



Understanding Teachers' Perceptions and Knowledge of the European Union

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Abstract

This study examines Turkish teachers' perceptions and knowledge of the European Union (EU) in the context of cultural, political, and educational impacts. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 484 teachers working in Kocaeli during the 2024–2025 academic year. A validated survey instrument, including the European Union Perception Scale, was employed to evaluate anxiety, perceived contributions, and cultural concerns regarding the EU. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied for analysis.

Findings revealed a significant level of anxiety among teachers regarding the EU, with an arithmetic mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.81) on the anxiety dimension. Perceived contributions and cultural factors yielded mean scores of 3.26 (SD = 0.95) and 3.07 (SD = 1.22), respectively, indicating neutrality and uncertainty. Teachers expressed skepticism toward the EU's commitment to Turkey, with 78.9% perceiving insincerity in the prolonged membership process. Furthermore, concerns about cultural impacts were prominent, as 39.5% feared potential harm to Turkish cultural norms.

The study underscores the complex relationship between Turkey and the EU, shaped by cultural identity and geopolitical dynamics. Teachers' perspectives highlight the need for informed engagement with EU principles while preserving national traditions. These findings suggest that improving teachers' political and cultural literacy may alleviate concerns and foster constructive dialogue on EU integration.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) emerged from the aftermath of World War II with the primary goal of fostering peace and cooperation across Europe. The initial step toward this vision was the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, which sought to integrate the coal and steel industries of member nations to minimize the risk of conflict. This early collaboration paved the way for the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and a common market to promote economic integration and trade among the six founding members: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands (McCormick, 2020; Phinnemore, 2013)

The modern European Union, as we know it today, was officially established with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. This treaty expanded the EU's role beyond economic integration by introducing political cooperation and a common currency, the euro, marking a crucial step toward deeper European integration (Goebel, 2003). Over the years, the Union has expanded from its original six members to 27 countries through successive enlargements. Notably, the 2004 and 2007 expansions brought Central and Eastern European countries into the Union, enhancing regional stability and integrating these nations within a unified European framework (Cameron, 2004).

Turkey's relationship with the EU has been complex and filled with challenges. After the establishment of a customs union in 1995, Turkey began formal accession negotiations in 2005, with the aim of achieving full membership. However, this journey has been impeded by significant concerns over Turkey's compliance with EU norms, particularly in areas such as human rights, democratic principles, and economic reforms. These challenges have contributed to a slow-moving process and have led some EU member states to question the feasibility of Turkey's membership (Stivachtis, 2008; Medvec, 2009).

Although Turkey remains a candidate for EU membership, its progress has been limited. Political and social factors, such as shifts in governance and societal trends, complicate the country's ability to meet EU standards. Moreover, Turkey's strategic geopolitical position—situated between Europe and Asia—gives it a unique role in trade, security, and migration management, further complicating its integration into the EU (Küçük, 2020). One area of particular importance is Turkey's involvement in migration management. The 2016 EU-Turkey agreement, which addresses migration flows and border security, exemplifies the collaborative approach that Turkey and the EU have adopted to address these challenges (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2016).

In recent years, Turkey has increasingly used education as a key avenue to align with EU policies, aiming to bring its national framework closer to European ideals such as democratic governance, intercultural awareness, and global citizenship (Tarman, 2010). This goal is reflected in the evolving Turkish curriculum, which aims not only to improve students academically but also to instill values that echo EU principles. Teachers in Turkey play a vital role in this process, tasked with implementing EU values while navigating the country's unique cultural and historical context. This dual responsibility places educators at the center of a national debate about the extent to which Turkey should adopt European educational norms (Wilkins, Lawson, & Busher, 2010).

As Tarman (2010) observes, many Turkish educators view this alignment with EU standards as an opportunity for professional growth and pedagogical improvement. They welcome the introduction of modern, student-centered approaches that promote critical thinking, active citizenship, and democratic engagement. Through these EU-supported educational reforms, Turkish teachers see the potential to equip students for global engagement and intercultural understanding. Nevertheless, some educators express reservations, fearing that adopting EU frameworks wholesale could overlook important aspects of Turkey's own educational traditions and cultural identity.

Research by Yılmaz and Yiğit (2010) further explores this tension. Their study of pre-service social studies teachers reveals that while many educators are enthusiastic about the influence of EU educational principles, they also filter these ideals through a distinct Turkish cultural perspective. Teachers often highlight Turkey's unique position as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, which informs their views on EU values. This perspective fosters a selective approach, where educators embrace EU principles that align with Turkish educational goals while remaining mindful of the need to preserve Turkey's cultural heritage.

The challenge of balancing EU principles with Turkish traditions is especially evident in areas such as citizenship education and multiculturalism. As noted by Wilkins, Lawson, and Busher (2010), EU frameworks promote inclusivity, pluralism, and democratic participation, values that align with Turkish efforts to prepare students for a diverse and globalized world. However, Turkish educators are careful to adapt these values in ways that reflect the unique social and political landscape of Turkey. This selective integration ensures that EU ideals complement, rather than overshadow, Turkey's educational and cultural traditions.

As Turkey continues its bid for EU membership, Turkish educators will remain essential in the country's efforts to balance integration with the preservation of national identity. Their perspectives reflect both an openness to EU educational standards and a commitment to maintaining Turkey's distinct cultural framework. By engaging thoughtfully with EU principles, Turkish teachers play a central role in shaping a generation capable of navigating both European and Turkish identities.

In contrast, educators within the EU tend to view themselves as active promoters of European values, benefiting from well-established educational frameworks that reinforce EU objectives. As Wilkins, Lawson, and Busher (2010) explain, EU teachers work within a standardized system designed to nurture a unified European identity. Citizenship education, intercultural competence, and environmental sustainability are key components of EU curricula, embedded in teacher training programs across member states. In Turkey, however, educators have more flexibility in integrating EU values while preserving a distinct national identity (Wilkins, Lawson, & Busher, 2010). This distinction reflects the broader challenge faced by Turkish teachers in incorporating EU principles while respecting Turkey's own educational priorities.

Teachers in the European Union are crucial in fostering European citizenship and values, yet their perceptions of the EU vary according to national contexts, educational priorities, and the challenges of translating EU ideals into practice. As Wilkins, Lawson, and Busher (2010) note, while many EU teachers support citizenship education to promote democratic engagement, some find it difficult to adapt broad EU ideals into locally relevant classroom activities. Educators often recognize the value of EU-promoted values, but they may perceive them as overly idealistic, requiring thoughtful navigation in everyday teaching.

In Germany, for instance, teachers appreciate the EU's emphasis on unity through diversity, which supports multicultural perspectives in classrooms and aligns with Germany's goal of fostering tolerance in a diverse society (Keating & Janmaat, 2016). However, German teachers also argue that EU policies should respect national distinctiveness, as a standardized approach to education may not suit every educational context. Similarly, Fielding and Vidovich (2017) report that French educators support European citizenship education but adopt a selective approach to integrating it, balancing EU values with national ideals like liberty and equality. This cautious approach reflects teachers' desire to incorporate EU principles while maintaining their country's cultural identity.

Teachers in newer EU member states, such as Poland and Hungary, show both enthusiasm and skepticism. According to Fairbrother (2019), Polish educators see EU initiatives as an opportunity to align with Western European standards and promote democratic values. However, some educators in Eastern Europe feel that EU influence can be overly prescriptive, limiting their ability to address unique social and cultural needs. Before Brexit, British teachers expressed mixed views on the EU. While some embraced EU initiatives for promoting multiculturalism and educational collaboration, others voiced

concerns about the EU’s perceived encroachment on national sovereignty (Brooks, 2018). This ambivalence reflected broader societal divisions in the UK regarding EU membership and highlighted the challenge of balancing national identity with European integration.

Overall, teachers across the EU recognize the value of the principles of democracy and unity that the EU promotes. However, they often feel the need to adapt these ideals to their local educational contexts. This selective approach underscores the ongoing challenge of integrating European values into national curricula in ways that respect both EU integration and national identity (Wilkins, Lawson, & Busher, 2010).

Problem Statement

How can understanding teachers' perceptions of the European Union help assess the alignment of educational frameworks with EU values while addressing cultural, political, and societal concerns in Turkey?

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilized a descriptive survey design to investigate Turkish teachers' perceptions and understanding of the European Union. Descriptive surveys are instrumental in providing an objective representation of situations, whether from the past or the present (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). In this context, the descriptive survey method was employed to gather data on teachers' views concerning the cultural, political, and educational impacts of the European Union.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The study group comprised teachers working in the Kocaeli district during the 2024–2025 academic year. From this population, a purposive sample of 484 teachers was selected to ensure diversity in terms of gender, professional experience, and educational level. This diversity was deemed critical to obtaining a comprehensive and detailed understanding of teachers’ perceptions and knowledge of the European Union. The demographic profile of the sample, including gender distribution, years of professional experience, and school levels, is presented in Table 1, offering a thorough overview of the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic Distribution of the Participants*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sub-Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Gender	Male	266	55%
	Female	218	45%
Experience	0-5 years	53	11%
	11-15 years	134	27.7%
	16-20 years	87	17.9%
	6-10 years	105	21.7%
	21 years and above	105	21.7%
School Level	Primary School	123	25.4%
	High School	111	22.9%
	Preschool	20	4.1%
	Middle School	230	47.5%
Total		484	100%

As presented in Table 1, the gender distribution of the participating teachers comprises 55% male and 45% female. In terms of professional experience, 11% of the participants have 0–5 years of experience, 21.7% have 6–10 years, 27.7% have 11–15 years, 17.9% have 16–20 years, and 21.7% have over 21 years of experience. Regarding the type of school where the participants are employed, 25.4% work in primary schools, 22.9% in high schools, 4.1% in preschools, and 47.5% in middle schools.

DATA COLLECTION

The study employed a survey instrument composed of three sections, with participation from 484 individuals. The survey was designed and administered via Google Forms to ensure accessibility and efficiency. The first section gathered demographic data, including gender, professional seniority, and school type, to contextualize the responses. The second section focused on perceptions of the European Union, evaluating participants' views on its benefits, effectiveness in addressing global challenges, and their awareness of and engagement with EU-related topics. The final section utilized a validated measurement tool to assess deeper attitudinal dimensions related to the European Union.

Responses across all sections were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree," allowing for nuanced analysis of participants' perceptions and attitudes. This structured approach ensured the survey comprehensively addressed the study's objectives while maintaining methodological rigor.

DATA COLLECTION TOOL

To measure participants' perceptions of the European Union with validity and reliability, the study utilized the European Union Perception Scale, a validated tool developed by Dikmenli (2022) in the study *Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of the European Union (EU): A Scale Development Study and Perceptions Levels*. Permission was obtained to adapt this scale, which is structured into three subsections:

1. Anxiety towards the EU – measuring concerns and apprehensions related to the EU and its policies.
2. Perceived Contributions of EU Membership – assessing participants' perceptions of the economic, political, and educational benefits of EU membership.
3. Concerns Regarding Cultural Impact – evaluating apprehensions about the EU's influence on Turkey's cultural identity and values.

The European Union Perception Scale's reliability, demonstrated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .746 in its original validation, provided confidence in the accuracy and consistency of the data collected. The use of this validated tool ensured that the study maintained methodological rigor and effectively captured participants' attitudes toward the European Union.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data obtained from the survey were analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to ensure a systematic and precise evaluation. Each component of the survey was addressed using appropriate methods to align with the objectives of the research.

1. Demographic Variables

Demographic data, including participants' gender, professional seniority, and school type, were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage distributions. This approach provided a clear overview of the participants' characteristics, forming the basis for contextualizing the survey results.

2. Questionnaire Responses

Responses to the survey statements were initially recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." For clearer interpretation aligned with the research objectives, these responses were recoded into three categories: "positive" (4-5), "neutral" (3), and "negative" (1-2). Descriptive statistics, specifically frequency and percentage, were used to interpret the recoded data, highlighting key trends and patterns in participants' perceptions.

3. Scale Questions

The responses to the scale items, which were also recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, were recorded into the same categories of "positive" (4-5), "neutral" (3), and "negative" (1-2) for clarity. Additionally, arithmetic means were calculated for each dimension of the scale to provide a quantitative summary of participants' views. As displayed in Table 2, the interpretation of arithmetic means was based on predefined score intervals, with evaluations ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The table also categorizes these intervals into negative, neutral, or positive views, offering a structured framework for interpreting the data.

Arithmetic averages can be interpreted within the following intervals:

Table 2- Intervals Used in Interpreting Arithmetic Means

Score Range	Evaluation
1.00-1.80	Disagree Strongly
1.81-2.60	Disagree
2.61-3.40	Neutral
3.41-4.20	Agree
4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree

* Here, 1 represents a negative view, 2 represents a neutral view, and 3 represents a positive view.

FINDINGS

VIEWS ON THE VALUES AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

This section presents findings on teachers' responses to questions about the institutions and values of the European Union. Each question in the questionnaire is analyzed, and the results are shown using graphical charts to provide a clear and detailed understanding of the data.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they believe the European Union benefits them are presented in Figure 1.

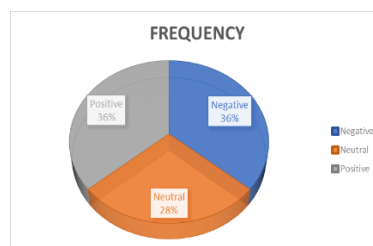


Figure 1 Distributions of the variable "Do you think the European Union benefits you personally?"

36% of the participants gave a positive opinion to the statement "Do you think the European Union benefits you personally?", 28% gave a neutral opinion and 36% gave a negative opinion. Accordingly, it can be said that most of the participants think that the European Union does not benefit them personally.

The responses of participants to the question of whether the European Union benefits their society are shown in Figure 2.

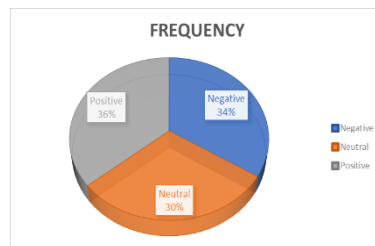


Figure 2 Distributions of the variable "Do you think the European Union benefits your society?"

36% of the participants gave a positive opinion to the statement "Do you think the European Union benefits your society?", 30% gave a neutral opinion and 34% gave a negative opinion. Accordingly, it can be said that most of the participants think that the European Union does not benefit the Turkish society.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they believe the European Union is effective in combating global problems are shown in Figure 3.

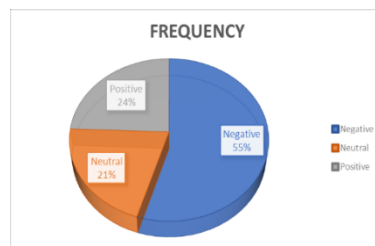


Figure 3 Distributions of the variable "How effective do you think the European Union is in combating global problems (e.g. terrorism, climate change)?"

24% of the participants responded positively to the question "How effective do you think the European Union is in combating global problems (e.g. terrorism, climate change)?", 21% responded neutrally, and 55% responded negatively. Accordingly, it can be stated that most participants think that the European Union does not benefit Turkey in terms of combating global problems such as international terrorism and climate change.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they know how European Union institutions work are shown in Figure 4.

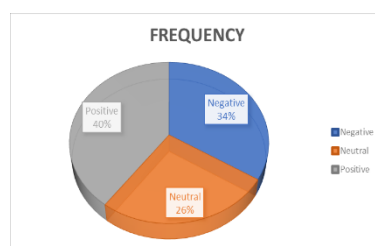


Figure 4 Distributions of the variable "Do you know how the European Union institutions work?"

40% of the participants responded positively to the statement "Do you know how the European Union institutions work?", 26% were neutral, and 34% expressed a negative opinion. Accordingly, it can be stated that a large majority of the participants are not knowledgeable about how the European Union institutions operate.

The responses of participants to the question of how often they seek information about the European Union are shown in Figure 5.

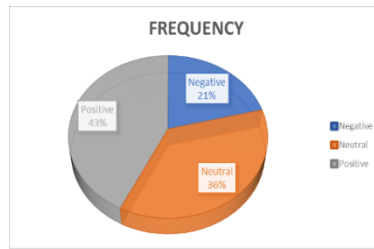


Figure 5 Distributions of the variable "How often do you seek information about the European Union?"

43% of the participants responded positively to the statement "How often do you seek information about the European Union?", 36% were neutral, and 21% expressed negative views. Accordingly, it can be stated that most of the participants does not frequently try to obtain information about the European Union.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they believe it would be helpful for their institution to provide more information about the European Union are shown in Figure 6.

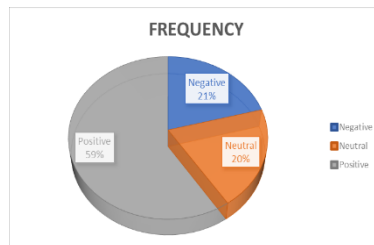


Figure 6 Distributions of the variable "Do you think it would be helpful for your institution to provide you with more information about the European Union?"

59% of the participants responded positively to the statement, "Do you think it would be helpful for your institution to provide you with more information about the European Union?" 20% were neutral, and 21% expressed a negative opinion. Accordingly, it can be stated that most participants feel informed about the European Union by their institutions.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they would like to know more about the European Union and its institutions are shown in Figure 7.

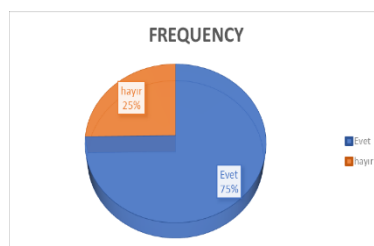


Figure 7 Distributions of the variable "Would you like to know more about the European Union and its institutions?"

75% of the participants answered "Yes" to the question, "Would you like to know more about the European Union and its institutions?" while 25% answered "No." Accordingly, it can be stated that a large majority of the participants want to obtain information about the European Union and its institutions.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they think it is important for their institution to provide information about different cultures in Europe are shown in Figure 8.

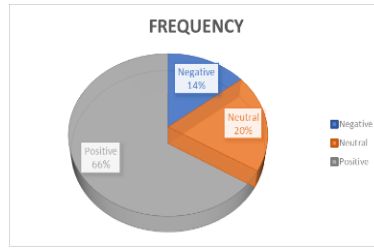


Figure 8 Distributions of the variable "Do you think it is important for your institution to provide information about different cultures in Europe?"

66% of the participants expressed a positive view on the statement "Do you think it is important for your institution to provide information about different cultures in Europe?", while 20% were neutral and 14% expressed a negative view. Accordingly, it can be stated that the vast majority of participants wish to be informed by their institutions about the cultural studies of the European Union.

The responses of participants to the question of whether they have friends from other EU nations are shown in Figure 9.

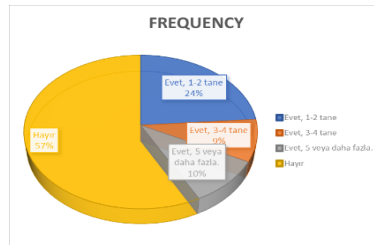


Figure 9 Distributions of the variables "Do you have friends from other EU nations?"

57% of the participants responded "No" to the statement "Do you have friends from other EU nations?" while 24% answered "Yes, 1-2," 9% answered "Yes, 3-4," and 10% answered "Yes, 5 or more." Accordingly, it can be stated that most of the participants does not have friends from other EU nations.

FINDINGS OF THE SCALE

This section presents the findings from the scale measuring participants' attitudes and perceptions towards the European Union, using The Scale for Perceptions of the EU developed by Yurdal Dikmenli (2022). A detailed discussion of these findings will follow to provide a comprehensive analysis of the participants' views on Turkey's relationship with the European Union. Table 3 represents the frequency and percentage distributions of participants' responses to each statement of the scale.

Table 3. Teacher candidates' perceptions of the European union

Statement		Negative	Neutral	Positive
1. I do not believe that the EU has a positive attitude towards Turkey's membership.	<i>f</i>	87	68	329
	<i>%</i>	18.0	14.0	68.0
2. I think EU countries manipulate the policies in Turkey by using its membership procedures as an excuse.	<i>f</i>	50	55	379
	<i>%</i>	10.3	11.4	78.3

3. I think some EU members exhibit hostile attitudes towards Turkey.	<i>f</i>	44	52	388
	%	9.1	10.7	80.2
4. I think some EU countries (such as Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration) will impose hardship on Turkey.	<i>f</i>	33	70	381
	%	6.8	14.5	78.7
5. I believe that the EU countries ignore Turkey's interests because they do not extradite the offenders to Turkey.	<i>f</i>	43	67	374
	%	8.9	13.8	77.3
6. I believe that some EU countries' attrition campaigns and negative political discourses on Turkey have negatively influenced the membership process.	<i>f</i>	48	85	351
	%	9.9	17.6	72.5
7. I do not believe that the EU keeps its promises to Turkey.	<i>f</i>	52	56	376
	%	10.7	11.6	77.7
8. I believe that EU countries support terrorist activities in Turkey.	<i>f</i>	47	94	343
	%	9.7	19.4	70.9
9. I do not believe that EU countries pay special attention to sensitive issues in Turkey, such as terrorist organizations or the so-called Armenian Genocide	<i>f</i>	44	52	388
	%	9.1	10.7	80.2
10. I think there are mutual conflicts because the EU tries to manipulate Turkey's foreign policy.	<i>f</i>	42	81	361
	%	8.7	16.7	74.6
11. Turkey's prolonged membership adventure proves the member countries' insincere towards Turkey.	<i>f</i>	47	55	382
	%	9.7	11.4	78.9
12. I do not think the EU accepts Turkey as a European country.	<i>f</i>	35	41	408
	%	7.2	8.5	84.3
13. I believe that my welfare will be greater if Turkey becomes a member of the EU.	<i>f</i>	116	133	235
	%	24	27.5	48.6
14. I believe that everything will be better if Turkey becomes a member of the EU.	<i>f</i>	147	160	177
	%	30.4	33.1	36.6
15. I think unemployment will decrease if Turkey becomes a member of the EU.	<i>f</i>	137	152	195
	%	28.3	31.4	40.3
16. I am sure that Turkey will be a stronger country if it becomes a member of the EU.	<i>f</i>	124	124	236
	%	25.6	25.6	48.8
17. I think Turkey's membership will contribute significantly to the security of the EU.	<i>f</i>	94	119	271
	%	19.4	24.6	56
	<i>f</i>	124	101	259

18. To me, the EU symbolizes development.	%	25.6	20.9	53.5
19. I think EU membership will damage the family institution in Turkey.	<i>f</i>	176	112	196
	%	36.4	23.1	40.5
20. I think EU membership will negatively affect Turkish cultural norms and values.	<i>f</i>	182	111	191
	%	37.6	22.9	39.5

As may be understood in Table 3, a significant proportion of participants expressed strong opinions regarding Turkey's potential membership in the European Union. For instance, 18% of participants held a negative view, 14% were neutral, and 68% expressed a positive opinion on the statement, "I do not believe that the EU has a positive attitude towards Turkey's membership," indicating that the majority perceive the EU as having a negative attitude towards Turkey's accession process. Similarly, the statement "I think EU countries manipulate the policies in Turkey by using its membership procedures as an excuse" elicited 10.3% negative, 11.4% neutral, and 78.3% positive responses, with the majority believing that EU countries manipulate Turkey's policies using its membership negotiations as leverage. A similar trend was observed in responses to the statement "I think some EU members exhibit hostile attitudes towards Turkey," where 9.1% expressed a negative opinion, 10.7% were neutral, and 80.2% believed that certain EU members hold hostile attitudes towards Turkey. Additionally, 6.8% of participants held a negative view, 14.5% were neutral, and 78.7% expressed a positive opinion about the statement, "I think some EU countries (such as Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration) will impose hardship on Turkey," highlighting a significant concern regarding the potential challenges Turkey might face from specific EU countries.

Furthermore, 8.9% of participants disagreed, 13.8% were neutral, and 77.3% agreed with the statement, "I believe that the EU countries ignore Turkey's interests because they do not extradite the offenders to Turkey." This shows a belief that the EU disregards Turkey's interests, particularly in matters of extradition. Regarding the influence of political discourse, 9.9% disagreed, 17.6% were neutral, and 72.5% agreed that "some EU countries' attrition campaigns and negative political discourses on Turkey have negatively influenced the membership process." The majority feel that such campaigns have hindered Turkey's progress in joining the EU. A similar pattern emerged for the statement, "I do not believe that the EU keeps its promises to Turkey," with 10.7% negative, 11.6% neutral, and 77.7% positive responses, reinforcing the perception that the EU fails to fulfill its commitments to Turkey. Additionally, 9.7% of participants disagreed, 19.4% were neutral, and 70.9% agreed with the statement, "I believe that EU countries support terrorist activities in Turkey," suggesting concerns about EU countries' involvement in activities perceived as detrimental to Turkey's security.

On matters related to sensitive issues, 9.1% of participants disagreed, 10.7% were neutral, and 80.2% agreed that "EU countries do not pay special attention to sensitive issues in Turkey, such as terrorist organizations or the so-called Armenian Genocide," reflecting a belief that the EU overlooks critical issues affecting Turkey. Similarly, 8.7% disagreed, 16.7% were neutral, and 74.6% agreed that "there are mutual conflicts because the EU tries to manipulate Turkey's foreign policy," indicating a perception of tension arising from EU interference in Turkey's foreign relations. Regarding the prolonged membership process, 9.7% disagreed, 11.4% were neutral, and 78.9% agreed that "Turkey's prolonged membership adventure proves the member countries' insincerity towards Turkey," suggesting a widespread view of EU member countries' lack of sincerity in supporting Turkey's EU ambitions.

In contrast, when asked about the EU's acceptance of Turkey as a European country, 7.2% disagreed, 8.5% were neutral, and 84.3% agreed, with most participants feeling that the EU does not consider Turkey to be part of Europe. On a more optimistic note, 24% of participants disagreed, 27.5% were

neutral, and 48.6% believed that “my welfare will be greater if Turkey becomes a member of the EU,” suggesting some positive expectations about the benefits of EU membership. Similarly, 30.4% disagreed, 33.1% were neutral, and 36.6% agreed with the statement, “I believe that everything will be better if Turkey becomes a member of the EU,” reflecting a mix of uncertainty and optimism about the potential advantages of EU membership. Regarding employment, 28.3% disagreed, 31.4% were neutral, and 40.3% agreed that “unemployment will decrease if Turkey becomes a member of the EU,” indicating that while many were uncertain, a substantial number believed that EU membership could help reduce unemployment. Furthermore, 25.6% disagreed, 25.6% were neutral, and 48.8% agreed with the statement, “I am sure that Turkey will be a stronger country if it becomes a member of the EU,” highlighting a belief in the strengthening potential of EU membership.

Additionally, 19.4% disagreed, 24.6% were neutral, and 56% agreed that “Turkey's membership will contribute significantly to the security of the EU,” suggesting that most participants view Turkey’s membership as a positive contribution to EU security. Meanwhile, 25.6% disagreed, 20.9% were neutral, and 53.5% agreed with the statement, “To me, the EU symbolizes development,” reflecting the view that the EU represents progress and growth. However, a significant portion of participants, 36.4%, disagreed, 23.1% were neutral, and 40.5% agreed with the statement, “I think EU membership will damage the family institution in Turkey,” showing concerns about the social impact of EU integration. Similarly, 37.6% disagreed, 22.9% were neutral, and 39.5% agreed that “EU membership will negatively affect Turkish cultural norms and values,” suggesting that the majority of participants feared a negative impact on Turkey’s cultural identity due to EU membership.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 4. *Teacher Candidates’ Perceptions of the European Union*

Factors	N	Descriptive Statistics			
		Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Anxiety	484	1.00	5.00	4.00	.81
Contribution	484	1.00	5.00	3.26	.95
Culture	484	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.22

*Here is a scale from 1-5 (1=I strongly disagree; 2=I disagree; 3=I am undecided; 4=I agree; 5=I strongly agree).

As presented in Table 4, the arithmetic mean of the participants' scores for the anxiety factor is $M = 4.00$ ($SD = 0.81$), corresponding to the response category "I agree." This finding indicates that the teachers participating in the study experience a significant level of anxiety regarding the European Union. Similarly, the mean score for the contribution factor is $M = 3.26$ ($SD = 0.95$), which aligns with the response category "I am undecided." This indicates that the participants are uncertain about whether the European Union has made or could potentially make positive contributions to Turkey. Additionally, the mean score for the cultural factor is $M = 3.07$ ($SD = 1.22$), also classified as "I am undecided." This result implies that the participants remain uncertain about whether the European Union will have a positive impact on Turkey's cultural and family structure.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions and knowledge of Turkish teachers regarding the European Union (EU) in cultural, political, and educational contexts. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected from 484 teachers in the Kocaeli district during the 2024–2025 academic year. The European Union Perception Scale, a validated instrument measuring anxiety, perceived contributions, and cultural concerns, was utilized to gather data. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale

and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The study aimed to understand how teachers view the EU and its relevance to Turkey's potential membership, focusing on implications for education and cultural identity.

The results reveal a nuanced and multifaceted perception of the EU among Turkish teachers. Anxiety toward the EU was prevalent, with an arithmetic mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.81), indicating high levels of concern. A significant portion of participants (78.9%) perceived the EU's approach to Turkey's membership as insincere, attributing this view to unfulfilled promises, perceived political manipulations, and prolonged negotiations. These findings are consistent with McCormick (2020) and Phinnemore (2013), who emphasize the geopolitical tensions and historical complexities in Turkey-EU relations. Additionally, 70.9% of participants believed that the EU indirectly supports activities that undermine Turkey's security, further fueling anxiety and mistrust.

Perceptions regarding the EU's contributions were marked by uncertainty, as reflected in the mean score of 3.26 (SD = 0.95). While 56% of participants acknowledged the potential for Turkey's EU membership to enhance security within the Union, only 40.3% believed it could alleviate unemployment. Furthermore, 48.6% associated EU membership with improved welfare, and 53.5% viewed the EU as a symbol of development. These findings align with Fairbrother (2019), who highlighted that optimism regarding EU contributions is often tempered by concerns over political and economic asymmetries.

Cultural concerns emerged prominently, with a mean score of 3.07 (SD = 1.22) for this dimension. A considerable proportion of participants (39.5%) expressed fears that EU membership might erode Turkish cultural norms and values, while 40.5% worried about potential harm to family structures. These concerns are supported by Wilkins, Lawson, and Busher (2010), who noted that educators often navigate tensions between embracing EU values and preserving national traditions. Participants with higher cultural literacy demonstrated lower levels of anxiety and a more positive outlook on the EU, suggesting that informed perspectives mitigate fears related to cultural identity.

The study also revealed demographic differences in perceptions. Male participants reported higher anxiety and perceived contributions compared to female teachers, aligning with Baldwin's (1995) findings on gendered variations in attitudes toward international relations. Teachers from Turkish education departments exhibited significantly higher anxiety levels than their counterparts in social studies and mathematics departments, possibly reflecting the emphasis placed on national identity and cultural preservation in their curricula.

Knowledge and engagement with the EU presented a mixed picture. Although 75% of participants expressed a desire to learn more about the EU and 59% believed their institutions should provide more information, only 43% actively sought such knowledge. This gap between interest and engagement highlights a need for institutional support to promote informed understanding. Teachers with higher political and cultural literacy were less anxious and more optimistic about EU membership, supporting Fairbrother's (2019) assertion that literacy plays a critical role in shaping constructive attitudes.

In conclusion, Turkish teachers' perceptions of the EU are shaped by a complex interplay of skepticism, anxiety, and cautious optimism. While concerns about cultural preservation and the sincerity of EU commitments dominate their perspectives, the findings also indicate an undercurrent of optimism regarding the potential benefits of EU integration. Addressing gaps in political and cultural literacy is essential to enabling teachers to navigate the challenges of aligning EU principles with Turkey's unique educational and cultural priorities.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions can be made for practitioners and future researchers:

- Targeted programs to enhance political and cultural literacy among teachers could be implemented, fostering a more balanced understanding of the EU's principles and potential benefits.
- Tailored workshops to address educators' concerns about cultural preservation could be offered while equipping them with strategies to integrate EU ideals into their teaching.
- Campaigns could be launched to inform teachers and the public about the socio-economic and cultural benefits of EU integration while dispelling prevalent misconceptions.
- A culturally sensitive curricula could be designed which incorporates EU values, such as democracy and inclusivity, while preserving Turkey's unique heritage.
- Longitudinal studies could be carried out to track changes in perceptions over time and evaluate the impact of educational interventions on attitudes toward the EU.

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