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Turkish MBA candidates must find ways to cope with GMAT

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For any student seriously considering a Masters in Business Administration, the GMAT, or Graduate Management Admissions Test is a difficult hurdle that must first be negotiated.

Along with cumulative GPA, a GMAT score is one of the most important determinants for acceptance to an MBA program. Most business schools use the GMAT to measure certain core academic skills that are

just part of a larger overall package that includes academic performance and work experience. In order to improve their chances for admission to elite schools, MBA candidates throughout Turkey invest a great deal of time, money and effort into increasing their GMAT scores.

The GMAT was created by the Graduate Management Admissions Council, or GMAC, a non-profit affiliate of Educational Testing Services, or ETS, the world's leading creator of standardized tests.

The GMAT is delivered by computer on a near-daily basis to locations around the world. The current cost is \$250 and registration is processed through www.mba.com.

Success on the GMAT requires a variety of skills. The quantitative section tests high school level math concepts but also uses unusual combinations of principles, diagrams and word problems to dramatically increase difficulty. The verbal section evaluates argumentative logic, reading ability and knowledge of standard written English. The writing section measures the ability to support a thesis and the ability to dissect and critique the logic of a presented stimulus. Together with the multiple-choice section, the sections of the exam produce a score between 200 and 800. The 2006 mean score, according to GMAC, was 533 while those currently attending some of the top 10 business schools earned average scores between 680 and 750.

The GMAT has many unusual characteristics. The multiple choice sections are computer adaptive, which means that correct answers increase the difficulty of future questions while wrong answers have the opposite effect. There is also no calculator use on GMAT – all scrap work must be done with a marker and an erasable board. Finally, the schools to which students send their GMAT scores also receive copies of the students' essays, not just their essay scores.

The most obvious challenge that Turkish GMAT test takers face is the fact that the test makes no

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allowances for their status as non-native English speakers. Reading passages on GMAT are not introductory level materials that one might find on a TOEFL exam but are rather the equivalent of journal articles – laden with jargon and vocabulary – written by and for experts. In addition, Turkish students are used to objective knowledge exams that test the ability to use facts and formulas exactly as they were taught in class. The GMAT, on the other hand, does everything it can to hide the principles being tested or combines them in a way that a student has never seen before.

There is hope, however. Since the GMAT is a standardized test, its format, rules and content do not change. This standardization allows test prep companies and publishers in the United States and around the world to create materials and methods designed to cope with the GMAT. Given that the test is created in America, the most reputable courses are those that are also from the United States. The American market leader in the test preparation industry, Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions, maintains an office in Istanbul's Şişli district. Kaplan-Istanbul provides the same GMAT course and identical materials to those offered in the U.S., a strong draw for those familiar with the company's reputation. In Turkey, the annual enrollment in Kaplan's GMAT courses is exceeded only by that of those taking TOEFL classes. In addition to classroom preparation, GMAT do-it-yourself prep books released by noted U.S. publishers Barron's, Kaplan or the GMAC itself are also available in most English language bookstores.

With increased demand for effective managers in Turkey and a widening gap between rich and poor, an MBA is becoming more a necessity than a luxury for Turks looking to succeed in business. The GMAT is an intimidating but necessary stepping stone that prospective MBAs must traverse. No matter how they choose to prepare, serious candidates cannot afford to take the GMAT lightly.

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