HOW DOES MESKHETIAN TURK’S CULTURE AFFECT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: WHAT DOES HELP?

Thesis

Submitted to

The School of Education and Allied Professions of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Science in Early Childhood Education

By

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Dayton, OH

August, 2012
HOW DOES MESKHETIAN TURK’S CULTURE AFFECT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: WHAT DOES HELP?

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the study was to explain the history, culture, and characteristic of Meskhetian Turks and investigate the relationship between their culture and academic success. Ethnography, which is a qualitative design, was used for this research. The data was collected through field-work, informal observations, and interviews with a teacher and a parent.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The immigrant population in the United States has recently reached significant numbers. With this increasing, the diverse population in schools is also growing rapidly. The percentage of students, enrolled in public schools, in the United States who are English Language Learners (ELL) is 8%, or an estimated 3.7 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In the state of Ohio less than 4% are ELL. The percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home is 6.3% in Ohio and 3.9% in the city of Dayton (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Based on the resources and capacities of cities, Meskhetian Turks have resettled in the United States as refugees (Aydıngün, Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, & Swerdlow, 2006). There are 240 Meskhetian families, also called Ahiska Turks, currently living in Dayton, Ohio (Page, 2011). Their mother tongue, Turkish, is often used in Eastern Anatolia. The language has changed over time and accepted new words from other languages (Aydıngün et al., 2006). Outside of the home, Meskhetian Turks speak mostly, English at work or school, while at home they speak Turkish or Russian.

This research is intended to explain the history, culture, and the characteristics of Meskhetian Turks and investigate the relationship between their culture and academic success. This study is separated into three parts; first, an exploration of their history, and then how their history shaped their culture. Second, an explanation of how the culture and
education are related. Finally, discovering how Meskhetian Turk students’ culture affects their academic achievement in Dayton, Ohio.
CHAPTER II
OVERVIEW OF MESKHETIAN TURKS HISTORY

Meskhetian Turks have suffered a great deal in the past. They were deported from Georgia, faced discrimination and pogroms (massacres) in Uzbekistan, and were challenged with human right issues in Russia. After all of these hard times, they came to resettle in the United States (Aydingün, et al., 2006). Because of a lack of identity, they have never traveled from one place to another freely or lived in one place for an extended period of time. They are often called Meskhetian Turks in literature; however they call themselves Ahıska (Aa-hes-kah) Turks, a reference to the largest city in their homeland in southern Georgia (Aydingun et al., 2006).

Origin and Homeland of Meskhetian Turks

The origin of Meskhetian Turks is Meskheti-Dzhavakhtei, an area in Georgia (Mirkhanova, 2006) that borders with Turkey. The surface area of Meskhetia is about 3.728 square miles. Because of the harsh weather in the area, this region is often referred to as Georgia’s Siberia (Minehan, 2002).
Map 1. Meskhetia and major cities

Source: (Administrative map of the country of Georgia, 2008)

Their ethnic identity and historic origins have always been a debated issue. According to Georgian sources, Meskhetian Turks appeared in Georgia during Ottoman assault in 1578. During that time people who had lived in the region were Meskhs, a Georgian tribe. After their conversion to Islam, they started to speak Turkish under Ottoman rule and ultimately they were labeled as Turks (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Despite Georgian view, Turkish sources argue that Meskhetian Turks had resided there prior to the Ottoman time. They suggest that during the 11th and 12th century, Georgia faced attacks from Turkic tribes. In fact, during that time, Georgian King David IV asked for help from their biggest conflicting tribe, Kipchak Turks, to defend this territory from attacks (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

There is another theory between these two contrary theories. According to scholar Alexander Osipov, there were both Turk Muslims and the Georgians (who were
converted to the Islam unwillingly). According to the Islam laws, land owning was prohibited for non-Muslims. For the Georgians, the best thing to do was to convert to Islam and ultimately own property. (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

After Soviets forces gained control over Georgia in 1921, they affirmed various perspectives for Meskhetian Turks. Firstly, Soviet authorities thought that these Meskhetian people were Turkish speaking Georgians and they allowed Turkish teaching at schools. Then, from 1926 to 1935, they changed their view; Meskhetian people were either Muslim Turks or Tyurki (Turkic). After 1935, they started to call them Azeris, who were from Azerbaijan, and with this new perspective they started to teach Azerbaijani at the schools. Around World War II, Soviet authorities changed their perspective to their original perspective and labeled Meskhetian people as Georgians again. Whatever Soviets called these people, the reality was that they were deported suddenly from their homeland (Aydıngun et al., 2006).

**Deportation from Homeland**

Stalin’s biggest fear was the division of Soviet Union into various nationalities. After 1934, he started to label nationalities according to their loyalty. Lavrenti Beria, who was the most trustable man to Stalin, created the solution of deporting nationalities, labeling them as potentially disloyal. Beginning with eight major nationalities (Meskhetian Turks, Volga Germans, Karachai, Kalmyks, Chechen, Ingush, Balkars and Crimean Tatars) exiles began (Aydıngun et al., 2006; Mirkhanova, 2006).

Soviet forces acted immediately, and forced 100,000 Meskhetian Turks from their region. They confiscated their properties, placed them in cattle cars and sent them to
either Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Uzbekistan between November 15 to 17, 1944 (Aydingün et al., 2006).

*Map 2. Countries that Meskhetian Turks were exiled*

A Meskhetian Turk explained the events:

> Before the 1944 deportation, our people lived and worked peacefully in South Georgia, on the border with Turkey. We faced a misfortune on November 14, 1944. While our fathers and brothers struggling in a war defending their Motherland, their wives, children, and grandparents were herded into cold freight carts and forcefully relocated to what was to them unknown lands. Since that time we have been granted and underserved stereotype of an enemy population. (Mirkhanova, 2006, p. 35-36)
Many people died during the month long travel in freight cars. One person recounted the experience:

At 4 a.m., four soldiers came into our house and said we had one hour to pack. We were not told where we would be sent. About 120 families were loaded into one freight car. We traveled 18 days and nights to Central Asia. Many died of typhoid. At each stop they would unload the dead. (Aydingün et al., 2006, p. 6)

During the deportations to Central Asia many Meskhetian Turks died from cold and hunger. With the deportation and during the first few years of resettlement an additional 15% to 20% of their population was lost. Most Meskhetian Turks worked in farms, which were the only place they were permitted to be employed. They had to get permission if they want to travel and had to go to the police station to sign documents to prove that they were in the city. Some of them were not welcomed, and most of them faced discrimination and deprivation. Within a few years, with both hard work and high self-esteem they started to build or purchase their own houses (Aydingün et al., 2006; Sumbadze, 2002).

With Stalin’s death, things started to change with the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev. He allowed some deported nationalities (i.e. Chechens and Ingush) to return to their own homeland. Meskhetian Turks were not as lucky, for multiple reasons, first during the Cold War era, the Meskhetia region became a very important point, it was the border between Soviet Russia and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Second, after Meskhetian Turks were deported from their homeland, Armenians were resettled in the region. (Aydingün et al., 2006).
Meskhetian Turks tried, despite being labeled untrustworthy people, to preserve their cultural identity under the harsh regime in Central Asia. In order to preserve their culture, they tended to live in close proximity to each other in the regions where they were forced to live. Often they were living close to others who were from the same village in their homeland (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Deportation from Central Asia and New Home

There were no important changes until late 1980’s among Meskhetian Turks who were living in Uzbekistan. In the late 1980’s, a massacre broke out. Khalima, a witness of those days, cries: “Allah (God) is my witness, we never feuded with them. My entire childhood I lived alongside Uzbeks. Went to school with them, then worked and celebrated with them, visited in each other’s homes” (Shevchenko, 2010, p. 55). With the raising nationalism idea in the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan, a pogrom broke out in 1989. The real reason has never been given, but approximately 100 Meskhetian Turks were killed and hundreds were wounded (Aydıngün, 1999).
Map 3. Second Deportation Map

Source: (Regional Map of Caucasus and Central Asia, 2009)

An interview was given by one witness many years after the 1989 events:

Uzbek crowds appeared on the streets and they were throwing stones and threatening people... We became very afraid when we heard that in other places they (Uzbeks) were burning houses and killing people, so we fled... We left in such a hurry that we had no time to collect any possessions. We did not even take our documents... It was devastating to leave. With hard work people had built a nice life and we had to leave with nothing. (Aydingün et al., 2006, p. 8)

Some believed that actions were planned, another witness of those days explains:

The government let the Uzbeks do what they want. The wounded Turks were asking for the help of the police (Russian mainly) who were saying that they
could not do anything since they had not received any orders. Once they realized that the Uzbeks had finished with us, they helped us in order to give impression that the Russians are our allies. They took us to the military polygon saying that they could not protect us elsewhere and mentioned that if the Uzbeks attacked us in the polygon, we could beat the soldier waiting near the weapon store who already knows that he has to quit the store if the Ahıskə Turks come. In such a case they said we could do what we wanted to protect ourselves. We were surprised since it was the Russian soldiers who some weeks before had collected all the weapons we had. Since all the Turks were not registered as such, some were registered as Uzbek, some others as Azeri; they marked the houses where Turks were living and the number of people in the household while collecting the weapons. (Aydıngün, 1999, para. 11)

The result of the pogrom was a disappointment for Meskhetian Turks. Around 17,000 Meskhetian Turks were deported from the Fergana Valley immediately to Russia by the Soviet Army. The remaining 70,000 Turks who were living in the other parts of the Uzbekistan moved to Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan on their own (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

A new life was started again for the Meskhetian Turks after exiling from Uzbekistan to the Russian region of Krasnodar. As it has been documented in other parts of Russia, Meskhetian Turks were accepted as legal residents and many of them became citizens. However in Krasnodar, the local governance refused to accept 13,000 Meskhetian Turks as residents (Aydıngun et al., 2006; Mirkhanova, 2006). One of the Meskhetian Turks, Ilyas told of those days:
Soon after our arrival, we managed to buy a house in Krasnodar. The Greeks and Tatars were leaving at that time and sold their houses to us for cheap. We had some money because the Uzbek government bought our houses. The conditions in Krasnodar were terrible. There was no gas. We had to start our lives from the very beginning. The first two years we were allowed to drive our cars with Uzbek plates. Then after the collapse of Soviet Union they gave us special car plates, which started with the letters KKZ. This was a good way for the militia to recognize Turks and asked them for money. Then they changed the plates to a yellow color, which helped them identify us from a distance. After 1996 they stopped issuing plates for Turks. Every 45 days we had to pay 288 rubles so we could live there. (Mirkhanova, 2006, p. 39)

Non-Slavic people, like Meskhetian Turks were marginalized and became stateless people. The Russian government denied them propiska (residency permit and record of migration).

Without a propiska the Meskhetian Turks could not own property, work legally, obtain a passport or other personal documents of identification, attend public institutions of higher education, register marriages and the births of their children, and gain access to social security pensions or healthcare benefits (Aydingün et al., 2006, p. 9).

Since 1991, Meskhetian Turk children despite being born in Krasnodar have been denied their right to have birth certificates. Meskhetian Turks have also been forced to attend segregated schools based on the premise that they were unwilling to learn Russian (Aydingün et al., 2006). Discrimination against Meskhetian Turks was not the only
problem; they were also victims of violent attacks by Cossack organizations. For 15 years, thousands of attacks occurred; many of which had the official support from the authorities who were working as law enforcement.

A Meskhetian Turk explained those terrifying days:

You wake up in the morning and you are immediately afraid. You not only fear going out into the street, but also worry about being visited by the police, or Cossack groups, who do nothing but demand bribes and harass you… You try to leave home as infrequently as possible. When you must go out to shop, or for some other task, you always worry about being stopped… The authorities do not accept our Soviet era documents… They say that we must have Russian documents. When we try to explain reasons that we do not have proper documents, they do not care. Their reply is either go away or die. (Aydıngün et al., 2006, p. 11)

When Krasnodar authorities began to prevent Meskhetian Turks from working in farms, anxiety reached an all time high. In response to the worsened conditions, 40 people organized a 40-day hunger strike as a declaration to the deportable conditions and a means of helping raise awareness to the violated human rights of the Meskhetian Turks. (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

**International Attention**

Repatriation to Georgia was an important issue for international organizations. A conference was coordinated by multiple international organizations to find a solution to displaced people from their homeland during Soviet Union regime. With Georgia’s entry to the European Council, Georgia initially agreed to repatriate Meskhetian Turks.
However, authorities denied accepting Meskhetian Turks, based on the situation that Armenians were resettled in the Meskhetian Turks region (Aydingün et al., 2006). International organizations did not pay as much attention to the human rights issue in Krasnodar as they did to the repatriation issue. Finally, in 2004, the United States joined the international effort and offered a refugee program to Meskhetian Turks (Aydingün et al., 2006).

Resettlement in the United States

The problem in Krasnodar reached a pinnacle; the United States gave a hand for those people who had suffered. Around 9,000 Meskhetian Turks, who had been living and facing discrimination in Krasnodar, were eligible for the resettlement program (Mirkhanova, 2006). Meskhetian Turks resettled in over 30 states; along with the District of Columbia resettlement occurred in “Pennsylvania (785 individuals), and Georgia (623)... Other sizable populations are found in Washington (590), Illinois (508), Kentucky (499), Arizona (497), Idaho (471), Texas (417), Virginia (417), New York (394), and Colorado (365)” (Aydingün et al., 2006, p. 26). After 60 years from deportation from their homeland, Meskhetian Turks finally found a permanent home and a new identity. One of the first Meskhetian Turks who came to the United States explained his experiences:

On March 1st 2004, I submitted my documents and on February 4th 2005 we departed from Krasnodar to St. Louis. I feel like I am at home here in St Louis. We are the people with no homeland. Our parents claim Georgia to be our homeland because they were born there. But nobody wants us there. Uzbekistan kicked us out and Russia hates us. I truly hope that my children will be happy
Do you know what homeland is for me? A homeland for me is a place where my children are happy. I hope that America is our last destination.

(Mirkhanova, 2006, p. 42, 43)

For some, the experience was presented as a parallel to the immigration of Jews to the United States. A case worker explained the parallel:

When I began working with the Meskhetian Turks, I was reminded of the Jews who immigrated to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. These were individuals who, like the Meskhetians of Krasnodar, knew that there was no country for them to return to if things became difficult. Therefore, they strove even harder than all the others. In addition, like the Jews who maintained their faith underground in the Soviet period, the Meskhetian Turks have had to maintain a double life, with many identities. This trait has helped them to master several languages and is making learning English for them. They are used to dealing with hardship and are very disciplined. These qualities will help them succeed here.

(Aydıngün et al., 2006, p. 26)
CHAPTER III

OVERVIEW OF MESKHElian TURKS’ CULTURE

Cultures have to be both dynamic as well as open to change for cultural survival (Aydingün et al., 2006). Before deportation Meskhetian Turks had no idea about ethnic differences and its’ effects (Aydingün, 2002). They had never thought about their ethnicity or culture; no one thought that someday they would have to work very hard in order to preserve their culture. They had to learn how that feels with deportation from their homelands; a religious and cultural awareness appeared within the Meskhetian Turks (Cetinkaya & Kodan, 2012).

Meskhetian Turks are originally Sunni Muslims; but because of the Soviet’s assimilation strategy they are not strict to their religion. They keep practicing circumcision, most of them fast during Ramadan, and they do not eat pork. Meskhetian females tend to be more religious than males; however this can differ within communities. Like other Muslims, Meskhetian Turks celebrate two big events in a year, Ramazan Bayramı (Ramadan Festival), and Kurban Bayramı (Festival of Sacrifices). These two events do not have definite dates because they are defined according to the lunar calendar. (Aydingün et al., 2006).
Family and relationships with relatives have an important place in Meskhetian Turks’ culture. They use many words to describe family members and relatives, and most of them cannot be translated to English; for example they have special names for the brother of the father and the brother of the mother, which in the English language has one word, uncle. They like to know their ancestors, thus when they give names to their children they use rhyme” such as Sarvar, Dzhafar, Nufar, Zufar, and Anvar” (Aydıngün et al., 2006, p.17).

Family has a main cultural role in Meskhetian Turks’ culture; with deportation from their homeland and faced discrimination in Uzbekistan, family became more essential. The importance of the marriage is Meskhetian culture is unquestionable. Elders arrange most of the marriages, and they avoid relative marriages, and mixed marriages; they do not encourage marriage with a Muslim who is outside the community. The bride’s family is as important as the groom’s, and the bride and the groom respect both families equally. Meskhetian Turk families tend to live all together. Grandparents, parents and the children live together in one house. Most of the couples have more than two children. Like other Turkish cultures, parents live with the youngest son of the family in Meskhetian Turk culture (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

The toy (wedding) has numerous traditions within it. It begins with a formal proposal between two families and continues with nişan (engagement). Nişan time is various but it is no longer than two years. There is a specific drink for this day, şerbet. Families decide a toy day after drinking şerbet. Toy begins with a cortege from the home of the groom to the bride’s residence. The cortege length depends on the groom’s relatives and friends. In some cases there are hundreds of cars in the cortege. The bride
comes to the door in a white dress with her father and Mullah reads a prayer. Then the groom takes the bride and the cortege returns to the groom’s house. The cortege is welcomed in the groom’s house with music and then with prayers. Before the bride enters the house she breaks some plates for good luck. Then she enters the home, sits in a chair and a baby is handed to the bride. It is a belief that she is going to have babies based on the good luck brought by the holding of the baby. The toy starts with dances, and foods. The number of guest attending typically range in the hundreds, with men and women sitting separately. During the toy everyone presents their gifts to either the bride or the groom. The last dance is demonstrated by the bride and the groom and the toy finishes (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Because of deportations and modernization, traditional Meskhetian Turk dress and crafts have nearly been forgotten. Meskhetian females used to wear a shawl, silver belt, and scarf. Today nearly all of the Meskhetian Turks especially who live in the United States wear modern clothes. A few elderly religious men continue to wear Muslim caps (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Many Meskhetian Turks have lost their contact with Turkey and the Turkish language after deportation from Georgia. However, they have never forgotten their dialect of Turkish and have passed on the language from generation to generation. After deportation from Uzbekistan, some Meskhetian Turks moved to Turkey, and reestablished their connections with Turkey. With resettlement in the United States many of the Meskhetian Turks, now American citizens with American passports, are able to travel back to Turkey. Also, the number of Turkish communities in the Unites States has
been increasing recently. With all of these, the language of Meskhetian Turks’ has started to become the standard dialect in Turkey (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Meskhetian Turks who live in the United States can speak multiple languages (Turkish, Russian, and one other language such as, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, or Uzbek). It depends on where they lived after deportation from Georgia. They used to speak Russian in Krasnodar in order to communicate with the people, thus their Russian is often more fluent. Meskhetian Turks are an example of people that were not assimilated by the Soviet Union; they used their language as a tool in order to preserve their culture (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Before Meskhetian Turks were deported from Georgia, they were labeled Turkish speaking Georgians, and allowed to teach Turkish at schools When they were later labeled as Azeri people they started to teach Azeri. After the deportation they had to learn the languages where they lived. The Soviet Union also forced them to learn Russian. After dissolution of the Soviet Union, every nation started to use their own language in their schools, and Meskhetian Turks sent their children to the schools where the education was given in the local language (Aydıngün et al., 2006).

Many Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar either were educated in segregated schools or faced discrimination. They did not receive a proper education and they did not have a chance to attend higher education because Krasnodar authorities did not register them as residents. Despite this, Meskhetian Turks whose ages are between 35 and 55 could attend higher education in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (Aydıngün et al., 2006).
CHAPTER IV

CULTURE: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Researchers have deeply studied culture and its impacts on education (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1997). Culture is the total value of one group’s historical acting, beliefs, and traditions. Culture which passes through generations establishes a way of living with morals, customs, and traditions (Damen, 1987; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Parham, 2002; Parsons, 1949). According to Nieto (2000) culture is “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (p.139). Culture then by definition, can’t be simplified by basic customs. For the Meskhetian Turks, this means that their culture cannot be defined by only Turkish culture. Over the years, they moved from one place to another, and tried to adjust to the new cultures and languages.

We cannot narrow the definition of culture to holidays, foods, or dances (Nieto, 2010). Banks (1989) assert that:

Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a
culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies. (p. 13)

Learning and culture affect each other; when children start school they bring adopted skills to the educational system with them such as, way of communication, language, and behavior (Saville-Troike, 1978). Parenting styles and family structures are affected by the cultural values and traditions and affect students’ learning experiences (Educational Research Service, 2003). The Meskhetian Turk students come to school with two languages but no English. In addition to their lack of English they faced discrimination at schools before coming to the United States, thus were behind in their education. Despite these disadvantages their parents try to support their education as much as they can. Both these factors affect their way of learning. In the theoretical framework of many researchers, culture has an essential place in education. As such, according to Erickson (1997), culture is imperative to education:

Culture as it is more or less visible and invisible to its users, is profoundly involved in the processes and contents of education. Culture shapes and is shaped by the learning and teaching that happen during the practical conduct of daily life within all the educational settings we encounter as learning environments throughout the human life span, in families, in school classrooms, in community setting, and in workplace. (p. 33-34)

For Meskhetian Turks, culture is a meshing of two to three different worlds. The culture which they have experienced in exile, the one in which they have been exposed to due to
resettlement and the one that will occur at school. Jordan (1984) explains the idea of two cultures that traditionally affect students:

By the time children come to school, they have already learned very complex material as part of being socialized into their own culture. This means that in minority schooling we are dealing with a situation involving two cultures; the culture of the school and the culture of the child. When the two are not compatible, the school fails to teach and the child fails to learn. (p. 61)

The implications of being part of two (or three) cultures, the one at home that is the child’s and the one at school, creates opportunities for conflict that can influence positively or negatively student success.

Children start to learn knowledge first from their parents at home. Family members and caregivers play an essential role in educating children through learning culture both as practice but also as membership. Families from different cultural groups raise their children differently, and these differences affect children’s learning, Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) suggested that rather than expect families to change their way of raising children, schools need to change and employ different ways of learning.
CHAPTER V
CURRENT STUDY

Research Design

This study’s primary focus was to explore how culture affects academic achievement among Meskhetian Turk high school students residing in Dayton, Ohio. In order to focus on culture and its’ effects, a qualitative ethnographic research design was used for the study. Structured interviews were conducted with a parent and a teacher.

The main point of an ethnographic inquiry is a group of people and their culture (Merriam, 2002). Anderson-Levit (2005) suggests that, ethnography tries to explore the essentials of culture and its effects on that particular group of people. According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999, p. 2), ethnography is a type of method which uses both qualitative and quantitative data. Ethnography is useful for social studies of culture in social settings such as education.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore how culture influences academic achievement of Meskhetian students in Dayton. In order to find answers the following questions were asked in this study:

1. What are the impacts of the family on the students’ education and what is the role of culture?

2. What does help make Meskhetian Turk students be more successful?
Data Collection

In this study numeric data, interviews, and fieldwork notes through observations were used to collect data. Numeric data for Meskhetian Turk students were drawn from school data containing students’ cumulative grade point average (GPA) for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years and the Ohio Graduation Test scores (OGT).

Procedure

When I first came to Dayton, I had a chance to meet a family who had been living here for seven years after being exiled from Krasnodar. A man who is coming from Turkey is a gift for the family. Most of the Meskhetian Turks dream about going to Turkey for years; but the dream did not become a reality because of lack of identity. The family accepted me as a son, and helped me to settle down in Dayton. Thus, I had a chance to observe their life styles, interact with their relatives and neighbors, and help their children with their lessons. Being ‘one of them’ allowed me to see how well the students were doing with their schoolwork. I started taking notes when we were talking about their history, culture, and daily conversations. Data collection began early with the gathering of information from conversations, observations and interactions.

As a second data collection point, I conducted a voice recorded interview with a parent who had a child in the high school. Because of the parents’ lack of English the interview was done in Turkish. There was another person with me who engaged in code switching both English and Turkish during the conversation. In addition to the parent interview, I discussed with the parent –off record- the amount of time spent on homework, participation in social activities, relations with other cultures, and value of education. After interviewing the parent I did another voice recorded interview with a
teacher from the high school. Both interview questions were prepared prior to the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis progressed through coding the field notes and transcribed interviews, and categorized for themes. After analyzing and coding the data from the field notes and interviews, similarities and patterns were discovered. With further analysis, the final categories were defined as parent involvement, lack of English language, Turkish community, current performance in school, and female Meskhetian students.

Role of the Researcher

I am an international master student in the University of Dayton, School of Education and Allied Professions. I am from Turkey, and graduated from university as a primary school teacher in 2008. I worked as a primary school teacher for one year. I received a scholarship from the Turkish government to get my master degree in the United States.

It was a big decision for me to come to the United States. I knew that it was not easy to adjust here, but I’ve never thought that it was this hard. When I came to Dayton I could not find a place to live in the first couple weeks. I stayed two weeks at my Turkish friends’ house whom I met here. After finding a place, it was very hard to find food to eat. Because of cultural and religious factors I could not get used to American food. When I went to the grocery shop, my shopping lasted two-three hours, because I was reading ingredients of everything. Despite these, the biggest problem was language. Even though I knew English, it was very hard to understand people and respond to them.
realized that I knew English in theory. In short, it was not easy to settle down and adjust to a new country and culture. As a Turkish student who is living in Dayton now, I can be the ‘one’ who can understand what Meskhetian Turks had been through.

Two weeks after arriving in the U.S., I found myself in a Turkish community. As soon as I settled down, I tried to spend time with the Meskhetian Turks in order to understand their history and culture. I have seen that their culture was close to mine with some differences. Although they have been in the United States for at least four years, I have noticed that most of them are still not able to speak English. As an educator I wanted to explore how well they were doing at school, and how their culture has affected their academic achievement.

**Findings**

Past studies have examined differences in culturally diverse students and educational outcomes of children in the school system. They have found that ethnicity has varied effects on the educational outcomes of children in the school system (College Board, 1999). Metin is a teacher, who is also from Turkey, in a charter school which has a diverse student population with 61 Meskhetian Turk students enrolled in the school in the 2011-2012 school year. He said the following about the culture:

Every culture has their own characteristics that effect their way of living and learning. When they come to school they also bring their history, believes and knowledge. We do not see students like a blank page anymore. Every culture has different learning process. For example African Americans like hands on activities and collaborative works. When we accommodate lessons for African Americans we can see that African Americans become more successful.
According to Ohio Department of Education (2012), Asian and White students got significantly better scores than African American and Hispanic students on the Ohio Graduation Tests. OGTs are a requirement for graduation from high school. This study seeks to explain the impact of the culture on Meskhetian Turks academic achievement in Dayton.

**Involvement of Meskhetian Turk Parents in Education.** Parent involvement in the education of the children is an important indicator of students’ academic achievement in schools in the United States. Parents can be involved in the education process by helping their children with homework and assignments. They can also attend school activities, parent meetings and be part of the decision making process (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). In order to gauge the quality of parent involvement in schools, among Meskhetian Turk parents, I investigated attendance of parent-teacher meetings and homework assistance.

Both the parent and the teacher who participated in this study hoped that Meskhetian students would get good jobs such as, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and nurses. Metin said:

I have visited many of the parents of Meskhetian Turk students and I have seen that most of the parents told me that they could not go to a college and they came to United States just for their children; and they want to send them to good schools, so they can get educated. They like to have their children obtain “white color jobs” such as doctors, nurses, and teachers.

Mustafa is a Meskhetian Turk who came to the United States in 2006 from Krasnodar. He is married and he has four children; one of whom attends Metin’s school.
He has owned a restaurant in Dayton for three years. When asked about his children’s education, he states:

I have told earlier, I have two sons and two girls. Last two children is very young, but I like that the eldest one who is a boy would become a lawyer, and I want the second one who is a girl would become a doctor like her mother; my wife is attending medical school right now.

Meskhetian Turks were exiled from several countries and at the end they settled down in the United States. Coming to the United States was a beginning for them. They had nothing when they came, and they tried extensively to gain employment. Lack of money, time, and cultural differences and different expectations explain why parents do not participate in the education of their children. Metin, the teacher, said the following when asked about parents:

Most of the Meskhetian Turk parents are working. Because they have to work, they have to settle down in the United States. They were lack of education in Uzbekistan and Russia. Because of the lack of education they could not get a degree and right now they are working in hard jobs. Mostly their fathers are truck drivers or they are working in construction companies, they do painting jobs. They do not know much about American Education. Their mums are not university educated, they do not have a college degree. Even if they have, they do not know English well and they are a little bit afraid to talk English. In some cases they do not even know who is the teacher of their children.

When asked about attending parent meetings or school activities and helping their children’s education, Mustafa, the parent, said the following:
I do not have that time to go to their schools. I should stay at restaurant all the
time. My wife is going to parent meetings and school activities. Teachers call
from schools and inform us about parent meetings and school activities, my wife
attends most of the time…When I wake up and leave home to go to work my
children sleeps, when I come home from work my children also sleeps. I can
spend time with them just on Sundays. Thus, my wife take cares of the children’s
homework.

Meskhetian Turks have a high value in education. They faced discrimination at
schools in Uzbekistan and Russia and they are happy that their children no longer suffer.

When asked about education value among Meskhetian parents, Mustafa said the
following:

I have graduated from high school in Russia, and I attended to English course in
the Sinclair College in Dayton. I did not get a formal education here, but I can say
the education system is better here than Russia. We faced discrimination in
Russia, the biggest reason why we moved here was that. We could not attend
colleges or universities in Russia.

**Lack of English Language.** Most Meskhetian Turks arrived in the United States
without knowing even one word in English. They speak their native tongue of Turkish,
which they continue to use for their daily life. Meskhetian Turks who live in the United
States can speak both Turkish and Russian fluently, and typically one other the language
(Aydingün et al, 2006). When they are at home they only speak their dialect of Turkish
with borrowed words from other languages. When they get stuck in conversation they
suddenly start to speak Russian. Meskhetian Turks who came from Krasnodar used to
attend Russian speaking schools, thus their speaking Russian skills are much better than Turkish. Meskhetian Turk students in American schools are English language learners in a new culture; previously they received education in a second language in Russia, now they are learning subjects in a third language. With all of these language complications they are trying to be successful. Metin said the following when asked about Meskhetian Turk students’ success:

If they emphasize more on English, they will be more successful. It might be the result of waking up in Russia, because they speak two-three languages such as Turkish, Russian, and Uzbek. They do not have a really good background of Turkish or Russian or Uzbek language. That is why they do not know these three languages as well. As a result of this they do not know English well. If they can start learning English at young age, they can be more successful.

To further understand how English impacts the students’ learning and success, Mustafa was questioned regarding the process his child had with learning English. He stated;

Because that we came from Russia our Russian is great. Our mother tongue is Turkish as you know. We have lots of Russian books, and how to learn Russian books for children from kindergarten to high school. My father is responsible to teach Russian to our children, with his leading my father and my wife teach Russian to the children. My first two children can speak Turkish, Russian, and English now. Children start learning English when they start school. We do not know English well enough, but when they start learning English we practice English with our children at home. We do not teach or speak English at home before they start school.
According to the OGT results the percentage of Meskhetian Turk students who passed in all subtests (writing, reading, mathematics, social studies, and science), was lower than other student group (African American and non-Meskhetian White students), and their passing percentage was lower than the state average. Table 1 shows 2010-2011 school year OGT results:

\[ \text{Table 1} \]

OGT Results 2010-2011 School Year 11\textsuperscript{th} Grade Pass Rates (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meskhetian*</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Meskhetian*</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of Meskhetian Turk and non-Meskhetian students pass rates obtained from school administration.

Source: (School Card, 2011)

Meskhetian Turkish students scored lower than non-Meskhetian students in all of the subtests. The lower scores could be explained by the limited mastery of English, as Meskhetian Turkish students does not speak English as their primary language, “English Language Learners (ELL) by definition do not have a strong command of the English language, both learning and assessment are affected by their limited English proficiency” (Abedi & Gândara, 2006, p. 37). Studies suggest that an achievement gap exists between ELL and non-ELL students. The assessments are linguistically very complex for ELL
students and this may explain the reason for the gap (Abedi, 2006; Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004).

**Living in the Turkish Community.** Meskhetian Turks lived together in Uzbekistan and Russia in order to preserve their culture. They are following the same pattern in the United States to resist assimilation. Thus, most of the Meskhetian Turks who are living in Dayton live in only two zip codes located within one county. There are some advantages and disadvantages for Meskhetian Turk students living in a community. Living closer allows students to tutor one another in their own language. As explained before their parents do not know much about American education, and the English proficiency of parents are low. Accepting and getting help with their homework and assignments from their elders and friends is the best option for Meskhetian Turk students. In order to preserve Meskhetian Turk culture in the United States, they have an organization, Ahıska Turkish American Community Center. Students go to the center to get help for their classes, learn Turkish and English, and participate in sport activities.

By contrast that, as long as they spend time within their small community, they tend to not benefit from the wealthy American culture around them, and learning English language becomes a longer process. Another issue is that, Meskhetian Turks living in this small community are getting married at younger ages and limiting their educational opportunities. Metin explained the impact of community on the students:

These Meskhetian people are living as a community, and they have very strong ties in the community. They like to live in harmony, because they know that they used to live together for long years. They were exiled from Georgia in 19440s-50s, since then they lived in some countries as small communities. Within the
community they have the harmony and they live in peace within the community and they support each other. This is also affecting the education of Meskhetian Turk students. They are getting married at very early young age, which is limiting the education of girls especially.

**Female Meskhetian Students Were More Successful.** Academic achievement had been defined as grades that the students get from test scores for several years. Metin said the following when asked about academic achievement:

Academic achievement is achieving the goals determined by the Ohio Department of Education for every subject. Ohio Education Department has curriculum standards, if the students can meet all these requirements, then we can say those students achieving academic standards, and they are successful students.

Although Meskhetian students are ELL, their GPA scores were better than native students. Table 2 shows 2010-2011 school year average GPA for all quarters, and Table 3 shows 2011-2012 school year average GPA for the first and second quarter (data was gathered in the middle of second quarter).

**Table 2**

2010-2011 School Year GPA Mean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Groups</th>
<th>Quarter1</th>
<th>Quarter2</th>
<th>Quarter3</th>
<th>Quarter4</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students (N:229)</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meskhetian Students(N:68)</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Meskhetian Students(N:151)</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Meskhetian Students(N:33)</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Meskhetian Students(N:35)</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: (School Administrator, 2012)*
Table 3

2011-2012 School Year GPA Mean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Groups</th>
<th>Quarter1</th>
<th>Quarter2</th>
<th>Quarter3</th>
<th>Quarter4</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students (N:242)</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meskhetian Students (N:61)</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Meskhetian Students (N:181)</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Meskhetian Students (N:33)</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Meskhetian Students (N:28)</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (School Administrator, 2012)

It is noteworthy that, overall the GPA average was 2.47 over a 4.0 scale for all students, while for Meskhetian students it was 2.70, and 2.31 for non-Meskhetian students in 2010-2011 school year. In addition, in the 2011-2012 school year, Meskhetian students had better GPA than non-Meskhetian students. According to these data, one can say that Meskhetian Turks were academically more successful than their native peers despite all mentioned disadvantages.

Further analysis of the data shows that, Meskhetian female students perform better with an average GPA of 3.02 than Meskhetian male students with an average GPA of 2.39 in the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally female Meskhetian students were the only group that showed a gradual increase in GPA for the 2010-2011 school year. Metin answered when he was asked about Meskhetian students’ academic success:

Generally they are successful. But I have seen in the last three years; girls are more successful than the boys. They are better achieving students. It might be, girls stay at home most of the time, and the boys, they are a little bit enjoying the life, driving cars, going outside, having joy. That is why girls are more successful.
Another reason might be that, male Meskhetian students want to earn money as soon as possible. Thus after graduating from high school and getting diploma, they follow in their father’s footsteps becoming truck drivers.

Meskhetian Turk students have positive interactions with teaching staff members at the school. This is also a contributing factor of higher GPAs. According to Metin: They are very respectful to their elders because of their culture, they listen what they say. They do not argue with their parents in most cases. They also show respect to the teachers which is a big advantage for Meskhetian students. Even though they are not strong in education, they are eager to learn, they come to the teacher in a respectful way, and they say they like to learn. They usually do their homework, they do their assignments; but they do not do it in time, and sometimes they do not bring their assignments on time.

**What Helps Meskhetian Turk Students.** There are approximately 240 Meskhetian Turk families living in Dayton. The school, where Metin works, is one of the schools that Meskhetian Students attend. There were 61 students in 2011-2012 school year. According to their GPA their academic success was better than their native peers. In order to make them more successful, Metin suggests:

If they emphasize more on English, they will be more successful. If they can start learning English younger ages, they can be more successful. We have seen this in the elementary section. In the elementary section, the kids are younger and they are learning English quickly, and they are not having any English problem. Older students like hands on activities, because of their lack of English. They like to see, they are tactile and kinesthetic learners, and they like to be involved. The other
thing is they are getting married at very early ages, like 15-16 for girls and 19-20 for boys. So they do not get a chance to go to college. If they wait like 5-6 years and get married after college they would get better jobs.

Meskhetian Turks can speak at least two languages as well as their mother tongue, Turkish and Russian. Before entering school they do not see learning English as a necessity, and they do not speak English to their children. Because of living in a Turkish community, children do not hear English in their environment. When Meskhetian students enter the school setting, they find themselves in a new world, and they are challenged at school. If parents allow them to learn English (i.e. in preschools and kindergartens), they might be more successful in schools.

Despite what Metin stated about his observations that females do not go to colleges, they do. Even if they get married at an early age, they attend colleges and universities. However, male students are more eager to earn money as soon as possible. They do not have a dream to go to colleges or universities in order to get better jobs. Thus, they do not consider academic achievement necessary, and they do not work hard towards it.

Making accommodations for diverse learners is a way to teach lessons appropriately. These accommodations will help students to understand and practice the lesson. As Metin said, Meskhetian students are kinesthetic learners. While planning lessons in order to reach Meskhetian students, making the learning more kinesthetic would make them more successful.
Female Meskhetian Students Go to Colleges. Meskhetian Turks could not go to universities when they were living in Krasnodar. Not only males but also females have been denied attendance to local kindergartens, and none of them were eligible to attend Russian Universities (Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, 2005). After coming to the United States they were allowed to attend colleges and universities. However, most of the male Meskhetian Turks prefer to earn money as soon as possible in order to help the family budget. In contrast, females are more eager to go to college. Although teachers comment that females do not go to colleges, they do. Metin observed from his experiences, “They are getting married at very young ages like 15-16 for girls. So they do not get a chance to go to college.”

Even if they get married at very early ages, they do go to colleges to get good jobs in nursing or teaching. Due to being refugees, the United States Government pays their tuition fees for higher education. While their husbands are working in hard jobs to maintain the family, female Meskhetian Turks attend colleges and universities. Mustafa said following Meskhetian female’s university education:

Female Ahiskans go to colleges and universities in the United States. My wife is a student in the medical school as well. We did not have an opportunity to attend universities In Russia because of discrimination. We have the chance to educate ourselves, so why we do not use this chance. Females should not stay at home all the time, they can support family budget.
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explain the history, culture, and characteristic of Meskhetian Turks and investigate the relationship between their culture and academic success. This study also tried to find the ways of improving academic achievement among Meskhetian Turk students.

Meskhetian Turks live in 33 states and the District of Columbia in the United States. Dayton is a hub for Ahıskan Americans. Islam Shakhbandarov, president of the Ahıska Turkish American Community Center in Dayton, said in an interview:

I was one of the first Ahiskans to move to Dayton. When I moved here with my family and few relatives, there were only about 16 Ahiskan families. However, within two years, Dayton had a unique experience. About 240 families moved to Dayton in that time frame. And they continued to do so. They come from all across the states. (World in America, 2012)

Key Findings

I had the opportunity to interact with a few Meskhetian Turk families. I observed that tradition, obedience, respect, and preserving their culture and language are the
essential values for Meskhetian Turks. In order to preserve their culture they live in community. Respecting elders and obedience are the most expected values for Meskhetian Turks. Children do not argue with their parents or they do not voice their opinion in most cases. They practice their tradition in many situations. Their foods, wedding ceremonies, and funerals are the same as they were before being resettled in the U.S. They used to work in agriculture, which requires hard work, they are working in the hardest jobs now in the United States. They are known for their work ethic in the United States.

Stevenson and Lee (1990) found that different cultures have different values for academic achievement, and different expectations from schools. In this concept, academic achievement has an important place for Meskhetian Turks’ culture. Exiled from one country to another, they had to learn different languages and have been adjusted to the new culture several times; however education always had an essential value. They faced discriminations in schools, often studying at segregated schools but they refused to give up. Because of the Soviet rules they could not obtain higher education degrees until the United States accepted them as refugees.

Findings showed that, Meskhetian Turk parents are not involved in their children’s education at school. Fathers are working most of the time; the majority of the mothers do not know English and are afraid of speaking to teachers. Despite this, they are trying to help their children with assignments and homework at home. Their biggest reason to come to the United States was their children. They want them to have access to education for the purpose of obtaining good jobs. Most of the parents could get a higher
education degree, and they wanted this for their children. They are very hopeful, because their children will not face discrimination again at school.

Another finding was identified; English proficiency of Meskhetian students was not good enough for becoming academically successful. Speaking Turkish at home and not getting support from families to learn English, are the main reasons for lack of English proficiency. In addition to these, living in a Turkish community and having very few English speaking neighbors also prevent children from learning and mastering English. Although living in a Turkish community has benefit, disadvantages are also present. Living in a community prevents the practicing of English. Another disadvantage is a lengthened adaptation time for Meskhetian children’s to the American culture

Although Meskhetian students’ OGT scores were below the state average and non-Meskhetian students, their GPAs demonstrate that they were more successful academically than their non-Meskhetian peers. Additionally, female Meskhetian students performed much better than the rest of their peers. The reason behind this was either they generally sit at home and study more while boys are going out and having fun, or they study harder to get higher education degrees and get better jobs.

**Limitations**

This study tried to explore Meskhetian Turks history, culture, and affects of culture in students’ academic achievement. The study accomplished these goals even despite some limitations. First, in this study interviews were done with two people; one teacher and one parent. Interviewing more people may have exposed additional findings.
Second, numeric data was gathered from one high school. In order to look at students’ academic achievement, this study could have gathered data from other schools with Meskhetian student populations.

**Recommendations**

In order to enhance and sustain the academic achievement of Meskhetian Turk students, the following recommendations have been made.

**One Must Know.** First of all, one must know that Meskhetian Turks are refugees not immigrants. Beyond the definition, there are various differences between the two. Before coming to the United States, immigrants can prepare for the transition. They have time to make all arrangements such as, finding a job in the United States, selling or renting their homes in their home country, and/or gaining support from previous immigrants. Most importantly they have a choice to come. In contrast, refugees come to the United States with nothing but hope. Most of them escape from war and violence. Some of them, like the Meskhetian Turks, are looking for an identity.

**For Parents.** Researchers have demonstrated that parent involvement and student success are related (LaRockue, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Epstein, 1996; Floyd, 1998). Most of the Meskhetian Turks came to the United States because they wanted their children to receive a good education and get good jobs. Thus, Meskhetian parents must try their hardest to be more involved in their children’s education. They should attend parent meetings, know their children’s teachers, be involved in decision making, and participate in school events. They should learn the American education system, be familiar with tests and admissions. Supporting children at homes by helping with their
assignments, reading to them, listening to their reading, and sending them to the school prepared would help their academic success.

**For Educators.** Immigrant population in the United States has been reached significant numbers recently. With this increasing, the diverse population in the schools is growing rapidly. The number of English Language Learners (ELL) in the United States schools is approximately 3.7 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This percentage is less than 4% in the state of Ohio. The percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home is 6.3% in Ohio and 3.9% in the city of Dayton (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Teachers should know that Meskhetian Turks are refugees, not immigrants. Even though they came to the United States willingly, one should consider that they escaped for freedom and identity. Thus, first of all teachers should consider this; these students had suffered, they hurt.

Second, teachers must know the cultural background of these students in order to appropriately serve them. They did not receive a proper education in Russia. Teacher should encourage and provide opportunities for them. They should provide cultural interactions between American students and Meskhetian students. While they plan lessons they should make accommodations for Meskhetian students who need hands on activities and kinesthetic learning opportunities.

**For Meskhetian Turk Organizations.** There are two Turkish organizations in Dayton, Ohio. The first one is the Ahıska Turkish American Community Center, their mission is:

to preserve and promote rich and diverse Ahıskıa culture, language, and customs and transfer to the youth; to build lasting sincere friendships by fostering
interactions between the people of Ahıskalı origin and the American community
and to aid individuals of Ahıskalı origin to be a good American citizen. (Ahıskalı
Turkish American Community Center, 2012).

The organization has sport programs such as, soccer, wrestling, and ping pong; religious
programs such as, Quran classes; and citizenship, Turkish language, and English
language classes. The second organization is the Turkish American Society of Ohio-
Dayton (TASO). Their mission is:

To foster fellowship and promote the understanding of diverse cultures, to
strengthen intercultural community and ensure a positive experience for those
who are willing to participate in cross cultural activities; TASO seeks to enrich
the experience of the entire community by providing opportunities to engage and
educate the community related to diversity. (Turkish American Society of Ohio-
Dayton, 2011)

This organization has also sport activities such as, soccer, taekwondo, pool, and
ping pong; religious programs such as, Quran classes and Islam classes; and additionally
Turkish classes.

These two organizations are good opportunities for Meskhetian Turks, but they
should consider education of the children at American schools. Parents do not know
much about American education, thus the organizations should provide classes and
panels about the American education system. Additionally they should also provide
support for Meskhetian students to improve their academic skills.
For Further Studies. This study took place in Dayton, which is one city where the Meskhetian Turk population is high. This study explored the history, culture, and relationship between culture and academic achievement of Meskhetian students. In order to collect data, Meskhetian Turks were observed, and one teacher and one parent were interviewed. More studies with multiple methods should be conducted.

I would suggest that, similar studies be done in several cities and states. To be more effective further studies would be longitudinal in design. Meskhetian Turks need to be observed more deeply and this should be done by a research team. A research team could interview more parents, teachers, and students. Additionally, another qualitative research study should be done by a researcher from a different cultural background.

In order to promote Meskhetian students academic skills, quantitative researches should be done with a control group. Different methods and techniques of teaching should be tried by educators in these studies. Pre-tests, interviews, and observations should be done before the study, while post-tests, interviews, and observations could be done after the study has concluded.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explain the history, culture, and characteristic of Meskhetian Turks and investigate the relationship between their culture and academic success. Ethnography, which is a qualitative design, was used for this research. The data was collected through field-work, informal observations, and interviews which were given to a teacher, and a parent. Research questions for this study were:

1. What are the impacts of the family on the students’ education and what is the role of culture?
2. What does help make Meskhetian Turk students be more successful?

This study demonstrated that the GPA results of Meskhetian students were better than their native peers in all quarters of the 2010-2012 school year, and in the 1st and 2nd quarter of 2011-2012 school year. Additionally female Meskhetian students performed much better than the rest of the students. However their OGT results express the opposite. Meskhetian students scored lower than non-Meskhetian students.

Meskhetian Turk parents do not typically take part in Meskhetian students’ education. They lack information about the American education system, are not involved in parent meetings and school activities, and some of them do not know their children’s teachers. They support them at home by helping with their assignments and homework; but they do not support them enough to go to colleges and universities and to get better jobs.

Students are influenced by the cultural belief of early marriage, and they are getting married after finishing high school. Because of this, male Meskhetian youths must work to support the household and they do not apply to attend colleges and universities. Another influence from the culture is the effort of preserving their culture and language. The fear of assimilation prevents Meskhetian Turks from adapting to American culture. Meskhetian students have a few American friends in their social life that they know from school. Thus, they do not culturally adapt to the United States. This makes learning English harder among Meskhetian Turks.

In order to help Meskhetian students to become more successful, parents, teachers, and the organizations supporting Meskhetian Turks need to change. Parents should be involved in their children’s education. They should first find ways to teach
their children English. Sending them to preschools and kindergartens may be a choice. Second, they should learn the American education system such as, how it works, what to do at home, how to get accepted to colleges and universities. They should also be a part of parent meetings, school activities, and the decision making process. Finally, they should not support or encourage their children to marry at a young age. They should encourage them to go to universities to get better jobs, and to marry after obtaining higher education degrees.

Teachers should know Meskhetian students’ cultural background. They should consider that they did not get a proper education in Russia and their readiness of education may not be enough. They must plan their lessons with accommodations for Meskhetian students to promote their academic learning. They are mobile students, and they like hands on activities; thus teachers should consider this when they are making accommodations.

Meskhetian Turk organizations are good opportunities for Meskhetian Turks to sustain their cultural life, but they should consider the education of the children in American schools. Parents do not know much about American education, thus the organizations should provide classes and panels about the American education system. Additionally they should also provide support for Meskhetian students to improve their academic skills.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you describe academic achievement?
2. According to your definition, how successful are Meskhetian Turks?
3. How does culture affect a student’s academic achievement?
4. How does the Meskhetian Turks’ culture affect students’ academic achievement?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of students?
6. What are the impacts of the parents in students’ academic achievement?
7. What are the best teaching methods and strategies for the Meskhetian students?
8. What does make these students be more successful?
APPENDIX B

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your level of education?
2. How can you compare and contrast the schools in Russia and the United States?
3. What do you want your children to be?
4. How do you support your children’s education?
5. How often do you go to your children’s school?
6. When do your children start learning English?
7. How many languages do your children can speak?
8. Do female Meskhetian Turks attend college or university?