

CHAPTER

10

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN TÜRKİYE: DEMOGRAPHIC AND ACADEMIC INDICATORS

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Globalization, in other words, the intercultural exchange of products, ideas, and worldviews, has also led to internationalization among institutions. The most important of these institutions are higher education institutions that host many international students for economic, social, and cultural reasons. Globalization, defined as the intercultural exchange of products, ideas, and worldviews, has significantly contributed to the internationalization of institutions. This process not only fosters cross-border collaborations but also facilitates the sharing of knowledge, innovation, and best practices among diverse academic and professional communities. While these students create better educational opportunities for themselves, they also indirectly enable the concept of internationalization to grow and develop. Not only the search for a better education, but also the desire to benefit from the intellectual accumulation that comes with globalization, ease of travel, and the development of cooperation and commercial and social relations between countries have forced higher education institutions,

like all institutions, to internationalize. At the same time, higher education institutions that are in pursuit of competing with educational institutions all over the world and benefit from the common market have volunteered to open their doors to the winds of internationalization.

10.2 THE ROLE OF DIGITAL INTERNATIONALIZATION

The term "internationalization" points to different dimensions in different disciplines and sectors. In a very broad sense, it can be defined as "the process of increasing involvement in international operations" (Welch, 1988, p.36). Educational internationalization, on the other hand, is referred as "the ability for teaching and learning to be increasingly involved with international cultures in order to enhance globalized learning" (URL-5). It is described, in the report by European Parliament, as "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit et al, 2015:33). As seen in these definitions, internationalization of education is strictly intertwined with the inclusion of intercultural dimensions to the teaching process to globalize it. The term "internationalization", when it comes to higher education, often covers different things and includes different dimensions with different focuses at different levels (Yang, 2002, p. 72). Internationalization of higher education depends on varied elements including stakeholder groups, government, private sector, institutions, faculty members, academic disciplines, and students (Zolfaghari et al., 2009, p. 2). Considering all these elements and dimensions, Knight (2006) defines it as given: "Internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service elements of an institution".

All these definitions emphasize that educational internationalization is a dynamic process, rather than being a technique in the classroom or

an item in the instructional guideline, which aims to enhance education to global standards. Internationalization of higher education, on the other hand, is considered to carry out research activities and deal with service elements along with teaching processes. Higher education is a mechanism where traces of globalization can be directly observed and intervened in, as its outputs can be observed in the workforce and service processes. Besides, higher education institutions, where an increasing number of international students are hosted, are expected to carry out research and reach global standards and enhance their visions to embrace both national and international communities.

When the concept of internationalization is considered, the socio-cultural and academic aspects of it are often emphasized; however, the concept is significant due to some further reasons. Knight and de Witt (1995) find internationalization crucial due to political, economic, academic, and social-cultural reasons. For the political aspect, it is clear that bilateral agreements within countries and student exchanges contribute to their political relations. Reaching and participating in the common market, competing with the developed countries in trading, having commercial relations with these countries, and fostering a highly skilled workforce can be listed as economic reasons. Academic reasons are closely related to improving the process of teaching and learning as well as reaching excellence in scholarly work and research. Recognizing social and intersocietal changes and adapting to globalization in social dynamics are defined as the social reasons behind the internationalization of higher education. Not only Knight and de Witt (1995), but also some other scholars put forward some other reasons for the explanation of internationalization in higher education. While Hayhoe (1989) talks about academic mobility, international scholarships, technical and economic development, international curriculum studies, and the spread of cultural values, Gacel-Ávila et al. (2005) mention the reasons, including technical assistance, nation-building and positioning, improved cooperation, and the development of national and regional identity. These reasons listed by various scholars indicate that internationalization in higher education is a

necessity to keep up with the times, and it is crystal-clear that the concept of internationalization of higher education is an inextricably intertwined and complementary mechanism.

10.3 WHAT IS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT?

An international student, very briefly, is a student who studies outside his/her own country (Bolat, 2017). Lin (2022) defines these students as "People who cross a national border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled in educational institutions that are outside their country of origin" (2022:49). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2024), *Global Education Digest*, an international student is the student who has physically crossed an international border between two countries, their country of origin, and moved to another city with the intention of studying (URL-1).

These definitions indicate two features in common for the definition of "international student". First of all, these students should have 'crossed a border' or 'left their home countries'. Secondly, they should have the singular objective of participating in educational activities. The term "foreign student" is eliminated since foreign students are not necessarily expected to cross a border for educational activities (URL-9).

The number of international students is getting higher and higher every year. According to UIS (URL-1), the number of international students was 6,361,963 in 2020; while this number was 6,100,755 in 2019 (It should be kept in mind that the authorized source for worldwide student statistics is the Institute of Statistics, and worldwide statistical data in the field is 3 years behind). The last updated data in the field is from 2020). The data show that the number of international students increased 4.68% in one year. This number was 800,000 in 1975. For 2024, the number of international students worldwide is estimated to be around 7.5 million in 2024 and is expected to reach 20 million in 2030 (URL-6)

As of 2020, Türkiye is among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of the number of international students it hosts. Data gathered

from YÖK (URL-2) indicate that 301,694 international students are enrolled in educational institutions in Türkiye today. 103,498 of these are new students who were enrolled in a higher education institution in Türkiye in 2022–2023. It is observed that there is a 15.91% increase in the number of students compared to the previous year. According to the Migration Research Foundation, as of 2024, approximately 350,000 students from 198 countries study at Turkish universities (URL-4). These data show that Türkiye is moving decisively towards internationalization and signal that these numbers will increase in the coming years and that the traces of internationalization will be reflected in Turkish educational institutions. Table 10.1 shows the number and the increase in international students in the last 10-year period.

Table 10.1 International students in Türkiye in years (Source: UDEF, 2024)

Years	Total Number	Increase (in number)	Increase (Rate)
2022–2023	301.694	41.505	15.91%
2021–2022	260.289	36.241	16.18%
2020–2021	224.048	39.001	21.08%
2019–2020	185.047	30.542	19.77%
2018–2019	154.505	29.367	23.47%
2017–2018	125.138	17.062	15.79%
2016–2017	108.076	20.173	22.95%
2015–2016	87.903	15.725	21.79%
2014–2015	72.178	23.995	49.80%
2013–2014	48.183	–6202	11.41%

According to Table 10.1, the data from UDEF (2024), the number of international students in Türkiye has increased from 48,000 to 300,000 since 2013. The number of international students in 2023 is six times more than the number in 2013. However, while there is an observable increase in the number of international students compared to 2013, the decline in the growth rate does not go unnoticed. This decline may have appeared due to many reasons, including the relations

between countries, social and political changes that Türkiye went through, or the opportunities offered to international students by higher education institutions in Türkiye. A detailed study can be conducted examining this situation and analyzing the periods of decline.

Table 10.2 indicates the top 10 countries that host international students. This table shows that, in 2019, the United States was the leading country with 1,095,299 international students. Australia ranked second with 509,160 students, and the United Kingdom ranked third with 489,019 international students. These countries were followed by Germany, Russia, Canada, France, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and China. In 2020, the United States was still the leading country with 957,475 international students. The United Kingdom ranked second with 550,877 international students, and Australia ranked third with 458,279 international students. They were followed by Germany, Canada, France, China, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and Türkiye, respectively. In 2023, Russia fell from the top ten list, and Türkiye entered the list in 10th place with 185,047 international students. As mentioned previously, it is estimated that 350,000 international students are now enrolled in educational institutions in Türkiye.

Table 10.2 Top ten countries with the highest number of international students hosted (Source: UDEF, 2024)

2019		2020	
United States	1,095,299	United States	957,475
Australia	509,160	United Kingdom	550,877
United Kingdom	489,019	Australia	458,279
Germany	333,233	Germany	368,717
Russia	282,922	Canada	323,157
Canada	279,167	France	252,444
France	246,378	China	225,100
United Arab Emirates	225,339	Japan	222,661
Japan	202,907	United Arab Emirates	215,975
China	201,177	Türkiye	185,047
Total	6,100,755	Total	6,361,962

Due to the increasing number of international students in Turkish educational institutions, there is extensive literature and previous studies addressing various aspects, including academic, socio-cultural, and emotional aspects. Türel (2021) conducted a study with six international students on socio-cultural adaptation. In his study, he applied the in-depth interview technique and used semi-structured interviews to gather data. The interviews were held online, and each was recorded to be analyzed later by the researcher. In these interviews, the adaptation problems that the students experienced were categorized under six main themes, and they were discussed with the participants: demographic features, financial features, sheltering and socio-cultural adaptation, social acceptance, education, and language. In this study, it was determined that international students with the same or similar linguistic and cultural background as the target country adapted more easily. These were also emphasized by elements contributing their academic development. It was also mentioned by the students that having social networks both strengthened their economic cycles and facilitated their social adaptation.

Another study conducted by Radmard (2017) focused on the factors affecting international students' demands on higher education in Turkish universities. For the study, 545 students from 4 state universities in Ankara were selected as participants using an appropriate sampling method for the study. The data were gathered from a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire with 20 items. The findings of the study indicate that the participants of this study were mostly male, single, and undergraduate students. It was observed that more than half of the participants had positive attitudes towards Türkiye and this is considered a reason for preference. In addition, students stated that their belief in receiving a quality education in a prestigious university was an important reason. In addition, this study revealed that children from families with higher socio-cultural and economic levels are more inclined towards international education. In this study, more than half of the participants' families had postgraduate degrees. Moreover, the study found out that students' home countries are also an important factor affecting their

demand for international education and the adaptation process afterwards.

A study on international student mobility in Türkiye was also carried out by Yılmaz and Güçlü (2021). Yılmaz and Güçlü (2021) found in their study that the nationalities of international students in Türkiye for higher education are as follows: Syria 50%, Azerbaijan 14%, Turkmenistan 10%, Iran 5% and Afghanistan 5%. This data shows that a vast majority of the international students have similar social, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to Turkish people; therefore, this may be considered a crucial factor in where to enroll in higher education. Additionally, Yılmaz and Güçlü (2021) argue that, in terms of international students, the prestige of the university and the quality of the program they attend are of significant importance for international education.

Similarly, some other scholars carried out some studies to find out the demographic features, their motives for preferring Türkiye for higher education, and their expectations from Turkish educational institutions. Among these, Yıldırım and Köksal (2017) reached some noteworthy results. They gathered the necessary data through semi-structured interviews with 25 international students from various countries and nationalities. Their study included 19 male and 6 female students. The results indicated that the majority of the students (68%) preferred Türkiye due to the fact that their cultures, languages, and religions are similar. Some students stated that their families and friends who visited Türkiye previously played an important role in their decisions. Some other reasons for their enrollment in Turkish universities can be summarized as good education, having been to Türkiye before, affordable education and daily life, and geographical proximity. In this study, students' opinions about Türkiye before they came to Türkiye and after they started living in Türkiye were also collected. Although most of the positive comments expressed before remained the same, there were also comments that turned negative. These negative comments often focused on the fact that the city they live

in is small, there are no entertainment venues for students, it is not safe, and there are difficulties in transportation.

Tekelioğlu et al. (2012) also conducted research on the factors that affect international students' preferences of country and university for higher education. They employed a survey to 80 international students to reach the results. 52 male and 28 female students participated in the study. In this study, the factors affecting their enrollment in Turkish educational institutions were revealed as follows: better education than in their home countries, scholarships provided by their countries and the Turkish government, similar social, cultural, religious, historical, and ethnic backgrounds; recommendations from relatives and friends who have previously studied in Türkiye, a common native language; affordable tuition fees; affordable daily life; promotion of Turkish universities in fairs in their countries; and international recognition of Türkiye and Turkish universities.

In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the demographic and academic characteristics of the international students who are enrolled in higher education institutions in Türkiye and contribute to the policies and strategies to attract international students by higher education institutions and the Turkish government. While the research examines the international student profile in Turkish higher education institutions, it will also reveal the challenges and strengths of these institutions from the perspective of foreign students. The study will contribute to improving the educational experiences of international students in Türkiye.

The hypotheses of this study include:

- (1) Over the past ten years, Türkiye has grown in popularity for international students for higher education.
- (2) There is typically a concentration of international students in particular cities and universities.
- (3) International students have certain demographic characteristics (both academically and individually) in common.

In light of these hypotheses, the next section will provide information about the methodology of the study, which will mention the design, the participants, and data collection instruments utilized.

10.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, the principles of descriptive research were employed. Descriptive research is "a research method describing the characteristics of the population or phenomenon studied" (Bhat, URL-10). A descriptive research focuses on the "what," rather than the "why" of the research. It aims to have an in-depth examination of a phenomenon or its characteristics. The main goal of this research type is to describe the phenomenon as it is and reach conclusions; it is not about finding the underlying reasons or justifications. Therefore, a descriptive research design is utilized to make judgments about the select phenomenon, identify the problems in the current situation, and provide alternative solutions or improvements to existing practices (Shinija, 2024).

Among the types of descriptive research, exploratory research design is applied to the gathered data in this research. This type, as the name suggests, aims to explore the phenomenon or the situation and the factors related to it in detail to provide a deeper understanding about it. In this study, the goal is to examine the demographic and academic characteristics of international students in the higher education institutions in Türkiye, reach conclusions, and provide contributions to the existing practices and policies. Therefore, exploratory research design, within the principles of descriptive research, is employed in this study.

10.5 TÜRKİYE'S INCREASING POPULARITY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Türkiye, especially in the last decade, has become a center of attraction for international students. As the number of international students

increases, it has become a necessity to create demographic profiles of international students studying in Türkiye.

The data obtained from YÖK (URL-2) indicate that 301,694 international students were enrolled in higher education institutions in Türkiye recently. In the 2013–2014 academic year, the number of international students in Türkiye was recorded as 48,183 (Table 10.3) which is approximately 6 times less than the current number of students in the 2022–2023 academic year. It is observed through these data that the number of international students has increased steadily and reached around 300,000 in the recent academic year. The number of international students is 15,91% higher than the previous year in the 2022–2023 academic year, and 21.28% of these are newly registered students. Since 2013, an average of 24,730 international students have been enrolled in Turkish higher education institutions each year, indicating an increase of 19.53% per year (URL-2). Especially since 2020, after Türkiye became one of the top ten countries with the highest number of international students, this increase has accelerated. Türkiye, which entered the list with a change rate of 19.77%, was the country with the largest annual increase among the top ten countries (Table 10.2). Table 10.3 compares the number of international students enrolled in Turkish higher education institutions with Turkish students preferring studying abroad to get a degree in higher education.

The data presented in Table 10.3 show that most of the international students in Türkiye are of Syrian, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Iraqi, Iranian, and Afghan origins. These are followed by such countries as Somalia, Germany, Yemen, Egypt, Bulgaria, and Palestine. From a broader perspective, it is evident that Türkiye attracts many students from a great range of countries for higher education. On the other hand, Turkish students are seen to have mostly preferred such countries as Germany, the United States, and England for higher education.

Table 10.3 The number of international students and Turkish students (Source: UDEF, 2024)

Country	Incoming Students	Country	Outgoing Students
1.Syria	37,236	1.Germany	10,862
2.Azerbaijan	21,069	2.USA	8,687
3.Turkmenistan	18,016	3.England	4,083
4.Iraq	9,752	4.Ukraine	2,977
5.Iran	8,776	5.Azerbaijan	2,571
6.Afghanistan	7,517	6.Canada	2,160
7.Somalia	6,104	7.Italy	2,149
8.Germany	4,637	8.France	2,082
9.Yemen	4,386	9.Austria	1,731
10.Egypt	4,109	10.North Macedonia	1,329
11.Jordan	4,043	11.Poland	1,317
12.Bulgaria	3,688	12.Bulgaria	1,123
13.Palestine	3,145	13.Hungary	1,086
14.Greece	2,874	14.Switzerland	824
15.China	2,433	15.Australia	802
16.Pakistan	2,386	16.Kyrgyzstan	509
17.Kazakhstan	1,792	17.Bosnia and Herzegovina	505
18.Nigeria	2,208	18.Russia	384
19.Kyrgyzstan	1,792	19.Spain	378
20.Morocco	1,758	20.Belgium	369

In Türkiye, the internationalization process in higher education is carried out meticulously in order to attract more international students to the country and to be a part of the globalizing world. The Turkish government has implemented a number of policy arrangements in order to both meet the increasing demand for Türkiye from the international arena in recent years and to attract more international

students to the country. Among these, the first one is the regulations in the Foreign Student Examination (YÖS) exam, which has been mandatory for international students to take in order to receive education in Türkiye since 1981. This exam was abolished in 2010 (Kadıoğlu & Özer, 2015), and universities were provided with flexibility in the foreign student admission processes. This flexibility granted to universities has provided a great advantage for their criteria of student admission, and there has been a significant increase in the number of students since 2010, when the exam was abolished (Çetinsaya, 2014). However, with this increase, it was observed that the success of international students in universities was below expectations, and the exam was reintroduced in 2023, and universities were also given the chance to determine their own criteria (Bulut-Şahin & Eriçok, 2023).

Another regulation implemented to attract international students to participate in higher education in Türkiye is the Türkiye Scholarships program. "Türkiye Scholarships is a government-funded higher education scholarship program runned by the Republic of Türkiye for international students". The primary purpose of this program is to provide opportunities to international students for higher education in Türkiye (URL-7). Since 2012, the year the program was designated, Türkiye Scholarships program has attracted a great number of international students, and the applications to the program have shown a considerable increase throughout the years. The official data collected from the program's website reveals that while around 40,000 students applied to the program in 2012, this number increased to 117,000 from 162 countries in 2023 (URL-7).

Joint degree programs are also a crucial part of internationalization processes of higher education institutions. These are programs designed by cooperating universities under common regulations. In these programs, unlike double degrees, students seek a single degree, performing their studies in two or more joint institutions. In a report published by YÖK, the number of joint programs carried out with universities abroad is stated as 269 (URL-2). According to this report,

Türkiye mostly collaborates with the United States on joint programs at the undergraduate level (Şengül & Serpil, 2018).

There can be no doubt that, Türkiye has gained growing popularity for international students in the last decade, and with the opportunities it offers, it is evident that this popularity will continue to increase.

The distribution of international students by cities is observed to be in parallel with the distribution of domestic students. As Table 10.4 suggests, Istanbul, the most metropolitan city in Türkiye, has the highest number of state and foundation universities and therefore hosts the highest number of students, both domestic and international. The number of students in Istanbul is 1.453.543 in total, 97.865 of which are international. This concentration is an expected situation, considering the worldwide popularity of the city of Istanbul, its historical value, and the fact that it is the city that hosts the highest number of universities in Türkiye.

Table 10.4 Student distribution by cities in Türkiye (Source: UDEF, 2024)

Seq.	Town	Number of International Students	Ratio to Total Number of International Students	Total Number of Students in the Town	Rate of International Students Among the Total Number of Students in the City
1	İstanbul	97.865	32%	1.453.543	6.70%
2	Ankara	19.586	6%	355.048	5.50%
3	Eskişehir	18.810	6%	1.936.498	1.00%
4	Karabük	11.908	4%	45.358	26.30%
5	Erzurum	9.263	3%	502.964	1.80%
6	Sakarya	8.702	3%	80.527	10.80%
7	İzmir	8.352	3%	191.345	4.40%
8	Kütahya	7.317	2%	50.604	14.50%
9	Bursa	6.625	2%	79.855	8.30%
10	Samsun	5.060	1%	58.267	8.70%

Another city that hosts the highest number of international students is Ankara. There are 355.048 students in this city, 19.586 of which are international students. However, this is certainly not surprising since Ankara is the capital city of Türkiye and home to Türkiye's most popular and well-established universities.

Eskişehir ranks 3rd on this list, with a total of 18,910 international students. The total number of students studying in this city is 1,936,498. It should be noted that Eskişehir has always been a popular city for students due to its geographical location and being a student-friendly city. Therefore, it is normal that international students, like domestic students, tend to concentrate in Eskişehir.

Alongside these cities, there are some other cities where the number of international students is quite high. One of these cities is Karabük, where 11,908 of its 45,358 students are international students, which makes 26.30% its total student population. Established in 2007, Karabük University is a relatively new and developing university. Karabük, on the other hand, is a small city with a population of approximately 250,000 people, which is not very popular for domestic students. Similarly, Kütahya is another city that attracts international students. 7,317 of its 50,604 students are international students, which makes 14.50% of its total student population. With a population of approximately 500,000, Kütahya is also a small city and is not a center of attraction for domestic students. The presence of these cities in the list of the most popular Turkish cities for international students can be explained by the effective promotion of these universities in the international arena and the opportunities they offer to foreign students, which are more appealing compared to other universities.

Other cities on the list are not surprising, considering their geographical location, having a well-established university, and the advantages they offer to both local and international students. Table 10.5 shows the least popular cities for students.

Table 10.5 Least popular cities for students (Source: UDEF, 2024)

Seq.	Town	Number of International Students	Total Number of Students in the Town	Rate of International Students Among the Total Number of Students in the Town
81	Hakkari	0	3.774	0.00%
80	Muş	11	12.555	0.09%
79	Amasya	76	18.127	0.42%
78	Ordu	78	17.709	0.44%
77	Şırnak	91	5.723	1.59%
76	Tunceli	101	7.891	1.28%
75	Osmaniye	116	14.353	0.81%
74	Ardahan	131	6.041	2.17%
73	Sinop	141	13.483	1.05%
72	Batman	196	15.726	1.25%

The cities with the least number of international students are also observed to be in line with the number of domestic students. The fact that cities such as Muş and Şırnak are less popular for both international and domestic students can be explained by their geographical location, while the lower popularity of cities such as Ordu and Amasya can be explained by the socioeconomic status of the city and the local people.

Hakkari, which has the lowest number of students in Türkiye, does not host any international students. This can also be explained by reasons such as geographical location and socioeconomic and sociocultural situations.

It is observed that some of the international students prefer to be enrolled in foundation universities rather than state universities. As of 2023, 301,694 international students study in Türkiye recently. While 214,458 (71.08%) of them are enrolled in state universities, 87,136 (28.88%) are enrolled in foundation universities (URL-2). It is clear that

international students mostly prefer to study at state universities; however, the number of students enrolled in foundation universities should not be underestimated.

Table 10.6 indicates that, according to 2022–2023 data, despite slight changes in rankings, international students tend to enroll in certain universities in Türkiye. The ranking of the universities seems parallel to city ranking, and this also proves that the tendency for concentration on some cities and universities is no doubt. However, in Istanbul, where 32% of the international student population is enrolled in a university, only Istanbul University, as a state university, was included in the top 10 rankings. Istanbul Medipol University, Istanbul Gelişim University, and Istanbul Aydın University are the foundation universities included in the list. This shows that although international students tend to be concentrated in the city of Istanbul, they do not tend to be concentrated in a particular university.

Table 10.6 Top 10 universities with the highest number of international students in Türkiye (Source: UDEF, 2024)

2022		2023	
Anadolu Uni.	15.755	Anadolu Uni.	16.441
Karabük Uni.	11.931	Karabük Uni.	11.908
İstanbul Uni.	8.281	İstanbul Uni.	9.938
KütahyaDumlupınar Uni.	8.281	Atatürk Uni.	9.164
Atatürk Uni.	6.692	Istanbul Medipol Uni.	7.380
Bahçeşehir Uni.	5.790	Kütahya Dumlupınar Uni.	7.255
Altınbaş Uni.	5.629	Bahçeşehir Uni.	6.788
Bursa Uludağ Uni.	5.473	Altınbaş Uni.	6.141
İstanbul Aydın Uni.	5.110	Istanbul Gelişim Uni.	5.387
Sakarya Uni.	4.960	İstanbul Aydın Uni.	5.362
ÇankırıKaratekin Uni.	4.769	Bursa Uludağ Uni.	5.336
Istanbul Gelişim Uni.	4.216	Sakarya Uni.	4.651
Istanbul Medipol Uni.	4.033	ÇankırıKaratekin Uni.	4.260

10.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

When the data on international higher education students in Türkiye are considered, it is obvious that international students in Türkiye share some prominent characteristics in common. First and foremost, the vast majority of the international students in Türkiye are from the same or nearby countries or regions. The distribution of international students in Türkiye by their countries of origin is shown in Table 10.7.

International students' preferences of which country to study in are influenced by a variety of factors: geographical proximity, cultural background, religion or socio-economic reasons. Table 10.7 indicates that international students are influenced by geographical proximity more than cultural or religious similarity. As the top five countries considered, it is obvious that international students prefer to study in a country that is not geographically far from their homelands. Among these countries, some also have cultural or ethnic ties with Türkiye; however, geographical proximity is the one common thing for all five countries. The following countries are, on the other hand, mostly countries with religious ties with Türkiye, although a few of them have cultural ties as well. Many of the countries with religious ties to Türkiye are not geographically close, but Türkiye has still been able to attract international students from these countries. Some nations having ethnic ties with Türkiye are at the top of the list, while others are towards the end. They still rank among the top 20 nations, nevertheless. As Table 10.7 is examined, it is seen that geographical proximity is a distinguishing characteristic in drawing international students. However, the religious ties and common religious history of the countries also appear to be remarkably important. Following these, it can be seen that the existence of common ethnic and cultural roots is important. It should also be added that the situation of Syrian international students is a special situation for Türkiye. Since many of these students are students residing in Türkiye, it may be more accurate to define them as foreign students rather than international students. However,

geographical proximity and religious ties account for the top ranking of Syrian students, even if they are classified as international students.

Table 10.7 International students in Türkiye by their countries of origin (top 20 countries) (Source: UDEF, 2024)

Country	Number of Students	Ratio (Compared to the Number of International Students)
Syria	58.213	19.30%
Azerbaijan	34.247	11.35%
Iran	22.632	7.50%
Turkmenistan	18.250	6.05%
Iraq	16.172	5.36%
Somalia	10.043	3.33%
Egypt	9597	3.18%
Afghanistan	9203	3.05%
Kazakhstan	8864	2.94%
Yemen	8198	2.72%
Jordan	7266	2.41%
Palestine	5705	1.89%
Sudan	5171	1.71%
Bulgaria	5120	1.70%
Morocco	4958	1.64%
Uzbekistan	4794	1.59%
Indonesia	4662	1.55%
Germany	4448	1.47%
Pakistan	4171	1.38%
Nigeria	3669	1.22%

Gender is also considered a significant variable in this study. As mentioned previously, 301.694 international students study in higher education institutions in Türkiye currently. According to the data

obtained from YÖK (URL-2), 179.670 (59.6%) of these students are male, while 122.024 (40.4%) are female students. As of the 2022-2023 academic year, Türkiye has welcomed 103.498 newly registered students. Among these, 58.629 (56.6%) students are male, since 44.869 (43.3%) are female students. These data indicate that male students make up the majority of international students in Türkiye. However, the disparity is not distributed equally between the countries (Lewis & Lüküslü, 2024). They state, in their work, that "around 80% of students from Yemen, three-quarters of students from Afghanistan and Nigeria, and roughly two thirds of students from Azerbaijan, Somalia, Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan are male. However, female students outnumber male students, or their ratios are more balanced among cohorts from countries like Germany (57% female), Iran (55% female), Kazakhstan (54% female), Bulgaria (53% female), and Turkmenistan (51% female). This indicates that there is a disparity between genders, but it does not include all the countries. Therefore, this disparity can be explained by cultural, religious, or geographical reasons.

Proving the information given in the previous paragraph, Table 10.8 demonstrates the disparity between the genders. This list shows that, except for a few countries, mostly male international students from many countries study in Türkiye. This can be explained by the fact that many of these countries have strict religious rules. Some religious governments or beliefs may not emphasize the schooling of girls. Countries such as Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, and Palestine can be given as examples for it. However, explaining this phenomenon only with religious beliefs may not be enough; it is also useful to consider cultural reasons. Countries including Iran, Turkmenistan, and Morocco are examples in this issue since they have the same religious background as the countries mentioned before but have a higher number of international female students in Türkiye. On the other hand, the number of female international students of German origin in Türkiye is approximately twice that of male students, and this can be explained by socio-cultural reasons. There is a long-standing interstate relationship between Türkiye and Germany. The reason for this is the wave of guest

migrant workers from Türkiye to Germany, which started in the 1960s and lasted until the 90s. In this wave of immigrant workers, many Turks went to Germany as workers and then took their family members with them and established a life in Germany (Kocaman-Wilutzki, 2023). Today, 2.85 million citizens of Turkish origin live in Germany. However, these Turks who migrated did not sever their ties with Türkiye. Therefore, it can be said that many international students coming from Germany are actually of Turkish origin, meaning that a large portion of the number of students coming from Germany to Turkey for university education may consist of these students. In fact, the high number of female students of German origin can be partially explained by this. It would not be interesting if Turkish-origin families living in Germany found it safer to send their daughters to their hometown for university education than to send them to another country. To put it briefly, the situation of students of German origin in the context of international studentship requires a separate and multidimensional analysis from other origins.

Table 10.8 Gender distribution by countries (2022–3023)
(Source: Lewis & Lüküslü, 2024.)

Country	Number of Students	Male	Female
Syria	58,213	32,890	25,323
Azerbaijan	34,247	23,023	11,224
Iran	22,632	10,157	12,475
Turkmenistan	18,250	8,901	9,349
Iraq	16,172	9,948	6,224
Somalia	10,043	6,540	3,503
Egypt	9,597	6,304	3,293
Afghanistan	9,203	6,812	2,391
Kazakhstan	8,864	4,116	4,748
Yemen	8,198	6,599	1,599

Jordan	7,266	5,022	2,244
Palestine	5,705	4,004	1,701
Sudan	5,171	4,013	1,158
Bulgaria	5,120	2,414	2,706
Morocco	4,958	2,280	2,678
Uzbekistan	4,794	3,012	1,782
Indonesia	4,662	2,690	1,972
Germany	4,448	1,896	2,552
Pakistan	4,171	2,659	1,512
Nigeria	3,669	2,741	928
Total (Countries Listed)	245,383	146,021	99,362
Total (All Countries)	301,694	179,670	122,024

As previously mentioned, more international students are being drawn to certain departments and faculties in addition to institutions. According to 2018–2020 data (URL-7), international students in Türkiye mostly enroll in the following departments in various universities: Business and Economics (23%), Engineering departments (20%), Arts and Sciences departments (10%), Health and Medicine (13%) and Education (12%). In addition to these departments, students also enroll in departments such as theology, agriculture, and veterinary medicine. The data obtained from YÖK which indicates the popular departments for the 2009–2010 academic year, provides similar results, though. In the 2009–2010 academic year, international students seemed to have tended to enroll in departments of business, economics, engineering, health and medicine, arts and sciences, and education mostly (URL-8). It can be stated that departments including business, economics, engineering, and medicine have always been popular among international students all over the world since these departments address international audiences. Additionally, departments such as engineering and medicine are known for providing qualified education in Türkiye;

therefore, it is not unexpected to observe that these departments draw international students. As a final touch, the rationale behind the selection of Türkiye by international students will be discussed. The data obtained from UDEF (URL-3) indicates that international students enroll in higher education institutions in Türkiye due to various reasons. In Table 10.9, these reasons are listed.

Table 10.9 The reasons behind studying in Türkiye (Source: UDEF, 2024)

	Reason	Rate (%)
1.	Qualified Education	23.39
2.	Similarity in Religion	19.81
3.	Similarity in Culture	12.37
4.	Family Advice	8.65
5.	Scientific Achievements	8.45
6.	Geographical Location	5.41
7.	Turkish Acquaintances	3.99
8.	Friend Advice	3.58
9.	Geographical Proximity	2.77
10.	Türkiye Scholarships	2.77
11.	Scholarship Opportunities	2.64
12.	Being More Affordable than Home Country	2.03
13.	The Advantage of Being a Türkiye Graduate When Finding a Job	1.49
14.	Getting a Visa is Easy	0.95
15.	Being Visa-Free	0.88
16.	Difficulty in Obtaining a visa to Europe/USA	0.81
		100%

As the table indicates, Türkiye is a center of attraction for international students in higher education due to various reasons. According to international students' views, having a qualified education is the most important reason for enrolling in a higher education

institution in Türkiye. The table shows that 23.39% of the international students interviewed believed that they would have a qualified education. The following reason, as suggested in various parts of this chapter, is having the same religious background as Turkish society. A common religious view and lifestyle, as 19.81% of the international students stated, is an important factor for their higher education preferences. A third reason for international students is, unsurprisingly, having cultural bonds or similarities with Turkish society. Confirming this, 37% of the international students mentioned their preferences were influenced by cultural reasons. In addition to these reasons, 86.5% of the international students expressed that they were affected by their families' advice on preferring Türkiye for higher education. International students, in addition, stated some other reasons for studying in Türkiye including geographical location and proximity, financial reasons, visa exemption, and so on. Above these, Türkiye scholarships are listed as well, which is mentioned in the previous pages. It is observed that the steps taken by the Turkish government in this regard have been effective in attracting foreign students.

The demographics of international students currently enrolled in Turkish higher education institutions were covered in this section of the chapter. The following section will provide the conclusion and further suggestions for future research.

10.7 CONCLUSION

Internationalization, which is a relatively new phenomenon in educational contexts, is a dynamic process that aims to enhance education to global standards. Internationalization is an inevitable and natural consequence of globalization, which has swept the world and changed it radically, especially in recent decades. Higher education institutions, like all institutions in the world, whether small, large, local, or international, have been affected by this change. In order to catch up with global standards, not to fall behind the times and to take part in the global common market, higher education institutions focus on providing

teaching outcomes that satisfy global standards. Internationalization of higher education, as a matter of fact, is described as the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into all the processes, including teaching, research, and service, of an institution.

International students, on the other hand, are described as students who relocate between countries or cross a border for educational activities. Unlike the term "foreign student", international students are expected to have crossed a country border for educational purposes.

The number of international students has been growing throughout the world, and Türkiye is one of the popular countries for international students, as the number of international students it hosts is considered. As of today, Türkiye hosts around 300.000 international students and is one of the top-10 countries with the highest number of international students. In the light of these data, it can be said that Türkiye has taken firm steps in the internationalization process.

This study basically focuses on three main hypotheses. These include:

- (1) Over the past ten years, Türkiye has grown in popularity for international students for higher education.
- (2) There is typically a concentration of international students in particular towns and universities.
- (3) International students have certain demographic characteristics (both academically and individually) in common.

First of all, it is crystal clear that Türkiye has been popular for international students, especially for higher education, over the last decade. Since 2020, in particular, Türkiye has become one of the top 10 countries for international students, and it has grown in rapid popularity. It should be noted that various regulations made by the Turkish government and some opportunities offered, such as Türkiye scholarships, played an important role in this achievement.

In Türkiye, international students are concentrated in some cities and universities. Considering the number of international students, the cities Istanbul, Ankara, Eskişehir, Karabük and Erzurum lead the list;

however, considering the ratio of domestic students to international students, it is observed that the cities Karabük, Kütahya, Sakarya, Bursa, and Samsun stand out. In this list, Kütahya and Karabük are particularly noteworthy with their number and rate of international students since these cities are actually not very popular for domestic students. In this case, it is possible to say that domestic students and international students consider different criteria in their university selection. In fact, it can be estimated that the cities of Karabük and Kütahya have successfully managed policies to attract international students to their universities and that they make a strong representation of their universities in the international arena. It can be said that the opportunities offered to foreign students have contributed to the successful attraction of students to these universities. Considering these issues, it is suggested for future researchers to carry out a detailed study on these universities. Furthermore, the data show that international students tend to concentrate in some particular universities (Table 10.6); however, this concentration seems to be parallel to the concentration in cities. Therefore, it can be suggested that international students tend to enroll in some universities and, consequently, some cities. For Istanbul alone, the situation can be different; international students who did not enroll in a state university preferred to enroll in various foundation universities in Istanbul.

When it comes to the characteristics of the international students, it is no doubt that they have some common characteristics in common. As discussed previously, geographical proximity between countries or having a common religious, cultural, or ethnic background is of significant importance (Table 10.7). Gender is another issue to be discussed for this chapter since it is a remarkable aspect to consider. It is observed that the number of male international students, especially from particular regions or countries, is dramatically higher than female students, whereas in some regions or countries there is a balance between the genders. This situation can also be discussed within the frames of cultural or religious boundaries. Socio-cultural factors

constitute another aspect at this point; it has been determined that some countries are also affected by socio-cultural situations.

It is also discussed in this chapter that some particular departments are subject to more preference by the international students. These include departments of business and economics, engineering, arts and sciences, health and medicine, and education. Besides, international students seem to enroll in faculties of theology, agriculture, and veterinary medicine. This data shows that international students, mostly, prefer to enroll in departments addressing an international audience.

As a final remark, the reasons argued by the international students to study in Türkiye were discussed. According to the international students' responses, having a qualified education ranked first among all the reasons, similarity in religion ranked second and similarity in culture ranked third. As discussed throughout the whole chapter and the data suggest, cultural, religious, and ethnic similarities are of significant importance for international students and internationalization in Türkiye. The other reasons include family advice, geographical location and proximity, and scholarship opportunities in Türkiye (Türkiye Scholarships). It is unsurprising to find that the characteristics, the department/university preferences of international students, and their reasons to study in Türkiye are in harmony like parts of a whole.

Internationalization is an inevitable result of globalization, and Türkiye has managed to attract a large number of international students by successfully managing its own internationalization process. It seems that Türkiye, both with its various regulations and the scholarships it offers, will continue to attract international students and become a strong part of the common global market.

In order to better manage the higher education part of the internationalization process and eliminate deficiencies, as well as to grow further in the international market, it is important to hold detailed interviews with international students and focus on the points they see as deficiencies. Therefore, it may be recommended to conduct detailed interviews with international students in future studies. Additionally, reaching international students in multiple institutions and working with

a large number of international students will provide guidance to Türkiye in the internationalization process.

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