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## **International Students' Satisfaction Perception of Administrative Services: The Case of a Turkish University**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the perception of international students regarding their satisfaction with administrative services while studying in Türkiye. Internationalization stands as a pivotal policy within Türkiye's higher education framework. In addition to the services students receive at the academic level, the quality of administrative services significantly influences overall student satisfaction. Understanding student satisfaction with public services from their application process to their departure is crucial for identifying and addressing any existing issues. In this context, a survey was conducted with 250 international students at Bartın University. The results indicated general satisfaction with administrative services among participants, with notable variations in responses based on gender, age, prior experiences with administrative issues, and the presence of close relatives or acquaintances in Türkiye. In addition, interviews revealed that the primary causes of administrative difficulties stem from language barriers, procedural complexities in documentation, and associated costs.*

**Keywords:** Administrative services, higher education, international students, non-academic services, student satisfaction, Türkiye

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In recent years, international students, which is one of the important policies of universities, have led countries and higher education institutions to compete with

each other and to produce incentive policies due to their economic, political, social, and cultural contributions (Akpinar& Küçüköksel, 2022). Türkiye is also making efforts to benefit from this process. Efforts are being made to ensure that international students come to Türkiye.

There are various endogenous and exogenous factors that influence students' choice of university and country of study. While some of these factors cannot be intervened upon, some factors can be improved, especially those that can provide a competitive advantage and make universities attractive. One of these factors is the administrative procedures and personnel that students encounter from the time they start to benefit from academic services, during the application process to the university, until they return to their home country. For many students, administrative procedures may influence their choice of university or country or their level of satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to determine the level of satisfaction of international students with administrative services and to develop policies accordingly. In this context, the current study will first discuss international studentship and international students in Türkiye, and then the satisfaction of university students will be discussed. In the last part of the study, the satisfaction levels of Bartın University students, an example from Türkiye, regarding administrative services and processes will be analyzed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **International Studentship and International Students in Türkiye**

In short, international education is the study of a student in a country other than the country of citizenship. While increasing mobility with the impact of globalization has brought education to an international dimension, expectations from universities have gone beyond education, competition has increased, and the search for partnerships has come to the fore (Ger et al., 2017).

The main reasons for internationalization policies in higher education can be grouped under four headings: academic reasons (scientific contribution and development), economic reasons (trained human resources, economic and financial gains), political reasons (contribution to world peace and tranquility), and sociocultural reasons (Selvitopu, 2016). It is stated that internationalization in universities starts with student mobility, and various strategies are developed to be attractive to students (Metem, 2020). The flow of student mobility is mostly from less developed and newly industrialized countries to Western industrialized countries (Li & Bray, 2007).

Internationalization in universities starts with student mobility and various strategies are developed to be attractive to students (Metem, 2020). Strategies developed for internationalization include academic mobility, field studies, curricular activities, activities that support the development of the individual, activities that support the international dimension of the institution, and giving an international, intercultural and global dimension and perspective (Knight, 1994).

In addition to short-term economic contributions such as housing, nutrition, clothing, education, health expenditures, transportation, and other expenditures,

they also have long-term economic impacts and contributions as a qualified workforce. According to a study conducted by NAFSA (2022), international students studying in the US contributed 40.1 billion dollars to the economy in the period 2022-2023. According to 2020-2021 figures, the contribution of international student mobility to the UK is over 41.9 billion (IAS, 2024). In Türkiye, it is stated that international students contribute over 2.1 billion dollars every year (Kabirova et al., 2023). International students also make various contributions to universities. In addition to creating diversity on campuses, student mobility is also seen as a source of increasing university income (Bista et al., 2018). International students are also beneficial in that they are more familiar with different business policies of countries and contribute to broadening the horizons of local students (EEIK, 2012). They contribute to raising qualified manpower, creating economic value, creating sociocultural interaction and strategic cooperation, and producing scientific knowledge at a universal level (Kireççi et al., 2016).

While the total number of international students was 2.1 million worldwide and 18 thousand in Türkiye in 2000, this number exceeded 6.3 million worldwide and 300 thousand in Türkiye in 2021 (YÖK, 2022). While the proportion of international students in OECD countries is 3.4% in associate degree programs, 4.9% in bachelor's programs, 13.6% in master's programs, and 23.6% in doctoral programs, in Türkiye it is 0.9%, 3.2%, 8.4% and 6.7% respectively (TEDMEM, 2023). According to the latest data, there are a total of 301 694 international students in Türkiye (YÖK).

It is seen that the most important strategy for internationalization in higher education in Türkiye is attracting international students (Şahin & Eriçok, 2023). Türkiye's internationalization efforts in higher education are based on academic development and interaction, economic development and solidarity, social and cultural interaction, and the development of political and diplomatic relations (YTB, 2023). YÖK (2017) published the "Strategy Document on Internationalization in Higher Education" covering the years 2018-2022. One of the goals of the 2024-2028 Development Plan is to make universities a center of attraction for international students and successful academics. In this context, the higher education system was harmonized with the quality definitions of the European Higher Education Area and quality qualifications were improved by following global trends and technological developments (SBB, 2023). Within the scope of internationalization of higher education, Türkiye Scholarships and international programs such as "Study in Türkiye" are carried out.

### **Reasons for International Students' Preference and Factors Affecting Satisfaction**

Internal and external factors push students to study in different countries. While internal factors constitute students' individual preferences, external factors are academic and educational quality, image and prestige of the university, administration and staff support, environment and safety, personal influences, career and retention reason, and economic and financial situation (Ngamkamollert

& Ruangkanjanases, 2015). Sandy (2018) defines student preference as an internal factor, and educational service, infrastructure and staff support, image and prestige, sociocultural, security, and economic factors are external factors. Arambewela and Hall (2009) define satisfaction factors as educational factors (feedback from lecturers, access to lecturers, high standards in teaching), social factors (counseling services, social events, close working relationships with all students, international programs), economic factors (temporary jobs, migration opportunities, cost of living), security and lifestyle factor, Prestige (International prestige, prestige of the university in the country of destination, prestige of the university in the country of origin), access to technology and modern technological infrastructure, reasonable cost and good standards in accommodation. The reasons are generally expressed as personal and academic expectations, the opportunities and advantages provided, and the living conditions of the countries (Nkoko, 2016). Although they come for educational purposes, social adaptation is also effective in the positive realization of international students' experiences abroad (Al-Khatib & Kağnıcı, 2023).

Academic quality and reputation, student orientation, internationalization, tuition fees, support, scholarship opportunities, accessibility and facilities, diversity, organizational structure, location and place, recommendations of family and friends, marketing, reputation, support for priorities, and parking facilities (Lapina et al., 2016) influence the level of satisfaction. The focus is on the quality of teaching staff, personal relationships between faculty and students, international activities of the university, employment opportunities, image, information support during the learning process, and university infrastructure (Mizintseva et al. 2016).

There are various studies on students' educational preferences in Türkiye. Some of the factors that influence students' preference for Türkiye are qualified education, scholarship opportunities, learning about different cultures, political characteristics of the countries they come from, cultural affinity, love for Türkiye, educational advantages, seeing education in their countries as inadequate, political uncertainty and turmoil in their countries, taking advantage of the advantages of studying abroad, finding a job easily, lack of graduate education in their countries, economic development, costs, geographical location, relatives, economic and political connections with visa/residence facilities, religious reasons, ease of Turkish language, institutional image of the university, interesting courses, variety of programs, tuition fees, the fact that their country only cooperates with the university they study at, social life around the university, and the usefulness of the university website (Metem & Özgenel, 2021; Metem, 2020; Radmard, 2017; Ger et al. 2017; Savaşan et al, 2017). Another study in Türkiye found that feeling safe, participating in social activities, benefiting from counseling services, communicating with faculty members, and institutionalization facilitated adaptation (Gündüz & Alakbarov, 2019).

The difficulties and problems experienced by students also affect their satisfaction levels. The difficulties experienced by international students in Türkiye are generally language problems, emotional difficulties, financial difficulties, official procedure difficulties, educational assistance problems, health

problems, psychosocial problems, daily activities and leisure time, housing, exclusion, discrimination, prejudice and racism, psychological problems, cultural adaptation, questioning of private information and bureaucratic problems, visa, recognition, and residence (Kılınç et al., 2020; Taylan, 2019; Özoğlu et al., 2012; Mete, 2020; Radmard, 2017; Akanwa, 2015; Savaşan et al., 2017; Tekelioğlu et al., 2012).

### **Satisfaction Level of International Students in Türkiye with Administrative Services**

Administrative services are carried out to meet an important and common need for society (Aydın, 1988). These services are carried out within the framework of legislation within the bureaucratic system. Bureaucracy includes the concepts of division of labor, specialization, organization, hierarchical structure and planning (Akçakaya, 2016). The bureaucratic problems that exist in administrative service delivery in Türkiye is centralization, organizational growth, secrecy and closedness, rule-making and evasion of responsibility, nepotism, conducting business through intermediaries, corruption and bribery, and politicization. The rigidity of hierarchy, the concentration of authority at the top, excessive rules, narrow discretion, inability to renew oneself and lack of competition are also mentioned in this context (Çevikbaş, 2014: 93-94).

International students receive services within the framework of the administrative processes and procedures of the country they come from. Students have to fulfill a large number of administrative processes and procedures from the stage of application to the countries until they graduate / disengage and leave the country, and at the same time, they benefit from many services of that country, such as hospitals, security, transportation, services on campus. Their experiences in this process may affect their satisfaction level. For example, it is stated that non-academic services such as campus systems and student support systems in universities serve as a bridge to student satisfaction (Yang & Sigdel, 2023).

There are various studies in the literature on the impact of non-academic services as well as academic services on the brand and image of universities (e.g., Yang & Sigdel, 2023; Jihad, 2020; Kalim et al., 2022). Although students primarily base their preferences on educational services, it is stated that the features that make universities different and stand out are generally auxiliary elements (Yılmaz & Temizkan, 2022). In addition to the main service, issues such as safety, health, activities, quality of life, university environment and visa requirements can have an impact on the perception of service quality (Cubillo et al., 2006).

In the next section of the study, the satisfaction of international students in Türkiye with administrative services will be analyzed. The administrative services mentioned in the study include public services at all levels (ministry, provincial level, university level, etc.) with which students are in contact. Bartın University was selected within the scope of the research. Bartın is a province with a surface area of 2330 square kilometers and a population of 208 238, with a coast on the Black Sea and large green areas. It has the advantage of being close to the capital,

Ankara (283 km) and the largest city, Istanbul (435 km). The low population density and the fact that it is a quiet city can make the university attractive, especially for international students.

Bartın University, is established in 2008. Compared to previously established universities, it has advantages such as staff dynamism, a technologically compatible system, and the number of students. The university has recently achieved significant national and international success in research, projects, publications and other academic activities (BARÜ NEWS, 2024). Some of these can be listed as follows:

- The university ranked in the top 400 in the world in the Times Higher Education (THE) "2024 Young University Rankings" and became the best public university in Türkiye in the "Research Quality Category." In the "THE University Impact Rankings for 2024" list, it ranked in the top 200 worldwide in 2 areas and in the top 3 in Türkiye. In "THE World University Rankings for 2024", it ranked in the top 500 in the world in the field of "Education," in the top 800 in the field of "Engineering," and in the top 5 in the field of "Education" and the top 10 in the field of "Engineering" in Türkiye.
- Stanford University's annual list of the world's most influential scientists includes 11 faculty members of the university.
- Ranked 2,447th among 31 thousand higher education institutions in the Webometrics World University Rankings.
- Ranked 9th in Türkiye and 159th in the world in the Green Metric rankings. It ranked 187th in the UI Green Metric ranking and ranked among the best higher education institutions in the world.
- Ranked among the top 5 universities in 7 research fields in TÜBİTAK's "Field-Based Competency Analysis of Universities" quality indicator. It ranked 3rd in Türkiye in the period 2023/1 with the number of 2209-A student projects.
- The university has the largest library in the region with over 100 thousand books and more than 8 million electronic publications, open 24/7.
- Ranked in the top 5 in Türkiye in the fields of "Cyber Security," "Finance," and "Retail and E-commerce" in 2023 patent performance.

In 2023, approximately 100 percent of the national student quotas were filled, and 4,847 international students from 82 different countries applied for the 2023-2024 Academic Year. As of December 2023, the university has 1786 international students from 66 countries (BARÜ, 2024). In the university, where the total number of students is 17807, international students account for 10% of the total number of students.

## METHOD

In this study, a mixed method consisting of a questionnaire and an interview was used. First, a questionnaire was administered to 250 international students selected through random sampling. In the questionnaire, questions were asked,

especially about the bureaucratic problems that exist in Türkiye. The survey method is a data collection method that aims to reveal living conditions, behaviors, beliefs and attitudes (Thomas, 1998) and has advantages such as rapid application to large groups and low cost (Büyüköztürk, 2005). It is a suitable method for studies in large groups such as university students. The survey was conducted in April and May 2023. It was envisaged that the surveys would be conducted face-to-face, but since the courses were online due to the earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş, the survey was conducted both online and face-to-face. The end of the semester was chosen to conduct the survey, and the questions were also prepared in English in case the students did not fully learn and understand Turkish. The data were analyzed with SPSS software.

After the opinions of the participants were obtained by using the questionnaire method, the interview method was used. The purpose of the interview is to enter the participant's inner world and understand his/her perspective on the subject or situation (Patton, 1987). The most important feature that distinguishes the interview technique from other data collection techniques is that it provides in-depth information on an event, phenomenon or situation (Dömbekci & Erişen, 2022).

### **International Students' Satisfaction Level with Administrative Services in Türkiye**

In the next part of the study, the satisfaction of international students studying in Türkiye regarding administrative processes will be revealed. Bartın University was selected within the scope of the research. Bartın has a surface area of 2330 square kilometers and a total population of 208,238. The low population density and the fact that it is a quiet city can make the university attractive, especially for international students. It has the advantage of being a small and natural city in terms of having relatively few urban and environmental problems, as well as the width of green areas and the seashore.

Bartın University is a relatively new university established in 2008. Compared to previously established universities, it has advantages such as personnel dynamism, a technologically compatible system, and the number of students. The university has an International Student Office established to inform international students to ensure their adaptation to the university and the city, to guide in solving problems, to increase cultural closeness between their country and Türkiye, and to increase the number of international students of the university (BARÜ, 2024). As of December 2023, there are 1786 international students from 66 countries at the university (BARÜ, 2024). In the university, where the total number of students is 17807, international students account for 10% of the total number of students. In this sense, it can be said to be a significant rate.

### **Participants**

In this study, 250 international students selected through random sampling were surveyed. The field research was conducted in April and May 2023, and

ethics committee permission was obtained. It was envisaged that the surveys would be conducted face-to-face, but since the courses were online due to the earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş, the research was conducted both online and face-to-face.

The end of the semester was chosen for the questionnaire, and the students were expected to reach certain competencies in Turkish. Despite this process, the questions were also prepared in English in case they had not yet fully learned and understood Turkish, and English forms were given to those who wanted them. The participants were asked closed-ended multiple-choice questions, and the data was analyzed using SPSS software.

### Findings from the Survey

57.6% of the participants were male and 42.4% were female. It is understood that 29.6% of the participants have been residing in Türkiye for less than one year, 40.4% for 1-3 years, 22.4% for 4-6 years, and 6.4% for seven years or more. On the other hand, 42.8% of the participants stated that they have a relative or relatives in Türkiye, while 54.8% stated that they do not. In response to the question asked to the participants to find out why they wanted to study in Türkiye, 58.4% of the participants answered success in education, 14.8% answered my acquaintances in my country and my environment, and 14% answered the opportunities provided to students. While 8% of the participants attributed their reasons for studying in Türkiye to living conditions, 2.4% stated other reasons. While 77.2% of the participants stated that they did not experience any problems in public institutions in Türkiye, 22.8% stated that they did.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of International Students**

<u>Duration of Residence in Türkiye</u>	<u>Status of Relatives in Türkiye</u>	<u>Reasons for wanting to study in Türkiye</u>	<u>Experiencing Problems in Public Institutions in Türkiye</u>
Less than one year: 74 (29.6%)	Yes: 107 (42.8%)	Academic Achievement: 146 (58.4%)	Yes: 55 (22.8%)
1-3 years: 101 (40.4%)	No: 137 (54.8%)	Acquaintances: 37 (14.8%)	No 193 (77.2%)
4-6 years: 56 (2.4%)		Facilities: 35 (14%)	
Seven years and above: 16 (6.4%)		Living Conditions: 20 (8%)	

Respondents were asked about the speed, simplicity, and comprehensibility of public services, processing time, compatibility of the methods used with technology, being equal and fair, being transparent and solution-oriented, being of high quality and reasonably priced, and the level of knowledge and approach of the personnel. In the analyses, the answers to agree and strongly agree and the answers to disagree and strongly disagree were evaluated together.

**Table 2: International Students' Level of Satisfaction with Administrative Processes**

Items	I do not agree at all.	Disagree	Undecided	I agree	Absolutely agree
In Türkiye, I can get things done quickly in public institutions.	24 (9.6%)	41 (16.4%)	70 (28%)	86 (34.4%)	20 (8%)
In Türkiye, public institutions' procedures are simple and straightforward.	23 (9.2%)	46 (18.4%)	77 (30.8%)	78 (31.2%)	15 (6%)
Public personnel in Türkiye are polite and helpful to me.	21 (8.4%)	24 (9.6%)	69 (27.6%)	106 (42.4%)	22 (8.8%)
In Türkiye, I can get things done in public institutions in a short time.	28 (11.2%)	41 (16.4%)	71 (28.4%)	82 (32.8%)	17 (6.8%)
Civil servants in my country are more polite than here	23 (9.2%)	36 (14.4%)	94 (37.6%)	68 (27.2%)	22 (8.8%)
Methods used in public institutions in Türkiye are innovative/technology-compatible.	18 (7.2%)	34 (13.6%)	69 (27.6%)	98 (39.2%)	24 (9.6%)
In Türkiye, when I am denied a request at a public institution, I can find out why.	21 (8.4%)	35 (14%)	73 (29.2%)	82 (32.8%)	32 (12.8%)
When I went to do my work in public institutions in Türkiye, I witnessed that some people were given privileges.	26 (10.4%)	51 (20.4%)	68 (27.2%)	65 (26%)	32 (12.8%)
Public servants in Türkiye are knowledgeable enough to answer the questions I have asked.	19 (7.6%)	39 (15.6%)	60 (24%)	99 (39.6%)	24 (9.6%)
In Türkiye, when I face any problem in public institutions, I can find someone to solve the problem.	22 (8.8%)	29 (11.6%)	60 (24%)	101 (40.4%)	30 (12%)
I can benefit from online services without going to public institutions in Türkiye	17 (6.8%)	30 (12%)	56 (22.4%)	100 (40%)	38 (15.2%)
In Türkiye, I benefit from affordably priced public services.	29 (11.6%)	42 (16.8%)	55 (22%)	81 (32.4%)	36 (14.4%)

It is seen that the lowest level (37.2%) of the participants' agreement responses regarding public services is in the option that the procedures are simple

and understandable. The highest value (55.2%) is the question about being able to benefit from public services online. Apart from these two options, 52.4% of the respondents agree that they can find someone to solve any problem, 51.2% agree that the personnel is polite and helpful, 49.2% agree that the public personnel has sufficient knowledge, 48.8% of the respondents stated that they were able to benefit from affordably priced public services, 45.6% stated that if their requests were rejected, they were able to find out the reason, 42.4% stated that they were able to get their work done quickly in public institutions in Türkiye, 39.6% stated that they were able to get their work done in a short time, and 38.8% stated that they witnessed that some people were given privileges. 37.6% of the participants answered "I am undecided" to the question "Public employees in my country are more courteous than here."

**Table 3: Comparison of International Students' Home Countries and Türkiye**

Items	Türkiye	My own country
Transactions are handled faster	170 (68%)	78 (31.2%)
Shorter signature processes	144 (57.6%)	103 (41.2%)
Bribery is more common in public institutions	83 (33.2%)	150 (60%)
Bureaucracy more transparent	138 (55.2%)	103 (41.2%)
Politics is more active in institutions	181 (72.4%)	62 (24.8%)
Civil servants are more understanding	150 (60%)	91(36.4%)
Better quality public services	171 (68.4%)	71 (28.4%)
Public services are cheaper	119 (47.6%)	123 (49.2%)

Participants were asked some questions to enable them to compare administrative processes with those of their countries. Most of the participants stated that the procedures in Türkiye are faster, signature processes are shorter, bureaucracy is more transparent, politics is more effective, personnel are more understanding, and services are of higher quality. Participants stated that bribery is more common in their home countries, while about half of them preferred their home countries for cheaper public services.

Some of the answers given by the participants differ significantly depending on gender, age, duration of living in Türkiye, having relatives/relatives, and experiencing problems in Türkiye (see Table 4). Accordingly, male respondents state that transactions are handled faster in public institutions, while female respondents state that they benefit from online services more than male respondents.

As the age of the respondents increases, their level of agreement with the questions about getting things done quickly, getting the transactions done in a short time, the personnel being polite and helpful, and the level of knowledge of the personnel increases.

**Table 4: Participants' Responses and Significant Relationships**

Items	Gender	Age	Survival Time	Relative status	Troubleshooting
I can benefit from online services without going to public institutions in Türkiye	-.147 .023		.147 .023		.128 .048
In Türkiye, I can get things done quickly in public institutions.	.214 .001	.131 .043	-.159 .012		.128 .048
In Türkiye, I can get things done in public institutions in a short time.		.189 .003			
Have you ever experienced any problems in public institutions in Türkiye?				.184 .004	
In Türkiye, when I am denied a request at a public institution, I can find out why.				.263 .000	.188 .003
In Türkiye, public institutions' procedures are simple and straightforward.					.142 .028
Methods used in public institutions in Türkiye are innovative/technology-compatible.					.139 .030
When I encounter any problem in public institutions in Türkiye, I can find someone to solve the problem.					.133 .039
Public personnel in Türkiye are helpful to me.		.144 .026			.129 .045
Public servants in Türkiye are knowledgeable enough to answer the questions I have asked.		.145 .025			
Signature processes are shorter in public institutions.	.232 .000		-.141 .028		
Bureaucracy in public institutions is more transparent.	.165 .011	-.155 .016	-.176 .006		
Better quality public services in public institutions	.226 .000			-.140 .031	
Bribery is more common in public institutions.				-.221 .001	
Politics is more active in public institutions.		-.144 .025			

In addition, as the duration of stay in Türkiye increases, the level of agreement with the question of utilizing online services increases. On the other hand, it is observed that the positive answers given to the question on faster execution of transactions decrease as the duration of residence increases.

There are some differences in the answers of the participants according to the status of their acquaintances or relatives in Türkiye. Those who have

relatives/relatives/acquaintances state that they experience more problems in public institutions. On the other hand, those who do not have relatives state that they can learn the reason when their request is rejected.

Those who stated that they had experienced problems in public institutions are more likely to answer negatively on the issues of getting things done quickly, procedures being simple and understandable, personnel being polite and understanding, the methods used to be innovative and compatible with technology, learning the reason if their request is rejected, finding someone to solve the problem when faced with any problem, and using online services.

There are also some significant relationships in their answers to the question on comparison with their own countries. Accordingly, female respondents answered the option that signature processes are shorter, bureaucracy is more transparent, and public services are of higher quality more frequently in Türkiye. In the questions of bureaucracy being more transparent and politics being more effective in public institutions, the answers given to the Türkiye option increased as the age of the participants increased. In the proposition that signature processes are shorter, and bureaucracy is more transparent, it is seen that the answer for Türkiye intensifies as the duration of living in Türkiye increases. Those who have close relatives in Türkiye, on the other hand, are more likely to prefer their home country when asked about the quality of public services and the prevalence of bribery.

### **Findings from the Interview**

This part of the study analyzes the interviews with ten international students (IS) who have been studying at Bartın University for at least four years and four staff (S) who carry out the administrative procedures of these students. With this method, it was aimed to reveal the satisfaction levels of the participants with the current administrative functioning, the identification of problem areas, if any, with concrete examples and their solution suggestions. Interviews were also conducted with the staff, considering that they would make accurate determinations in terms of their knowledge of the system in Türkiye. Of the student participants, seven stated that they came with the recommendation of relatives or acquaintances, six stated that they had previously applied to different universities and received acceptance. In addition, six of the participants handled the paperwork during the application process with friends or professional intermediaries.

The reasons for the participants' preference for Türkiye are the desire to study in a different country, language proximity, religious and cultural harmony, the geographical proximity of the countries, mutual cooperation between the countries, shorter admission processes than their home countries, more developed education system compared to their home countries, affordable fees, double diploma and internationally valid diploma. The reasons for preferring Bartın University are that Bartın is a small, calm, safe, quiet city, with reasonable cost of living, its natural beauties, ease of transportation, the proximity of institutions, and the fact that relatives and acquaintances study in Bartın.

IS1 expresses Bartın as follows: "Bartın University is very beautiful; it has natural beauties. It does not have the complexity of a crowded city." IS4 said, "Studying in Bartın is especially helpful in terms of transportation. You can go to the hospital, governorship and municipality immediately." IS7 emphasizes the economic reason by saying, "I won Ankara, but I did not go because Ankara was too expensive."

Almost all of the students stated that they did not have any significant problems with administrative processes in Türkiye due to the fact that the paperwork processes are open; they bring their documents in full, and intermediaries carry out these processes. IS9 said, "Administrative processes here are smooth and understandable. The staff are helpful. They write down what I do not understand on a piece of paper for me and give it to me".

Students generally have economic problems, housing problems and communication problems due to language. Students express that they have problems due to the high living standards in Türkiye, the high cost of living, and especially the high rent. IS8 gives an example: "There is a double difference between the money I spent when I first came to Türkiye and the money I spend now." IS5 said, "My biggest problem is that I have to work."

Tuition fees are also an important economic problem for students. IS8 expresses this problem as follows: "It is a good country for a diploma but economically uncertain. We paid eight thousand TL this semester; we don't know what next semester. Students drop out of school because of inflation, rents, and tuition fees."

Students also have some problems regarding administrative processes. These problems are:

**Long paperwork processes:** Students complain that it takes a long time to obtain some important documents. IS9 "For example, when we send documents for a residence permit, we make an appointment, and these appointment processes can take a very long time. If there is a missing document, we have to reapply, make an appointment, and wait again." S2 also points to the same problem and says, "The most difficult document to obtain in the paperwork process is the equivalence certificate. Because there are differences between countries, it takes time for them to complete it." Another Staff, S4 points to the following problem in the paperwork process: "They submit the documents to us. However, those documents may be needed by the student for equivalency and other reasons, and they have to come to us frequently to get these documents until they graduate. here are some time-consuming procedures for the student who graduates or deregisters to get the documents, and the student must wait".

**The cost of paperwork and transportation problems:** An important problem for students is the fees required for obtaining documents and the necessity of obtaining documents from big cities. IS2 "Official procedures in Türkiye are costly. It can also be expensive to go to Ankara." IS3 said, "For recognition, you need to go to the consulates in Ankara and Istanbul. There is a governorship here, but it does not do it."

**Administrative Problems Due to Language Deficiency:** Administrative problems may arise due to not knowing Turkish. IS10 "For example, I came here, I don't speak Turkish, the universal language is English, but it is not spoken. Only Turkish is spoken in the governorship and student affairs." Staff also stated that students have language problems. S1 said, " They come to the wrong place because they do not speak the language, and we have difficulty in describing them. Sometimes we have to explain what we need to explain 3-5 times."

**Conflicts between their home countries and Türkiye:** While some of the students stated that they could not receive the documents requested from their home countries as requested, the staff mentioned that the students were insistent on this issue, but they had difficulties in fulfilling the students' demands because they used standard documents. IS4: "They constantly demand documents from our country. These documents seem ridiculous to student affairs." S3 gives the following example: "Male students are asked for a student certificate with a wet signature for military service. The country does not accept ours. They want a letter stating when they will graduate, but we cannot give it. Because it is not clear when he will graduate."

**Strict measures and practices in Türkiye:** It is stated that Türkiye imposes unnecessary formalities and strict measures due to previous negative examples. IS5 "They complicate what can be done simply by saying "you are a foreigner." IS6 said, "When I came here, the equivalency certificate was not so difficult. Even residence permits have become very difficult. Of course, this has something to do with those who abuse." Similarly, IS7 said, "There may be situations such as fake ID cards. We are also victimized because of the tighteninging."

**Not being able to benefit from some rights for administrative reasons:** Students especially state that they cannot benefit from free health services. IS6: "We have health insurance, but it seems invalid. We pay money when we go to the hospital, and this money is not small. It costs as much as a private hospital".

**Frequent changes in rules and procedures and unnecessary procedures:** Frequent changes in admission requirements and procedures may cause victimization due to lack of information. IS8 states this as follows: "There is a YÖS exam. I don't understand why they put it. Students lose their application processes because they don't know about it." He expresses it as follows.

S4 also mentions a change that he finds meaningless and states that an unnecessary bureaucracy is created as follows: "The Provincial Directorate of Migration Management used to administer the residence permit. Now, the universities have requested the documents. We take the documents from the student and send them there. The student makes an appointment with the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management and completes the process there. So, we are an unnecessary intermediary."

**Problems arising from intermediary persons/institutions:** Students receive support from intermediaries for a fee to facilitate the processes. This causes problems for the staff, and students may be victimized by these intermediaries. S2 explains this situation with the following example: "Students usually give their contact information to the intermediaries. Many numbers are not used, or too many people use the same number. We cannot reach them." "A student received a certificate of equivalence through these companies, but in fact, the document is fake. They can be defrauded in this way." S4 gives an example of the problems caused by intermediaries.

## **CONCLUSION**

International students are one of the most important higher education policies of recent years and Türkiye gives an important place to policies for international students in higher education. In the literature, the factors that make countries and universities attractive to students and ensure their satisfaction are defined as intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Some of these factors are issues that policymakers cannot intervene in or that are not easy to solve. However, simple adjustments and improvements in some areas can contribute to making a country attractive for international students. One of these areas is administrative services.

In the survey and interview study, it was seen that students' opinions on administrative processes were generally positive. In this respect, the data are in line with Çetin et al. (2017), who conducted a study on local culture in Türkiye, and Kılınç et al. (2020), who conducted a study on social cohesion and public relations. However, especially in their answers to the question on comparisons with their own countries, it is seen that the answers given in terms of short signature processes, bureaucracy being more transparent, public services being cheaper, and transactions being carried out quickly and in a short time are not positive at high levels. In bureaucratic processes, measures should be taken to satisfy international students in this respect. The suggestions of the interviewed participants for solving the problems include mutual cooperation between countries and harmonization of paperwork processes, understanding-based human relations, preparation of petitions and forms and direction signs in different languages, the provision of personnel to help with the language at least when they first arrive, and the widespread use of online administrative services. In this area, it would be useful to make a more comprehensive process improvement by utilizing the experience and knowledge of students and relevant staff. For example, to solve the problem of not being understood due to language, satisfaction in this area can be achieved by taking some small steps to make the procedures more understandable and easier, such as offering more services online and in different languages, selecting personnel who speak the local languages of the students to the relevant units, reducing the signature process to involve fewer units, thereby reducing requirements for bureaucratic red tape and office visits. An administrative procedure that has become a part of daily, social, and cultural life for native students may be tiring, laborious, and costly for students from a

different country. For this reason, there is a significant benefit in revising and improving these seemingly simple processes.

This study does not argue that administrative procedures are a major reason for preference. There may be more demand for countries with similar and perhaps more severe bureaucratic conditions and administrative procedures to Türkiye. However, the impact and contribution of administrative procedures in this context are also important.

It should not be forgotten that the practices, policies, systems, cultures, and habits of the countries where the students were born and raised have an impact on the results. On the other hand, in this study conducted in Bartın province, some opportunities will contribute to positive results, such as bureaucratic facilities arising from the fact that it is a small city, ease of transportation, and the number of international students and foreigners in general.

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