: Early Alert Program, First Year Experience, Mentoring program.

Early Alert One of the major causes of student departure is what is generally called *Fit*; that is, a student's feeling that she or he does or not belong in the institution, for academic or social reasons. The very first days of school have a major impact on this feeling. Most new university students find this new experience quite overwhelming – they are coping with social separation from family and friends, thrust into an unknown social environment, and at the same time forced to adapt to completely new academic structure. Although there is a long school year ahead, it is quite possible that students "drop out" either physically or emotionally within this very short timeframe. It is also during this window that the Early Alert System (EAS) becomes a critical tool to decrease student attrition. Based on indicators that appear among individual students in the first days of a school year or semester – that instructors and staff are trained to identify – a system of assistance is enacted to offer support and increase the likelihood of the student remaining in the institution.

There are a number of early-warning indicators that students may evidence in the first days of a semester. These may appear as small, and rather harmless, but if not addressed immediately, they may scale up to larger issues. Examples may be absent from class or late for class, fatigue in class, no course text or materials, alcohol on breath, and so on. Instructors report such behaviors to the Student Success Advisor. The advisor will take the initiative to contact the student in order to determine the reason why the student has exhibited the reported behavior. The next step is for the advisor to assist the student in finding a solution, such as ensuring that the student brings materials to class, guiding the student to a counselor if necessary, pairing the student with a mentor. The primary goal of the Early Alert program is to ensure that early indicators of distress receive a rapid response and that students are aware that someone within the institution is concerned about them and wants them to succeed.

The First Year Experience In order to gain access to a tertiary institution, students must commit the larger part of their high school years to preparing for the university entrance exam. This singular dedication to the cognitively demanding exam comes at a critical time period when adolescents should also be developing the non-cognitive abilities that have been linked to college, career, and lifelong success; e.g. self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Dymnicki et al., 2013) and self-regulated learning, self-efficacy, coping and resilience (Rosen et al., 2010). The end result is that students may gain access to a university, but they arrive on campus lacking the skills to effectively adapt to the new environment, as well as to succeed over the long term at the school. Thus, for a substantial majority of newly matriculating private higher education students, they not only lack the non-cognitive skills and abilities to transition to a university, they are placed under the added weight of becoming academically proficient in a foreign language in 1 year's time.

Rather than simply relying on a short-term orientation program in the first days of the school year – when a student may still be disoriented in the new environment – the First Year Experience is a long-term program that helps students become academically and socially acclimated. They may attend workshops and seminars that introduce them to the campus, to learn study skills, establish social and academic relationships, lead a healthy lifestyle, effectively manage their time, and so on. There may also be a seminar component where students attend lectures provided by faculty members, with the intent of gaining exposure to a seminar experience. The benefits of first year experience programs and seminars are well-documented (e.g. Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Schmidt & Graziano, 2016), and Prep programs should strongly consider these as a critical piece of the curriculum.

Mentoring Mentoring may come in two forms. There are programs where students mentor students, and those where faculty mentor students. The student-to-student programs are advantageous in that they are closer in age to each other, and there is a greater chance of the students being able to better understand each other's perspective. The student-mentor, particularly if the mentee is in the Prep program, has been in those shoes before, and can understand the feelings and questions that the mentee may express. The challenges with student-to-student programs are that mentors must be selected carefully and well-trained in providing accurate and appropriate information, as well as in acting confidentially and ethically. Teachers-as-mentors, while also requiring the same level of training, come with a different set of benefits because of their maturity levels, their better understanding of the university systems that are hindering the mentee, their ability to put the mentee in contact with other individuals who may provide support, and their knowledge of the content in the language program. Mentoring programs are proven beneficial, but they are labor-intensive, requiring and administration by a dedicated individual, which circles us back to the need for a Student Success Advisor to strengthen the retention initiative.

4   Conclusion

Student retention in any university is a complex phenomenon, with many variables impacting the relationship between the student and the institution. This is all the more complicated in the context of EMI, and in country such as Turkey with its numerous gate-keeping, high-stakes exams adding pressure to the lives of students of all ages. This chapter has focused on the first year of the EMI. For somewhere around 80% of all newly matriculated students in EMI institutions, the first year is dedicated to learning English in an intensive language program. It is arguably at this point that the greatest number of students are at risk of dropping out, particularly the absolute beginners, the transfer students, and those who are required to study in the Prep program for a second year. The answers to this sophisticated phenomenon are not easy to come by, yet data collection and analysis are a good place to begin defining the right questions. Further, leadership recognition of the issues around retention, along with the dedication of resources to establish a structure to address the identified barriers to success are positive steps in the right direction.

At this point in the larger field of EMI in Turkey, the issue of retention remains, as was noted earlier, and invisible challenge. For reasons that cannot easily be explained, in a higher education sector where access is highly coveted, then completion should, one would think, gain equal import. Likewise, approximately half of Turkey's 200 higher education institutions rely on student tuition for revenue. It would also appear that there would be a national spotlight on this issue. Currently, the number of universities that have made student retention a priority are few, including Bahçeşehir University and Bilgi University in Istanbul, Yıldırım Beyazit University in Ankara, and Izmir University of Economics in Izmir. It would be a great advance if the Turkish Council of Higher Education and international accrediting bodies were to turn their attention to this important issue.

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