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BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

**Cultural Integration in International Entrepreneurship: How
Foreign Food Businesses Localize in Türkiye**

Aaliyan KHAN

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PREFACE

This thesis has been prepared as a requirement for the completion of my Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at Beykoz University, Istanbul, with a focus on Cultural Management. It explores the experiences and insights of foreign business owners who have established enterprises in Türkiye, shedding light on the cultural and managerial challenges they face. This research fulfills the academic requirements for my graduation and lays the groundwork for my future academic goals, as I intend to pursue a PhD in Business and continue developing this area of study.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Burak Nedim AKTAŞ, for his dedicated guidance and support throughout this process. I am also deeply thankful to jury members, whose inspiration and insightful guidance. Their mentorship has been essential to the completion of this thesis and to my academic development.

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, uluslararası girişimcilikte kültürel uyumun dinamiklerini inceleyerek yabancı sahipli restoranların Türkiye'nin kendine özgü kültürel ve idari yapısına nasıl adapte olduklarını ele almaktadır. On beş yabancı restoran işletmecisiyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere dayanan bulgular, geleneksel mutfakların Türk tüketici beklentilerine uyarlanmasının, bürokratik engellerin aşılmasının ve yerel topluluklarla bağ kurulmasının önemini ortaya koymaktadır. İşletmelerini başarıyla yerelleştiren girişimciler, kültürel duyarlılığı, hukuki esnekliği ve stratejik ağ kurma becerisini bir arada kullanabilmişlerdir. Araştırma, kültürel entegrasyonun yalnızca hayatta kalma stratejisi değil, aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin canlı ve çeşitlilik barındıran pazarında gelişmenin yolu olduğunu göstermektedir. Kültürel uyum, yasal mevzuata uyum ve toplulukla etkileşim arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkiyi inceleyen bu çalışma, Türkiye'de faaliyet gösteren uluslararası yiyecek işletmelerinin başarı faktörlerine dair değerli bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kültürel entegrasyon; yabancı girişimcilik; restoran işletmeciliği; Türkiye; düzenleyici ortam; yerelleştirme stratejileri; kültürlerarası yönetim

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of cultural integration in international entrepreneurship, focusing on how foreign-owned food businesses adapt to Türkiye's unique cultural and regulatory landscape. Through qualitative research involving fifteen semi-structured interviews with foreign restaurateurs, the findings highlight the importance of aligning traditional cuisines with Turkish consumer preferences, navigating bureaucratic challenges, and fostering community connections. Entrepreneurs who successfully localized their operations demonstrated a blend of cultural sensitivity, legal adaptability, and strategic networking. The research underscores that cultural integration is not merely a survival strategy but a pathway to thriving in Türkiye's vibrant and diverse market. By examining the interplay between cultural adaptation, regulatory compliance, and community engagement, this study provides valuable insights into the success factors for international food businesses in Türkiye.

Keywords: Cultural integration, foreign entrepreneurship, Restaurant business, Türkiye, Regulatory environment, Localization Strategies, Cross Cultural Management

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INTRODUCTION

Türkiye occupies a singular cultural and geographic position, straddling Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and has historically served as a crossroads for trade, migration, and cultural exchange. This positioning has endowed the country with an unparalleled culinary diversity that blends Ottoman heritage, Mediterranean freshness, Central Asian influences, and regional Anatolian traditions. In the modern era, this rich heritage intersects with global gastronomic trends, producing a dynamic and competitive food market. For foreign entrepreneurs in the food industry, Türkiye offers an environment that is at once highly attractive for its opportunities and highly complex for its challenges. Over the past two decades, Türkiye's rapid economic growth, infrastructure modernization, and expanding tourism sector have driven demand for new culinary experiences. Major metropolitan hubs such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir have become melting pots of residents, domestic migrants, expatriates, students, and international visitors. These diverse urban populations form a cosmopolitan consumer base receptive to global cuisines, thereby creating fertile ground for international food businesses. Simultaneously, the expansion of the Turkish middle class, with its increasing disposable income, has reinforced demand for both traditional dishes and novel dining concepts. This dual demand rooted in cultural pride yet open to experimentation defines the strategic opportunity space for foreign-owned food enterprises.

However, entering this market requires more than simply introducing a foreign menu; it demands a deep process of cultural integration. Consumer acceptance is contingent upon how well foreign businesses can embed themselves into the existing social, cultural, and regulatory fabric. In Türkiye, business interactions often operate within high-context communication frameworks, where trust, personal rapport, and respect for customs such as

hospitality and communal dining are paramount. In contrast, certain globalized metropolitan segments operate with low-context characteristics, emphasizing clarity, efficiency, and standardized procedures. This duality means that foreign entrepreneurs must skillfully navigate between relational, tradition-oriented modes of interaction and more transactional, efficiency-driven practices.

The concept of localization adapting products, services, and operations to fit the cultural, social, and linguistic context is not merely a marketing choice in Türkiye but a strategic necessity. Successful cultural integration in the food sector frequently involves deliberate adjustments to flavor profiles (Flavor Adjustment) to suit local palates. For instance, cuisines with strong spice levels, such as South Asian or Latin American, may tone down heat intensity to appeal to a broader Turkish audience, while still retaining signature ingredients to maintain authenticity.

Beyond the menu, Décor Localization plays a role in aligning the dining experience with local sensibilities. Many foreign-owned restaurants in Türkiye incorporate Ottoman motifs, Anatolian colors, or Mediterranean design elements into their interiors to signal cultural familiarity. This physical adaptation both enhances consumer comfort and strengthens perceptions of cultural respect.

Language Learning is another significant integration strategy. Given the prevalence of Turkish in everyday transactions from supplier negotiations to customer interactions language proficiency enables smoother operations, reduces misunderstandings, and builds trust with both clients and regulatory authorities. This is often complemented by Staff Training, ensuring that service teams understand and respect Turkish dining customs, such as the value placed on hospitality, shared plates, and unhurried meals.

In an increasingly connected marketplace, Social Media Presence has emerged as a powerful tool for cultural integration. Foreign restaurateurs often leverage platforms like Instagram and TikTok to promote their menu and engage with Turkish audiences through culturally relevant content celebrating national holidays, featuring local ingredients, or collaborating with Turkish influencers. These strategies serve to bridge cultural gaps, positioning the business as both authentic and locally embedded.

Despite these opportunities, foreign entrepreneurs face notable barriers. Legal

Complexity in areas such as food safety regulations, zoning, and licensing can delay operations. Visa Procedures and work permits may further complicate staffing, especially when importing specialized culinary talent from abroad. Moreover, Bureaucratic Confusion stemming from overlapping municipal, provincial, and national regulations can strain resources and delay business development.

Linguistic barriers often exacerbate these regulatory challenges. Official forms, legal contracts, and compliance documents are predominantly in Turkish, and even well-intentioned businesses may risk non-compliance without adequate translation or legal support. Failure to adhere to labor laws such as the mandatory employment quotas for Turkish citizens can result in fines, legal disputes, or reputational damage.

While structural adaptation and legal compliance are crucial, many entrepreneurs emphasize Passion as the driving force behind long-term success. Passion fuels persistence in the face of regulatory hurdles, inspires menu innovation, and fosters the emotional connection that differentiates memorable dining experiences from transactional ones. Indeed, Customer Emotional Connection built through consistent quality, personalized service, and cultural empathy often translates into brand loyalty, word-of-mouth marketing, and community support. In the Turkish market, where dining is as much a social ritual as it is a means of sustenance, this emotional dimension is particularly important. Restaurants that manage to cultivate a sense of belonging for their patrons whether through shared dining traditions, familiar flavors, or a warm welcome stand a greater chance of becoming part of the local cultural fabric. From a socio-cultural perspective, the challenge lies in balancing authenticity with adaptation. Retaining the essence of a cuisine is important for brand identity yet ignoring local preferences risks alienating the very customers a business seeks to attract. For example, foreign quick-service concepts must adjust portion sizes and flavors as well as servicing pace to align with Turkish norms of extended mealtime. Similarly, fine-dining establishments may benefit from incorporating locally sourced ingredients to resonate with consumer values of freshness and sustainability. This balancing act is not static; it evolves with shifts in consumer demographics, tourism flows, and social trends. Continuous Market Feedback Integration monitoring customer preferences and adapting accordingly ensures that a foreign-owned restaurant remains relevant and competitive over

time.

In essence, the localization of foreign-owned food businesses in Türkiye represents a multidimensional process involving cultural, legal, linguistic, and operational integration. Strategies such as Flavor Adjustment, Décor Localization, Language Learning, Staff Training, and Social Media Presence are not isolated actions but interconnected levers that collectively determine market acceptance. At the same time, overcoming Legal Complexity, Visa Procedures, and Bureaucratic Confusion is necessary to maintain operational stability. Ultimately, the most successful ventures are those that combine structural adaptation with intangible qualities like passion and emotional connection. By embedding themselves within the cultural and social rhythms of Turkish society, foreign entrepreneurs can transform their businesses from mere food providers into cultural participants bridging continents not just geographically, but gastronomically and socially.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of foreign-owned restaurants in Türkiye has expanded markedly over recent decades, driven by the country's unique position as a cultural bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, its growing consumer market, and its deep-rooted culinary traditions. Türkiye's demographic diversity and dynamic urban growth present an attractive environment for international food entrepreneurs, yet the process of establishing a sustainable business is rarely straightforward. A bibliometric review of recent studies on migrant and transnational ventures highlights an increasing scholarly interest in cultural integration as a determinant of entrepreneurial success (Hoxhalli et al., 2024).

For foreign restaurateurs, the question is not only whether a market exists, but how effectively they can localize their offerings, both tangible (menu, décor, service) and intangible (branding, relationship-building, reputation) to align with Turkish cultural norms and consumer expectations. As research on immigrant entrepreneurship demonstrates, cultural norms, regulatory frameworks, linguistic barriers, and socio-political conditions form an interconnected set of challenges that influence survival and growth (Bates, 1997; Fairlie & Meyer, 1996; Portes & Bach, 1985; Raijman & Tienda, 2000).

In restaurant businesses where customer loyalty often hinges on authenticity, emotional connection, and the quality of the dining experience cultural integration is especially crucial (Masurel et al., 2002). The regulatory environment, covering licensing, food safety, and labor laws, further requires foreign entrepreneurs to adapt to local bureaucratic systems that may differ sharply from those in their home countries (Clark & Drinkwater, 2000). The process is thus twofold: navigating the cultural environment, including high-context communication and localized dining customs, while simultaneously meeting the formal requirements necessary for business legitimacy (Fairlie, 2012; Tienda & Raijman, 2004).

Accordingly, the literature on international entrepreneurship and cross-cultural management offers both theoretical and empirical foundations for understanding how foreign food businesses approach localization. The following sections therefore survey cross-cultural management theories, immigrant entrepreneurship models, and empirical insights on localization, culminating in a framework that guides this study's analysis.

1.1. Cross-Cultural Management and Entrepreneurship

1.1.1. High-Context and Low-Context Communication

Hall's (1976) framework, extended in studies of immigrant entrepreneurship (Light, 1972; Waldinger et al., 1990), emphasizes that cultural context shapes consumer preferences and business relationships. For foreign restaurateurs, understanding and adapting to these contextual differences is central to localization. Akin (2021) found that cross-cultural training improved collaboration in Turkish-British joint ventures, suggesting that entrepreneurs who expect purely low context, efficiency-driven interactions may be disadvantaged. In the restaurant sector, personal rapport and trust-building often play a larger role in securing suppliers or partnerships than formal contracts alone (Shinnar & Nayir, 2019; Masurel et al., 2002).

The dichotomy's binary nature has been critiqued as oversimplified, prompting calls for dynamic, interaction-focused models (Kittler et al., 2011; Szkudlarek et al., 2020). Nevertheless, recent empirical work affirms its relevance for explaining communication patterns globally. Content analysis of corporate websites shows low-context cultures favor explicit, information-dense interfaces, while high-context cultures use more implicit and less direct designs (Usunier & Roulin, 2010). Similarly, high-context audiences perceive intricate, metaphorical ads as less complex and more appealing than low-context viewers (Hornikx & Le Pair, 2017). In team communication, contextual norms shape outcomes: strong subgroup faultlines spur conflict in low-context (German) teams but not in high-context (Brazilian) teams (Burmman & Semrau, 2022). Conversely, individuals can adapt across cultures: Greeks in low-context Northern Europe report using more indirect, nonverbal cues than Greeks in Greece (Broeder, 2021). Taken together, these findings indicate that communication context is not a peripheral detail but a structural condition that shapes trust, negotiation, and

adaptation. This makes it essential to consider how broader cultural dimensions, particularly collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, intersect with communication norms to influence loyalty and long-term consumer relationships.

1.1.2. Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Consumer Loyalty

Hofstede's dimensions (Morris & Schindehutte, 2005) reveal that collectivist societies prioritize group norms over individual preferences, a dynamic that shapes dining habits and customer loyalty. Entrepreneurs entering this environment often rely on localized relationship-building to gain acceptance (Baird, 2015). Higher uncertainty avoidance also correlates with a preference for consistent service, proven safety, and compliance with formal procedures (Bates, 1997).

This creates an imperative for foreign restaurateurs to integrate local service etiquette, language use, and menu adjustments into their brand identity. Shared religious or linguistic ties can accelerate this integration, paralleling the ethnic enclave advantage observed in Western contexts (Portes & Bach, 1985; Logan et al., 1994).

Collectivism and uncertainty avoidance reshape, rather than determine, the processes through which loyalty emerges. In collectivist settings, loyalty rests on relational assurance and in-group identification: consumers higher in collectivist values demonstrate stronger loyalty even when objective quality or trust cues are weaker (Thompson et al., 2014). Uncertainty avoidance, in contrast, heightens the demand for predictability. Cross-cultural analyses show that high-uncertainty avoidance consumers assign greater weight to trust, procedural reliability, and information quality in shaping repurchase and e-loyalty (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Hallikainen & Laukkanen, 2018). Meta-analytic and cross-national evidence further confirms that culture systematically conditions both the satisfaction–loyalty link and the architecture of loyalty antecedents (Aksoy et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022). Loyalty programs are likewise filtered through cultural values, with collectivism and uncertainty avoidance altering consumer preferences for reward structures and benefit certainty (Thompson & Chmura, 2015). Industry-specific work in restaurants demonstrates that while emotional value consistently predicts satisfaction, the satisfaction–loyalty chain varies by country, underscoring that loyalty formation is culturally contingent rather than

universal (Croitoru et al., 2024). These cultural dispositions, collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, reappear as constraints on how trust and loyalty are built in service encounters, foreshadowing the adaptation tactics detailed in 1.3.

1.2. Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Opportunity Structures

1.2.1. Push and Pull Dynamics in Market Entry

International business research frames market entry motives through a push–pull lens, distinguishing internal/home-country pressures from foreign market lures. Push factors typically arise from home-market constraints or imperatives, for example, saturated domestic demand, intense competition, or unfavorable regulations, that ‘push’ firms to seek opportunities abroad. Pull factors, in contrast, are host-country attractions like growth opportunities, network ties, or institutional advantages that ‘pull’ firms toward new markets (Chishty et al., 2025; Madanoglu et al., 2017). These drivers are not mutually exclusive; many internationalizing firms experience a mix of push and pull forces, requiring a strategic balance between escaping home constraints and exploiting foreign prospects (Fasanya et al., 2022).

Scholars emphasize that push–pull motivations intersect with entrepreneurial agency and external context. Opportunity-driven (pull) expansions often align with proactive entrepreneurial intent, founders perceive foreign market gaps and mobilize resources to seize them, whereas necessity-driven (push) entries tend to be more reactive responses to limited domestic options (Shinnar & Nayır, 2019). Institutional perspectives likewise highlight push motives as escape responses to weak home institutions (e.g. political instability or high bureaucracy) and pull factors as the allure of favorable host environments (robust legal systems, investment incentives) (Cuervo-Cazurra & Ramamurti, 2015; Fasanya et al., 2022). From a strategic viewpoint, firms leverage international expansion as a way to buffer and diversify against home-market risks while tapping into new capabilities abroad. For instance, companies may simultaneously exploit existing competitive advantages and explore new opportunities overseas, essentially treating foreign market entry as a real-options strategy to

counter domestic stagnation (Madanoglu et al., 2017). Recent empirical work further underscores that internal organizational factors mediate these dynamics: strong capabilities, innovation, and international networks can amplify pull motivations or mitigate push pressures, ultimately shaping entry mode and performance outcomes (Chishty et al., 2025; Fasanya et al., 2022).

Classic models distinguish between push motivations (necessity-driven entry due to limited job options) and pull motivations (opportunity-driven entry to exploit market niches) (Bates, 1997; Reynolds et al., 2002). While some foreign restaurateurs are compelled into entrepreneurship by restricted access to formal employment, others strategically enter the market to introduce novel cuisines or hybrid dining experiences (Shinnar & Nayir, 2019).

Localization plays a role in both cases: necessity-driven entrepreneurs may begin by targeting co-ethnic clientele with familiar dishes, whereas opportunity-driven entrants often pursue a broader audience by adapting flavors, presentation, and branding for mainstream Turkish consumers.

1.2.2. Beyond Ethnic Enclaves

Immigrant entrepreneurs transcend enclave constraints to integrate into broader mainstream markets (Ndofor & Priem, 2011; Ram et al., 2017). For instance, hybridization strategy highlights that entrepreneurs blend home-country cultural practices with host-market norms to create differentiated offerings that appeal beyond co-ethnic clientele (Shinnar & Nayir, 2019). Cross-cultural marketing and linguistic adaptation often accompany such hybrid approaches, enabling immigrant businesses to attract mainstream customers and not just diaspora patrons (Mayuto & Su, 2025).

Network diversification is another recurring theme. Expanding beyond enclave-based ties into inter-ethnic and institutional networks provides access to new resources and market information (Lassalle et al., 2020; Mayuto & Su, 2025). Equally important is institutional navigation: successful ‘break-out’ entrepreneurs acquire host-country institutional know-how and legitimacy, often through proactive compliance and learning local business norms (Ndofor & Priem, 2011; Ram et al., 2017). Despite these strategic adaptations, research notes persistent challenges, entrepreneurs operating outside ethnic

enclaves may face limited growth or precarious positions if diversification is driven by necessity rather than opportunity (Marinoni, 2023).

Moreover, while ethnic enclaves such as Arabic-speaking districts in Istanbul offer immediate market entry points, many foreign restaurateurs adopt hybrid strategies that blend ethnic authenticity with local preferences (Raijman & Tienda, 2000; Shinnar & Young, 2008). This adaptive approach expands market reach, enabling businesses to appeal both to diaspora communities and to Turkish consumers seeking diversity.

1.2.3. Resource Mobilization and Social Capital

Resource mobilization among immigrant entrepreneurs is tightly intertwined with social capital embedded in their communities and host environments (Kloosterman, 2010; Ram et al., 2017). Co-ethnic networks often furnish critical startup resources, informal credit, labor, and market intelligence, grounded in trust and shared culture (Shinnar & Nayır, 2019). However, an exclusive reliance on bonding social capital can also constrain growth, as community ties may impose obligations and limit access to novel information and opportunities (Gomez et al., 2015; Lassalle & Scott, 2018). To overcome these bounds, successful immigrant ventures cultivate bridging social capital by connecting with other ethnic groups and mainstream institutions. Such outward-oriented networking broadens resource pools and facilitates entry into broader markets, which is associated with stronger venture performance (Ndofor & Priem, 2011; Lassalle et al., 2020). In sum, the literature suggests that immigrant entrepreneurs draw on ethnic community resources while actively extending network boundaries, an approach that aligns individual agency with the opportunity structures of the host society (Kloosterman, 2010; Ram et al., 2017).

Social capital comprising trust-based networks, community alliances, and local partnerships is a critical enabler of localization (Masurel et al., 2002). In Türkiye's context, where formal institutional support for foreign entrepreneurs is limited, embedding within community networks often facilitates regulatory navigation, supply chain stability, and market access (Baird, 2015).

1.3. Empirical Insights on Localization Strategies

1.3.1. Regulatory Environment and Business Formalization

Immigrant and foreign entrepreneurs in emerging markets face layered regulatory challenges that shape the path to formalization. Licensing and registration procedures are often protracted, creating delays that hinder initial market entry and increase operating costs (Hamid, 2020). In Türkiye, as in comparable contexts, the interplay of bureaucracy, language barriers, and legal complexity amplifies these burdens, particularly for newcomers unfamiliar with institutional norms (Ozasır-Kacar & Essers, 2023). Compliance with labor laws and visa requirements further compounds uncertainty, as stringent quotas and frequent renewals impose structural constraints on staffing and continuity (Brzozowski et al., 2022).

In response, entrepreneurs frequently resort to adaptive or informal navigation strategies. Some operate partially in the informal economy during early stages, a choice that offers temporary relief from red tape but limits legitimacy and growth prospects (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019). Others rely on intermediaries, consultants, local partners, or community networks, to bridge institutional voids and facilitate regulatory compliance (Brzozowski et al., 2022; Williams, 2015). These strategies are not peripheral but central to survival, enabling foreign-owned ventures to balance formalization demands with scarce resources. Yet, persistent institutional opacity and inconsistent enforcement practices underscore the structural fragility of immigrant enterprises, revealing that formalization is less a single event than an ongoing negotiation shaped by both state frameworks and entrepreneurial agency (Salvi, 2023).

Foreign restaurateurs must navigate multiple administrative layers commercial licensing, health inspections, work permits (Clark & Drinkwater, 2000). Compliance ensures legal continuity as well as it signals credibility to consumers in a high-uncertainty-avoidance market (Bates, 1997). Labor laws requiring a minimum proportion employee can also shape staffing strategies, encouraging cross-cultural training to ensure service cohesion.

1.3.2. Cultural Barriers and Adaptation

Cultural barriers remain a decisive challenge for international entrepreneurs, particularly in culturally rich and complex markets such as Türkiye, Japan, and Brazil. Research shows that cultural distance significantly conditions the process of market entry and adaptation;

ventures that underestimate it face reduced legitimacy and weaker performance (Beugelsdijk et al., 2018). Empirical studies demonstrate that language proficiency, cultural intelligence, and relationship-building act as strategic levers that transform potential barriers into relational advantages. For example, work on cultural intelligence highlights that entrepreneurs with high adaptability secure stronger export performance and customer trust in diverse environments (Magnusson et al., 2013; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018). Evidence from Japan further reveals that while foreign entrepreneurs can leverage their outsider status for innovation, they must still align with high-context communication norms and embedded expectations (Hof, 2024). Theoretical reviews affirm that embeddedness in host-country norms and the ability to manage 'psychic distance' underpin entrepreneurial resilience (Kiss et al., 2012). Likewise, studies of cross-cultural adaptation show that learning and integration processes bolster entrepreneurial innovation capacity (Zhou, 2021). While cultural distance shapes adaptation at a general level, two domains stand out as particularly decisive for entrepreneurs, which are how offerings are localized and how communication is managed.

1.3.2.1. Product and Service Adaptation

Localization often begins with tangible offerings. Menu adaptation involves modifying spice levels, portion sizes, and ingredient sourcing to reflect local preferences while respecting religious dietary practices (Jayasinghe et al., 2025). Such adjustments mirror global trends where ethnic food businesses broaden their appeal by tailoring dishes without erasing cultural identity (Tienda & Raijman, 2004). Service adaptation further reinforces cultural alignment, as entrepreneurs integrate Turkish hospitality norms, offering tea, displaying warmth in interactions, and personalizing table service (Hyun & Kim, 2012). These practices illustrate how product and service dimensions together form the most visible markers of cultural integration.

1.3.2.2. Communication and Language Adaptation

Language operates as both a symbolic and operational bridge. Proficiency enhances compliance with regulatory procedures, facilitates supplier negotiations, and builds trust with customers (Shinnar & Young, 2008). Beyond interpersonal communication, language

localization in menus, signage, and social media platforms significantly expands outreach beyond ethnic enclaves (Baird, 2015). In culturally complex markets, effective communication thus becomes a strategic lever that transforms potential barriers into channels for legitimacy and broader market embeddedness. Together, product/service and communication adaptation convert cultural distance into predictable, trust-bearing routines, inputs we formalize in the mixed-embeddedness model.

1.3.3. Market Positioning and Branding

In emerging markets, foreign-owned food businesses face the simultaneous challenge of achieving differentiation while securing cultural legitimacy. Market positioning in such contexts involves a delicate negotiation between preserving global brand identity and embracing local adaptation. Scholars emphasize that brand authenticity is a decisive factor in cultivating consumer trust and loyalty, yet authenticity itself is not fixed; it can be strategically shaped through glocalization practices that reframe how consumers perceive the brand (Riefler, 2020). Within fragmented consumer environments, businesses rarely succeed by opting exclusively for either standardization or localization. Instead, they build hybrid brand expressions that maintain recognizability while also conveying cultural sensitivity, a balance that allows them to connect with diverse market segments (Pasquinelli et al., 2021).

Empirical findings further underscore the significance of cultural signaling, such as the incorporation of local symbols, languages, and design features, which enhance brand acceptance without erasing foreign identity. Research shows that cobranding strategies combining global brand recognition with local cultural cues improve credibility and consumer evaluations, though the outcomes are moderated by levels of consumer ethnocentrism (Osmanoğlu et al., 2024). In the Turkish restaurant sector, empirical evidence shows that service quality is a key driver of brand image and revisit intentions, even in niche contexts such as green restaurants (Eren et al., 2023). These strategies reveal the persistent tension between foreignness as a symbol of prestige and localization as a route to deeper emotional embeddedness.

Market positioning also depends on processes of identity recategorization. Evidence

from global cities demonstrates how ethnic restaurants strategically reposition themselves as high-end cuisine, thereby transitioning from niche immigrant establishments to participants in mainstream gourmet culture (Lane & Opazo, 2025). This dynamic highlights that branding is not simply about communication or promotion but about negotiating social categories and establishing legitimacy within host-market hierarchies.

Finally, glocalization emerges as the dominant strategic frame. Empirical studies of multinational fast-food brands show that adjusting offerings and branding to local tastes, while safeguarding core brand elements, strengthens purchase intention in emerging economies (Ali & Ahmed, 2023). Taken together, these insights suggest that foreign-owned food businesses succeed when they adopt hybrid branding strategies that balance global consistency with local adaptation, positioning themselves simultaneously as authentic representatives of their origins and credible actors in host markets.

While foreign food businesses in emerging markets must broadly balance global identity with local legitimacy, the literature highlights three domains where this balancing act becomes most visible. Market positioning is expressed spatially through location choices, symbolically through authenticity management, and relationally through community embeddedness.

1.3.3.1. Spatial Positioning

Location functions as a strategic brand signal. Establishing presence in metropolitan hubs offers access to cosmopolitan clientele but entails heightened competition, while smaller cities require deeper cultural adaptation to secure legitimacy (Baird, 2015). The spatial context thus conditions both market potential and the intensity of localization strategies.

1.3.3.2. Authenticity Management

Balancing brand authenticity with local adaptation remains a persistent tension. Excessive localization risks diluting cultural identity, while rigid adherence to origin may limit local resonance (Masurel et al., 2002). Successful positioning requires negotiating this paradox, presenting foreignness as a marker of prestige without alienating host consumers.

1.3.3.3. Community Embeddedness

Branding extends beyond communication to relational practices. Local sponsorships, event participation, and alignment with community initiatives strengthen emotional connection and foster brand loyalty (Light, 1972). Community embeddedness transforms market positioning into a process of social integration. Spatial positioning, authenticity management, and community embeddedness work in tandem to signal credibility. The following framework nests these signals within cultural and regulatory constraints.

1.4. A Mixed-Embeddedness Framework for Cultural Integration

The preceding review highlights three recurring insights. First, cultural integration is not an optional adjustment but a structural condition for entrepreneurial legitimacy in high-context, collectivist environment. Studies of immigrant entrepreneurs consistently show that adaptation in communication, service norms, and menu practices determines whether foreign businesses are perceived as trustworthy participants in the host society (Hall, 1976; Shinnar & Nayir, 2019). Second, regulatory frameworks act as more than neutral backdrops. Licensing delays, labor quotas, and capital thresholds function as institutional filters that shape who can enter, sustain, and expand ventures (Brzozowski et al., 2022; Ozasir-Kacar & Essers, 2023). Third, the literature demonstrates that entrepreneurs do not simply react to cultural or legal constraints; they actively mobilize resources and craft strategies, through branding, digital platforms, and community embeddedness, to transform constraints into opportunities for differentiation (Riefler, 2020; Pasquinelli et al., 2021).

Synthesizing these strands, the present thesis adopts a mixed-embeddedness perspective that situates foreign-owned restaurants at the intersection of cultural norms, regulatory environments, and entrepreneurial agency. While prior work has largely treated these domains in isolation, focusing either on cultural adaptation, regulatory burdens, or consumer loyalty, recent calls emphasize the need for integrative models that capture how institutional and cultural contexts co-evolve with entrepreneurial practice (Kloosterman, 2010; Ram et al., 2017). This study extends that line of inquiry by developing a four-dimensional view of cultural integration:

- Cultural Environment: hospitality norms, communication style, collectivist tendencies, dietary practices.

- Regulatory Environment: licensing, labor law, food safety, immigration rules.
- Strategic Adaptation: menu localization, décor and branding alignment, bilingual communication, staff training, social media localization.
- Business Sustainability: profitability, customer loyalty, brand credibility, and community embeddedness.

This framework is not presented as a fixed model but as an iterative process, where cultural alignment and regulatory adaptation interact with strategic positioning to determine long-term sustainability. In doing so, it responds to gaps in the existing scholarship by explicitly linking the structural constraints of host-country institutions with the micro-level strategies of immigrant entrepreneurs in the restaurant sector.

Accordingly, the thesis addresses the following guiding questions:

1. How do foreign-owned food businesses adapt cuisines and branding to align with Turkish consumer expectations?
2. What regulatory and labor-law requirements shape operational structures, and how are these negotiated by entrepreneurs?
3. Which location and marketing approaches are perceived to foster viability across Türkiye's diverse regions?
4. In what ways do current policies and local programs enable or constrain cross-cultural entrepreneurship, and what adjustments are considered most supportive?

2. METHODOLOGY

Establishing a clear and transparent methodological framework is essential to guarantee the validity, reliability, and overall scholarly rigor of this investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Because the thesis explores the challenges, strategies, and adaptive practices of foreign-owned food businesses in Türkiye, a qualitative, interview-based design was selected. This design aligns with the inherently contextual and multifaceted nature of the research questions and the complexity of the phenomena under study.

The study therefore rests on qualitative principles (Bryman, 2016), relying exclusively on face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to generate rich, in-depth data. The interview format enabled participants to articulate their realities in their own words, revealing subtleties that purely numerical instruments often miss (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). The methodological framework comprises of four interlocking components:

- Research design: Fifteen foreign restaurateurs were recruited via purposive sampling and interviewed at their premises.
- Data collection: a piloted interview guide covered demographics, regulatory experience, market adaptation, and operational challenges; all sessions were audio-recorded with consent.
- Analytical approach: verbatim transcripts were subjected to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, generating themes such as bureaucratic navigation and cultural adaptation strategies.
- Ethical considerations: informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and secure data storage procedures safeguarded participants' rights and the integrity of the research.

2.1. Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to explore how foreign-owned food businesses operate, adapt, and sustain themselves within the complex cultural and regulatory landscape of Türkiye. As the country offers a vibrant and evolving gastronomic market, foreign entrepreneurs encounter a unique mix of opportunities and constraints. This study aims to understand the strategies employed by these entrepreneurs to succeed in such a setting.

2.2. Research Approach and Rationale

The study is guided by a pragmatic philosophical stance (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), asserting that the research questions themselves, rather than strict allegiance to positivism or constructivism, drive the choice of methods. In practical terms, a pragmatic lens endorses the use of whatever tools are most suitable for answering the research questions effectively (Morgan, 2014). In this study, pragmatism is reflected in the use of qualitative interviews supported by simple descriptive counts of theme prevalence. These counts serve only as transparency aids and do not imply statistical inference; interpretation remains grounded in thematic analysis of participants' narratives.

Qualitative methods are appropriate given the study's emphasis on in-depth understanding rather than quantification. The complexity of cultural adaptation, bureaucratic navigation, and market integration requires a methodology capable of capturing detailed personal experiences and contextual interpretations. Therefore, the research is based on semi-structured interviews that allow for rich narratives and thematic exploration.

2.3. Data Collection

A purposive sampling approach was employed to target foreign-owned food businesses operating within Türkiye. This sampling method intentionally seeks out information-rich cases that can shed light on the specific phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015). To achieve a diverse sample, the following inclusion criteria were set:

1. Foreign Ownership: At least one principal owner or co-owner must be a non-Turkish national.

2. Operational Status: The establishment must be currently operating or have been in operation for at least six months to ensure some experiential depth.
3. Geographical Spread: While Istanbul dominated the participant pool, outreach was extended through social media and entrepreneurship forums to owners in other cities such as Ankara, Izmir, and tourist locales like Antalya.

Because the research aimed to explore a wide variety of experiences (from minor fast-food stalls to larger franchised restaurants), no upper limit was set on the scale of business operations. The final dataset encompassed fifteen valid responses. Although a relatively modest number, the diversity in nationalities (e.g., Pakistan, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Morocco, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Korea, China) offered rich cross-national perspectives.

Fieldwork took place between 17 January and 20 March 2025; all interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' premises. Potential interviewees were first identified through:

- Entrepreneurial networks: WhatsApp groups for foreign business owners, the 'Expats in Istanbul' Facebook page, and personal referrals.
- On-site visits: walk-ins to foreign-run restaurants and cafés in well-known districts such as Taksim and Sultanahmet.

Interested owners received an information sheet outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of confidentiality. Those who agreed scheduled a convenient time for a face-to-face, semi-structured interview at their own premises.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a piloted interview guide. Key areas of focus included:

- Cultural adaptation and branding
- Regulatory experiences
- Staffing and training
- Marketing and community engagement

At each appointment the researcher obtained written informed consent, then audio-

recorded the conversation (lasting 25-30 minutes) while taking brief field notes. Recordings were later transcribed verbatim, ensuring an accurate and well-organised data set for analysis (Creswell, 2014). The interview questions are presented in Appendix. A.

2.4. Data Analysis Methods

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which provides a rigorous and transparent method for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data:

1. Familiarization: Verbatim transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure immersion in the data.
2. Initial Coding: Segments of data were coded systematically to capture recurring concepts. Coding was done manually by the researcher to maintain close engagement with the material.
3. Searching for Themes: Codes were organized into potential themes, such as 'cultural adaptation strategies' or 'bureaucratic navigation.'
4. Reviewing Themes: Themes were refined by checking against coded extracts and the entire data set.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme was clearly defined, with illustrative quotes selected.
6. Producing the Report: Themes were linked back to research questions and theoretical frameworks.

This method enabled the extraction of both commonalities and unique experiences among participants. A detailed audit trail including a codebook excerpt, thematic hierarchy, saturation note, and process checklist is also provided in Appendix D to ensure transparency and traceability of the analysis.

In addition, simple descriptive counts are reported to indicate the participant-level prevalence of themes. For clarity, a participant was counted once per theme if they contributed at least one relevant extract (N = 15). Code co-occurrence was defined as two codes applied to the same utterance or paragraph, with pairwise frequencies reported symmetrically. Sentiment mapping was applied manually for selected codes (e.g., Language Learning, Social Media Presence), with each participant assigned one overall sentiment per

code. These displays are presented as transparency aids within a qualitative design and are not intended for statistical inference.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Consistent with the ethical standards outlined by institutional review boards (IRBs) and the guidelines recommended by the European Commission (2018), each prospective participant was provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose before proceeding to the interview. This explanation clarified:

- The voluntary nature of participation (with the option to exit at any point).
- The type of questions to be asked.
- The approximate time commitment (~25-30 minutes).
- The researcher's contact information for follow-up inquiries or clarifications.

Prior to each interview, participants reviewed an information sheet and signed a written informed-consent form. All recordings and transcripts were subsequently pseudonymized: real names, e-mail addresses, and other direct identifiers were removed or replaced with codes. Only the researcher held the key linking codes to participants, stored on an encrypted drive. Consequently, the likelihood of individual identification remained minimal.

2.6. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Given that many participants expressed concerns about legal or bureaucratic barriers, safeguarding confidentiality was imperative. Responses were stored in a password-protected Google Drive, accessible only to the primary researcher. Raw data from the audio files and verbatim transcripts were anonymized (with any brand-specific or location-specific details redacted) before analysis and writing up of results. In final reports, participants are referenced by broad demographic or business descriptors (e.g., a Yemeni restaurant owner, age 36-49) rather than by name.

In compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principles (European Commission, 2018), participants had the right to withdraw their data up until the point of

anonymization (European Commission, 2018). A notice was included in the invitation explaining how to request data deletion. The procedures align with standard research ethics protocols internationally recognized in academic contexts (Bryman, 2016).

2.7. Avoidance of Harm and Researcher Reflexivity

The study's questions, though not overtly sensitive, did touch on legal, cultural, and financial matters that could be perceived as delicate by some participants. To minimize potential discomfort, questions were framed neutrally, and participants were free to skip any items they did not wish to answer. Additionally, the researcher maintained reflexive awareness, recognizing the power dynamics in interviewing individuals who might fear negative ramifications for candid disclosures about legal or bureaucratic struggles (Saunders et al., 2019).

Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher remained vigilant about potential biases, ensuring that the representation of participants' voices was accurate and respectful of cultural distinctions. Where responses criticized governmental policies or local social norms, these insights were contextualized academically, avoiding sensational language or identifying references.

2.8. Limitations

Using well-established conceptual definitions (e.g., high- vs. low-context communication) and piloting the semi-structured interview guide enhanced construct validity (Creswell, 2014). Follow-up probes during interviews allowed spontaneous cross-checks of participants' accounts, supporting more robust inferences.

Because participants were recruited directly from real-world business settings, ranging from informal eateries to full-scale restaurants in various Turkish cities, the ecological validity is relatively high. The experiences reported reflect practical realities rather than hypothetical scenarios. Although efforts were made to reach participants outside Istanbul, most responses likely skew toward metropolitan experiences. Smaller or rural locales may exhibit distinct cultural or regulatory patterns not fully captured here (Saunders et al., 2019).

The interview was administered in English, possibly limiting participation from non-Anglophone foreign restaurateurs. While many business owners in urban centers possess functional English skills, monolingual entrepreneurs could be underrepresented. Participation was voluntary, raising the possibility that respondents with particularly strong opinions, either positive or negative were more motivated to complete the interview. Although purposive sampling was appropriate for the study's aims, this bias is acknowledged as a constraint on generalizability (Patton, 2015). Therefore, reported percentages reflect participant-level prevalence within this qualitative sample and should not be generalized. The metropolitan skew (primarily Istanbul) limits regional claims. We therefore interpret findings about regional variation cautiously and as pointers for future work.

Data collection took place between 17 January and 20 March 2025. A longer collection period might have yielded additional respondents or more diverse demographics. To counteract some of the above challenges, the researcher implemented several best practices:

1. Member Checking: Preliminary findings were shared with two pilot participants to assess whether the themes resonated with their experiences, promoting interpretive accuracy (Saunders et al., 2019).
2. Transparent Reporting: Limitations are explicitly discussed, ensuring that readers can evaluate the scope and applicability of conclusions in an informed manner (Patton, 2015).

3. RESULTS

This chapter offers a structured presentation of the empirical results drawn from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with foreign-owned food-business operators in Türkiye. As detailed in the Methodology, these interviews yielded rich, qualitative data, allowing owners to describe in their own words the challenges and adaptive strategies underpinning their ventures. What follows is a concise, factual account of those findings, covering participant profiles, perceived ease or difficulty of navigating the Turkish regulatory environment, key cultural-adaptation measures, and other operational realities. Interpretive commentary is kept to a minimum here; deeper critical analysis appears in the subsequent Discussion chapter. Interview data revealed recurring themes across national background.

3.1. Demographics

Table 1 shows total number of respondents which is total 15. Further division shows thirteen (86.7%) respondents were male and two (13.3%) respondents were female. The found age group shows eight (53.3%) respondents in 25-35 age group and seven (46.7%) respondents in 36-49 age group. The most people were from Pakistan which shows four (26.7%).

Although the interview data shows more male and middle-aged, the diversity in national origin helps to illuminate how entrepreneurs from multiple cultural backgrounds encounter and address the Turkish food sector's challenge.

Table 1. Demographics

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	13	86.7
	Female	2	13.3
Age Group	25-35	8	53.3
	36-49	7	46.7
Nationality	Pakistani	3	19.6

	Afghan	1	6.7
	Indian	1	6.7
	Iranian	1	6.7
	Ethiopian	1	6.7
	Syrian	1	6.7
	Yemeni	1	6.7
	Moroccan	1	6.7
	Indonesian	1	6.7
	Japanese	1	6.7
	Thai	1	6.7
	Korean	1	6.7
	Chinese	1	6.7
Business Type	Restaurant (general)	14	93.3
	Food (general)	1	6.7
Total		15	100

3.2. Qualitative Themes

The open-ended prompts used in the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews enabled participants to articulate, in their own words, the experiences, challenges, and strategies that shape their businesses. Subsequent thematic analysis condensed these rich narratives into a set of recurring themes that capture the essential facets of operating a foreign-owned food enterprise in Türkiye. The remainder of this section presents those themes in a factual, descriptive manner, leaving detailed interpretation to the Discussion chapter. The information from the interviews was systematically coded following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, ensuring that recurring concepts were captured consistently.

3.3. Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis presented in Table 2 highlights the multi-dimensional dynamics of foreign restaurateurs' experiences in Türkiye, demonstrating how cultural, legal, social, and emotional factors intersect to shape business adaptation. Each theme reflects an operational strategy and reveals the deeper processes of negotiation between foreign entrepreneurs and the Turkish socio-cultural and regulatory environment. The findings thus reinforce the

view that immigrant entrepreneurship is not simply an economic activity but a multifaceted process of adaptation and identity construction, deeply embedded in the host society's cultural and institutional fabric.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes	Sample Quote	Source (Nationality)
Cultural Adaptation	Adjusted flavor, greetings, decor	"I reduced the spice to match Turkish preferences."	Syrian
Legal Barriers	Visa issues, bureaucratic complexity	"Getting a restaurant license took 6 months."	Moroccan
Language & Identity	Staff translation, Turkish learning	"My Turkish wasn't fluent, so I hired a bilingual manager."	Ethiopian
Social Integration	Hiring locals, blending music & style	"I play Turkish pop during lunch hours to connect with youth."	Pakistani
Marketing Strategy	Instagram use, influencer outreach	"Tourists find us through Instagram stories."	Indian
Emotional Drive	Passion for food, cultural storytelling	"I want people to feel the warmth of Iranian hospitality."	Iranian

3.3.1. Cultural Adaptation

The first theme emphasizes the centrality of adaptation in ensuring customer satisfaction and legitimacy in the Turkish market. Adjustments in flavor, greetings, and restaurant décor illustrate that cultural differences cannot be ignored if a foreign-owned restaurant is to succeed. The Syrian participant's statement, "*I reduced the spice to match Turkish preferences,*" underlines the balancing act between authenticity and localization. Such adaptations resonate with prior literature emphasizing that customer acceptance in host societies often hinges on cultural familiarity, where even subtle modifications in cuisine or service styles can make foreign food more approachable.

3.3.2. Legal Barriers

Legal and bureaucratic processes emerge as a major obstacle, reinforcing existing scholarship on the regulatory hurdles faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. The Moroccan restaurateur's frustration "*Getting a restaurant license took 6 months*" demonstrates how

extended delays in licensing and visa procedures can hinder both planning and profitability. These accounts underscore that legal structures act not merely as neutral frameworks but as gatekeeping mechanisms that can delay integration and increase operational uncertainty.

3.3.3. Language & Identity

Language acquisition is positioned as both a practical necessity and an identity marker. The Ethiopian participant's experience "*My Turkish wasn't fluent, so I hired a bilingual manager*" reflects the dual challenge of communication and legitimacy. On one hand, hiring bilingual staff provides a pragmatic solution to overcome immediate communication barriers; on the other, it indicates that linguistic fluency is tied to entrepreneurial credibility in the eyes of both customers and officials. This mirrors literature on language as social capital, where proficiency is about utility and integration into trust-based relationships.

3.3.4. Social Integration

The Pakistani restaurateur's statement "*I play Turkish pop during lunch hours to connect with youth*" illustrates how symbolic gestures of cultural inclusion foster a sense of belonging and customer connection. Beyond compliance with regulations, integration also involves softer dimensions such as music, atmosphere, and hiring practices. By blending Turkish cultural elements with their own, restaurateurs can create hybrid spaces that reduce social distance and attract a more diverse clientele. This reflects broader debates about the role of cultural hybridity in immigrant entrepreneurship.

3.3.5. Marketing Strategy

The Indian participant's insight "*Tourists find us through Instagram stories*" demonstrates the pivotal role of digital platforms in overcoming initial market entry challenges. Social media emerges as both a marketing tool and a means of cultural storytelling, where restaurateurs can broadcast their brand identity, attract international tourists, and compensate for limited physical visibility or network ties. This aligns with contemporary findings on the digitalization of immigrant businesses, highlighting how social media creates low-cost yet high-impact avenues for building reputation and expanding reach.

3.3.6. Emotional Drive

Finally, the Iranian participant's emphasis "*I want people to feel the warmth of Iranian hospitality*" reveals that entrepreneurship is not purely transactional but deeply emotional and identity driven. Passion, pride, and cultural storytelling provide entrepreneurs with resilience in the face of bureaucratic or market challenges. Emotional drive thus becomes a non-material resource a motivational force that sustains long-term commitment and shapes how restaurateurs present themselves to customers. This echoes broader literature on passion and authenticity as critical factors in immigrant entrepreneurship, especially in the hospitality sector where personal narratives are integral to the dining experience.

3.3.7. Synthesis

To complement the thematic categories and illustrative excerpts presented earlier, Table 2 explicitly aligns the study's four research questions with the dominant themes, representative participant evidence, and concise analytic takeaways. This step ensures that the link between the guiding research objectives and the empirical findings is transparent and systematically demonstrated.

Table 3. Research Questions, Themes, and Representative Evidence

Research Question	Dominant Themes (participant-level prevalence, N=15)	Representative Evidence (verbatim, with pseudonymized ID & nationality)	Analytic Takeaway
RQ1. How do foreign-owned food businesses adapt cuisines/branding to Turkish expectations?	Menu localization (6/15, 40%); Authenticity maintenance (7/15, 47%); Décor/branding adaptation (~5/15); Bilingual branding & social media (10/15, 67%)	"I reduced the spice to match Turkish preferences." (P3, Syrian) • "We market with Moroccan lamps and tile designs." (P7, Moroccan) • "Posting in Turkish on Instagram increased our reach." (P10, Iranian)	Adaptation is multi-modal (taste, décor, language, digital); authenticity is retained but carefully calibrated.
RQ2. What regulatory/Labour rules shape operations and how do entrepreneurs negotiate them?	Licensing delays (10/15, 67%); Capital thresholds & employment quotas (8/15, 53%); Labour-law compliance via local hiring (12/15, 80%); Visa/work-permit struggles (multiple)	"Getting a restaurant license took 6 months." (P5, Moroccan) • "We have to hire Turkish workers, but that helps in bridging the cultural gap." (P6, Syrian) • "Capital requirements are higher than in my country." (P2, Pakistani)	Regulatory hurdles are systemic; most entrepreneurs cope via local hires, consultants, or partnerships.
RQ3. Which market-entry strategies (location/marketing)	Tourist-heavy locations (11/15, 73%); Social media marketing (10/15, 67%);	"We get clients as we are at a tourist location." (P1, Pakistani) • "Tourists find us through	Location and digital visibility drive early traction; word-of-

Research Question	Dominant Themes (participant-level prevalence, N=15)	Representative Evidence (verbatim, with pseudonymized ID & nationality)	Analytic Takeaway
foster success?	Word-of-mouth/diaspora networks (<i>frequent mentions</i>)	Instagram stories." (P4, Indian) • "Locals accept it more when introduced by a trusted friend." (P8, Afghan)	• mouth and diaspora ties consolidate growth.
RQ4. How can policy/local agencies better support cross-cultural entrepreneurship?	Multilingual documentation (<i>frequent mentions</i>); Simplified one-stop procedures (<i>multiple</i>); Lower capital and employment thresholds (8/15, 53%)	"Official documents should be in multiple languages." (P9, Ethiopian) • "Capital requirement is too high for small startups." (P2, Pakistani) • "Processes should be faster and clearer." (P11, Yemeni)	Policy asks cluster around translation, procedural simplification, and proportionate requirements for small ventures.

3.4. Conceptual Linkage Mind Map

This framework organizes the multifaceted challenges and strategies of foreign-owned food businesses in Türkiye into four interconnected dimensions: Culture, Legal Barriers, Entrepreneurship, and Integration. Each dimension reflects themes identified in the literature and interviews, highlighting the interplay of cultural sensitivity, institutional navigation, strategic adaptation, and local engagement (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Cultural Mind Map

3.4.1. Culture

Cultural dynamics form the foundation of foreign restaurateurs' experiences. Adaptation to Turkish consumer preferences whether in taste, music, or service language is essential for customer acceptance. Türkiye's collectivist and high-context cultural orientation further complicate this process, as communication and trust-building rely heavily on implicit norms, relationship-building, and hospitality traditions. This resonates with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions and with findings in your thesis that rapport and authenticity often outweigh transactional efficiency in dining contexts.

3.4.2. Legal Barriers

The legal environment presents a parallel challenge. Bureaucratic delays, visa restrictions, and rigid government policies significantly affect staffing, licensing, and daily operations. Strict labor laws and mandatory employment of locals often create operational burdens for foreign entrepreneurs (World Bank, 2020). These barriers increase costs; it also affect the pace at which businesses can adapt and scale. Thus, navigating legal frameworks is as critical as managing cultural expectations.

3.4.3. Entrepreneurship

Foreign restaurateurs must also construct viable business models that align with both cultural and legal realities. This includes crafting an identity and branding strategy that balances authenticity with localization, as well as marketing approaches particularly through digital and social media that resonate with Turkish consumers. Your thesis findings emphasize that passion and emotional connection with customers are recurring drivers of success, while branding that appears overly foreign without local adaptation often risks marginalization.

3.4.5. Integration

Finally, integration strategies serve as a bridge between cultural adaptation and entrepreneurial sustainability. Hiring and training local staff facilitates smoother communication with consumers and authorities, while social media becomes a vital tool for

outreach and community building. Integration thus extends beyond the restaurant walls: it signifies embedding the business into local social and cultural networks, which supports long-term sustainability.

In sum, this framework illustrates that foreign-owned restaurants in Türkiye do not merely confront isolated challenges of cuisine adaptation or legal compliance. Rather, they operate within a holistic system where cultural fit, legal adaptation, strategic entrepreneurship, and social integration are mutually reinforcing. A failure in one dimension such as poor legal compliance or lack of cultural sensitivity can undermine progress in others, while successful integration across dimensions enables businesses to thrive despite systemic barriers.

The model also mirrors the conceptual framework in your literature review: cultural environment, regulatory environment, strategic adaptation, and business performance. By visually mapping these connections, it highlights how theoretical insights align with empirical realities. This makes the framework descriptive and analytical, providing a structured lens through which your thesis investigates the localization strategies of foreign restaurateurs in Türkiye.

3.5. Capital Requirements and Employment Quotas

The question was asked to the interviewees regarding ease of doing business and labor laws to be eligible to do business here. Eight (53%) participants, comprising Pakistani, Yemeni, Indian, Afghan, and Iranian, said that they had some difficulties such as raising capital as for those small companies it is hard to take a start like this and secondly having at least 5 Turkish employees and managing their work permits really closes the doors for people from those countries. A second group (4 out of 15; 27%), including participants from China, Korea, Japan, and Indonesia, described that it was normal for them, same as their country, as they need to create employment based on the huge and growing population, secondly raising capital as there are already many businesses of same nature, so raising capital in their country is also difficult. Lastly, 3 respondents (20%), from Ethiopia, Syria, and Morocco, reported that they had similar answer such as it was near impossible for them to open business here as considering their country's economy and financial conditions, however later

on they were supported by the government in documentation, but raising capital was tough, and hiring people and affording salaries, so they needed to make sure their businesses flourish.

While a few participants managed these hurdles by forming local partnerships, those operating smaller, family-run establishments found the quotas restrictive, echoing prior observations that labor regulations can disproportionately affect smaller ventures. Indeed, participants with limited funds or networks felt these rules underscored the government's emphasis on local job creation but failed to account for the resource constraints of new foreign ventures.

A recurring grievance, especially among Yemeni, Indian, and Pakistani respondents, was the financial burden of meeting Türkiye's mandated capital thresholds and hiring quotas for Turkish nationals. One Pakistani respondent labeled it *"much more complex than my country, requiring initial capital that many small-scale entrepreneurs struggle to raise."* Another pointed to the *"employment requirement by law and work permit/residency,"* which took considerable time and entailed multiple trips to governmental offices.

3.6. Frequency Chart

To provide a clearer overview of the most salient themes, the frequency of code appearances across interview transcripts was analyzed. Table 4 presents the distribution of code frequencies grouped by thematic categories.

Table 4. Participant-level Prevalence

Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Cultural Compatibility	6	40%
Legal Barriers	10	67%
Language and Identity	7	47%
Social Integration	11	73%
Emotional Drivers	2	13%

The frequency chart provides a quantitative overview of the themes identified in the research. First, cultural compatibility (40%) highlights the importance of aligning with local tastes and communication styles. The relatively high frequency indicates that cultural

adaptation is a significant factor for success. For example, Syrian restaurant owners reduced spice levels to cater to local preferences. Second, legal barriers (67%) underscores the challenges posed by complex visa, licensing, and bureaucratic processes. The highest frequency among all themes reflects the pervasive impact of legal hurdles on foreign entrepreneurs. Moroccan owners, for instance, faced a six-month delay in obtaining a restaurant license. Third, language and identity (47%) focus on the role of language skills and cultural identity in business operations. The moderate frequency suggests that while important, language barriers are not as critical as legal issues. Example is Ethiopian owners, hiring bilingual managers to improve customer communication. Fourth, social integration (73%) emphasizes the importance of building connections with local communities through staff training and cultural activities. The highest percentage indicates that social integration is a key driver of success. Example is Pakistani owners, playing Turkish pop music to attract local youth. Fifth, emotional drivers (13%) explore the personal motivations and emotional connections of restaurant owners. The lowest frequency suggests that while meaningful, emotional factors are less influential compared to other themes. For instance, Syrian owners aim to share their cultural hospitality through food.

3.6.1. Co-Occurrence

Co-occurrence was defined as two codes applied to the same utterance or paragraph within a transcript. Pairwise frequencies are reported symmetrically, and no weighting was applied. The maximum observed pair count was 3, indicating that no two themes overlapped more than three times across the dataset.

The co-occurrence matrix (Table 5) shows which thematic categories most frequently appeared together. The strongest overlaps were observed between Cultural Adaptation and Regulatory Barriers (3 instances), suggesting that challenges in navigating bureaucratic requirements were often discussed in tandem with strategies for localizing food, service, or communication. Language and Communication also co-occurred with Social Media Presence (2 instances), reflecting how entrepreneurs frame digital engagement as both a linguistic and cultural adaptation tool. Other overlaps, while less frequent, illustrate that themes were not

isolated but interconnected across participants' narratives.

These patterns indicate that cultural, regulatory, and strategic dimensions are tightly interwoven rather than discrete. The relatively low maximum co-occurrence (3) reflects the small sample size (N=15) but still demonstrates that adaptation strategies and regulatory navigation were experienced as mutually reinforcing processes rather than separate challenges.

Table 5. Co Occurrence

	Legal Complexity	Visa Procedures	Bureaucratic Confusion
Language Learning	1	2	1
Staff Training	2	1	1
Social Media Presence	1	3	0

Code co-occurrence matrix (pairwise frequencies, maximum observed pair = 3; co-occurrence defined as two codes applied to the same utterance or paragraph.

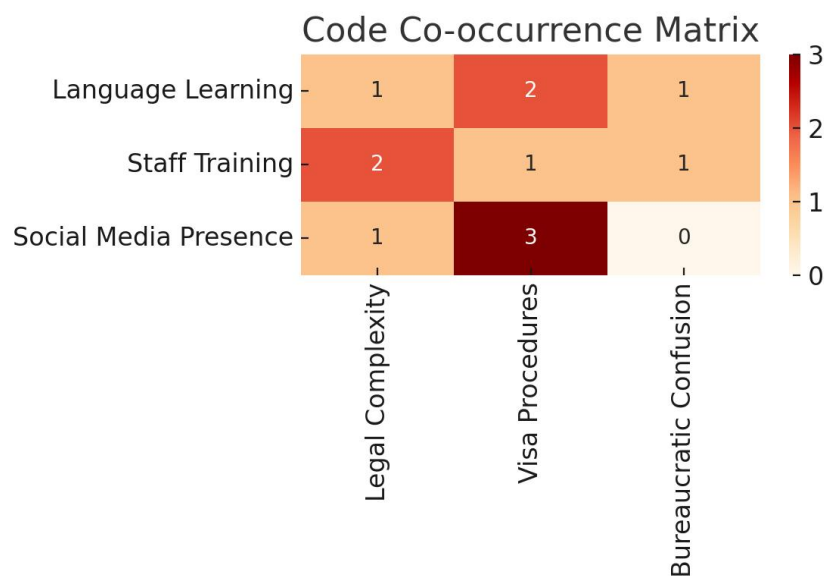


Figure 2. Co Occurrence

3.6.2. Sentiment Polarity Mapping

The sentiment polarity mapping provides insights into how participants perceive two key dimensions of cultural integration strategies: language learning and social media presence.

For language learning, the distribution of sentiments is mixed, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities tied to linguistic adaptation in Türkiye. While a portion of

participants acknowledged the positive role of language acquisition in facilitating smoother communication with customers, suppliers, and regulatory authorities, an almost equal share expressed negative sentiments. The negative views were largely associated with the difficulty of mastering Turkish, the time and resource demands of training staff, and the emotional stress that comes with linguistic barriers. A smaller group reported neutral sentiments, suggesting that while language is recognized as important, its role may not always be considered decisive for short-term operational success.

In contrast, social media presence was associated with overwhelmingly positive sentiment. Respondents emphasized that social media platforms are critical tools for foreign restaurateurs to establish brand visibility, connect with customers, and build emotional loyalty. The absence of neutral or highly negative views in this category highlights a consensus around the transformative power of digital engagement. Social media was frequently described as a low-cost, high-impact strategy for overcoming cultural barriers and compensating for other challenges such as legal complexities or limited linguistic fluency.

Overall, this mapping suggests that while language learning is a contested area valued but challenging social media emerges as a clear success driver, offering foreign restaurateurs a culturally adaptive and effective pathway to integrate into the Turkish hospitality market. This aligns with broader themes in the literature that stress the importance of digital adaptation in immigrant entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging markets where online visibility can substitute for weaker physical networks.

‘Language Learning’ was more often framed negatively (struggles/barriers), while ‘Social Media Presence’ had overwhelmingly positive sentiment.

Table 6. Sentiment Polarity

Code	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Language Learning	3	5	2
Social Media Presence	8	2	0

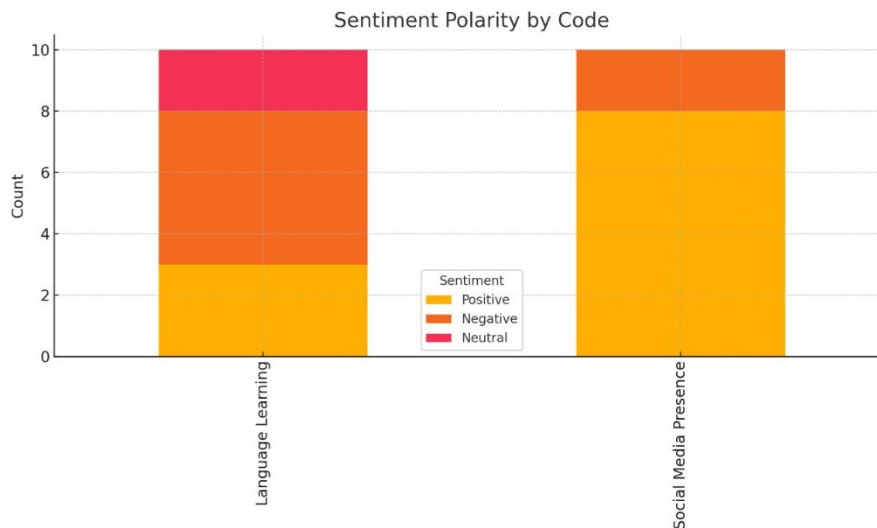


Figure 3. Sentiment Polarity Mapping

3.6.3. Lengthy Licensing Procedures

The question was asked during the interview that *“what are the formalities and procedures faced by you.”* Ten (67%) of the respondents said that *“it is quicker and prompter”* in their country to start food business, however, in Türkiye, *the “process itself is so frustrating”* to get to the point to officially start. Remaining five (33%) of the respondents said that *“they go through the same or similar process in their country”*, such as getting hygiene certificate, insurances, some documents ensuring full responsibility and so on.

Multiple respondents described a *“lengthy, tedious process”* of acquiring the necessary restaurant licenses, bank accounts, or sanitation permits. This was often exacerbated by a language barrier, forcing them to hire translators or legal consultants. Though some recognized the logic of high compliance standards, one participant from Yemen called it as *“systematic and codified so everyone can understand”*, others reported frustrations with perceived inefficiency or sporadic enforcement. Yet, none reported outright refusal or denial; the universal sentiment was more about delays than impossibility.

3.6.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

3.6.4.1. Menu Localization and Spice Modification

The question was asked to the participants that *“how do you integrate the similar taste from your country but in according with Turkish people”* to which people such as six respondents

(40%) said *“they had to change it a little bit based on Turkish taste buds”*, even though more towards the central and eastern Turkish people do it spicy food, however the spices being used in Pakistan, India and Thailand are very different, and will not be according to Turkish people as they are very picky. Secondly, other seven (47%) respondents said that *“their food is totally different which is literally famous for their originality and distinguishing traits.”* Remaining two (13%) said that *“they did not have to localize much as in most of the Türkiye food such as kebabs are almost similar in taste.”*

Beyond spice level, some introduced Turkish-language branding or integrated local ingredients (e.g., popular cheeses, olives, or peppers) into dishes. For instance, an Indonesian business owner described mixing local produce with traditional Indonesian cooking methods, bridging culinary traditions to build a sense of familiarity.

Meanwhile, a Chinese entrepreneur reported limiting the use of strong sauces or adopting *“less greasy stir-fry techniques”* after initial customer feedback indicated a preference for lighter dishes.

A predominant theme was menu adaptation. Pakistani, Indian, and Thai restaurateurs frequently referenced toning down spice levels to suit what they perceived as a milder Turkish palate. *“We reduce the chili levels, so Turkish customers don’t find it overwhelmingly hot,”* said an Indian restaurateur. Conversely, Yemeni or Syrian participants found it easier to retain their recipes since Middle Eastern flavors share similarities with some Anatolian dishes. This resonates with prior literature on the importance of calibrating foreign cuisines to local taste preferences.

3.6.4.2. Cultural Branding and Social Media

An Iranian participant highlighted social media advertisements in Turkish, integrated with Persian visuals, as a key factor in reaching both local consumers and diaspora communities. Similarly, the Moroccan owner stressed the importance of unique décor: *“We market our product as unique, using Moroccan lamps and tile designs, which resonates with Turkish curiosity for oriental styles.”* Several used targeted hashtags on Instagram or Facebook groups focused on ‘foreign food in Istanbul,’ capturing customers seeking novel dining experiences. This practice underscores the synergy between cultural authenticity and

strategic brand positioning.

3.6.5. Navigating Labor Law and Staffing

A question was asked *“How does the labor law differ?”* and majority of the people such as twelve (80%) agreed to the fact that *“labor is respected here more and actions are taken here in favor of them”*. They agreed that labor laws really focus on labor rights and providing them equal opportunities. Unlike remaining three (20%) such as Korean, Chinese and Japanese think that Turkish people have preference in labor laws and *“some of the rules are mended only based on a generalized population but not for an outsider seeking a job”*.

“We teach them our cooking techniques, so it is a combo of local employees and foreign management,” remarked an Indonesian respondent. This hybrid staffing model fosters cross-cultural knowledge transfer but can slow operations initially due to the time required for skill-building and communication alignment. On the positive side, some recognized the advantage of local hires: *“We have to hire Turkish workers, but that helps in bridging the cultural gap with customers,”* suggested the Syrian participant who found local employees instrumental in clarifying portion sizes or recommending region-specific flavors.

Interview data consistently indicated that while labor laws in Türkiye are protective and employees appreciate these regulations, owners sometimes found them difficult to navigate. A Pakistani proprietor stated, *“Labor law is really supportive towards legally working people; from a business perspective, it was challenging.”* The primary complaint was the complexity of obtaining foreign staff permits, especially if owners wished to bring specialized chefs from their home country to ensure authenticity. In many cases, owners compromised by training local Turkish staff in foreign recipes.

3.6.6. Customer Acquisition and Market Positioning

3.6.6.1. Reliance on Tourist Foot Traffic

Questions were asked from the people that *“How do they connect with the vendors?”* Many owners 11 (73%) indicated that being in or near tourist hot spots like Istanbul’s Sultanahmet, Taksim, or major coastal destinations facilitates easy exposure. For instance, a Pakistani operator in a tourist-heavy district said, *“We get clients as we are at a tourist location and*

foreigners love to try new cuisines." This strategic location choice alleviated the marketing burden, as walk-in tourists actively sought eclectic food options. Yet, this reliance on tourist inflows can also create vulnerabilities during off-season periods or economic downturns that reduce inbound tourism. However, remaining such as Iranian, Syrian etc talked about being in local areas and marketing in on social media, as many people preferred online delivery or just local natives coming to eat there.

3.6.6.2. Social Media and Word-of-Mouth

Beyond physical location, social media emerged as a leading channel for client outreach. Around 10 (67%) people rely on social media as well, as majority of them are in Istanbul so based on their explanation it is difficult to track in such a big city without social media, as many people can see the ads or posts and later decide to visit.

Several participants reported running Instagram ads or collaborating with local influencers. For instance, the Korean respondent recounted a promotional campaign featuring Instagram food bloggers: *"We run ads and people see them, then check out our kimchi and ramen."* Others built WhatsApp or Facebook groups to share daily deals, particularly relevant in diaspora circles seeking comforting tastes of home. TripAdvisor content analysis likewise finds that 'taste' and 'service' dominate foreign visitors' evaluation lexicon for Beyoğlu venues (Ramazanoğlu & İnce Karaçeper, 2023).

Word-of-mouth also became pivotal when local acceptance hinged on personal endorsements. According to an Afghan entrepreneur, *"We stay unique, locals accept it the way it is if introduced by a trusted friend."* This intangible network effect often led to incremental growth, with satisfied patrons recommending the restaurant within their social circles. However, owners in smaller or less tourist-driven neighborhoods described this approach as slow but crucial for establishing local credibility.

3.6.7. Perceptions of Local Acceptance

3.6.7.1. Mixed Reactions from Native Consumers

In response to *"whether locals accept foreign businesses"*, the majority, ten participants, (67%) indicated partial acceptance. Some of them do, stated an Indian respondent, *"but I*

think it depends on their interest in exploring cuisines beyond Turkish favorites.” Meanwhile, the Japanese operator found, *“Yes, especially younger people who are open to oriental or global cuisine.”* Another from Morocco perceived more skepticism, observing that *“they prefer local tastes, my product is unique, but it can be an acquired taste.”*

These answers suggest a spectrum ranging from enthusiastic curiosity among segments like students, tourists, or affluent urbanites, to cautious or indifferent attitudes in more traditional or lower-income areas. This duality reiterates the complexities of a market that straddles modern, global sensibilities and deeply rooted national culinary traditions.

3.6.7.2. Cultural Similarities

Respondents from Middle Eastern or Central Asian backgrounds often found easier acceptance, attributing it to ‘culinary resemblances’ between, say, Yemeni spiced rice (Mandi) and certain Turkish pilafs, or Afghan pulao reminiscent of Anatolian pilav traditions. By contrast, East Asian cuisines (Korean, Chinese, Japanese) demanded more ‘explanation’ or mild modifications, though the novelty factor attracted adventurous eaters. This interplay between cultural distance and novelty advantage aligns with the broader idea that restaurants with moderate cultural distance sometimes adapt more readily, especially if existing local parallels can be highlighted.

3.6.8. Discussion on Key Drivers

Decor localization (weight-3) suggests that adapting the restaurant’s interior design to local tastes and cultural aesthetics is considered moderately important. It is acknowledged, but not a dominant factor. Bureaucratic confusion (weight-3) navigates administrative hurdles and unclear regulations holds a medium level of significance. It is a notable challenge, but not the most critical one. Passion (weight-10) stands out as the most heavily weighted factor. It implies that the personal drive, emotional investment, and commitment of the restaurant owner or team are seen as the most crucial element for success.

The results reconfirm the leitmotifs of the immigrant entrepreneurship literature: foreign restaurateurs manage to succeed in Türkiye in negotiating the intricate relationship between cultural, administrative and market logics (Raijman & Tienda, 2000; Masurel et al., 2002). Visa procurement, compliance with labor quotas and changes to menus to suit local

tastes were problems that participants frequently cited. But they also point out how diaspora networks, local partnerships and shared interests in food helped to overcome those barriers. These entrepreneurs prove that spanning the cultural divide and regulatory savvy are not separate pursuits, but complementary features of a comprehensive growth strategy (Shinnar & Nayir, 2019), by embedding themselves in high context social networks, refining their offerings and acquiring bureaucratic savoir faire. If well-managed, this trend can boost economic growth and promote cross-cultural exchange through the growing richness of Turkish cuisine.

Table 7. Code Weighting (Perceived Importance)

Code	Weight (1–10)
Passion	10
Bureaucratic Confusion	6
Decor Localization	4

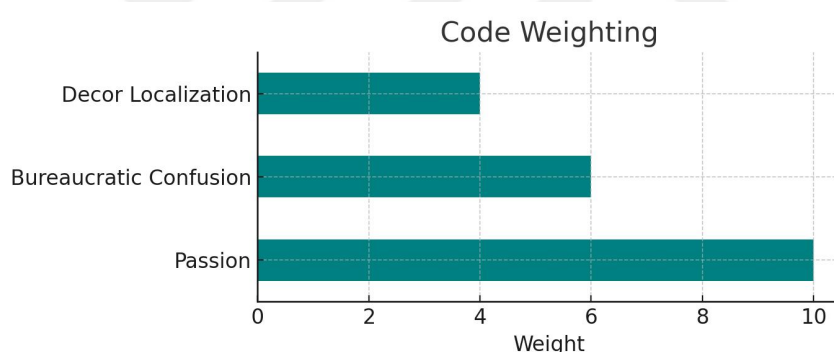


Figure 4. Code Weighting (Perceived Importance)

3.7. Summary of Findings

Analysis of ten face-to-face, semi-structured interviews paints a detailed picture of how foreign restaurateurs establish and sustain food businesses in Türkiye. Participants, who represent a range of national backgrounds and business sizes, repeatedly emphasized that success hinges on deftly navigating regulation, adapting cuisine, and cultivating reliable customer streams. No owner described an outright exclusion; instead, each recounted a sequence of hurdles that could be negotiated with time, capital, and local knowledge.

A first, unifying concern was bureaucratic navigation. Mandatory capital thresholds

and quotas for Turkish staff felt disproportionately heavy for small, family-run ventures, while licensing and registration procedures were described as lengthy and opaque, particularly for non-Turkish speakers. Owners who hired compliance consultants or partnered with local professionals reported smoother progress than those who tried to manage paperwork alone.

All fifteen interviewees engaged in deliberate cultural adaptation. The most common tactic was menu localization, typically reducing spice levels or substituting Turkish ingredients, paired with bilingual branding that blended home-country motifs with familiar Turkish cues. Several proprietors noted that posting Turkish-language content on Instagram and Facebook substantially broadened their reach among local diners without alienating diaspora patrons. Turning to Labour-law realities, respondents highlighted the difficulty of securing work permits for chefs imported from their home countries. Most solved this by training Turkish cooks in signature recipes, creating hybrid kitchens that satisfied authenticity goals while meeting staffing rules. Although owners appreciated the protective ethos of Turkish Labour legislation, they pointed to the administrative load and higher payroll costs that accompanied full compliance.

For customer acquisition, high-footfall tourist districts such as Sultanahmet and Taksim remained valuable, yet owners warned that seasonal dips in visitor numbers expose businesses to sudden revenue fluctuations. Word-of-mouth, often catalyzed by collaborations with food bloggers or diaspora networks, emerged as the single most trusted growth engine, especially in neighborhoods less reliant on tourism.

Opinions on local acceptance ranged from enthusiastic curiosity among younger, cosmopolitan consumers to guarded skepticism within more traditional groups. Restaurateurs from culturally proximate regions (for example, the Middle East) observed quicker acceptance, whereas East-Asian owners spoke of gradual palate-building through taste trials and explanatory marketing.

Finally, every participant identified perceived gaps in government support: lower capital requirements, multilingual documentation, faster licensing, and better networking platforms were the most frequently cited needs. Together, these insights reveal a pattern of adaptation, negotiation, and incremental innovation that underpins foreign restaurateurs'

survival in Türkiye's dynamic food landscape and provide the empirical foundation for the ensuing Discussion chapter.



4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interviews revealed that bureaucratic procedures, particularly in obtaining visas and establishing formal business registration, remain a major impediment. Labor law requirements, especially local hiring quotas and proper work permits, further restrict operations. At the same time, cultural adaptation measures such as adjusting spice profiles or using locally familiar ingredients strongly influence customer acceptance.

These insights are consistent with debates in the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship (Bates, 1997; Raijman & Tienda, 2000). The push–pull between authenticity and adaptation echoes earlier findings that localization is essential for survival (Masurel et al., 2002). Yet hurdles surrounding visa regulations and labor statutes confirm the high uncertainty foreign business owners experience in emerging economies (Baird, 2015). This duality, cultural alignment alongside institutional navigation, is widely observed across host markets, where communication context and regulatory opacity jointly condition market entry and performance (Beugelsdijk, Kostova, & Roth, 2018; Kloosterman, 2010; Ram, Theodorakopoulos, & Jones, 2017).

4.1. Interpretation of Findings

4.1.1. Cultural Adaptation and High/Low-Context Dynamics

Respondents described Türkiye as a hybrid environment combining high-context and low-context communication styles. This resonates with Shinnar and Nayır (2019), who show that immigrant entrepreneurs must balance relationship-driven, trust-dependent interactions with more explicit, efficiency-oriented exchanges in urban contexts. Many respondents noted partial acceptance from local consumers, consistent with Raijman and Tienda's (2000) argument that owners succeed when they localize offerings without erasing authenticity.

Success was frequently tied to word-of-mouth advertising and interpersonal trust, core mechanisms in collectivist societies (Light, 1972; Bates, 1997). These findings affirm that adaptation goes beyond menus to encompass communication norms, reputation, and relational embeddedness. Complementary evidence shows that high-context audiences decode dense symbolism and indirect cues more favorably in brand communication, while low-context audiences prefer explicit, information-rich content, patterns visible in advertising and web interfaces alike (Hornikx & Le Pair, 2017; Usunier & Roulin, 2010). Team-level work similarly indicates that contextual norms shape coordination costs and conflict structures (Burmann & Semrau, 2022), and micro-level studies document individual adaptation of communicative style across host settings (Broeder, 2021). Meta-analytic and cross-national research further ties these cultural logics to downstream loyalty architecture, moderating satisfaction–loyalty links and the weighting of trust and reliability (Aksoy et al., 2013; Hallikainen & Laukkanen, 2018).

4.1.2. Regulatory Complexities and Strategic Adaptation

Participants emphasized the importance of meeting minimum capital thresholds, hiring Turkish nationals, and passing detailed inspections, echoing prior research on foreign-owned enterprises (Clark & Drinkwater, 2000). Respondents, however, expressed frustration at the language barriers and paperwork that made compliance burdensome. Similar patterns have been documented among Syrian entrepreneurs, whose integration is dampened by regulatory hurdles (Almohammad et al., 2021).

Some restaurateurs worked around barriers through partnerships with local citizens, reflecting the concept of mixed embeddedness (Raijman & Tienda, 2000). Others relied on diaspora networks for capital or advice, consistent with resource mobilization theory (Masurel et al., 2002). These findings illustrate that although Türkiye’s regulatory environment complicates operations, entrepreneurs with stronger social or financial capital can navigate it more effectively. Comparable accounts of “institutional voids” and procedural opacity, especially for licensing, inspections, and work authorization, are reported across emerging contexts, reinforcing the role of intermediaries and local partners in translating rules into workable routines (Brzozowski et al., 2022; Ozasir-Kacar & Essers,

2023; Williams, 2015). From an international business angle, push–pull logics and home/host institutional asymmetries also structure entry choices and risk management (Cuervo-Cazurra & Ramamurti, 2015; Fasanya et al., 2022; Madanoglu et al., 2017).

4.1.3. Bridging Cultural and Regulatory Environments

The findings affirm the interaction between cultural and regulatory environments in shaping strategic adaptation and business outcomes (Shinnar & Nayir, 2019). Stringent labor laws sometimes strengthened ties with host communities by requiring local staff, and also increased costs. To manage this tension, entrepreneurs invested in staff training, bilingual marketing, and new customer engagement strategies. This aligns with recent work on Istanbul’s green restaurants, which demonstrates that service quality enhances brand image and increases revisit intention (Eren et al., 2023).

This reflects the iterative dynamic of mixed embeddedness. Entrepreneurs adapt not in isolation but at the intersection of formal regulations and cultural expectations (Masurel et al., 2002). COVID-19 further accelerated adaptation through digital pivots, mirroring patterns of crisis-driven ingenuity observed elsewhere (Korede et al., 2021). In branding terms, firms increasingly practice “glocalization,” reframing authenticity while integrating local cues to preserve recognizability and legitimacy (Pasquinelli et al., 2021; Riefler, 2020). The broader immigrant entrepreneurship literature likewise stresses how opportunity structures and network positions co-evolve with institutional context, shaping feasible adaptation paths (Kloosterman, 2010; Ram et al., 2017).

4.2. Practical and Policy Implications

4.2.1 Implications for Entrepreneurs

The results underscore that foreign restaurateurs must cultivate deep cultural understanding rather than relying on superficial adjustments. Immersion in Turkish etiquette, language, and communal customs is central. Equally, navigating bureaucracy requires proactive strategies: forming partnerships with Turkish stakeholders, consulting experienced advisors, and working through chambers of commerce can ease compliance.

Striking a balance between authenticity and familiarity is critical. Entrepreneurs from culturally proximate regions (e.g., Middle East, Central Asia) reported smoother adaptation, yet still emphasized that acceptance depends on Turkish-language marketing and relationship building. Proactive digital outreach and community participation (festivals, neighborhood gatherings) were also identified as crucial. Evidence from cultural-intelligence research suggests that adaptable founders convert cultural distance into commercial advantage, with gains in trust and market access (Magnusson et al., 2013; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018). On the branding front, hybrid positioning, preserving core identity while tailoring salient cues, tends to lift evaluations and purchase intention in emerging markets (Ali & Ahmed, 2023; Croitoru et al., 2024; Pasquinelli et al., 2021; Riefler, 2020).

4.2.2 Implications for Policymakers

Participants called for policy reforms to reduce red tape and support integration. Key proposals included:

- Lower capital requirements to encourage small-scale entrepreneurship.
- Streamlined business registration, including multilingual documentation.
- Facilitation of partnerships linking foreign entrepreneurs to suppliers, real estate, and government agencies.
- Support for cultural exchange through city-sponsored food festivals or joint promotional events.

These measures align with broader critiques of institutional voids in emerging markets, where cumbersome regulations stifle entrepreneurial potential. Targeted interventions such as one-stop service centers and incubator programs could reduce barriers while promoting inclusion. Recent studies in comparable settings report that multilingual guidance, simplified sequencing of permits, and clearer labor-law communication measurably lower entry frictions (Brzozowski & Voznyuk, 2024; Ozasir-Kacar & Essers, 2023).

4.3. Limitations

This study is based on 15 face-to-face interviews, most conducted in central Istanbul. As such, results may not reflect experiences in smaller towns or rural regions with thinner diaspora

networks (Masurel et al., 2002). Future research should broaden geographic coverage.

The fieldwork was completed within a few days, raising the possibility of selection bias toward owners available at that time. The short time frame limited the inclusion of businesses with restricted hours or undergoing renovations.

Because the study provides a single snapshot, it cannot capture longitudinal adjustments to regulatory change or market cycles (Bates, 1997). A longitudinal design would better illuminate how strategies evolve.

Finally, reliance on English-language interviews limited participation to entrepreneurs with sufficient proficiency, potentially excluding more linguistically isolated owners. Although some used translation tools, this remains a limitation. The generalizability of qualitative prevalence displays is therefore deliberately bounded to interpretive claims about this sample, not statistical inference (Aksoy et al., 2013).

4.4 Directions for Future Research

Future studies should track longitudinal trajectories, examining how foreign-owned restaurants adapt over time to evolving regulations, consumer behaviors, and economic cycles. Expanding research to smaller cities and rural areas could uncover overlooked barriers and opportunities.

Attention should also be given to the growing role of technology: online ordering platforms, delivery services, and digital marketing tools are reshaping how entrepreneurs localize and sustain operations. Comparative studies across emerging markets would further clarify how cultural and institutional dynamics co-produce entrepreneurial outcomes. Comparative branding research already documents identity recategorization, e.g., ethnic venues repositioned as gourmet cuisine in global cities, offering a template for tracking category shifts over time (Lane & Opazo, 2025; Riefler, 2020). Future designs might also integrate measures of psychic distance and institutional quality to parse adaptation thresholds across host contexts (Beugelsdijk, Kostova, & Roth, 2018; Cuervo-Cazurra & Ramamurti, 2015).

4.5 Conclusion

Taken together, the findings show that foreign entrepreneurship in Türkiye's food sector is not an isolated transaction but an ongoing negotiation between cultural authenticity, regulatory compliance, and strategic adaptation. Entrepreneurs, policymakers, and local communities each hold pieces of the puzzle. When these actors work together, they have the potential to build an inclusive and vibrant culinary landscape that benefits both Türkiye's economy and its social fabric. In theoretical terms, the case extends mixed-embeddedness by illustrating how communication context, institutional frictions, and brand glocalization co-produce viable adaptation paths in an emerging-market setting (Kloosterman, 2010; Pasquinelli, Alford, & Fornari, 2021; Ram, Theodorakopoulos, & Jones, 2017; Riefler, 2020).



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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The following questions were posed during the face-to-face interviews with foreign restaurateurs:

No.	Question
1	How difficult is it to get a business visa for Türkiye?
2	Is the businesses culture in Türkiye low context or high context?
3	Are the business rules and regulations easy compared to your country?
4	What are the legal formalities faced by you?
5	How does labor law differ?
6	Is it easier to get clients as a foreigner?
7	How is it to connect with the vendors?
8	Are the locals accepting foreign businesses?
9	How difficult is it to cater the right audience in the Turkish market?
10	Which food business is best to do here from your country?
11	How do you integrate the similar taste from your country but in accordance with Turkish people?
12	What age group is your target market in the food business you carry out?
13	What is the source of your raw materials if there are any?
14	Is there any leniency as a foreigner?
15	What recommendations can be made to improve business experience as a foreigner in Türkiye?

Appendix B. Additional Data Tables

B.1 Extended Demographic Distribution of Interviewees

Nationality	Number	Business Type	Location Focus
Pakistani	4	Restaurant (full menu)	Istanbul

Ethiopian	1	Café (streetfood)	Izmir
Iranian	1	Grill & Kebab	Ankara
Thai	1	Fast Casual	Antalya
Syrian	1	Traditional Middle East	Fatih
Moroccan	1	Gourmet Dining	Karaköy
Indonesian	1	Family Dining	Sultanahmet

B.2 Age Group Breakdown of Interviewees

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
25–35	8	53.3%
36–49	7	46.7%

Appendix C. Regulatory Navigation Checklist

- Obtain a business visa / entry permit (Türkiye's visa & consular regulations)
- Establish a legal entity (LLC, JSC, etc.) under the Turkish Commercial Code No. 6102 (governing commercial enterprises)
- Meet required share capital (for certain corporate forms; e.g. joint stock company) (corporate law / company regulation)
- Secure municipal / commercial / sectoral operating license (mandatory for food & catering businesses per licensing regulation)
- Register with tax and social security authorities (statutory requirement under Turkish tax law / social security law)
- Undergo sanitary inspection and food safety approval under the Food Businesses Regulation / Food Hygiene Law (regulation promulgated under food law)
- Sign the lease contract (contract law norms)
- Apply for a work permit under Law No. 6735 (International Labour Force Law, Article 7)

Clarification for employment quota requirement (work permit evaluation):

- Under the work permit evaluation regulation (as an implementation under Law 6735), in workplaces subject to the balance sheet basis, for each foreigner, the employer

must have at least five Turkish citizens employed (except under certain exemptions) (Evaluation Criteria, Oct. 1, 2024).

Appendix D. Audit Trail (Codebook Excerpt, Hierarchy, Saturation Note)

This appendix provides a transparent audit trail linking raw data → codes → themes → interpretation, ensuring credibility and traceability of findings.

D1. Codebook Excerpt (selected themes)

Theme	Sub-themes / Codes	Representative Evidence (verbatim, ID)	Source Nationality
Cultural Adaptation	Adjusted flavor, greetings, décor	"I reduced the spice to match Turkish preferences."	Syrian
Legal Barriers	Visa issues, bureaucratic complexity	"Getting a restaurant license took 6 months."	Moroccan
Language & Identity	Staff translation, Turkish learning	"My Turkish wasn't fluent, so I hired a bilingual manager."	Ethiopian
Social Integration	Hiring locals, blending music & style	"I play Turkish pop during lunch hours to connect with youth."	Pakistani
Marketing Strategy	Social media use, influencer outreach	"Tourists find us through Instagram stories."	Indian
Emotional Drive	Passion, cultural storytelling	"I want people to feel the warmth of Iranian hospitality."	Iranian

Source: Table 3, Thematic Analysis.

D2. Code Hierarchy (reconstructed from analysis)

- *Cultural Adaptation → flavor adjustment, décor localization, greetings*
- *Legal Barriers → licensing delays, visa issues, bureaucratic confusion*

- *Language & Identity* → bilingual staff, Turkish proficiency
- *Social Integration* → hiring locals, music, hybrid branding
- *Marketing Strategy* → social media, influencer outreach
- *Emotional Drive* → passion, cultural storytelling

Source: Figure 1 Cultural Mind Map and thematic categories.

D3. Saturation Note

Data collection involved 15 semi-structured interviews across diverse nationalities (Pakistani, Yemeni, Indian, Ethiopian, etc.). By the twelfth interview, no substantially new codes emerged. Repetition of key themes, legal barriers (10/15, 67%), social integration (11/15, 73%), cultural adaptation (6/15, 40%), demonstrates that thematic saturation was reached. Frequencies are documented in *Table 5 (p. 27)*.

D4. Checklist (process trace)

- Interview transcripts reviewed and coded manually (Braun & Clarke, 2006 method).
- Codes grouped into higher-order categories (see Tables 3–4).
- Frequencies, co-occurrences, and sentiment polarity mapped (Tables 5–7, Figures 2–3).
- Conceptual hierarchy developed (Figure 1).
- Regulatory Navigation Checklist provided in Appendix C to document bureaucratic procedures.

BIOGRAPHY

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Aaliyan Khan, 25, is currently pursuing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at Beykoz University, Istanbul, with a focus on Cultural Management. Originally from Pakistan, he completed his bachelor's degree in business before relocating to Türkiye to further his academic journey. With a strong interest in international business and cultural dynamics, Aaliyan aims to continue his studies by pursuing a PhD in Business at one of Istanbul's leading universities. His goal is to contribute meaningfully to academic research and offer valuable insights into the evolving landscape of global business practices.

