



International student recruitment in policy and practice: A research from Turkey

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Abstract

Aim: This research aims to make projections about the efforts. Turkish universities are making to attract international students. Some nations like Turkey are actively trying to attract more foreign workers. Managers of international student offices are the focus of the research because they are both policymakers and practitioners and, as a result, have unique perspectives on international recruitment.

Methodology: Data were collected from the International Office Directors of Turkish universities via a survey conducted between December 2014 and February 2016. The online survey tool Survey Monkey was used to collect responses.

Findings: According to the research conducted, international student offices in Turkish universities are relatively new establishments that lack authority and personnel. In addition, the board members all agreed that universities do not provide enough funding for international outreach. Similarly, many higher education institutions do not systematically plan for international students.

Implications/Novelty: There are still significant obstacles that must be carefully addressed before Turkish universities can truly reap the benefits of their increased international student enrollment. Insights into how to solve these issues have been provided by this study, which has brought to light the issues that international students face.

Key Words: International Students, Internationalization in Higher Education, Internationalization Policy, Student Mobility, Turkish Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of their commitment to universality, universities have traditionally attracted a diverse international student body. Still, the profound changes of the 21st century have made the international dimension of higher education a phenomenon of increasing complexity and strategic importance. As a result, the focus of higher education has shifted from the "social, cultural, national" to the "economic, international" in many nations. Both national administrations and educational institutions have made internationalization a priority. Traveling students are a very old phenomenon, and certain regions of the world have a long experience with this form of internationalization. Many former colonies have sent students to their former masters in Europe. Likewise, many students from Latin America travel to the North to continue their education at the graduate level. Some countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union established international study programs during the Cold War to attract and educate students from other countries with similar political ideologies. During this time, the Atlantic community also grew through increased educational exchange between the United States and Western Europe (Van Damme 2001). Thus, political and academic factors have always favored global mobility. In recent years, however, there have been dramatic shifts in the scale and composition of international student mobility. Education abroad has grown in size, breadth, and complexity at an unprecedented rate as globalization has emerged as the dominant trend.

Since the early stages, the total number of international students has increased dramatically worldwide. Foreign students increased from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.5 million in 2012. By 2025, there will likely be 7.2 million students participating annually in international or cross-border student mobility (OECD 2014). In 2012, 16.4 percent of international students studied in the United States, followed by Germany (6.4%), France (6%), and Australia (5.5%). For the countries that benefit from international education, it has also generated a substantial

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financial resource. International students added an estimated \$10 billion to the UK's economy in 2015. Over 400 billion dollars in annual revenue is expected to be generated from the international student market worldwide. Again, it was estimated that international students brought in 21 billion USD in revenue to the United States each year, which was more than NASA's budget for the year (Turkish Ministry of Development 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally universities in the North America and Europe have shared the biggest proportion of international students, yet in recent years countries like Singapore, China, Malaysia, Japan, Jordan and Korea have also expanded the number of international students. Knowing that people with higher levels of education are more likely to migrate and contribute to the economy of receiving country, governments around the world are introducing policies to attract "the most talented migrants". Internationalization, once seen simply as a marginal issue and a matter of cultural exchange, is now a necessary mechanism to increase the number of international students, especially graduate research students (Stensaker et al. 2008). Universities aim at recruiting more international students both as a means of generating income and of adding diversity to the student body.

Beside traditional receiving countries, universities in other countries have made various efforts to recruit more international students both as a means of generating income and as a means of adding diversity to the student body (Altbach and Knight 2007). Turkey is one of these countries attempting to increase international recruitment and to improve conditions of international students. As for the academic year 2014-2015, international students are more than 70.000 in Turkey, an increased but insufficient number when potential of the country is taken into account. Turkmenistan has the largest number of students in Turkey, followed by Azerbaijan and Iran, according to the data from Turkey's Council of Higher Education. Africa's share has also increased in the last years due to Turkey's policy toward the continent, which involves outreach and financial aid. 80 percent of international students in Turkey attend state universities, while 20 percent of them enrolled in foundation (private) universities in the 2013-2014 academic year (Turkish Ministry of Development 2015).

Despite the expansion of Turkish higher education and the country's steady path toward its enrolment targets, there are some challenges that need to be addressed. Studying abroad involves various processes from application to graduation, even after graduation. Application procedures, visa requirements, accommodation, language, study programs, staff and students in host institution, campus environment and city are among the factors that all shape study abroad experience. Thus, there is a growing need for the development of innovative and well-conceptualized programs for promotion, management, and guidance of international students. In this regard, there are many studies carried out with the international students to obtain feedback on their study abroad experiences in Turkey (Kondakci 2011; Mahmut 2012; Ozoglu, Gur, and Coskun 2012; Snoubar and Celik 2013; Turkish Ministry of Development 2015; UAK 2016; YOK 2014; Ozyurek and Uluturk 2016). Yet, there is a second group of people who also experience international student recruitment in practice, that is to say, the staff working in international student offices. International office staff play a three-dimensional role regarding international student recruitment. They put the national policies into practice, they shape institutional strategies and they deal with international students in many aspects. Thus, evaluations and recommendations of international office staff are important and should be taken into consideration in policy processes. This study aims at providing a contribution for both researchers and policy makers through a survey held with international student office managers in Turkish universities.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were collected between December 2014 and February 2016 from the International Office Directors of Turkish universities. At the time that survey was held, the number of universities was 176 and to ensure the quality of the research, 100% sampling was taken in questionnaire and the link to the questionnaire was sent to international office directors of all Turkish universities. Survey questions were formed in the light of literature, international student reports and the issues discussed in related national/ international meetings that the researcher participated in. In addition, survey was previewed by Suleyman Demirel University international student office managers. Questionnaires were administered using the Survey Monkey web-based software package. An information e-mail was sent to all directors in Turkish universities which contained information about researcher,

the goal and content of the survey. After a two-week monitoring, a second reminder e-mail was sent to coordinators. At the end of two-month duration, 64 international office directors completed the survey. The limited participation of directors is one of the limitations of the study. Besides, survey was designed as a short one with limited number of questions for the sake of simplicity for respondents who have a heavy workload. This has limited the possibility of a deeper analysis and to decrease this limitation, open-ended questions were put at the end of the survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey questions could be divided into three general categories; institutional features, international student strategy and difficulties of study abroad. Accordingly, findings are presented in this order in the following sections.

Institutional Features

Among the directors who participated in the survey, 58% work in state universities, while the other 42% work in foundation universities. 19 participant universities were established before the year 2000, and remaining 45 universities after that year. Thus majority of the universities explored in the study were new universities. Nearly 65% of the universities have less than 10,000 students. As regards to international student offices, approximately 80% of them were established after the year 2010. Among the directors who participated in the study, 24 directors had more than 3-year experience in the Office and remaining ones had less. Thus, an overview of institutional features revealed that international student offices were relatively newly established and directors were also new at their posts. Next few questions focused on the statute and conditions of the offices. Results were given below:

Table 1: Institutional features

Q. 1. What is the statute of your Office?			
Type of Institution	A unit of International Office	A unit of Registrar's Office	An independent International Student Office
State	51.43%	25.71%	22.86%
	18	9	8
Foundation	63.16%	15.79%	21.05%
	12	3	4
Q.2. What should be the statute of your Office?			
Type of Institution	A unit of International Office	A unit of Registrar's Office	An independent International Student Office
State	%33.33	%18.18	%51.52
	11	6	17
Foundation	%40.00	%4.00	%56.00
	10	1	14
Q.3. Do you think that the number of staff in your Office is adequate?			
Type of Institution	Yes	No	
State	%16.67	%83.33	
	6	30	
Foundation	%24.00	%76.00	
	6	19	
Q.4. Do you think that the infrastructure (building, computers, other materials etc.) are adequate?			
Type of Institution	Yes	No	
State	%60.00	%40.00	
	21	14	
Foundation	%73.08	%26.92	
	19	7	

Both in state and in foundation universities, international student offices were established as a unit working under the international office. Yet, more than half of the directors agree that international student offices should be organized as autonomous offices. Approximately 70% of respondents recorded that the infrastructure of their

offices were adequate. On the other hand, the numbers of the staff were regarded as insufficient by both state and foundation universities. Directors at state universities were more dissatisfied with the infrastructure and human resources in the Office.

International Student Strategy

Following questions were asked to explore international student strategy of participant universities. Findings are as following:

Table 2: International student strategy

Q.1. Do you think that your university allocates sufficient resources for promotion abroad?									
Type of Institution	Yes	No							
State	%13.51	%86.49							
	5	32							
Foundation	%40.74	%59.26							
	11	16							
Q.2. Are there any special international student recruitment policies in your university?									
Type of Institution	Yes	No							
State	%51.35	%48.65							
	19	18							
Foundation	%59.26	%40.74							
	16	11							
Q.3. Which level of study takes the first place in your international student strategy?									
Type of Institution	Associate	Bache- lor's	Master's	Doctorate					
State	%13.51	%78.38	%40.54	%13.51					
	5	29	15	5					
Foundation	%11.11	%85.19	%33.33	%3.70					
	3	23	9	1					
Q.4. What are the main countries of origin of the international students in your university?									
Type of Institution	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Turkic Re- publics	EU coun- tries	Asia	The USA	Africa	Latin America	
State	%54.29	%68.57	%85.71	%31.43	%22.86	%0.00	%37.14	%0.00	
	19	24	30	11	8	0	13	0	
Foundation	%53.85	%76.92	%69.23	%42.31	%15.38	%11.54	%34.62	%0.00	
	14	20	18	11	4	3	9	0	
Q.5. Which regions take the first ranks in your international student strategy?									
Type of Institution	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Turkic Re- publics	EU coun- tries	Asia	The USA	Africa	Latin America	
State	%56.25	%50.00	%90.63	%75.00	%15.63	%3.13	%12.50	%3.13	
	18	16	29	24	5	1	4	1	
Foundation	%58.33	%70.83	%66.67	%62.50	%16.67	%8.33	%16.67	%0.00	
	14	17	16	15	4	2	4	0	

As for the international student strategy, more than 50% of the respondents recorded that there was no particular strategy for international students in their universities. Similarly, majority of the respondents believed that their institutions did not allocate sufficient resources for promotion abroad. This ratio was approximately 60% for foundation universities, whereas it increased to a very high degree (86%) for state universities. Thus, it could be said that both state and foundation universities lack a strong international student strategy supported by financial resources for promotion abroad. When the target regions for international student recruitment was explored, Middle East and Turkic Republics were recorded as the main target for universities and majority of international students came from those countries. As for the level of study, universities focused on bachelor's and master's degree students as their primary target. The next section of the survey focused on the difficulties regarding international student recruitment processes for both international offices and international students. Main findings have been analyzed in

the following section.

Difficulties Confronted During Study Abroad Period

In this section, first three questions were asked for exploring difficulties confronted by international student offices.

Table 3: Difficulties confronted by the international student office

Problems regarding application and admission					
Type of Institution	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Total
State	%37.14	%48.57	%5.71	%8.57	%56.45
	13	17	2	3	35
Foundation	%48.15	%33.33	%14.81	%3.70	%43.55
	13	9	4	1	27
Problems regarding registration					
Type of Institution	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Total
State	%42.86	%45.71	%5.71	%5.71	%56.45
	15	16	2	2	35
Foundation	%33.33	%37.04	%22.22	%7.41	%43.55
	9	10	6	2	27
Problems regarding academic issues					
Type of Institution	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Total
State	%22.86	%25.71	%45.71	%5.71	%56.45
	8	9	16	2	35
Foundation	%22.22	%37.04	%37.04	%3.70	%43.55
	6	10	10	1	27

Table 4: Difficulties confronted by the international students

Problems regarding application and registration				
Type of the University	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%38.24	%50.00	%2.94	%8.82
	13	17	1	3
Foundation	%38.46	%34.62	%26.92	%0.00
	10	9	7	0
Financial problems				
	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%8.57	%37.14	%48.57	%5.71
	3	13	17	2
Foundation	%12.00	%52.00	%24.00	%12.00
	3	13	6	3
Accommodation				
	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%0.00	%45.71	%51.43	%2.86
	0	16	18	1
Foundation	%28.00	%32.00	%36.00	%4.00
	7	8	9	1

Table 4: Contii...

Language	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%5.71 2	%31.43 11	%37.14 13	%25.71 9
Foundation	%15.38 4	%34.62 9	%42.31 11	%7.69 2
Academic success	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%22.86 8	%28.57 10	%34.29 12	%14.29 5
Foundation	%28.00 7	%36.00 9	%36.00 9	%0.00 0
Adaptation to social life	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%22.86 8	%62.86 22	%11.43 4	%2.86 1
Foundation	%30.77 8	%57.69 15	%11.54 3	%0.00 0
Negative attitudes of academic staff	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%74.29 26	%20.00 7	%5.71 2	%0.00 0
Foundation	%88.00 22	%12.00 3	%0.00 0	%0.00 0
Negative attitudes of students	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%85.71 30	%14.29 5	%0.00 0	%0.00 0
Foundation	%80.00 20	%16.00 4	%4.00 1	%0.00 0
Negative attitudes of people in the city	Low	Medium	High	Very high
State	%64.71 22	%29.41 10	%2.94 1	%2.94 1
Foundation	%79.17 19	%12.50 3	%8.33 2	%0.00 0

In general, directors agreed that the difficulties related to admission and registration processes were at lower levels. Yet, issues regarding academic success of students were more problematic according to the directors. 45% of state university directors perceived academic issues as problematic. Thus, it could be inferred that international student offices are more convenient with the issues directly managed by them, yet they find difficult to deal with academic problems of international students which necessitate cooperation with other units of the university. Last questions were devoted to understand difficulties that international students face during their study period. Findings are given in Table 4.

In order to find out the most significant problems of international students, their answers on the level of difficulties were put in order by summing up the ratios for “high+very high” and the following results were found: The most challenging matter for international students is the language barrier. Approximately 63% of respondents rated language problem as high and very high. Second problematic area is financial problems which 55% of

respondents rated at high and very high degree. Another challenging issue arises from the accommodation problems. Accommodation was rated nearly as important as the financial problems and language barrier. International students have opportunity to stay in the dormitories, yet problems related to the capacity and conditions of state dormitories have been a concern for local students as well. On the other hand, in many Anatolian cities' apartment rents are very high and difficult to afford for particularly students coming from low income countries.

Academic success was depicted as another important problem by approximately 44% of respondents. This is in conformity with the findings recorded in the previous question which revealed that international student offices had difficulty in dealing with academic matters of the students. Inclusion of students in town and campus life is another important issue regarding international students. Participants did not report discrimination and negative attitudes toward international students. Yet, adaptation to social life was regarded as a medium-level problematic issue by 63% of the respondents.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Main findings of the survey reveal that international student offices in Turkish universities are newly established units and suffer from lack of autonomy and insufficient human resources, at most. Besides, directors agreed that universities do not allocate sufficient resources for promotion abroad. Similarly, an important portion of universities has no international student strategy. Thus, it could be said that there is need for reviewing and reorganizing international student policy at both national and institutional level. International student offices should be organized as autonomous units and supported both by financial and human resources. It was also stated in open-ended questions that there is no clear definition regarding responsibilities of these offices which in turn results in overlapping duties with other units of the university. Thus, responsibilities and authorities of international student offices must be well-defined in order to develop a more institutionalized structure.

As for the problems of international students, the most important ones are language, finance, accommodation, academic success and inclusion in social life. Students who come from relatively low income countries perceive Turkey as an affordable alternative for studying abroad compared to traditional receiving countries, but they still suffer from lack of financial resources.

Financial problems mainly stem from insufficient financial resources, limited opportunities for scholarships and lack of part-time jobs. Accommodation is also another important problem, as rents are very high and dormitories are insufficient. Indeed financial matters and accommodation facilities are usually out of the reach of universities and necessitate more complex policies at governmental level. Yet, universities should develop cooperation with the NGOs and private sector to increase scholarships and job opportunities for international students in their region.

In this regard, scholarships from both state and private institutions should be increased for local and international students. Anatolian cities should become more attractive for international students. There should be cooperation mechanisms and planning among universities, local governments and NGOs to improve these cities as attraction centers for international students with their living standards and opportunities.

Findings reveal that international students have difficulties in integrating to academic life and major barrier for academic success is language. This is one of the most important reasons for academic failure and has to be taken seriously. Indeed, findings revealed that students assessed Turkish courses as inadequate. Thus, for contributing to academic success of incoming students, Turkish language training has to be improved and designed in line with the academic needs of international students.

Above mentioned findings reveal that although Turkish universities have recorded an important success in attracting more international students, there are still some challenges that need to be carefully addressed. There is a growing need for the development of innovative and well-conceptualized programs for promotion, management, and guidance of international students and for creating a multicultural campus environment. For Turkey to better use its potential in the region, research on international students should be increased and regulations should be adjusted accordingly.

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