The Views of Students From a Migrant Background on Academic Competition: A Q Methodology Research

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Article Info	Abstract
	Increased student diversity with globalization complicates the impact of academic competition on students from a migrant background. This study goes beyond the simple dichotomy of "good" or "bad" competition and examines multi-layered perspectives of students from a migrant background on this phenomenon in depth. The research, conducted with the participation of 20 immigrant middle school students in Turkey, utilized Q methodology. As a result of factor analysis, four different and distinct opinion profiles reflecting students' perceptions of academic competition emerged: (1) Those Who View Competition as a Source of Motivation: A group that perceives competition as a driving force for personal development and emphasizes language proficiency. (2) Those Who Emphasize the Inequalities Created by Competition: Those who believe that competition creates systemic barriers and injustices for migrants. (3) Critics of Elite Competition: Those who argue that competition only benefits certain students and that individual effort is the main determinant. (4) Those Who Prioritize Support and Cooperation: Those who state that cooperation and social support are more valuable than competition for success. The findings show that students from a migrant background are not a homogeneous group and that "one-size-fits-all" approaches are inadequate. This study emphasizes the critical importance of individualized and inclusive education policies that balance competitive elements with collaborative and supportive structures to support both academic achievement and psychosocial well-being. **Keywords:** Q methodology, immigrant students, academic competition, student perceptions, psychosocial adjustment.

Introduction

With the acceleration of globalisation, education systems face students from increasingly diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (OECD, 2019). While this diversity offers important opportunities for the integration of migrant students into education systems, it also brings with it certain structural and psychosocial barriers (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). Academic achievement is not only an individual goal for these students; it can turn into a multidimensional pressure area where family, social and systemic expectations are combined (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

There are many factors that affect students' course success in educational processes. Research conducted for many years shows that factors such as intelligence, interests, ability, study habits, sense of responsibility and support from family or environment play an important role in success (Yıldırım, 2018). In addition, the anxiety experienced by students or the competitive environment they are in can directly affect this success (Özşahin & Atmaca,

2024). In particular, the concept of competition is often brought up as an element that can both motivate students and create stress on them (Posselt & Lipson, 2016; Van Nuland et al., 2015). Competitiveness is conceptualized in educational psychology as an individual's motivation to outperform peers, driven by a desire for recognition, achievement, and differentiation within a social or academic context. Rather than merely attaining goals, competitive individuals strive to surpass others, often influenced by normative standards and social comparisons (Murayama & Elliot, 2012). Accordingly, the competitive individual tends to evaluate his/her success not only based on his/her internal competences but also in comparison with other individuals. Success ceases to be an absolute measure; it gains its meaning only if it is better than others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). In essence, the distinctive feature of competitiveness is that it focuses on comparative success and establishes the value of the individual's success through the failure of others (Günay & Çelik, 2020).

Academic competition for success in the classroom, which migrant students also face, is a determining factor that shapes both their motivation to succeed and their psychological resilience. For some students, classroom competition can be a tool that encourages progress, while for others it can be a source of stress that reinforces feelings of exclusion, injustice and inadequacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, students are more likely to thrive academically when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met—conditions often undermined by inequitable competitive environments. Similarly, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) emphasize the critical role of social capital and identity development in shaping migrant students' academic engagement, highlighting how disrupted networks and a lack of belonging can negatively affect their motivation and integration into the school culture. This situation is more complex especially for students from a migrant background because factors such as language barrier, cultural adaptation problems and exclusion further deepen their academic competitive behaviours (Berry, 1997).

In this context, the main purpose of the study is to reveal how students from a migrant background experience academic competition, how they interpret this process and which psychosocial factors affect this experience. The findings obtained in this direction aim to guide both academic counselling processes and the development of immigrant-friendly education policies. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

- Is there a common trend in the perceptions of students from a migrant background regarding academic competition?

- On which aspects of academic competition do students from a migrant background show consensus, and on which aspects do they diverge?

- What subjective patterns shape participants' perspectives on academic competition and individual success, and what themes support these different perspectives?

Literature Review

Psychosocial dimensions of academic competition in students from a migrant background

While trying to adapt to their new educational systems, migrant students face not only academic knowledge and skill deficiencies but also challenges arising from social and cultural differences. Academic achievement can become an important source of stress for students from a migrant background due to both their own internal expectations and external pressures from family, teachers and society (Bang & Montgomery, 2013).

Competitive educational environments have a dual effect for migrant students: On the one hand, it can increase achievement by providing motivation, but on the other hand, it can threaten students' psychosocial cohesion and increase the risk of exclusion. In particular, studies on Chinese and Latino students have shown that academic achievement pressure has a direct impact on students' self-esteem, sense of belonging and social relationships (Fang et al., 2016; Gao, 2020).

Yuan (2011) emphasised that Chinese students often feel "marginalised" in the competitive environment, and therefore, cultural adaptation processes are intertwined with the pressure of academic achievement. Similarly, in a study conducted by Curiale (2019) among teachers of English language learners, it was determined that academic competition was seen as a threat factor in the perceptions of students from a migrant background. Such perceptions may negatively affect migrant students' relationships with their teachers and peers and put their psychological well-being at risk as well as their academic performance.

The intersection of academic competition perception with cultural differences

The perception of academic competition is deeply intersected with students' cultural backgrounds. Studies among students from a migrant background reveal that academic competition is not only a race for success but also a struggle for identity and belonging (Andrade, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). In particular, research on Chinese multilingual students shows that some of these students see competition as an opportunity for personal development, while others associate it with emotional pressure and anxiety (Fang et al., 2016; Gao, 2020).

Yuan (2010) emphasises that in Chinese students' academic and cultural adjustment processes in the US, competition often turns into a "survival" strategy and students feel obliged to prove themselves both academically and culturally. Similarly, studies on black students from a migrant background (Robinson, 2024) have found that cultural barriers and systematic exclusion shape their perceptions of competition and that competition is often perceived as a mechanism of disadvantage rather than equal opportunities.

These varying perceptions raise a critical question: what exactly do migrant students understand by "academic success" in competitive environments, and how does this shape their responses to educational challenges? In this study, the concept of academic success refers not to a single domain of achievement but to a broader, multifaceted construct that

encompasses both subject-specific competencies (such as language proficiency, mathematics, and science performance) and social-academic integration skills (such as classroom participation, communication, and adaptability). For migrant students, academic success is often shaped by their ability to navigate the host country's language of instruction, align with institutional expectations, and sustain motivation amid socio-cultural and economic challenges. This understanding is supported by recent literature, which emphasizes that academic success among students from migrant backgrounds is closely tied to linguistic adaptation, teacher support, and social belonging (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). Therefore, in the context of this study, academic success is not limited to test scores or grades but rather includes the holistic ability to function, adapt, and thrive within the academic environment.

These findings suggest that academic competition is not a uniform experience and is internalised in different ways according to students' cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Q methodology stands out as a powerful tool for systematically analysing such subjective experiences (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Researching the experiences of students from a migrant background using Q methodology

Q methodology is a mixed research method that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to systematically understand the subjective experiences of individuals (Brown, 1996; Watts & Stenner, 2012). It is a particularly effective tool for investigating personal and social issues such as identity formation, cultural adaptation, social integration and perceptions of academic achievement. This method allows participants to express their own perspectives and subjective evaluations, and these views are categorised through factor analysis to reveal common opinion groups.

Brown (1996) emphasises that Q methodology is a powerful tool for understanding individuals' experiences, especially in the processes of "cultural transition" and identity negotiation. Watts & Stenner (2012) state that the method simplifies complex social phenomena and offers researchers the opportunity to explore participants' thought patterns. Similarly, Lundberg (2018) demonstrates how Q methodology can be effectively applied to uncover the diverse and multifaceted beliefs of teachers regarding complex topics such as multilingualism. His work illustrates that Q methodology is not only valuable for capturing individual perspectives but also for providing deeper insights into pedagogical orientations and the value systems of educational stakeholders.

One of the sample studies applying this method is Swetnam's (2010) research with students from a migrant background of Mexican origin. Swetnam categorised students' perceptions of academic achievement into four subjective opinion groups and found that each of these groups attributed different meanings to achievement, family support and the education system. Another study by Bang and Montgomery (2013) examined the academic adjustment processes of international graduate students. In this study, the academic competition

experienced by the students, their efforts to adapt to the university culture and their individual coping strategies were analysed in detail using Q methodology. Such studies demonstrate the importance of the in-depth perspective offered by Q methodology in understanding the complex processes experienced by students from a migrant background and allow researchers to analyse different subjective experiences in a structured way.

Similar to these studies, the present research also employs Q methodology to reveal subjective opinion clusters among students with migrant backgrounds, focusing on their perspectives of academic success and competition. Like Swetnam (2010) and Bang & Montgomery (2013), this study captures how personal, cultural, and institutional factors intersect in shaping students' experiences. However, this study differs by specifically targeting middle school students from migrant backgrounds in the context of Turkey—a relatively underexplored population in existing literature. Unlike prior research which mostly focuses on higher education or North American settings, this study offers insight into how young learners in a linguistically and culturally distinct educational environment perceive academic competition. It thereby adds a unique cultural and developmental perspective to the existing body of research on academic adjustment and competitiveness.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted using Q methodology to systematically examine the perceptions and experiences of students from a migrant background regarding academic competition.Q methodology is a research method that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, allowing individuals to classify their values, attitudes and thoughts in a structured way (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this way, it is possible to analyse not only what the participants think but also how they prioritise among these thoughts.

Participants (P-Sample)

The study group of the research consists of 20 middle school students studying in a secondary school in Turkey and studying at the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade levels from a migrant background. Participants were selected to ensure diversity in terms of age, grade level, gender, country of immigration and duration of immigration. Participant selection was based on volunteerism and informed consent was obtained.

Table 1. Demographic Information About The Participants (N=20)

Code	Age	Gender	Class Level	Duration of Im. in Turkey	Turkish Lan. Proficiency
K1	14	Girl	8	7+ years	Very Good
K2	14	Male	8	7+ years	Very Good
K3	14	Girl	8	4-6 years	Good
K4	12	Male	6	1-3 years	Middle
K5	11	Girl	6	7+ years	Very Good
K6	11	Girl	6	7+ years	Very Good
K7	12	Girl	6	7+ years	Very Good
K8	11	Male	5	Less than 1 year	Middle
K9	10	Girl	5	7+ years	Good

K10	11	Male	5	7+ years	Very Good
K11	11	Male	5	7+ years	Very Good
K12	11	Girl	5	Less than 1 year	Very Good
K13	11	Male	5	4-6 years	Very Good
K14	11	Girl	5	7+ years	Very Good
K15	13	Male	7	4-6 years	Good
K16	13	Male	7	7+ years	Very Good
K17	14	Male	8	7+ years	Good
K18	14	Girl	8	7+ years	Very Good
K19	14	Girl	8	7+ years	Very Good
K20	13	Male	7	1-3 years	Weak

According to Table 1, the participants were between the ages of 10 and 14, 10 were girls and 10 were boys. The grade levels of the participants ranged between 5 and 8, with the highest number of participants in the 5th grade (7 participants), followed by the 6th and 8th grades (5 participants each) and the 7th grade (3 participants). In terms of duration of immigration in Turkey, 11 participants have been living in Turkey for more than 7 years, while 3 have been in Turkey for 4-6 years, 3 for 1-3 years and 2 for less than 1 year. When the level of Turkish language proficiency is analysed, 12 participants were evaluated as "very good", 4 as "good", 2 as "middle" and 1 as "poor". In general, the table reflects a group of students from a migrant background from different grade levels, balanced in terms of gender, who have adapted to Turkey for a long time and have high Turkish language proficiency.

Data Collection Tool (Q-Set)

The Q set used within the scope of the research was created in line with the literature review, expert opinions and preliminary interviews with migrant students. A total of 19 statements were designed to represent the personal, social, linguistic and psychological dimensions of academic competition. The statements were written in a plain language and were arranged in a way that the participants could understand in line with the opinions of 2 educational sciences field and 2 language experts and finalised before the application. The statements in the Q set are presented below:

Q Set (19 statements):

Q1. Academic competition encourages study and increases success.

Q2. Foreign students face more obstacles in academic competition.

Q3. Competitive environment in the classroom increases self-confidence and encourages more effort.

Q4. Turkish language proficiency makes a significant difference for academic competition.

Q5. Co-operation is a more powerful factor for success than competition.

Q6. Competitive pressure has a negative impact on academic performance.

Q7. Academic achievement is shaped by personal effort; environmental influences have a limited effect on achievement.

Q8. International students receive limited support in the process of academic competition. Q9. Low success in a competitive environment leads to a decrease in students' self-confidence.

Q10. Being in academic competition with local students requires a higher level of effort for foreign students.

Q11.International students need additional support mechanisms for academic progress.

Q12. Competition favours a small number of students in academic achievement.

Q13. Competitive exams and competitions offer an effective method to improve academic achievement.

Q14. Migration background poses different challenges in the process of academic competition.

Q15. Competition makes students more disciplined and responsible.

Q16. In a competitive environment, social support (teachers, friends, family) becomes a determining factor for academic success.

Q17. Academic competition allows individuals to discover their own talents.

Q18. Success in an intensely competitive environment requires strong motivation.

Q19. Academic competition favours high-achieving students.

Q-Sorting Process

The Q sorting scale and the Q-Set were printed out and given to each participant in separate sessions. Students were then asked to place the papers with the items written on them on the scale. The participants ranked the above Q-Set statements between -3 (strongly disagree) and +3 (strongly agree). The Q sorting scale used is given in Table 2. This process was carried out on a matrix similar to a normal distribution and the students were asked to place the statements according to their own perceptions in the way they most agree and least agree. Digital images of all statements on the Q sorting scale paper were taken and used in the data analysis process.

During the sorting process, the students were guided by the researcher, the incomprehensible expressions were explained, but their sorting preferences were not directed. After the sorting process was completed, a brief interview was conducted with the participants, asking them why they placed the items in the -3 (strongly disagree) to +3 (strongly agree) sections and asking them to write down their reasons for doing so. In this way, qualitative data supporting the research findings was obtained.

Table 2. Q sorting scale

Disagree			**Neutral**			**Agree**
-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3

Analysing the Data

The collected sorting data were analysed using Ken-Q Analysis (Version 2.0.1) (Banasick, 2023). The factor analysis applied through the software revealed significant opinion patterns among the participants. Auto-flagging and varimax rotation were applied to determine the factors. Factor extraction was based on the principal component analysis (PCA) method. The extracted factors were subjected to Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization, using the default software parameters, which include a maximum of 25 iterations to achieve orthogonality and maximize interpretability. In order to ensure more distinct and interpretable factor structures, a more stringent loading threshold of $|\lambda| \geq 0.50$ was adopted, following suggestions by Brown (1996) and Watts & Stenner (2012). This approach reduces ambiguity in factor assignment and strengthens the reliability of group interpretation. As a result of the analysis, different representative opinion profiles of the participants' perceptions of academic competition were obtained.

After the Q sorting activity, the participants were asked to briefly explain their reasons for placing specific statements in the +3 and -3 columns. These written responses were analyzed using descriptive analysis, a qualitative approach that focuses on summarizing participants' expressions under pre-defined themes and supporting them with direct quotations (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, descriptive analysis was used to identify and interpret the participants' positive and negative justifications in relation to academic competition. The

participants' responses were categorized thematically based on the research questions and interpreted to uncover meaningful patterns and underlying reasoning behind their views.

Additionally, the analysis of the Z-scores of the Q statements quantitatively revealed the extent to which each item contributed to the respective factors, thereby clarifying the distinguishing features of each factor structure. The ranking values further indicated the relative importance of each item within its factor, enabling a comparative interpretation of the viewpoint patterns.

Findings

In this section, the results of the Q methodology applied to reveal the thoughts of students from a migrant background studying at the secondary school level about academic competition are described. The findings are presented in the order of correlation analysis, factor structure determination, factor interpretations, common and divergent statements.

The research findings obtained within the scope of the first question of the study, 'Is there a common trend in immigrant students' perceptions of academic competition?', are presented below:

Correlation Between Q Rankings

Firstly, the correlation matrix between the Q rankings of the participants was analysed. As a result of the analysis, it was observed that there was no high level correlation (r > 0.80) between individual rankings. This reveals that there are significant individual differences in the way students perceive academic competition. This supports the basic assumption of Q methodology that subjective differences can be investigated.

Factor Analysis and Rotation

When the Scree plot graph given in Figure 1 was analysed, it was observed that there was a multi-factor structure. In order to reduce the number of factors and make the factors meaningful, 4 components with eigenvalues above 2 were deemed appropriate by the researcher and based on this, it was decided that a four-factor structure was appropriate for the analysis. These four factors represent meaningful patterns of opinions about academic competition among students.
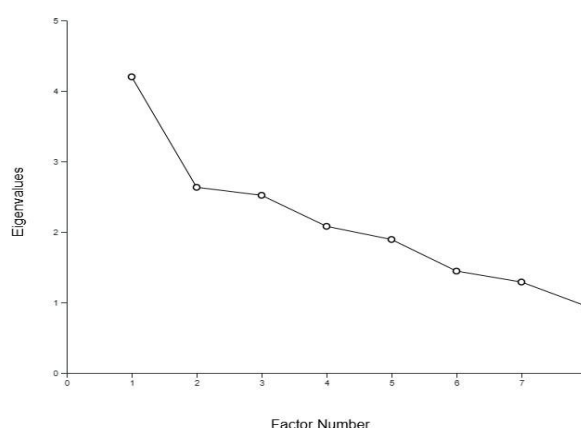
Figure 1. Scree plot graph

When the four-factor structure was tested, it was observed that the variance explained by the first factor was 18%, the variance explained by the second factor was 13%, the variance explained by the third factor was 13% and the variance explained by the fourth factor was 13% and the total variance was 57%.

The four factors determined were made interpretable by Varimax rotation method. This rotation process ensured that each participant was highly loaded on only one factor and contributed to a clearer separation of the factor structure. When the 4-factor structure obtained as a result of the Varimax rotation process was examined, it was determined that 14 of the 20 participants were significantly included in one of the four factors, while 6 participants did not load significantly on these four factors. When the participants were analysed according to the factors, 4 participants were in the first factor (Participants 7, 8, 12, 18), 3 participants were in the second factor (Participants 16, 17, 19), 2 participants were in the third factor (Participants 2, 3) and 3 participants were in the fourth factor (Participants 6, 11, 15). The distribution of Q statements according to the factors is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Factor loadings for four competition profiles

Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4	
Q Stat.	Factor Load	Q Stat.	Factor Load	Q Stat.	Factor Load	Q Stat.	Factor Load
Q7	0,745	Q16	0,717	Q2	0,849	Q6	0,835
Q8	0,617	Q17	0,706	Q3	0,592	Q11	0,848
Q12	0,718	Q19	0,816			Q15	0,682
Q18	0,639						

Correlation Between Factors

The correlations between the factors are quite low (highest r = 0.18), indicating that the four factors are significantly differentiated from each other and represent different thought patterns.

Contextual Interpretation of Factors

Factor 1: Competition strengthens motivation

When the items loaded to Factor 1 were analysed, it was de decided that the factor should be named as "Competition strengthens motivation". 4 out of 20 participants contributed significantly to Factor 1. The composite Q ranking of Factor 1 is shown in Figure 2.

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
** ◄ Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet sürecinde	Yerli öğrencilerle akademik rekabet içinde olmak, yabancı	Göç geçmişi, akademik rekabet sürecinde farklı	Rekabet ortamında sosyal destek (öğretmenler, arkadaşlar,	Akademik başarıyı artırmak için rekabetçi sınavlar ve	Türkçe dil yeterliliği akademik rekabet için önemli bir fark	Akademik rekabet, çalışmaya teşvik eder ve başarıyı
	** ◄ Sınıf içi rekabet ortamı özgüveni arttırır ve daha fazla çaba	* ◄ Rekabet, akademik başarıda az sayıda öğrenci için avantaj	* ► Akademik rekabet, bireylerin kendi yeteneklerini	Rekabet öğrencileri daha disiplinli ve sorumluluk sahibi bir hale	Yoğun rekabet ortamında başarı için güçlü bir motivasyon	
		Rekabet baskısı akademik performans üzerinde olumsuz bir	* ◄ Akademik rekabet, yüksek başarılı öğrencilerin ön plana çıkmasına	* Başarı için iş birliği yapmak, rekabet etmekten daha güçlü bir		
		Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet içinde daha fazla	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik ilerleme sürecinde ek	Akademik başarı kişisel çabayla şekillenir, çevresel etkiler		
			Rekabet ortamında düşük başarı, öğrencilerin kendine olan			

Legend

* Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05
** Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01
► Z-score for the statement is higher than in all other factors
◄ Z-score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

Figure 2. The composite Q ranking of Factor 1

According to Figure 2, the 8th statement in the -3 column and the 3rd statement in the -2 column are distinctive statements according to p<0.01 significance level. Students in this group see academic competition as a positive tool and evaluate it as a source of success and motivation. The discriminative statements in these columns are presented in Table 4.
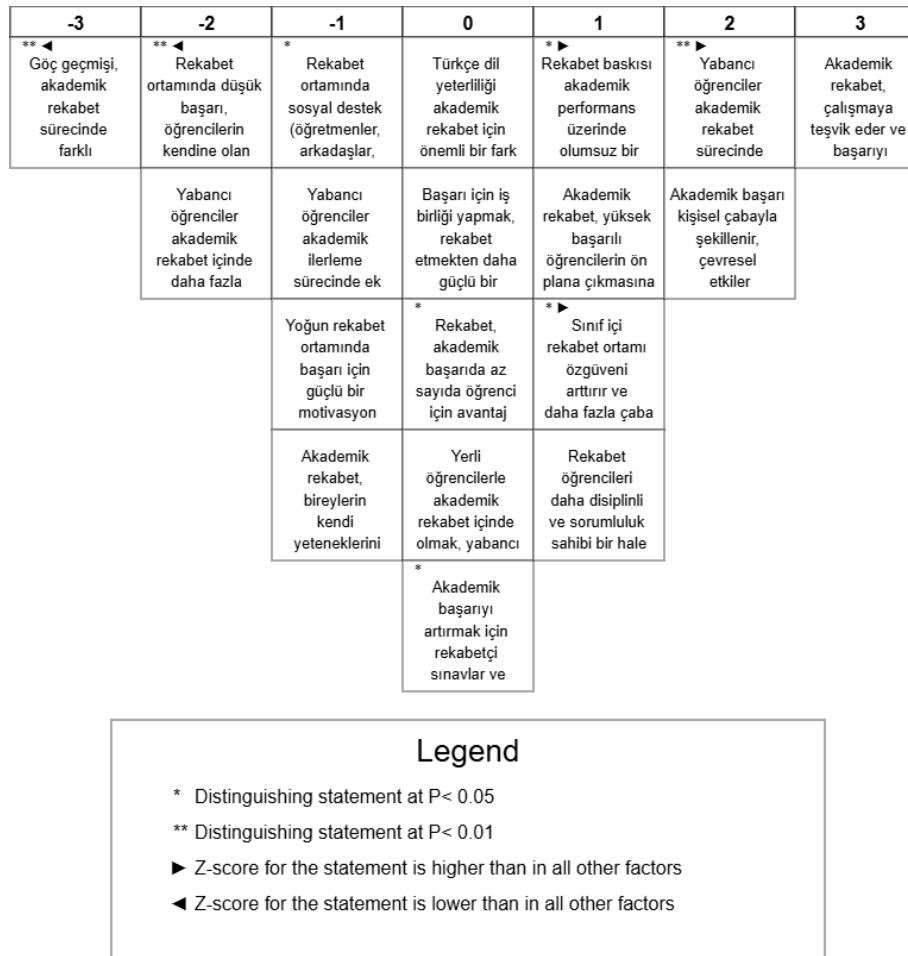
Table 4. Most and least agreed statements in Factor 1

Score	Number	Statement
-2	3	Competitive environment in the classroom increases self-confidence and encourages more effort.
-3	8	Foreign students receive limited support in the academic competition process.

According to Table 4, the statement in Factor 1 that the participants disagree with the most is "Foreign students receive limited support in the process of academic competition." Another statement that they agree with the least is "Classroom competition increases self-confidence and encourages them to make more effort."

Factor 2: Inequalities and difficulties created by competition

When the items loaded to Factor 2 were analysed, it was decided that it was appropriate to name the factor as "Inequalities and Difficulties Created by Competition". 3 out of 20 participants contributed significantly to Factor 2. The composite Q ranking of Factor 2 is shown in Figure 3.

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
** ◄ Göç geçmişi, akademik rekabet sürecinde farklı	** ◄ Rekabet ortamında düşük başarı, öğrencilerin kendine olan	* Rekabet ortamında sosyal destek (öğretmenler, arkadaşlar,	Türkçe dil yeterliliği akademik rekabet için önemli bir fark	* ► Rekabet baskısı akademik performans üzerinde olumsuz bir	** ► Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet sürecinde	Akademik rekabet, çalışmaya teşvik eder ve başarıyı
	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet içinde daha fazla	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik ilerleme sürecinde ek	Başarı için iş birliği yapmak, rekabet etmekten daha güçlü bir	Akademik rekabet, yüksek başarılı öğrencilerin ön plana çıkmasına	Akademik başarı kişisel çabayla şekillenir, çevresel etkiler	
		Yoğun rekabet ortamında başarı için güçlü bir motivasyon	* Rekabet, akademik başarıda az sayıda öğrenci için avantaj	* ► Sınıf içi rekabet ortamı özgüveni arttırır ve daha fazla çaba		
		Akademik rekabet, bireylerin kendi yeteneklerini	Yerli öğrencilerle akademik rekabet içinde olmak, yabancı	Rekabet öğrencileri daha disiplinli ve sorumluluk sahibi bir hale		
			* Akademik başarıyı artırmak için rekabetçi sınavlar ve			

Legend

*   Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05

** Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01

► Z-score for the statement is higher than in all other factors

◄ Z-score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

Figure 3. The composite Q ranking of Factor 2

According to Figure 3, the 14th statement in the -3 column, the 9th statement in the -2 column and the 2nd statement in the +2 column are discriminative statements according to p<0.01 significance level. The discriminative statements in these columns are presented in Table 5.
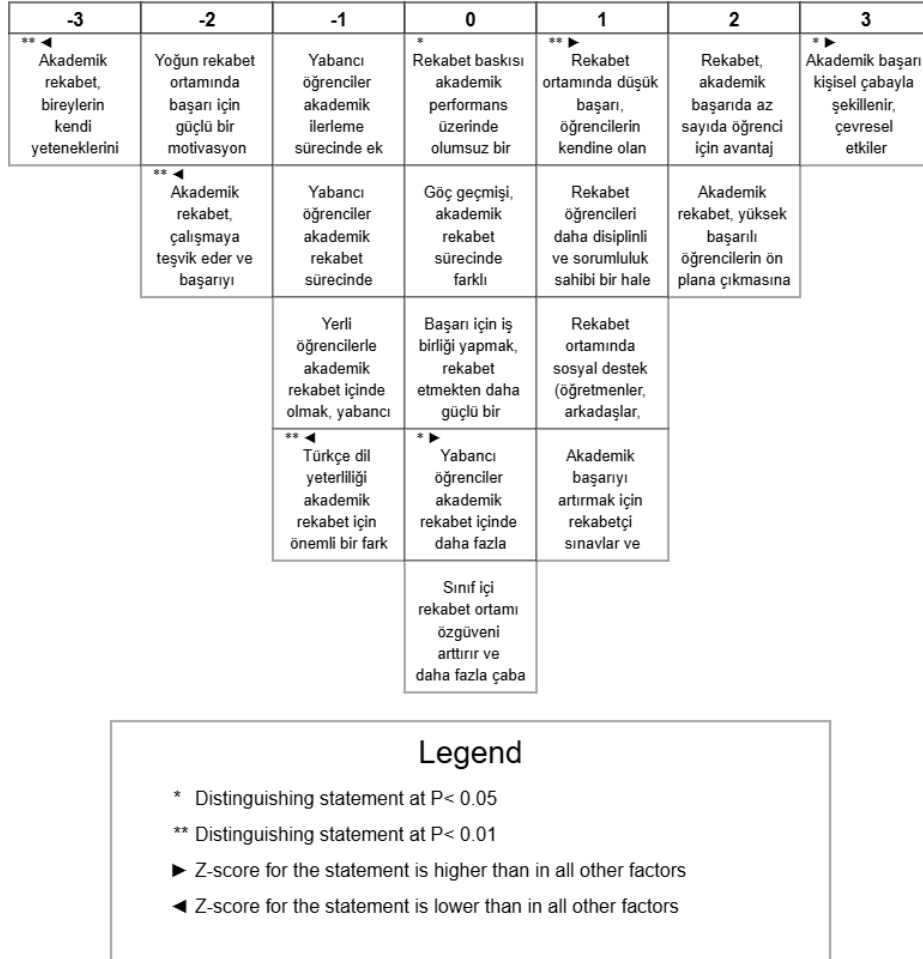
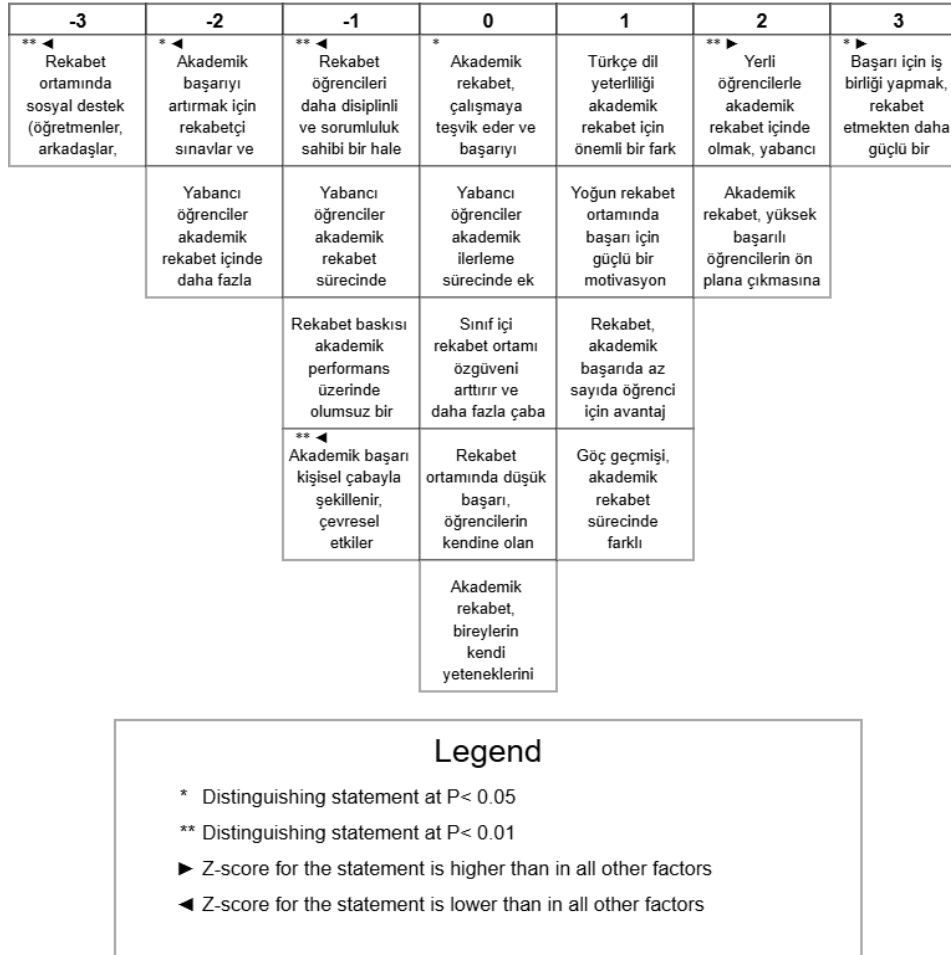**Table 5.** Most and least agreed statements in Factor 2

Score	Number	Statement
+2	2	Foreign students face more obstacles in academic competition.
-2	9	Low achievement in a competitive environment leads to a decrease in students' self-confidence.
-3	14	Migration background poses different challenges in the process of academic competition.

According to Table 5, the participants in Factor 2 mostly agreed with the statement "Foreign students face more obstacles in academic competition." The statement they agree with the least is "Immigration background poses different challenges in the academic competition process." Following this, another statement they disagree with is "Low success in a competitive environment causes a decrease in students' self-confidence."

Factor 3: Academic competition of the elite

When the items loaded to Factor 3 were analysed, it was decided that the factor should be named as "Academic Competition of the Elite". 2 out of 20 participants contributed significantly to Factor 3. The composite Q ranking of Factor 3 is shown in Figure 4.

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
** ◄ Akademik rekabet, bireylerin kendi yeteneklerini	Yoğun rekabet ortamında başarı için güçlü bir motivasyon	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik ilerleme sürecinde ek	* Rekabet baskısı akademik performans üzerinde olumsuz bir	** ► Rekabet ortamında düşük başarı, öğrencilerin kendine olan	Rekabet, akademik başarıda az sayıda öğrenci için avantaj	* ► Akademik başarı kişisel çabayla şekillenir, çevresel etkiler
	** ◄ Akademik rekabet, çalışmaya teşvik eder ve başarıyı	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet sürecinde	Göç geçmişi, akademik rekabet sürecinde farklı	Rekabet öğrencileri daha disiplinli ve sorumluluk sahibi bir hale	Akademik rekabet, yüksek başarılı öğrencilerin ön plana çıkmasına	
		Yerli öğrencilerle akademik rekabet içinde olmak, yabancı	Başarı için iş birliği yapmak, rekabet etmekten daha güçlü bir	Rekabet ortamında sosyal destek (öğretmenler, arkadaşlar,		
		** ◄ Türkçe dil yeterliliği akademik rekabet için önemli bir fark	* ► Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet içinde daha fazla	Akademik başarıyı artırmak için rekabetçi sınavlar ve		
			Sınıf içi rekabet ortamı özgüveni arttırır ve daha fazla çaba			

Legend
* Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05
** Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01
► Z-score for the statement is higher than in all other factors
◄ Z-score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

Figure 4. The composite Q ranking of Factor 3

According to Figure 4, the 17th statement in the -3 column, the 1st statement in the -2 column are discriminative statements according to p<0.01 significance level and the 7th statement in the +3 column are discriminative statements according to p<0.05 significance level. The discriminative statements in these columns are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Most and least agreed statements in Factor 3

Score	Number	Statement
+3	7	Academic achievement is shaped by personal effort; environmental influences have a limited effect on achievement.
-2	1	Academic competition encourages study and increases success.
-3	17	Academic competition allows individuals to discover their own talents.

According to Table 6, the participants in Factor 3 mostly agreed with the statement "Academic success is shaped by personal effort, environmental influences have a limited effect on success. The least agreed statement was "Academic competition allows individuals to discover

their own talents", followed by "Academic competition encourages studying and increases success".

Factor 4: Support and co-operation

When the items loaded to Factor 4 were analysed, it was decided that it was appropriate to name the factor as "Support and Co-operation". 3 out of 20 participants contributed significantly to Factor 4. The composite Q ranking of Factor 4 is shown in Figure 5.

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
** ◄ Rekabet ortamında sosyal destek (öğretmenler, arkadaşlar,	* ◄ Akademik başarıyı artırmak için rekabetçi sınavlar ve	** ◄ Rekabet öğrencileri daha disiplinli ve sorumluluk sahibi bir hale	* Akademik rekabet, çalışmaya teşvik eder ve başarıyı	Türkçe dil yeterliliği akademik rekabet için önemli bir fark	** ► Yerli öğrencilerle akademik rekabet içinde olmak, yabancı	* ► Başarı için iş birliği yapmak, rekabet etmekten daha güçlü bir
	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet içinde daha fazla	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik rekabet sürecinde	Yabancı öğrenciler akademik ilerleme sürecinde ek	Yoğun rekabet ortamında başarı için güçlü bir motivasyon	Akademik rekabet, yüksek başarılı öğrencilerin ön plana çıkmasına	
		Rekabet baskısı akademik performans üzerinde olumsuz bir	Sınıf içi rekabet ortamı özgüveni arttırır ve daha fazla çaba	Rekabet, akademik başarıda az sayıda öğrenci için avantaj		
		** ◄ Akademik başarı kişisel çabayla şekillenir, çevresel etkiler	Rekabet ortamında düşük başarı, öğrencilerin kendine olan	Göç geçmişi, akademik rekabet sürecinde farklı		
			Akademik rekabet, bireylerin kendi yeteneklerini			

Legend
* Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05
** Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01
► Z-score for the statement is higher than in all other factors
◄ Z-score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

Figure 5. The composite Q ranking of Factor 4

According to Figure 5, the 16th statement in the -3 column and the 10th statement in the +2 column are discriminative statements according to p<0.01 significance level, while the 5th statement in the +3 column and the 13th item in the -2 column are discriminative statements according to p<0.05 significance level. The discriminative statements in these columns are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Most and least agreed statements in Factor 4

Score	Number	Statement
+3	5	Co-operation is a more powerful factor for success than competition.
+2	10	Being in academic competition with local students requires a higher level of effort for foreign students.
-2	13	Competitive exams and competitions offer an effective method to improve academic achievement.

| -3 | 16 | In a competitive environment, social support (teachers, friends, family) becomes a determining factor for academic success. |

According to Table 7, the participants in Factor 4 mostly agreed with the statement "Collaborating for success is a stronger factor than competing". After that, they agreed with the statement "Being in academic competition with local students requires a higher effort for foreign students". The least agreed statement was "Social support (teachers, friends, family) becomes a determining factor for academic success in a competitive environment.", followed by the statement "Competitive exams and competitions offer an effective method to increase academic success.".

In this study, six participants did not load significantly on any of the four extracted factors (i.e., their factor loadings did not meet the $|\lambda| \geq 0.50$ threshold). This indicates that their Q-sorts did not align closely enough with the dominant opinion profiles identified in the analysis. Methodologically, such "non-loading" participants often represent individuals with highly idiosyncratic or internally inconsistent viewpoints that cannot be meaningfully clustered with other respondents (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this context, it is possible that these participants' perceptions of academic competition were shaped by unique combinations of personal experiences—such as specific migration trajectories, distinctive school environments, or atypical language proficiency levels—which diverge from the more coherent group patterns. While these non-loadings reduce the extent to which their perspectives can be represented in the factor interpretation, they also highlight the heterogeneity of migrant students' experiences and suggest the existence of nuanced subgroups that may warrant targeted qualitative follow-up.

Z-values and rankings of the Q statements of the factors are important in terms of making sense of the Q statements. Z-values of Q statements according to the factors obtained are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Z values of Q statements according to factors

No	Q Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4	
		Z Value	Rank.	Z Value	Rank.	Z Value	Rank.	Z Value	Rank.
1	Academic competition encourages study and increases success.	1,7	1	1,29	1	-1,6	18	0,42	8
2	Foreign students face more obstacles in academic competition.	-1,08	17	-1,44	18	-0,17	11	-1,38	18
3	Competition in the classroom increases self-confidence and encourages more effort.	-1,4	18	0,9	6	-0,17	12	0	10

4	Turkish language proficiency makes a significant difference for academic competition.	1,2	2	0,38	8	-0,39	13	1,08	4
5	Co-operation is a more powerful factor for success than competition.	0,95	5	0,01	9	0,17	8	1,58	1
6	Competitive pressure has a negative impact on academic performance.	-1,01	16	0,97	4	0	9	-0,78	15
7	Academic achievement is shaped by personal effort; environmental influences have a limited effect on achievement.	0,42	8	1,06	3	1,99	1	-0,78	16
8	Foreign students receive limited support in the academic competition process.	-1,81	19	1,26	2	-0,72	15	-0,72	14
9	Low achievement in a competitive environment leads to a decrease in students' self-confidence.	-0,16	10	-1,43	17	0,55	6	-0,33	11
10	Being in academic competition with local students requires a higher level of effort for foreign students.	-0,87	15	-0,16	11	-0,88	16	1,14	2
11	International students need additional support mechanisms for academic progress.	-0,34	13	-0,39	14	-0,55	14	0,36	9
12	Competition provides an advantage for a small number of	-0,8	14	0,01	10	1,6	2	0,92	6

	students in academic achievement.							
13	Competitive exams and competitions offer an effective method to improve academic achievement.	1,11	4	-0,38	12	0,22	7	-1,25	17
14	Migration background poses different challenges in the process of academic competition.	-0,18	11	-2,26	19	0	10	0,58	7
15	Competition makes students more disciplined and responsible.	0,85	6	0,77	7	0,88	4	-0,67	13
16	In a competitive environment, social support (teachers, friends, family) becomes a determining factor for academic success.	0,54	7	-0,38	13	0,72	5	-1,75	19
17	Academic competition allows individuals to discover their own talents.	-0,22	12	-0,66	16	-1,82	19	-0,61	12
18	Success in an intensely competitive environment requires strong motivation.	1,14	3	-0,46	15	-0,94	17	1,08	5
19	Academic competition favours high-achieving students.	-0,03	9	0,91	5	1,11	3	1,11	3

In the Competition Strengthens Motivation factor, it is an approach that emphasises the contribution of competition and language proficiency to success. The students of this group believe that competition is motivating and increases individual development and success, and they see the language factor as critical for academic success.

In the Inequalities and Challenges Created by Competition factor, there is a mixed perspective that draws attention to both individual effort and students' specific support needs. Although students see the benefits of competition in this factor, they emphasise the importance of support mechanisms, especially for foreign students.

The Academic Competition of the Elite factor reflects an approach in which competition provides limited advantage, but personal effort is the main determinant of success. There is a strong criticism that competition benefits certain students, not everyone. This factor emphasises the individual's intrinsic motivation rather than teacher or external support.

In the Support and Cooperation factor, it is the approach of the participants who argue that competition makes a difference between individuals, but cooperation is a more effective method. Lack of support mechanisms and individual skills and motivation are emphasised instead of social support. This factor has a critical focus on inequality and the need for effort.

When the Z values in Table 8 are analysed in general, the factors in which the Q statements are gathered and their contributions to these factors are seen more clearly. The ranking values show the rank of the Q statements in that factor. Thus, the status of Q statements according to the factors can also be understood.

The findings obtained in response to the second question of the study, "On which aspects of academic competition do students from a migrant background show consensus, and on which aspects do they diverge?", are presented below:

When the opinions of the participants are analysed, it is observed that there is consensus or disagreement among the participants. According to the results of the analyses, consensus or disagreement can also be obtained. The statements with the most consensus and the most disagreement among the participants are summarised below.

Common Views (High Consensus):

- The item "International students need additional support mechanisms in the process of academic progress." was ranked low or neutral in all factors.
- The item "Academic competition causes high-achieving students to come to the forefront." was ranked medium and high in all factors.

The similar ranking of common views in different factors indicates that some basic experiences are shared among students. For example, the low or neutral ranking of the statement "International students need additional support mechanisms in the process of academic progress" across all factors may indicate that although this view is generally acknowledged, it is not sufficiently valued or internalised in practice. Similarly, the consistent medium-high ranking of the statement "Academic competition causes high-achieving students to stand out" indicates that this perception is experienced as a common reality across different student groups. Such commonalities indicate that certain educational phenomena are widely accepted in a group- independent manner and emphasise the need to focus more on such areas in educational policies.

Diverging Opinions (High Diversity of Opinion):

- The item "Academic competition encourages to work." ranks the highest in Factors 1 and 2, while it ranks the lowest in Factor 3.
- The item "Social support determines success in a competitive environment." was ranked medium-high in Factors 1 and 3 and the lowest in Factor 4.
- "Migration background creates different challenges in the academic competition process." It is ranked at the lowest level in Factor 2 and at the medium level in Factor 4.

Students in different factors gave opposite scores to the same statements. For example, the statement "Academic competition encourages studying" received high approval in Factors 1 and 2, while it received the lowest score in Factor 3. This finding reveals the different ways in which students experience education, with factors such as their socio-cultural background, language proficiency and support systems. This diversity clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of a "one size fits all" approach to education and the need for individualised support.

Participant Views

The findings obtained in response to the third question of the study, 'What subjective patterns shape participants' perspectives on academic competition and individual success, and what themes support these different perspectives?', are presented below:

According to the results of the descriptive analysis of the statements placed by the participants in the +3 and -3 columns and their justifications, two main trends emerge in the participants' perceptions of academic competition and individual success.

Firstly, many participants think that academic success is shaped by personal effort, language proficiency and individual motivation. Among the most frequently placed statements in the +3 columns were *"Turkish language proficiency"*, *"co-operation for success"*, *"discovering one's own abilities"* and *"academic competition increases success"*. Participants frequently referred to personal experiences (e.g. language learning process, personal development) and emotional gains (increased self-confidence, perseverance, discipline) in support of these views.

On the other hand, based on the statements placed in the -3 column, the participants suggest that competition is dysfunctional or unnecessary in some cases, and that *it may* even *"disturb the peace in the classroom"*, *"overshadow individual competence"* or *"exaggerated in some cases"*. In particular, the placement of statements such as "migration background", "limited support" and "lack of social support" at -3 shows that participants do not find such generalisations valid for every individual. Some participants also rejected statements that contradicted their lived experiences.

These data reveal that the participants evaluate academic competition in individual contexts; for some, this process is *supportive and developmental*, while for others it is *a limiting or meaningless* construct. This diversity provides a strong example of "systematic analysis of subjective attitudes", which is a key feature of Q methodology.

Table 9. Descriptive analysis of the most positive item (+3)

Theme	Codes	Sample Testimonials
Academic Comp. and Motivation	Personal Development, Incentive, Success Motivation, Talent Awareness, Self-confidence Increase	"Competition Increases Our Success"; "It Creates Desire to Succeed"
Importance of Learning Turkish	Imperative, Key to Success, Communicating, Adaptability	"You cannot be successful without learning Turkish"; "If we don't know Turkish, success decreases"
Discipline and Responsibility	Organisation, Taking Responsibility, Planned Work, Focusing on the Goal	"It's good to be disciplined"; "We understand our responsibilities"
Family and Environmental Support	Family Support, Source of Morale, Not Being Alone, Emotional Support	"Family Members Support Each Other"
The Power of Working Together	Sharing, Stress Reduction, Ease of Understanding Concepts, Cooperation	"Working Together Makes It Easier"; "Less Stress"

According to Table 9, when the reasons for choosing the item that the participants placed in the most positive (+3) column are analysed, it is observed that they are grouped under four different themes.

Academic competition and motivation

In positive views, academic competition was defined as a tool that supports personal development and success. In particular, statements such as "desire to succeed" and "reaching the best version of oneself" show that students see competition as an opportunity to improve themselves, not just to compete with others. This shows that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic reward expectation work in harmony.

Importance of learning Turkish

It was frequently emphasised that learning Turkish, especially for migrant students, is a basic requirement not only for communication but also for academic success. Students stated that mastery of Turkish is directly related to skills such as doing homework, understanding lessons and expressing oneself. This finding emphasises the decisive role of linguistic competence on educational participation.

Discipline and responsibility

Some of the participants stated that being disciplined and taking responsibility directly affect academic success. Under this theme, study organisation, planning and sense of duty come to the fore. Especially statements such as "we understand our responsibilities" reveal that students develop self-management skills and that these skills contribute to success.

Family and environmental support

Students stated that they were more successful when they felt that they were not alone in the academic process, especially when they received emotional and academic support from their families. The fact that family support is perceived as "empowering" and "a source of morale"

emphasises the importance of social support systems. These findings show that family-school co- operation is even more critical for migrant students.

The power of working together

Finally, students reported that working together helped them to better understand concepts, reduce stress, and become more motivated. This finding shows that co-operative learning environments provide not only academic but also emotional benefits. Students' comments such as "working together provides convenience" support the importance of social learning environments.

Table 10. *Descriptive* analysis of the most positive item (-3)

Theme	Codes	Sample Testimonials
Harm of Competition	Fighting and Argument, Uselessness, Unnecessity, Not Contributing to Success, Stress and Anxiety	"Competition is nonsense, it can't increase success"; "It causes fights in the classroom"
The Insignificance of Migration	Not a Barrier, No Impact, Migration Background is Irrelevant, Everyone Learns Equally	"A migration background does not create difficulties for success"; "We get used to it, we forget it"
Criticism of Support and Equality	Inequality, Lack of Support, Discrimination, Exclusion, Inequality of Opportunity	"Foreign students do not receive equal support"; "They are not allowed to attend school because they are foreigners"
Individual Power and Self-Confidence	Strength, Self-confidence, Not worrying about small things, Emotional resilience	"One should be self-confident"; "One should not worry about small things"

According to Table 10, when the reasons for choosing the item that the participants placed in the most positive (+3) column are analysed, it is observed that they are grouped under four different themes.

Harm of competition

Most of the students stated that competition is not a factor that encourages success in the academic environment, but on the contrary, it creates stress, anxiety and conflict. Expressions such as "ridiculous", "unnecessary", "does not contribute to success" indicate that students associate competition with an emotionally negative experience. This indicates that academic competition does not work in the same way for every individual and may have demotivating effects especially for low achieving students.

The insignificance of migration

Some students stated that migrant background or being a foreigner in Turkey did not have a direct impact on academic success. This view shows that the impact of individual differences on the learning process is perceived relatively less and that students associate individual effort with success. Expressions such as "one gets used to it over time" or "everyone learns equally" show that learning is perceived as a more universal process shaped by effort.

Criticism of support and equality

Some participants stated that especially foreign students do not receive adequate and fair support in the school environment. The prominence of concepts such as "inequality", "exclusion" and "inequality of opportunity" among the codes reveals that students develop a critical attitude towards support systems. These views indicate that migrant students feel that they are disadvantaged not only academically but also socially and structurally.

Individual power and self-confidence

Some students emphasised that individual strength, resilience and self-confidence were decisive for success, regardless of external conditions such as competition and migration. These comments reveal student profiles who are aware of their internal sources of strength and emphasise personal resilience. Especially statements such as "not to worry about small things" and "one should be strong" are remarkable in terms of psychological resilience.

Discussion

This study aims to understand the multi-layered perspectives of secondary school students from a migrant background studying in Turkey by analysing their perceptions of academic competition using Q methodology. The findings revealed that migrant students evaluate the phenomenon of academic competition not only as a means to achieve success, but also in the contexts of belonging, equality, self-confidence and social support.

The four main factors revealed by the study showed how students evaluate academic competition in different dimensions. The first factor, "Competition Strengthens Motivation", views competition as a factor that increases intrinsic motivation and encourages achievement. This perspective is in line with the "achievement goal orientations" theory proposed by Elliot and McGregor (2001). Participants emphasised Turkish proficiency as a determining factor in competition, which is directly related to the link between "linguistic competence" and academic performance as defined by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008).

The second factor, "Inequalities and Challenges Created by Competition", argued that academic competition may create an unfair structure for migrant students. This view can be explained by Berry's (1997) cultural adaptation model, which suggests that adaptation difficulties can become a disadvantage in a competitive environment. As a matter of fact, Yuan (2010) and Gao (2020) also stated that students from a migrant background often see competition as a "survival strategy", therefore, inequalities in the classroom directly affect their perceptions of success.

The third factor, "Academic Competition of the Elite", indicates that competition is meaningful only for certain, advantaged groups. This view can be related to Portes and Rumbaut's (2014) concept of "selective acculturation", as the participants think that competition offers opportunities only for students with certain advantages, while the majority of migrant students are ignored. For this group, academic success is seen as a field that requires not

only effort but also social and cultural capital. This perspective is similar to the Q study conducted by Robinson (2024) with black students from a migrant background.

The fourth factor, "Support and Cooperation", suggests that solidarity and cooperation are more effective in success rather than competition. This view is in line with Ryan and Deci's (2000) "self- determination theory"; students stated that intrinsic motivation can only be strengthened in social support environments. Moreover, the positive effect of peer support mechanisms on motivation proposed by Wentzel et al. (2004) is in line with these findings.

An important theme that stands out in the participant views is that academic competition is intertwined with an "identity construction" process. In particular, some participants stated that being successful makes the migrant identity visible and acceptable. This supports the relationship between cultural belonging and academic performance, which has also been demonstrated in studies such as Curiale (2019) and Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008). Students from a migrant background approach success not only as an individual goal but also as a means of social acceptance. This finding shows that unidirectional success criteria in education create additional pressures on migrant students. Indeed, Stanton-Salazar's (2011) social networks theory emphasises that students' access to not only academic but also social capital is critical in this process.

The findings of the study made it clear that while for some students competition was an element that supported their development, for others it created a sense of pressure and exclusion. In particular, students with low Turkish proficiency and those with short-term migration experience felt disadvantaged in the competitive environment. This is in line with Rudolf and Lee's (2023) study on the bidirectional effect of competition on psychological well-being.

The participants' emphasis on concepts such as individual resilience, self-confidence, social support and family belonging in a competitive environment underlines that education is not only a cognitive but also an emotional and social process. In this framework, the functionality of academic competition is directly related to the student's access to environmental and social support resources.

The consensus among the participants on certain statements reveals that some of the main experiences of migrant students are perceived similarly regardless of group. In particular, the neutral or low ranking of the statement "Foreign students need additional support mechanisms in the process of academic progress" across all factors indicates that there is an implicit consensus on the importance of support structures for migrant students. However, this also indicates that this support is not systematically implemented in education systems (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Suárez- Orozco et al., 2010). Similarly, the similar ranking of the item "Academic competition causes high- achieving students to stand out" across different factors indicates that there is a common awareness among students about the elitist effects of competition (Posselt & Lipson, 2016). On the other hand, the striking divergences observed

especially in statements such as "Academic competition encourages students to study" indicate that the way students perceive academic competition depends largely on subjective conditions (e.g. language proficiency, previous educational experiences, social support network) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This diversity emphasises the need for individualised approaches in educational policies and teaching models based on multiple perspectives (Petrovic & Olmstead, 2001; Robinson, 2024). It is clear that uniform pedagogical interventions will be insufficient to address heterogeneous student groups and that this diversity should be integrated into pedagogical planning.

The most important contribution of the Q methodology in this study is its structured presentation of students' subjective experiences. By combining quantitative analysis with qualitative insight, this methodology offered the possibility of a student view-based analysis by capturing meaningful individual differences that conventional quantitative analyses may miss. As Watts and Stenner (2012) state, complex social phenomena can only be fully understood by looking at individuals' own prioritisation. In this respect, the study is important as it is one of the rare applications of Q methodology conducted on migrant students at the secondary school level in the Turkish context. Moreover, one of the unique contributions of the study is that it addresses the effects of academic competition not only on academic performance but also on multiple domains such as social identity, cultural belonging and psychological adjustment.

In conclusion, this discussion shows that migrant students' perception of academic competition manifests itself in four different ways: as a motivational force, as an unfair competition, as an area of individual responsibility or as a process in need of co-operation. These differences are shaped by a number of factors such as students' language proficiency, length of residence in Turkey, perceived social support and the identity strategies they adopt. This perspective resonates with Portes and Rumbaut's (2014) observations on immigrant identity strategies in dynamic school contexts, where access to opportunities is often mediated by both cultural adaptation processes and the selective advantages held by certain student groups. Therefore, educational policies and classroom practices for migrant students should avoid "uniform" approaches that ignore this subjective diversity.

However, the study is limited by its relatively small sample size and its focus on a single geographic region, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include larger and more diverse samples across multiple regions to explore whether similar factor structures emerge in different educational and cultural contexts. In addition, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how migrant students' perceptions of academic competition evolve over time and in response to changing educational policies and support systems.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study analysed the perceptions of students from a migrant background studying in secondary schools in Turkey about academic competition in depth with Q methodology and revealed that students have quite different and unique perspectives on this phenomenon. In line with the data obtained, four distinct patterns of thought were identified. These patterns reveal that students from a migrant background are shaped not only by academic achievement, but also by social, cultural, linguistic and psychological contexts.

The first factor reflects an approach that emphasises that competition motivates students, increases individual achievement and especially language proficiency plays a critical role in this process. Students with this view think that competition is a constructive element.

The second factor argues that academic competition creates more barriers for foreign students, individual effort may be insufficient and support mechanisms are critical.

The third factor reflects a perspective that academic success depends mainly on personal effort and that competition offers advantages only for certain students.

Finally, the fourth factor reflects the views of the participants who argued that co-operation is more effective than competition, that lack of social support challenges students and that academic success should be supported by more inclusive approaches.

All these findings suggest that migrant students need to be supported not only academically but also socially and culturally in educational environments. While the competitive environment can be a source of motivation for some students, for others it can trigger feelings of pressure, exclusion and insecurity. Therefore, it is of great importance that school environments are constructed in a way that not only favours achievement but also equality, multicultural inclusion and emotional well-being among students.

The most important contribution of this study to the field is that it demonstrates the inadequacy of approaches that treat migrant students as a homogenous group by empirically revealing the deep differences of opinion within this group. Q methodology went beyond the simple dilemma of "is competition good or bad?" and mapped the different meanings attributed to this concept and the subjective realities behind these meanings. The findings clearly illustrate how competition, which is a driving force for one student, can turn into a tool of exclusion and oppression for another. Therefore, this study underlines that educational policies and guidance services for migrant students should be designed with an individualised and inclusive philosophy that recognises these different perceptions and needs, rather than a "one-size-fits-all" model. The answer to the question "So, what to do?" is to recognise the existence of these four different student profiles and to create flexible and fair educational environments that can cater to each of them.

Recommendations in terms of Education Policies

Social Support Structures should be Strengthened: Guidance services, peer support systems and cultural awareness-based teacher training for migrant students should be increased.

Structuring Competition: Practices that encourage competition should be focused on cooperation and development to reduce the psychological burden among students.

Turkish Language Support: Since Turkish proficiency is critical in academic competition, language support programmes should be systematised.

Student views based on Q methodology: Models that are sensitive to subjective experiences should be popularised in educational environments.

This research once again reveals the necessity of policies based on students' views and emphasises the importance of justice-centred approaches that are sensitive to multicultural structure in education.

Ethical Considerations

In line with the study's ethical responsibilities, necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant school administration before the research began. As the participants were minors (under the age of 18), written informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians through a detailed "Parent/Guardian Information and Consent Form" that explained the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Additionally, the students themselves were provided with information about the research in age-appropriate language, and their verbal/written assent to participate was secured.

Participants and their guardians were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To protect participant confidentiality, all collected data were anonymized, and each participant was assigned a code (e.g., K1, K2) for reporting purposes. The collection, processing, and storage of data strictly adhered to the principles of Turkey's Personal Data Protection Law (No. 6698, KVKK) and relevant data protection regulations.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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