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Türkiye as an Educational Destination: Student Preference Dynamics and Future Expectations from the Turkic World

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ABSTRACT: *This research examines the reasons why students from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan choose Türkiye for higher education and their expectations regarding the educational process. Through semi-structured interviews, qualitative data from 26 university students revealed that the factors influencing the choice of Türkiye as a higher education destination cluster into four main themes: academic attractiveness, geographical and social proximity, cultural-historical continuity, and economic accessibility. The findings indicate that the perceived quality of education, program diversity and international recognition of diplomas at Turkish universities constitute significant attraction factors. Geographical location and social structure stand out as complementary factors that facilitate students' adaptation, whereas shared language, history, and cultural ties strengthen the sense of belonging to Türkiye. Furthermore, the relatively low cost of living and the widespread availability of scholarships and financial support make Türkiye an economically accessible option. The research findings indicate that for Türkiye to become a competitive regional higher education destination, it needs to develop sustainable policies that holistically consider the academic, cultural, and economic expectations of international students.*

Keywords: Turkic world, International students, Higher education, Türkiye, Education

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INTRODUCTION

International student migration is defined as a voluntary and temporary form of mobility undertaken by individuals between countries with different education systems to acquire higher education qualifications. With globalization, increasing competition in higher education, and the rise of the knowledge economy, this mobility is no longer merely a matter of personal choice; it has become closely linked to the economic, cultural, and political strategies of countries. The main driving forces behind this migration include students' desire to access advanced academic opportunities, broaden their areas of expertise, and obtain international professional qualifications (Tezcan, 2000). This process, often referred to as “academic migration” in the literature, is mostly voluntary and manifests itself as a relocation of individuals limited to the duration of their education (Juang & Schachner, 2020; Şevket, 2009). While approximately 800,000 students participated in international educational mobility worldwide in the 1970s, this number rose to 1.3 million in 1990 and 4.5 million in 2012 (Bohm, 2002). With the influx of students, particularly from East Asian countries, to North America and Europe, the total number reached 7.5 million in 2021 and is projected to reach 20 million by 2030 (OECD, 2024).

Although international student mobility initially took shape in line with the goals of developing countries to cultivate qualified human resources, it has gradually transformed into a significant economic and strategic sector for developed countries. The expenditures made by students during and after their education and their entry into the labor market of the host country provide significant economic contributions to these countries; however, these expenditures can lead to human capital loss and economic disadvantages for the sending countries (Akar, 2024). Therefore, international student migration is now considered a global phenomenon with multifaceted effects, including knowledge transfer, cultural exchange, capital flow, and demographic changes (Alkar, 2022). According to Castles and Miller's migration theories, mobility tends to favor countries with strong economies, political stability, and democratic governance (Adıgüzel, 2018). This trend is also reflected in student flows, with the U.S., the UK, Australia, Germany, France, and Canada attracting the greatest number of international students (OECD, 2021).

Although Türkiye may not be among the leading countries on a global scale, it has attracted attention in recent years because of its steady increase in the number of international students. The number of international students, which was 31,170 in the 2011–2012 academic year, reached 301,694 students from 198 countries in the 2022–2023 period (UDEP, 2024). As of 2022, Türkiye has become among the

top 10 countries hosting the most international students worldwide, rising to fifth place in Europe (YÖK, 2022). Student mobility to Türkiye gained momentum, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Turkic Republics; the Great Student Project and YTB scholarship programs have established this process within an institutional framework. Owing to its geographical location and historical ties, Türkiye has become an important educational origin, particularly for students from the Turkic world (Kethüda, 2015; Nguluma et al. 2019; OECD, 2020). In this context, examining the reasons why students from the Turkic world choose Türkiye and their expectations from Türkiye is important both for understanding the dynamics of international student mobility and for providing data that will guide Türkiye's higher education policies.

Literature Review

The literature on international students' host country preferences indicates that decision-making processes are multidimensional. Research conducted in different country contexts reveals that academic quality, international recognition of universities, language of instruction, scholarship opportunities, and postgraduation career opportunities are decisive factors in student preferences (Levatino, 2025; OECD, 2023; Pawar, 2025). In addition, the cost of living, immigration policies and social integration conditions are important attraction factors influencing students' choices (Dzotsenidze, 2025). Studies specific to Türkiye highlight the decisive role of cultural proximity, shared historical ties, geographical location and economic accessibility in addition to these global attraction factors (Avşar & Khalid, 2025; Çiftçiöğlu & Altınok, 2024) while emphasizing that scholarship programs provided by institutions such as the YTB and the academic diversity of universities reinforce the selection process (YTB, 2023; Özalp et al. 2025). The limited literature focusing on students of Turkish origin, forming a subset of this general trend, suggests that ethnocultural factors such as linguistic proximity and a sense of historical belonging give Türkiye an advantageous position compared to other countries (Enterieva & Sezgin, 2016; Kiliç & Atmaca, 2025). However, the existing body of knowledge describes only the selection phase of this student group; it falls short of addressing their expectations, experiences and needs regarding the educational process with a holistic approach (Avcılar & Gök, 2022; Enterieva, 2025; Yerken et al. 2022). This situation clearly reveals the lack of studies that address the experiences and needs of students from the Turkic world from a holistic perspective, both in the international student mobility literature and in the context of Türkiye. Therefore, this research aims to fill this knowledge gap and make original contributions to the field.

METHOD

This study was conducted using a phenomenological research design, which is positioned within qualitative research paradigms. Phenomenology is an approach that aims to reveal the common and shared aspects of a phenomenon by starting from individuals' direct experiences with that phenomenon and the meanings they

attribute to those experiences (Creswell, 2020). Data collection in this research was carried out through semistructured interviews. This method was chosen because it allowed participants to reflect in detail on their motivations for choosing Türkiye and the expectations shaped by this choice through their own narratives. Semistructured interviews were considered a functional data collection technique that provides the researcher with a specific framework while also providing participants with a flexible space for expression, allowing for the acquisition of in-depth and contextual data consistent with the research questions (Büyüköztürk et al. 2014).

Participants

The study group for this research consists of a total of 26 international students of Turkic Republic origin who are studying at universities in Türkiye. Seventeen of the participants were male, and nine were female. A voluntary participation approach was adopted in the formation of the study group; snowball sampling and criterion sampling strategies were used together in the process of reaching the participants. Within the scope of criterion sampling, the basic condition for inclusion in the research was that the students must be citizens of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan or Azerbaijan. Demographic information concerning the participant group formed accordingly is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	Section	Country	Duration of Residence
P1	F	25	Single	Economy	Kyrgyzstan	2 year
P2	M	27	Single	Business	Azerbaijan	3 year
P3	M	23	Single	Engineering	Turkmenistan	1 year
P4	F	22	Single	Engineering	Uzbekistan	1 year
P5	M	28	Single	Dentistry	Turkmenistan	2 year
P6	M	32	Married	Translation	Uzbekistan	4 year
P7	M	29	Single	Medicine	Uzbekistan	4 year
P8	M	21	Single	Psychology	Kyrgyzstan	1 month
P9	M	23	Single	Psychology	Turkmenistan	1 month
P10	M	25	Single	Psychology	Kazakhstan	1 month
P11	M	24	Single	Translation	Kyrgyzstan	1 month
P12	M	26	Single	Translation	Kyrgyzstan	1 month
P13	F	21	Single	Business	Azerbaijan	1 month
P14	F	20	Single	Theology	Azerbaijan	1 month
P15	F	23	Single	Engineering	Kazakhstan	1 month
P16	M	31	Married	Dentistry	Uzbekistan	4 year
P17	M	24	Single	Business	Uzbekistan	2 year
P18	F	23	Single	Politics	Azerbaijan	1 year
P19	F	21	Single	Education	Kazakhstan	1 year
P20	F	28	Married	Dentistry	Kyrgyzstan	5 year
P21	M	25	Single	Business	Azerbaijan	2 year
P22	M	27	Single	Engineering	Turkmenistan	2 year
P23	M	26	Single	Medicine	Azerbaijan	3 year
P24	M	22	Single	Education	Turkmenistan	2 year
P25	F	22	Single	Education	Kazakhstan	1 year
P26	M	28	Single	Medicine	Kazakhstan	4 year

Table 1 presents descriptive information on the sex distribution, age groups, marital status, academic fields of study, nationalities and duration of stay in Türkiye for the international students included in the study. Among the 26 students in the research group, 9 were female and 17 were male, with ages ranging from 20 to 32. Students are pursuing studies in various academic disciplines, primarily business, engineering, linguistics and health. Furthermore, the varying duration of their stay in Türkiye from one month to five years allows for a multifaceted assessment of both their academic adaptation processes and their sociocultural experiences.

Data collection

The data collection process was conducted using a qualitative research approach with international students studying at universities in Istanbul during the 2024–2025 academic year. A semistructured interview technique was preferred to reveal the participants' experiences in depth and contextually. This technique provided a framework based on predetermined questions while allowing for the introduction of new questions depending on the course of the interview, thus enriching the participants' narratives (Merriam, 2015; Patton, 2014). The first section of the interview form includes descriptive information about the participants' sex, age, marital status, field of study, length of stay in Türkiye and nationality. The second section contains open-ended questions aimed at revealing their reasons for choosing Türkiye, their level of satisfaction with their life experiences in Türkiye, their perceptions of economic conditions, and their feelings of security. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher; each interview lasted approximately 15–30 minutes and was audio recorded with the explicit consent of the participants to prevent data loss. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the principle of voluntary participation, confidentiality principles and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage; the collected data were coded and reported in a way that did not reveal the identities of the participants in accordance with ethical responsibilities.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data, audio recordings obtained through semistructured interviews¹ were first converted into written texts, and then a qualitative data analysis process was carried out on these texts. A content analysis approach was adopted in the analytical process; through this approach, the patterns of meaning, recurring expressions, and implicit relationships in the participants' narratives were examined within a systematic framework. Similar opinions were coded on the basis of conceptual integrity, and these codes were combined and interpreted under higher-level themes (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). To conduct the data analysis process in a more organized and traceable manner, MAXQDA software, which offers comprehensive tools for qualitative data analysis, was used; this

¹ Interview questions were provided at the end of the study.

software allows for detailed examination of the texts, establishment of relationships between codes and deepening of analytical inferences (Çayır & Sarıtaş, 2017). All the stages of digitizing, coding and thematically structuring the data were carried out by the researcher; in this process, the data were meticulously classified, taking into account similarities and differences, and evaluated within a holistic framework of meaning.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, validity refers to practices aimed at determining the extent to which the findings accurately and convincingly reflect the phenomenon under investigation; reliability, on the other hand, shows whether similar results can be obtained when the analysis process is repeated by different researchers (Gibbs, 2007). In this research, to ensure validity, the data obtained from the participants' opinions were examined in detail in light of the theoretical framework and relevant literature, and the semantic integrity between the created codes and themes was meticulously investigated. To increase reliability, the analysis process was reviewed by two independent researchers within the scope of an external audit approach; the coding and theme creation stages were systematically recorded in a transparent and traceable manner. In addition, cross-checking was performed by comparing the findings obtained by different researchers, and the consistency of the results was evaluated (Creswell, 2020). As a result of this holistic process, the research findings were clearly reported in detail, strengthening the scientific validity and reliability of the study.

FINDINGS

The research involved interviewing higher education students from the Turkic world about their reasons for choosing Türkiye and the experiences and life events associated with this decision. Analysis of the data obtained from the interviews revealed that the participants' narratives were concentrated around certain common patterns of meaning, and the findings were structured under four main themes. Each theme was further elaborated through sub codes derived from the participants' statements. A comprehensive overview of these themes and their corresponding codes is presented in Figure 1.

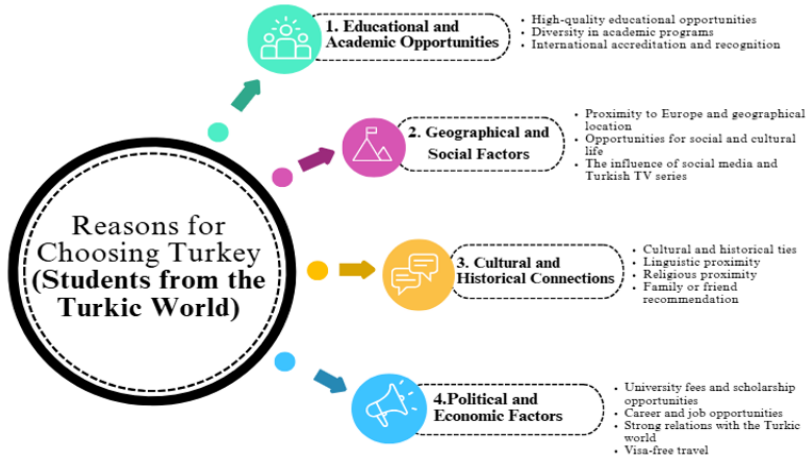


Figure 1: Reasons Why Students from The Turkic World Choose Türkiye.

An examination of Figure 1 reveals that the reasons why higher education students from the Turkic world choose to study in Türkiye are structured around four main themes. The participants' evaluations and experiences regarding these themes are presented in detail below.

1. Educational and Academic Opportunities

When participants chose Türkiye, educational and academic opportunities stand out as key themes. Within this theme, students cited “quality educational opportunities, diversity in academic programs, international accreditation and recognition” as determining factors.

High-quality educational opportunities: The vast majority of participants stated that universities in Türkiye have strong physical infrastructure, advanced educational facilities, and academic environments that support learning. Students emphasized that these conditions provide them with high-quality education; they stated that the courses met their expectations in terms of content, methods, and application. Some of the participants' opinions on this subject are presented below.

The education offered by universities in Türkiye is truly impressive. I could have received a good education in my own country, but the technological infrastructure, modern libraries and expert professors in their fields at the universities here attracted me. (P2)

I did not expect the quality of education at universities in Türkiye to be this high. There are many laboratory facilities and extracurricular academic activities here. I have always received support in the projects I do in my field, and this

pushes me further. Studying in Türkiye makes me feel more equipped academically and professionally. (P23)

Diversity in Academic Programs: The large number of programs offered by universities in Türkiye contributes to the diversity of choices.

There are many different departments and programs available at universities in Türkiye, which allows me to shape my education according to my interests. There are numerous options in both basic sciences and applied fields. (P8)

International Accreditation and Recognition: The international recognition of higher education and the high number of collaborations within the Erasmus program at universities in Türkiye are significant reasons for choosing this university.

The fact that universities in Türkiye have international accreditations and collaborations was an important factor in my decision to choose this university. For example, I studied at a university in Italy last semester under the Erasmus program, and this experience enriched me both culturally and academically. (P11)

2. Geographical and Social Factors

The participants indicate that geographical and social factors play a decisive role in the decision-making processes of students from the Turkic world who are choosing Türkiye. Under this theme, “proximity to Europe and geographical location, opportunities for social and cultural life and the influence of social media and Turkish TV series” are seen as influencing student preferences. In this context, some of the participants’ opinions are given below.

Proximity to Europe and geographical location: In the participants’ statements, Türkiye’s position as a bridge between Asia and Europe, its developed transportation networks, and the ease of access to different geographies stand out as important reasons for preference.

Türkiye being surrounded by seas makes living here much more attractive. We can go to the beach with friends on weekends and relieve stress. These natural beauty features of Türkiye have made my education more enjoyable. (P13)

Opportunities for social and cultural life: Participants stated that the cultural richness and variety of social activities in Türkiye enriched their extracurricular activities.

Meeting people from different cultures and participating in social events has greatly improved me. Being a student in Türkiye offers not only education but also a rich cultural experience. (P9)

Influence of social media and Turkish TV series: The majority of participants stated that Turkish TV series are very popular in their own countries and that they find much content about Türkiye on social media.

Turkish TV series are very popular in our country. The posts about the series and actors on social media have brought me closer to Türkiye. I was already familiar with this culture before coming to Türkiye. (P24)

I learned a lot about Türkiye by watching Turkish TV series on social media. I gained insight into the culture and lifestyle in particular, which increased my desire to come to Türkiye. (P20)

3. Cultural and Historical Connections

Under this theme, participant statements focus on elements such as cultural and historical ties, linguistic proximity, religious affinity and advice from family or friends. Some participants' opinions are as follows:

Cultural and historical ties: Participants stated that they found Türkiye similar to their own countries in terms of daily life, social relations, and values; this cultural continuity facilitated the adaptation process and reduced feelings of alienation.

Our cultural and historical ties are so strong that coming to Türkiye makes me feel at home. This shared heritage has greatly facilitated my adaptation process. (P1)

Language proximity: The participants stated that there are very significant similarities between their own languages and Turkish.

When I came to Türkiye, I didn't have any difficulty with the language. Since Azerbaijani Turkish and Turkish Turkish are very similar, I easily understood the lessons. Being able to communicate easily with teachers and friends helped me adapt quickly. (P23)

Religious proximity: Participants stated that religious life in Türkiye is much more liberal than it is in their own countries and that their religious sensitivities are respected in Türkiye.

In Kyrgyzstan, wearing a headscarf can sometimes be a problem; there are different opinions in society. In Türkiye, seeing that wearing a headscarf is a natural thing makes me very happy. Here, everyone can freely express their beliefs. (P25)

Family or friend recommendation: Participants stated that the advice of relatives or friends who had previously come to Türkiye was influential both in their own decision and in their family's acceptance.

As my friends described Türkiye, I felt a sense of excitement. They said, 'Here you can both get an education and make new friends. (P26)

My family was very supportive of me going to Türkiye. My mother, in particular, reassured me by saying that getting an education there would change my life. In addition, some of my mother's relatives were already living here. (P7)

4. Political and Economic Factors

Political and economic conditions significantly affect the country choice of students coming to Türkiye from the Turkic world. The participants' statements focus on university fees and scholarship opportunities, career and job opportunities, strong relationships with the Turkic world, and visa-free travel.

University fees and scholarship opportunities: Participants stated that the scholarship programs, tuition subsidies and large quotas allocated to students from the Turkic world offered by Türkiye through YTB (Turkish Scholarships and Student Loans Institution) were decisive in their educational decisions.

Owing to scholarship opportunities in Türkiye, I am able to receive a high-quality education. These opportunities have helped me improve myself both financially and academically. Otherwise, studying here would have been a dream for me. (P19)

Studying in Türkiye owing to scholarship opportunities is like a dream for me. My family raised me in difficult financial circumstances; I can never forget their sacrifices. When I won the scholarship, I started carrying not only my own future but also my family's hopes. (P28)

Career and job opportunities: Participants stated that they have an advantage in terms of language and appearance compared to citizens of other countries and that this provides an advantage in terms of career and job finding.

Our resemblance to Turks in appearance has helped me in the job-finding process. Employers trust me more because of our shared roots. This is a truly important advantage for me and allows me to express myself more comfortably. (P16)

Studying in Türkiye is a great opportunity for my career. I know that the knowledge I gain here will increase my chances of finding a job." "Additionally, establishing international connections makes me look to the future with more hope. (P6)

Strong relations with the Turkic world: Participants stated that both the trade agreements and the strong relations their countries have with the Turkish state have created a sense of security for them.

It is wonderful to meet so many people from the Turkic world in Türkiye. Owing to these strong relationships, I don't feel alone here. We all support each other, and sharing our common past deepens our friendship. (P11)

Kyrgyzstan's strong relations with Türkiye make me feel more secure in my education here. Trade agreements strengthen the bond between the two countries while also offering more opportunities to students like me. This atmosphere of trust increases the value of studying in Türkiye. (P12)

Visa-free travel: Participants stated that Türkiye's visa free travel policy is a preferred option because it makes it easier for both themselves and their families to travel back and forth.

Visa-free travel has made it much easier for me to come to Türkiye. Thanks to this, I can easily travel to visit my family and friends. (P5)

The fact that Türkiye does not require visas for our country makes it much easier for me to visit my family. This allows both me and my family to come and go to Türkiye whenever we want. Thus, I can spend more time with my loved ones. (P23)

DISCUSSION

The findings concerning the reasons for choosing Türkiye as a higher education destination by students from the Turkic world largely align with the literature. These four main themes are educational and academic opportunities, geographical and social factors, cultural and historical connections and economic and financial factors. These themes offer important insights into how Türkiye positions its higher education system and student attractiveness at the global level.

First, the findings related to the theme of educational and academic opportunities show that Türkiye's higher education institutions are preferable in terms of physical and academic facilities. These findings are also seen in similar studies conducted in other countries. For example, research indicating that international students studying in Canada choose that country because of its high quality of education and research opportunities is consistent with this study (Melissa & Yun, 2017). Almost all the participants stated that they were satisfied with the quality of education and the diversity of academic programs offered by universities in Türkiye. International accreditations and exchange programs such as Erasmus were also cited as increasing Türkiye's academic attractiveness. These findings support the effectiveness of Türkiye's internationalization strategies in higher education, which are frequently emphasized in the literature (Çalışkan, 2019). These strategies contribute to an increase in the number of international students and to Türkiye's goal of becoming a regional educational hub.

Second, the findings under the heading of geographical and social factors show that Türkiye stands out as an attractive educational destination for international students because of both its strategic location and its social life. Türkiye's role as a bridge between Asia and Europe is a noteworthy feature for students (Demir, 2023). This highlights Türkiye's significant position in the international student market. In particular, Türkiye's historical and natural features have been observed to have a decisive influence on students' preferences. Furthermore, the influence of social media and Turkish TV series on the younger generation is remarkable, revealing that these cultural elements are significant factors that increase the flow of international students to Türkiye (Gülner & Balcı, 2010). This can be considered a reflection of Türkiye's soft power policies (Yazar, 2020). Hammad's (2023) research on popular culture supports these findings, revealing that social media and popular culture are becoming increasingly influential in the educational

choices of international students. Türkiye's strategic use of its cultural and social ties provides a significant advantage in both attracting international students and fostering cultural interaction. Consequently, it appears that Türkiye's cultural and social structure makes it not only an educational origin but also an attractive destination for international students in terms of social life.

Third, regarding cultural and historical connections, participants indicated that factors such as linguistic and religious proximity positively contributed to their adaptation processes. In particular, students from the Turkic world stated that they did not feel like strangers in Türkiye because of cultural similarities, demonstrating the strong influence of historical ties in this context. These findings support studies showing that cultural proximity plays a significant role in choosing a destination in international student mobility (Bektaş, 2008; Özlük et al. 2019; Yıldırım & Köksal, 2017). Finally, under the heading of economic and financial factors, scholarships and job opportunities are seen as attractive to students. Türkiye's provision of financial support mechanisms to students, particularly through YTB scholarships, creates a significant advantage in student choices. These findings are consistent with studies highlighting the impact of economic opportunities on international student preferences (Teichler, 2017). Furthermore, Türkiye's commercial and diplomatic relations with the Turkic world also contribute to students viewing the country as a safe haven for education.

CONCLUSION

This study deeply examines the reasons why higher education students from the Turkic world choose Türkiye, analyzing them through four main themes and 14 codes. The findings reveal that the educational and academic opportunities offered by Türkiye, geographical and social factors, cultural and historical connections, and economic and financial advantages play significant roles in students' choice of Türkiye. Türkiye has become an attractive educational origin for students from the Turkic world because of its internationally accredited educational institutions and rich academic programs. In this context, these opportunities, which support students in achieving their academic goals, create a remarkable appeal for international students who choose Türkiye. In particular, the extensive research opportunities of universities and the opportunities to participate in international student exchange programs such as Erasmus increase Türkiye's global competitiveness in the field of higher education.

Social and cultural factors also appear to constitute a significant share of students' choice of Türkiye. Türkiye's strategic location, rich social structure and influence of the media make Türkiye more attractive in the eyes of students. Students develop positive perceptions of the Turkish way of life through social media and popular culture, which shape their choices toward Türkiye. Furthermore, cultural and historical ties, particularly linguistic and religious affinity, make Türkiye a more accessible and comfortable educational environment for students from the Turkic world. In this context, students find themselves in an environment where they can adapt more easily in Türkiye, and

they report that their social integration processes are accelerated. Thus, it is emphasized that studying in Türkiye has positive contributions not only academically but also socially and culturally.

Economic and financial opportunities are among the other important factors that increase Türkiye's attractiveness for international students. Scholarship opportunities offered by Türkiye, affordable living costs, and post-graduation job opportunities have been decisive factors in students with economic concerns choosing Türkiye. In particular, scholarship programs in Türkiye help students reduce their educational costs and facilitate their access to higher education. This demonstrates that Türkiye has a competitive economic advantage in the global student market. In conclusion, the diverse opportunities offered by Türkiye are not limited to the quality of education alone but also constitute a strong preference for international students in social, cultural, and economic terms. Accordingly, further emphasizing and developing the advantages offered by Turkish universities for international students will increase Türkiye's capacity to attract more international students in the future. Strengthening education policies with supportive programs for students' social and cultural integration processes can increase international student satisfaction and success rates. Furthermore, the effective use of social media and digital platforms, together with the dissemination of elements of Turkish popular culture, may help Türkiye reach a wider target audience in terms of international student mobility. In this context, re-evaluating Türkiye's international student strategies and further developing these advantages will increase Türkiye's attractiveness and enhance its international competitiveness in education.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has several important limitations. First, the study is limited to 26 students from the Turkic world, and this group should not be considered homogeneous. Participants' experiences and reasons for choosing Türkiye may differ across individuals. For example, students from different countries may have different perspectives on the Turkish education system or their social adaptation process. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized in this context.

Second, only semi structured interviews were used in the study. While this method reflects the in-depth views of the participants, some important information may have been overlooked. In particular, more data could have been collected regarding the difficulties or negative experiences the students faced. In addition, it could have been enriched with other data collection methods, such as surveys or focus group interviews. With these methods, different perspectives can be obtained from a wider range of participants.

Third, only the students' perspective was considered in the research, and the views of academics or administrative staff working in universities in Türkiye were not included in the study. This situation made it difficult to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation of the services and opportunities that universities offer to international students. Since there may be differences between students'

experiences and university officials' expectations, including these perspectives can help us understand the study's findings more deeply.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author(s) report no potential conflicts of interest in relation to this study.

Data availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines established in the Helsinki Declaration. Approval was obtained from the Istanbul Gelisim University Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2024-16). No personally identifiable information was collected from the participants.

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Appendix 1: Interview Form

1. How did your decision to choose Türkiye for higher education take shape?

- What was the primary factor that determined your choice of Türkiye? Did this factor change over time?
- Were there any differences between your expectations before coming to Türkiye and the reality you encountered after arriving?

2. How do you evaluate the academic environment and educational process offered at universities in Türkiye?

- To what extent do you think the education you received met your expectations in terms of content, teaching methods, and academic competence?
- How did the variety of programs and the validity of the diploma shape your career plans?

3. What were the effects of living in Türkiye on your adaptation process in terms of social, cultural, and geographical aspects?

- How did your adaptation process to daily life in Türkiye progress? What were the areas where you struggled or adapted easily?
- How did the common language, cultural similarities, and historical ties affect whether you felt “foreign” or “close” in Türkiye?
- What was the role of the university environment and the local community in your process of building a social network?
 - How would you evaluate the impact of Türkiye's geographical location (transportation, proximity to your country, etc.) on your decision and experience?

4. How do Türkiye's economic conditions and the support mechanisms it offers affect your educational experience?

- How do you evaluate Türkiye in terms of living costs, housing, and daily expenses?
- To what extent were scholarships, financial support, or work opportunities decisive in your education process?
- How did economic conditions affect your academic success and social life?

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