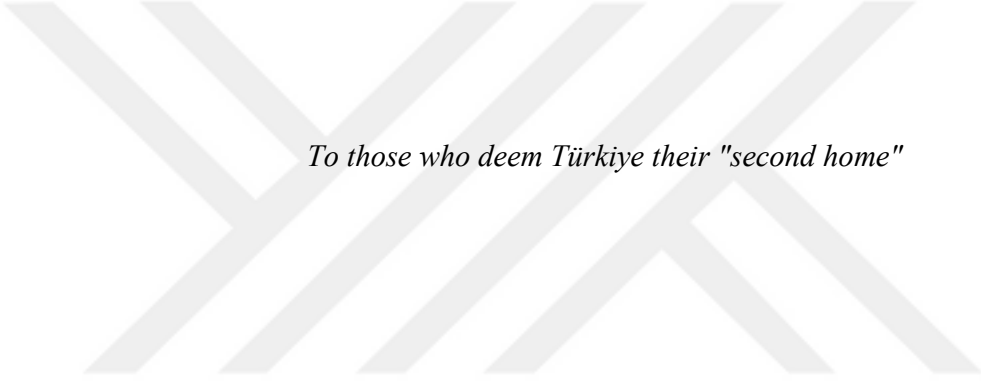




To those who deem Türkiye their "second home"

SCHOLARSHIPS AS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:
AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE TURKISH
GOVERNMENT FUNDED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by
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ANALYSIS OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT FUNDED
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

By Hacer Atabaş

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ABSTRACT

SCHOLARSHIPS AS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT FUNDED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

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This dissertation investigates the developmental effectiveness of Türkiye’s government-funded international scholarship programs within the framework of education-oriented foreign aid. While Türkiye’s programs have been widely discussed in terms of soft power and public diplomacy, their developmental dimensions—such as access to education, human capital formation, and contributions to social change—remain underexplored and empirically untested.

The main research question asks: How effective are Türkiye’s international scholarship programs in achieving their stated and implicit developmental objectives? Two sub-questions explore the developmental goals policymakers associate with these programs and the extent of alums contributions to their home countries’ development.

Using a qualitative and evaluative approach, the study analyzes 37 policy documents and five elite interviews to build a Theory of Change (ToC). This ToC is tested through 44 in-depth alums interviews conducted in Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, and Egypt, representing Central Asia, the Balkans, and the MENA region. The data are thematically analyzed using MAXQDA software, applying an extended Kirkpatrick model that assesses reaction, learning, behavior, organizational impact, and external outcomes.

Findings reveal partial effectiveness: alums contribute meaningfully in sectors such as education, governance, and entrepreneurship. However, home-country constraints, insufficient academic preparation, and lack of post-graduation support limit long-term impact.

The dissertation concludes with nine policy recommendations, five focusing on program design (e.g., return incentives, academic quality) and four on institutional reform (e.g., coordination, alums engagement), aiming to strengthen the developmental role of Türkiye's scholarship programs.

Keywords: Development Assistance, Foreign Aid, International Higher Education, International Scholarship Programs, Turkish Foreign Policy

ÖZET

KALKINMA YARDIMI OLARAK BURSLAR: TÜRKİYE’NİN KAMU KAYNAKLI BURS PROGRAMLARININ SONUÇLARININ AMPİRİK BİR ANALİZİ

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Bu doktora tezi, Türkiye’nin hükümet destekli uluslararası burs programlarının, eğitim odaklı dış yardım çerçevesinde, kalkınma hedeflerine ulaşmadaki etkililiğini incelemektedir. Bu programlar genellikle yumuşak güç ve kamu diplomasisi bağlamında değerlendirilmiş olsa da, eğitime erişim, beşeri sermaye gelişimi ve toplumsal dönüşüm gibi kalkınma boyutları büyük ölçüde göz ardı edilmiştir ve ampirik olarak test edilmemiştir.

Araştırmanın temel sorusu, Türkiye’nin uluslararası burs programlarının açık ve zımnî kalkınma hedeflerine ulaşmada ne derece etkili olduğudur. İki alt soru politika yapıcıların bu programlarla ilişkilendirdikleri kalkınma hedeflerini ve mezunların kendi ülkelerindeki kalkınma süreçlerine katkılarını incelemektedir.

Nitel ve değerlendirme odaklı bir yaklaşım benimsenen çalışmada, 37 politika belgesi ve beş uzman mülakatı üzerinden bir Değişim Teorisi (ToC) oluşturulmuştur. Bu çerçeve, Orta Asya, Balkanlar ve Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika bölgelerini temsilen; sırasıyla

Kırgızistan, Kuzey Makedonya ve Mısır'da gerçekleştirilen 44 derinlemesine mezun mülakatlarıyla test edilmiştir. Veriler MAXQDA yazılımı kullanılarak tematik analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiş, tepkiden öğrenmeye, davranıştan kurumsal ve dışsal sonuçlara kadar beş boyutlu genişletilmiş Kirkpatrick modeli uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular, mezunların eğitim, yönetim ve girişimcilik gibi alanlarda anlamlı katkılar sunduğunu, ancak ev sahibi ülkelerdeki yapısal sınırlılıklar, yetersiz akademik hazırlık ve mezuniyet sonrası destek eksikliğinin uzun vadeli etkileri sınırladığını göstermektedir.

Tez, Türkiye'nin burs programlarının kalkınmaya yönelik rolünü güçlendirmeyi amaçlayan, beşi program tasarımı (örn. geri dönüş teşvikleri, akademik kalite) ve dördü kurumsal reforma (örn. koordinasyon, mezun katılımı) odaklanan dokuz politika önerisiyle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası Burs Programları, Kalkınma Yardımları, Dış Yardım, Uluslararası Yükseköğretim, Türk Dış Politikası

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In a serendipitous turn of fate, shortly after I decided to study Türkiye's scholarship program, I was introduced to Mehmet Köse—who played a central role in designing and implementing it. Knowing him has deepened my belief in the significance of this research, given me the courage to carry on through moments of doubt, and reminded me of the importance of continuing to take even the smallest steps toward what I believe is

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I was also deeply moved by the graciousness of the alums I met in the field, who extended warmth simply because I came from Türkiye. Their regard was a quiet affirmation of belonging. I dedicate this study to them—with gratitude for their stories, and joy in knowing they see my country as their own.

Despite the privilege of being supported by such generous and insightful scholars, practitioners and alums, all shortcomings in the final version of this dissertation are, of course, my own.

During my studies, my peers and I at the Department of International Relations at Bilkent University often talked about how graduate school and thesis writing can feel like an isolating experience. In hindsight, and especially as I reflect on those I must thank, I realize we were mistaken. My cohort—especially Volkan İmamoğlu, as well as Gizem Kaya and others—stood by me in our shared struggle. Their companionship and solidarity merit my heartfelt thanks.

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Use of AI Tools

Generative artificial intelligence tools, particularly OpenAI’s ChatGPT, were used to support language refinement, structural coherence, and visual presentation (e.g., figures) of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to evaluate Türkiye’s unilateral higher education scholarship programs targeting international students, which has been implemented consistently for over three decades. Scholarship programs, particularly those administered by the government of Türkiye, have predominantly been scrutinized regarding their strategic and diplomatic objectives (Kelkitli, 2021; Budak & Terzi, 2021; Aras & Mohammed, 2019). This analytical focus placed on Türkiye’s motivations obscures the “pathways” (Dassin, Marsh & Mawer, 2017) for social and economic development opportunities and varying outcomes that these scholarships have created for the sending countries.

Foreign aid, which emerged as an important tool in international relations after the Second World War, focused on economic capacity building and physical infrastructure to compensate for the devastation caused by the war (Lancaster, 2007). Over time, the policy practice of development has turned towards improving human and social capital, which has been premised on human capital theory – i.e., investment in skills and knowledge formation that will advance economic growth and prosperity (cited from G.S. Becker’s 1964 book “Human Capital” in Weiss, 2015). In the 1960s, recognizing the importance of training the workforce and acquiring professional skills, training became part of aid (Heyneman & Lee, 2016). For instance, at the 1961 Addis Ababa Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa, participants underscored the vital role of education in economic and social development, reaffirmed their commitment to its expansion, and called upon foreign donors for support (Katsakioris, 2019, p. 281).

In the 1980s and 90s, when the foundation of education for development beyond the establishment of a skilled workforce was understood, the concept of “Education for All” became more widespread and basic and secondary education, as well as vocational training, became among the targets of the activities of international organizations and bilateral aid (UNESCO, 2002; World Bank, 1980). As multilateral development agencies, including the World Bank (2000), have emphasized that higher education access is a key enabling factor in socio-economic development, and that the growing “costs of being left behind” arising from inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure and human capital, and weak governance systems have continued to hinder access to higher education and the construction of skills and knowledge in many low-income countries (Dassin et al., 2017, p. 3).

In this context, the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development premised on the notion of “leave no one behind” has incorporated access to higher education into its transformative Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG Target 4.3. has affirmed the member states’ commitment to “ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (UN, 2015). The conceptualization of development through education, which formed the basis of human capital theory, involved the idea that studying abroad and earning a degree from a foreign country constitutes a form of human capital import (Perna et al, 2014). From this perspective, students returning from abroad would “contribute to faster creation of new knowledge and help other people acquire skills without any direct costs” (Kim, 1998, p. 338, cited in Perna et al., 2014, p. 64). In line with such ideas, SDG 4.b directly called for member states to increase the number of scholarship opportunities available to students from developing regions—particularly those from small island developing states, least developed countries, and African countries—to pursue higher education, covering both developed and developing nations’ provision to disciplines including science, engineering, information and communication technologies, and vocational training (UN, 2015).

Through talent transfer and capacity building, these scholarship programs are viewed as essential tools for advancing inclusive education, boosting human capital, and assisting

sustainable development. Various studies have shown that human capital development is related to all of the SDGs adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (Barua, 2021; Ugnich, Chernokozov, & Ugnich, 2021). For instance, human capital import in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM) has played an important role in nation-building processes. In the case of China, individuals educated abroad in STEM disciplines were actively recruited upon their return with incentives such as access to world-class laboratories, salary supplements, and financial assistance for housing and their children's education (Campbell & Neff, 2020, p. 836).

The share of aid for the improvement of economic and social infrastructure in total, including development cooperation activities in the field of education, increased from an average of 21 percent in the 1970-1979 period to 53 percent by 2019 (Tribe, 2024). And, Türkiye has “become one of the largest scholarship providers” through its Türkiye Scholarships program in recent years, and led to a significant improvement in the achievement of SDG Target 4.b globally (UNESCO, 2021, p. 343). Nevertheless, limited scholarly attention has been so far paid to the administration of these scholarships and the related developmental effects they have had. Addressing this gap, the present research empirically examines policymakers' perspectives on the objectives of Türkiye's scholarship initiatives, with a specific focus on development outcomes. Employing qualitative methodologies, this study further seeks to elucidate the extent to which these developmental objectives have been achieved. Moreover, by critically engaging with Turkish policy perspectives and experiences, this study aims to contribute to the diversity of the educational aid narratives and practices in the literature.

To accomplish this, the dissertation initially contextualizes foreign aid historically and globally. It subsequently positions Türkiye within this broader aid landscape, introducing the rationale underpinning international development cooperation. Special attention is drawn to the insufficient academic engagement with Türkiye's education-oriented aid programs, an area demonstrating significant and expanding relevance. By emphasizing scholarships as a distinct form of development assistance, the dissertation lays a foundational framework for its analytical chapters.

Before exploring in-depth analyses of scholarship program operations in global and Turkish contexts in the following chapter, this chapter clearly articulates the research problem and outlines the research questions guiding the study. Furthermore, the methodological approach adopted to address these questions is introduced, and an overview of the dissertation structure is provided.

1.1. A Conceptual and Historical Overview of Foreign Aid

Foreign aid and development assistance are terms used interchangeably to refer to the deliberate provision of free or significantly subsidized economic resources by a donor government to a recipient government, either directly or through an international organization, with the objective of enhancing the recipient's economic and social well-being, as defined in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies (Arase, 2017). While this is the most common and broadly accepted description, the rationales and motivations of states in adopting aid practice have been the major issue of analyses in the foreign aid literature. Foreign aid, which has been provided as a response to humanitarian crises emerging due to disasters since long before, is considered to have become a politicized tool after the Second World War; it is used in connection with diplomatic, commercial, development and humanitarian relief interests (Lancaster, 2007).

The professionalization of aid commenced in the 1950s and 60s, with the establishment of pertinent institutions and legislation by donor countries. This was followed by the formation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the establishment of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) under this organization. The primary function of the DAC has been to set standards for the quality and quantity of bilateral aid programs among its members, and it introduced the concept of 'Official Development Assistance' (ODA), which includes loans and other transfers, with at least 25 per cent being grants. The DAC set a goal of 0.7 per cent of GDP for aid, particularly for developed countries, establishing a global regime for foreign aid (Riddell, 2008).

The countries providing aid as part of this regime have been referred to as "traditional donors" after a growing number of different countries - especially middle-income

countries – have also started to disburse aid or have become strategic in their disbursements. The reconstruction support for Europe after the Second World War, such as the US Marshall Aid, the efforts of the former colonial powers, especially in Africa, to maintain their ties to these regions through aid as former colonial administrations disappeared, and finally the attempts of countries such as the Soviet Union and Japan to maintain their status in the international system and access to raw materials through aid define traditional donors and aid behavior (Lancaster, 2007).

Higher education scholarships have constituted a key instrument of foreign aid that emerged and flourished in the Cold War. In the context of regional security and stability considerations and objectives, scholarship programs were introduced in the 1950s and 60s by a number of countries including the small powers of the time. For instance, in 1950 Australia introduced the Colombo Plan, which is the product of its foreign aid policy scholarships for students from Asian countries (Parliamentary Education Office, n.d.). Japan initiated its MEXT scholarships in 1954 with the goals of developing international human capital, contributing to the collective development and raising leaders promoting growth (Gonzalez, 2019). The South Korean overseas scholarships program (Global Korean Scholarships, GKS) dates back to 1967, which has evolved in line with the nation's economic development (Ayhan, Gouda & Lee, 2022). Even though these programs were informed by contextually specific public diplomacy or other related foreign policy objectives, they have created individual or society level human capital development opportunities for the sending countries that are worth investigating.

As noted earlier, various countries have begun to extend aid to different regions driven by diverse motivations, while simultaneously problematizing the very conceptualization of “foreign aid.” This shift has led to a proliferation of actors, sources of aid, and approaches to assistance (Zimmermann & Smith, 2011). In contrast to traditional donors—who primarily provide substantial support to multilateral organizations where they can influence overall policy directions—these alternative countries, often referred to as “emerging donors,” predominantly deliver aid through bilateral channels. Some actors operating within the framework known as South-South Cooperation reject the donor–recipient dichotomy, asserting instead a principle of relations among equals.

Countries such as Brazil, China, and India, which prefer the term “cooperation” over “aid,” have increasingly focused on technical cooperation agreements that also promote trade and investment (Zimmermann & Smith, 2011). Unlike traditional donors who emphasize narratives such as good governance and the protection of human rights, these emerging donors are notable for their general avoidance of employing normative values or ideological conditionalities. This stance, often framed as “non-interference,” is also shared by some Arab donors—most notably Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates—who, nonetheless, promote Islamic cultural and moral values, illustrating a nuanced approach with the implicit diffusion of normative content (Apodaca, 2017).

Often classified as an emerging donor, Türkiye’s approach involves intersections with the traditional and emerging donors (Tüyoğlu, 2021; Üçkuş, 2022). Predominantly delivering its aid on a bilateral basis, similar to emerging ones, Türkiye allocates assistance largely through project-based mechanisms, irrespective of any consistent adherence to specific principles or standardized practices (TİKA, 2022). At the same time, it advances a normative framework shaped by historical, cultural, and religious ties—particularly to regions it refers to as its “geography of the heart” (*gönül coğrafyası*)—while emphasizing ideals such as anti-colonialism (Bölükbaşı, 2021). A founding member of the OECD, Türkiye has also held observer status in the DAC since 1991 and regularly reports data for the annual *Development Co-operation Reports*. This reflects not only the formal recording of its aid in accordance with OECD-DAC procedures but also indicates a degree of alignment with the methodological standards of traditional donors.

The following section explores Türkiye’s foreign aid trajectory in greater depth, elaborating on the intersections and divergences outlined above. Understanding how aid policies have evolved within the Turkish context is essential for accurately assessing the current state of its development cooperation. As an increasingly prominent actor in the global aid landscape, Türkiye continues to shape a distinctive model marked by both convergence with and departure from traditional donor practices. A meaningful evaluation of its aid outcomes thus requires a closer examination of the principles, mechanisms, and transformations that underpin this emerging model.

1.2. Türkiye's Foreign Aid Trajectory and Institutional Evolution

The foundations of Türkiye's foreign aid efforts can be traced back to the 1970s, with the first institutional initiatives emerging in the aftermath of the 1974 Peace Operation in Northern Cyprus. In 1975, the Council of Ministers established the Cyprus Coordination Committee (later restructured as the Prime Ministry Cyprus Affairs Chief Advisory Office) and its overseas office, the Turkish Assistance Delegation (later renamed the Development and Economic Cooperation Office), to manage and coordinate aid for the Turkish community in the region (Üçkuş, 2018). This marked Türkiye's first modern foreign aid organization, aimed at supporting the region's political, economic, social, and cultural development.

In the 1980s, Türkiye's focus expanded to include drought-stricken African countries, initiating its first comprehensive official development assistance efforts issues with a law foreseeing a-10-million-USD-grant disbursement to Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Somali, and Sudan in 1985 (Murphy & Sazak 2012; Fidan & Nurdun 2008). The key institutional milestone was the establishment of the Turkish Cooperation Agency Group Presidency within the State Planning Organization in the same year to oversee such policy adoptions. While these initiatives formally marked Türkiye's entry into organized development assistance, they were built within the framework of DAC norms (Üçkuş, 2022).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Türkiye initiated efforts to strengthen its relations with the Turkic World. To address the lack of a national coordination mechanism and improve the effectiveness of multiple actors engaged in the region, institutional measures were introduced. In 1991, the "Chief Advisory Office for Relations with the Turkic World" was established under the Prime Ministry to enhance coordination and address structural weaknesses. Subsequently, in 1992, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs formed the Economic, Cultural, Educational, and Technical Cooperation Department (*EKETİB* in its Turkish abbreviation). Its mandate was to support the development of neighboring countries and Turkic-speaking republics by promoting

economic, technical, social, cultural, and educational cooperation through projects and programs (Official Gazette, 27 January 1992).

EKETİB later evolved into the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (*TİKA*), laying the foundation for Türkiye's institutional framework for foreign aid activities. In 1999, TİKA was reassigned to the Prime Ministry to strengthen coordination at both national and international levels. Law No. 4668, enacted in 2001, formalized TİKA's structure and outlined its role in supporting the development of Turkic-speaking republics, neighboring countries, and other developing nations through cooperative projects in various sectors. The law also formed the TİKA Coordination Council to enhance collaboration and institutional capacity in foreign aid. Chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary and including representatives from relevant institutions, the Council sets priorities and plans aid projects aligned with Türkiye's foreign policy and development goals, ensuring coordinated efforts across agencies (Official Gazette, 2 May 2001).

On November 2, 2011, under the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – for which official abbreviation is *AK PARTİ* in Turkish, *AK Party* in English) Government, Decree Law No. 656 was issued on the Organization and Duties of the TİKA), leading to the agency's restructuring (Official Gazette, 2 November 2011). Alongside its existing responsibilities, TİKA was tasked with addressing broader global challenges, including governance, the role of women and families in development, information technology transfer, environmental and natural resource management, energy, infrastructure, and sustainable development. The agency also began focusing on strengthening its collaboration with civil society. The restructuring expanded TİKA's mandate to cover a wider range of activities, and the Coordination Council was replaced by the Advisory Council to further support its operations.

In addition to TİKA, various institutions have been formed and contributed to foreign aid activities during the AK Party Governments based their new foreign policy initiatives, such as “Opening to Africa” (Kılıçoğlu & Yılmaz, 2017). Notable examples include the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*YTB*), founded in

2010; and the Türkiye Maarif Foundation, established in 2016 (while overseeing the administration of private schools with international diploma qualifications, the institutions offers affordable tuition rates for certain regions and scholarships to a select of students). Other key organizations engaged in international aid as part of their primary mandates include the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (*AFAD*), the Turkish Red Crescent, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and the Turkish Diyanet Foundation. Following the transition to the Presidential Government System, while the roles and responsibilities of these institutions largely remained unchanged, their administrative affiliations were reorganized. *TİKA*, *YTB*, and the General Directorate of Foundations were placed under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; *AFAD* was linked to the Ministry of Interior; and the Maarif Foundation has been under the Ministry of National Education. These institutions and restructuring indicate the growing prominence of foreign aid as an effective instrument of foreign policy. They also point to the growing significance of culture and education in diplomatic initiatives.

The most significant development in the realm of foreign aid, which has emerged as an instrumental component of Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party, coincided with the civil war in Türkiye's neighboring nation, Syria. This conflict led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, who initially sought refuge in camps along Türkiye's borders and subsequently within the country itself. Subsequent to 2011, Türkiye augmented its foreign aid volume to a considerable extent in order to provide support to the refugees. *TİKA* played a significant role in integrating and quantifying support for refugees within the country in line with the OECD's definition of foreign aid (personal communication with a *TİKA* executive, 22 December 2022). While Türkiye has refined its foreign aid practices in an effort to adhere to the OECD DAC procedures (Tüyoğlu, 2021), it has also contributed to the global foreign aid regime operating under the DAC umbrella.

By aligning itself with the norms of traditional donors, Türkiye achieved the widely recognized target of allocating 0.7% of its gross national income to official development assistance and was recognized as the world's most generous donor in 2017, 2018, and 2019 (Elmalı, 2022). At the same time, it began to attract attention through its distinctive

aid modalities, which diverge in certain ways from the practices of established donor countries (Turhan, 2021). As Türkiye has come to be seen as a significant actor in the international aid landscape, scholarly interest in its development and humanitarian assistance policies has grown accordingly as detailed below. The following section offers a critical review of the emerging body of literature that seeks to understand and interpret Türkiye’s foreign aid practices, motivations, and institutional frameworks.

1.3. Türkiye’s Foreign Aid in Academic Perspectives

The early studies evaluating Türkiye’s foreign aid policies—which began as part of its foreign policy toward Central Asia and gradually globalized in the 1990s and 2000s—focused on the transformation of TİKA in response to changing local and global dynamics (Özkan & Demirtepe, 2012), the agency’s pivotal role in Türkiye’s normative foreign policy that emphasizes humanitarianism and shared cultural ties (Kardaş & Erdağ, 2012), and the shaping of Türkiye’s donor identity through new foreign policy initiatives, particularly in regions such as Africa (Özkan, 2013). Over time, scholarly attention has increasingly turned to the distinctive features of Türkiye’s foreign aid, leading to the emergence of discussions around what has come to be referred to as the “Turkish-type Aid/Development Model” (Turhan, 2022; Mengüaslan, 2023).

The term “Turkish Model of Development Assistance” first appeared in speeches by the former prime minister and the current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and gained formal recognition in TİKA’s 2016 Development Assistance Report, introduced by then Deputy Prime Minister Hakan Çavuşoğlu. The term continued to receive attention in subsequent reports (Ay, 2016; TİKA, 2017, 2018, 2021). Turhan (2022) pursued this concept and identified the distinguishing features of Türkiye’s development assistance model, as highlighted in official reports, discourse, and prominent academic studies. These features are (1) the *multitrack and total performance* approach, which incorporates various counterparts and employs multiple methods simultaneously, (2) a focus on bilateral assistance that directly reaches beneficiaries, rather than relying on multilateral aid channels, (3) targeting countries that share geographical, cultural, and religious proximity with Türkiye, and (4) establishing non-hierarchical, equality-based

relationships between donor and recipient, fostering mutually beneficial “win-win” partnerships. The “win-win” narrative became a prominent theme in Türkiye’s foreign policy during the AK Party era in fostering relations with low-income countries.

Highlighting the shift in foreign policy under AK Party governments and discussing the role of aid within this framework, Özkan (2017) examines the practices specific to Somalia and emphasizes characteristics in action. He argues that Somalia can be viewed as a laboratory for Türkiye’s use of development support as a foreign policy tool. This perspective is explained through two key points: (1) the development of a multidimensional aid model involving both public institutions and civil society, encompassing areas such as infrastructure development, the security sector, and education; and (2) the emphasis on shared identity through religious and historical ties, along with values such as humanitarianism. However, while positioning Somalia as a testing ground, Özkan (2017) underlines that Türkiye is still in the process of emerging as a significant actor in Africa’s development and suggests that its distinctive features in this domain remain limited.

Analyzing the transformation of Turkish foreign policy, İpek (2015), who traces how ideational factors and material interests shaped in the local environment affect policy-making, examines TİKA and the empirical situation in foreign aid decisions as a case study. First, with reference to the academic work of the changing foreign policy elite, the author presents a new foreign policy outlook that proposes to develop vision through geographical, historical and cultural reinterpretation, to adopt an approach based on ethical values and principles, and to set goals that balance social and material interests. Secondly, she describes how this foreign policy is reflected in aid practices through TİKA documents and supports this with the findings of her interviews with TİKA representatives. Finally, she demonstrates the link between these practices and international trade, indicating the process of foreign policy change created by the combination of normative values with material interests. This study is valuable as it shows that ideas and normative values prevail in Türkiye’s foreign aid practices and that this policy is pursued under locally determined conditions.

The principles and values emphasized for the Turkish foreign policy transformation also surface when attempting to model foreign aid policy. Historical, cultural and geographical proximity, i.e. living in areas under the former Ottoman rule or having a Turkic origin or Muslim identity, are critical traits in the inception and orientation of Turkish foreign aid. According to a comprehensive report on Turkish foreign aid published by the Africa Foundation, the changing discourses in foreign policy since the 1990s, including expressions such as “being a bridge between East and West,” then “regional power” and most recently “the world is bigger than five,” indicate a substantial change in foreign policy, and aid has evolved in parallel to this change (Üçkuş, 2022, p. 112). The discourse, which has developed in relation to domestic politics, have influenced all institutions and civil society organizations, prompting them to intensify their actions in the face of humanitarian crises and underdevelopment. Another elaborate report points out that Turkish foreign aid is framed in idealistic and cultural terms that emphasize historical ties, humanitarian sensitivity and generosity, especially in neighboring regions (Tüyoğlu, 2021). This is supported by the fact that it is humanitarian and emergency aid that is driving the increase in foreign aid, and that humanitarian aid accounts for an overwhelming share of all ODA (see Figure 1).

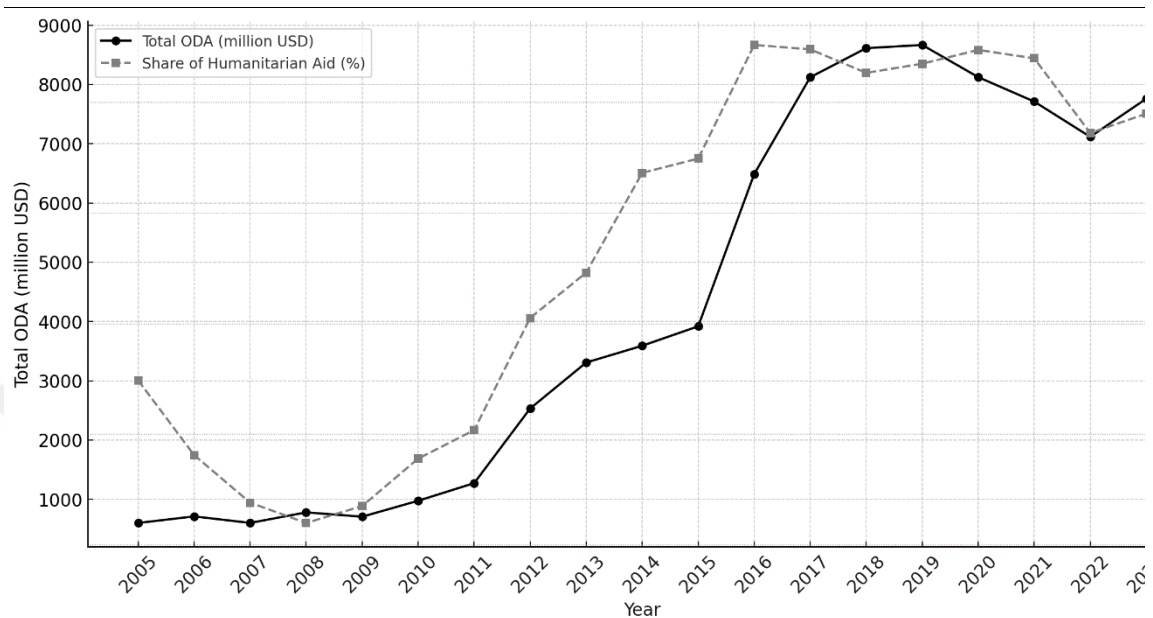
Aside from a norm-based framework emphasizing historical and cultural affinity, both reports highlight that a multidimensional institutional and sectoral aid practice characterizes Türkiye’s foreign aid. Another common note is that Türkiye provides development assistance alongside emergency and humanitarian aid. Tüyoğlu (2021) argues that this differentiates Türkiye from traditional donors. Moreover, while Tüyoğlu states that Türkiye’s aid follows DAC principles and standards - even though it has not formally opted to become a member - Üçkuş (2022) argues that standardization is an issue as aid is not regulated by a national strategy or legislation. Tüyoğlu also points out that standardization is not fully achieved, noting that decisions can be taken in dialogues between leaders.

As can be seen, academic studies and policy reports highlight certain characteristics when analyzing foreign aid. However, even outside of these examples, most of these studies focus on the foreign policy framework that foreign aid in its entirety points to

and the motivations that drive foreign aid. Altunışık (2014) notes that as a result of regional developments, Türkiye's geopolitical and strategic interests have been renewed and the goals of its foreign aid as a diplomatic tool have diversified regionally; however, she draws attention to the continuity of the aid approach in general. On the other hand, Kavaklı (2018) argues that changes in Türkiye's domestic politics have had an impact on the distribution of foreign aid, and his quantitative analysis shows that while ethnic ties and international alliances influenced aid distribution before the AK Party, economic aid was provided to trading partners and humanitarian aid to Muslim-majority countries during the party's term. Examining Türkiye as an example of an emerging donor, this study notes that the country behaves in line with OECD donors in terms of economic aid. However, Cihangir-Tetik and Müftüler-Baç (2021) compare Türkiye's humanitarian and sectoral aid strategies with those of the European Union—a union whose 21 out of 27 members are also OECD members and which shares significant normative overlaps with the OECD, – and identify a common prioritization of emergency relief and education aid.

In contrast to Altunışık's (2014) argument on the continuation of aid approach, Cihangir-Tetik and Müftüler-Baç (2021) argue that Türkiye's foreign aid policy underwent a significant transformation, particularly after 2012, driven by both regional developments and domestic factors such as political will and strategic interests. While all studies examining Türkiye's aid behavior are of considerable value, this work is especially noteworthy for its attention to sectoral details because there remains a notable scarcity of research that moves beyond policy discourse to examine aid implementation systematically.

Figure 1. Total ODA and Share of Humanitarian and Emergency Aid (2005–2023)

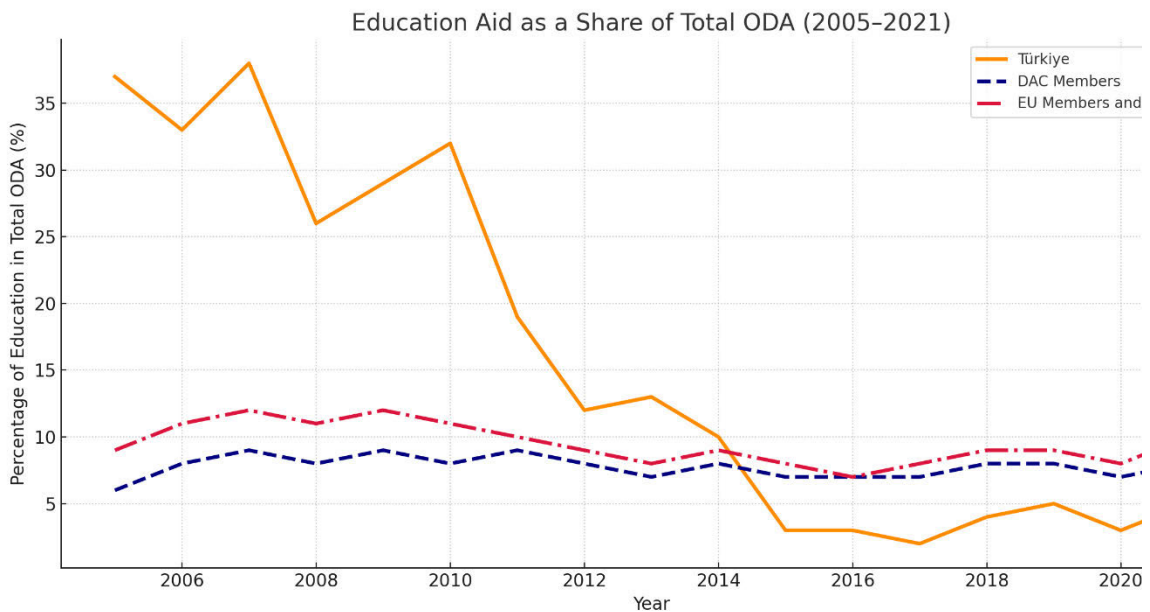


Note. Data is retrieved from TİKA Development Assistance Reports (2015; 2022; 2023)

Figure 1 shows the total amount of official development assistance (ODA) and the share of humanitarian and emergency aid in total ODA for the period 2005-2023. The dramatic increase in the share of Humanitarian and Emergency Aid in total ODA as of the 2010s indicates that the main driver of Turkish Foreign Aid is humanitarian interventions, and the practices in this sector are particularly worthy of scrutiny. Examining Türkiye's humanitarianism through its policy and aid to Somalia, Coşkun Türkmen (2020) discusses the use of humanitarian aid as part of Türkiye's strategic objectives, such as expansion into new markets, rivalry with regional actors and a civilizational narrative rooted in Ottoman memory and Islamic solidarity. The study argues that Türkiye's aid policy, which emphasizes its discursive divergence from the West's colonial legacy and its continuation of aid policies and references a civilizational narrative anchored in the Islamic sphere and Ottoman history, does not diverge from Western examples in practice. Although it focuses on the emergence and motivations of aid policies with a vigorous conceptual discussion, it leaves aside the empirical aspects of humanitarian aid, on which Türkiye has placed considerable emphasis.

A particularly noteworthy case for an implementation-focused analysis of Türkiye’s humanitarian and emergency aid—the largest component of its overall assistance portfolio—is the provision of medical aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Güngör (2023) examines the determinants shaping Türkiye’s choice of recipient countries and regions. Contrary to common assumptions that emphasize cultural factors such as shared ethnic origin or Muslim identity, the study finds these elements to be of limited explanatory power in Türkiye’s aid behavior. Instead, historical ties—particularly the legacy of former Ottoman administration—emerge as the most significant factor in determining aid allocation. While linguistic commonality (e.g., Turkic-speaking countries) and trade relations (as reflected in the share of Turkish exports) also play a role, their influence appears secondary to historical connections. The recipient countries’ level of need in the health sector is identified as a further, though less decisive, factor. Given the recency of these aid efforts, it remains difficult to assess their long-term outcomes or contributions to recipient countries. Empirical inquiry thus far has largely been confined to analyzing the geographical distribution of aid, with limited insight into its tangible impact.

Figure 2. Share (%) of Education Sector in the Total ODA of Türkiye, EU, and DAC Members (2005–2021)



Note. Cited in Cihangir Tetik & Müftüler Baç (2021).

Despite the growing body of literature on Türkiye’s development cooperation, most academic and policy analyses have tended to prioritize humanitarian aid, infrastructure building, and high-profile diplomatic engagements—often overlooking the education sector, which represents a core pillar of Türkiye’s foreign aid strategy. As shown in Figure 2, Türkiye allocated a proportionally larger share of its official development assistance (ODA) to education between 2005 and 2010 than both DAC members and EU institutions (Cihangir-Tetik & Müftüler-Baç, 2021). Although this share has declined significantly since 2011—falling below comparator averages after 2015—this shift reflects a proportional, not absolute, reduction at the face of soaring humanitarian and emergency aid. In fact, OECD CRS data indicate that Türkiye has consistently maintained high levels of education aid, with a temporary decrease only in 2020, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 1). In 2021, for example, Türkiye allocated over \$413 million to education, of which nearly two-thirds was directed toward higher education, including scholarship programs for international students. Other sub-sectors such as education facilities, administration, secondary education, and teacher training also received considerable support. These patterns—both in volume and in targeted sub-sectors—underscore that education is not a marginal component but rather a strategic and culturally embedded aspect of Türkiye’s development agenda.

Table 1. Türkiye’s Education Aid by Level and Type (2018–2021, million US in 2021 values)

Education Subsector	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total	Share (%)
Total Education Aid	376.76	429.42	220.47	413.89	360.13	100.00
Higher Education	347.22	308.38	82.84	182.75	230.30	63.95
Education Policy & Administration	5.31	90.16	101.73	20.36	54.39	15.10
Education Facilities	14.97	22.06	20.19	196.37	63.40	17.60
Secondary and Basic Education (combined)	6.88	6.00	15.56	12.44	10.72	~3.0
Other (teacher training, research, etc.)	2.38	2.81	0.15	2.54	1.97	<1.0

Source: Author’s compilation from OECD CRS data

Nevertheless, within Türkiye's foreign aid portfolio, education has received even more limited scholarly attention, particularly regarding implementation. One notable study (Öz, 2023) highlights that Türkiye, among countries reporting to the DAC in 2018, provided the highest volume of education aid in the form of scholarships. The study investigates the motivations behind the geographical distribution of Turkish education aid and identifies five main explanatory factors: (1) recipient needs based on development and income levels, (2) state fragility, (3) cultural elements such as ethnic or historical ties and religious proximity, (4) donor countries' economic, political, and strategic interests, and (5) governance quality. According to these findings, Türkiye prioritizes low-income and least developed countries, emphasizes humanitarian outreach to crisis-affected or fragile states, concentrates its efforts in regions with strong cultural and historical connections—such as the Turkic Republics and former Ottoman territories—and seeks to strengthen its international status and soft power. However, the governance quality of recipient countries does not appear to be a significant determinant.

As previously mentioned, although Türkiye's foreign aid has become an increasingly important area of inquiry, much of the literature still centers on the motivations behind aid provision, with only a few studies offering sectoral and empirical focus. In the realm of motivation-focused research, including the works of Güngör (2023) and Öz (2023), sector-specific analyses hold the potential to offer insights into the authenticity of aid, particularly in determining whether it is truly aligned with needs and whether the primary objective is indeed to promote substantial improvement within the concerned sector.

Mahembe and Odhiambo (2019), in their meta-analysis of studies on the impact of foreign aid on poverty reduction, reveal that sector-based aid that aims to develop public resources is more effective. They also demonstrate that while studies lacking empirical data may reach conflicting conclusions, measures based on clear indicators show significant results on the effectiveness of aid in reducing poverty. Sectoral and empirically grounded research can thus uncover strategic misalignments in aid allocation and contribute to enhancing aid effectiveness. Such analyses clarify which needs are being met and how, ultimately supporting more effective policy-making. These efforts,

in turn, promote transparency and accountability, strengthening the case for foreign aid as an instrument of international solidarity and responsibility rather than geopolitical leverage.

Türkiye has not yet developed a distinct definition of “development” separate from the OECD-DAC framework, often relying on internationally accepted norms in both discourse and practice. Accordingly, this dissertation adopts a conventional understanding of development in education—aligned with SDG 4—focusing on access, skill formation, and human capital enhancement (United Nations, 2015). However, Türkiye increasingly prefers the term “development cooperation” over “development assistance,” aligning with rising donors that emphasize mutual benefit and egalitarian partnerships (Turhan, 2022; Mengüaslan, 2023). This rhetorical shift reflects Türkiye’s dual position as both a provider and a developing country, suggesting that its cooperation efforts are also expected to generate reciprocal developmental gains. While this study occasionally uses the term “development assistance” for terminological consistency, it adopts the notion of “development cooperation” in line with Türkiye’s preferred framing and the broader discourse of mutual partnership among emerging donors.

1.4. Research Problem, Objectives, and Questions

Despite Türkiye’s growing prominence as an international donor, comprehensive scholarly examinations of its sector-specific foreign aid priorities remain limited. Current analyses typically emphasize motives and rationales behind aid policy, strategic approach, or foreign policy implications. When focused, humanitarian and emergency assistance draw the most attention in the literature, given its preponderance in Turkish aid. Yet, these domains are characterized by significant evaluation challenges due to their urgent, context-dependent, and politically sensitive nature. Heyse (2014) notes that humanitarian interventions frequently lack universally recognized evaluation frameworks, complicating the systematic measurement of their effectiveness. Evaluations struggle to balance immediacy with data reliability, adapt general assessment frameworks across diverse crisis scenarios (such as natural disasters versus

armed conflicts), and isolate the direct impacts of aid from broader socio-political contexts. Additionally, substantial critiques underscore humanitarian aid's potential negative impacts—such as fostering dependency, distorting local economies, undermining governance legitimacy, and even exacerbating violence—raising fundamental questions about its developmental value (Collier, 2011; Anderson, 1999).

Given these complexities and the scarcity of empirical research evaluating Türkiye's foreign aid outside of humanitarian contexts, this dissertation specifically addresses the educational sector. As the data above demonstrate, the largest share of Türkiye's education aid is allocated to the higher education sector. This predominance can largely be attributed to Türkiye's government-funded scholarship programs targeting international students. The following section will substantiate this claim with relevant empirical data. As will also be illustrated through the selected literature examples examined in detail in the next chapter, Türkiye's scholarship programs for international students have traditionally been examined through diplomatic or strategic lenses; however, notable gaps persist in assessing their efficacy in achieving developmental objectives. Therefore, this dissertation aims to systematically evaluate the developmental impacts of Türkiye's scholarship-based educational aid, addressing an essential empirical gap in the literature.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- To identify and analyze policymakers' developmental objectives associated with Türkiye's international scholarship programs.
- To empirically assess the realization of stated developmental objectives through an in-depth exploration of beneficiaries' experiences and their subsequent contributions to their home countries.

Aligned with these objectives, the dissertation addresses the following research questions:

How effective are Türkiye's scholarship programs for international students in achieving their stated developmental objectives?

1. What developmental objectives do policymakers associate with Türkiye's scholarship programs, and how are these integrated into Türkiye's broader strategy for international development cooperation?
2. To what extent have these scholarship programs achieved their intended developmental outcomes, and in what ways have alums contributed to their home countries' development trajectories?

By systematically examining the developmental intentions and outcomes of Türkiye's educational aid, this dissertation aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between policy objectives and empirical realities, thereby contributing to enhancing the effectiveness and developmental contributions of the program.

1.5. Analytical Framework

This dissertation assesses the Türkiye Scholarships program using the Theory of Change framework as its primary analytical tool. The Theory of Change (ToC) is a structured framework used in the evaluation of social programs—including those in education, health, and infrastructure—to map the pathway from initial interventions to intended long-term impacts. Originating from Carol Weiss's work and elaborated in the context of program evaluation by scholars such as Msila and Setlhako (2013), ToC offers a holistic assessment by identifying not only the program's activities and outputs but also the underlying assumptions about how change is expected to occur.

Therefore, decision to use of ToC serves to both methodological and strategic purposes. Unlike evaluations based exclusively on quantitative outputs or institutional mandates, ToC traces the causal logic of a program from inputs and activities to outputs, outcomes, and ultimately impacts (Msila and Setlhako, 2013) This sequence illustrates how specific interventions are expected to lead to short-, medium-, and long-term goals. It is consistent with the study's main goal of understanding the developmental potential of Türkiye's international scholarship programs beyond their more often studied implications for foreign policy.

The decision to reconstruct a ToC rather than adopt a predefined model arises from the absence of an explicit, program-wide approach in Türkiye Scholarships' formal

documentation. Instead, the framework presented in this study is an empirically derived reconstruction based on a comprehensive analysis of official policy documents, strategic plans, and elite interviews with program designers and implementers. By structuring objectives hierarchically and aligning them with measurable interventions and results, ToC enables evaluators to assess the extent to which a program delivers on its intended developmental goals and broader societal contributions.

In this sense, the framework functions not only as an analytical lens for tracing the logical framework between program components and developmental outcomes, but also as a normative guide for assessing the program's stated and implicit aims. The reconstructed ToC in this research will map the assumed logic underlying the program—from institutional inputs and operational activities to expected behavioral outcomes and intended developmental impacts. This layered approach will reveal how Türkiye Scholarships, as part of the Turkish international development cooperation, intends to meet its objectives.

To operationalize and empirically test this approach, the extended Kirkpatrick evaluation model [introduced by Donald Kirkpatrick (1979; 1994) and elaborated by International Institute of Education (n.d.)] is employed to interpret program participants' encounters and impressions in Türkiye during their education, and their post-graduation experiences. The approach adds to the ToC by evaluating experienced and observed changes at different outcome layers by categorizing alums reflections into five particular levels: reaction, learning, behavior, organizational results, and external results. This allows the study to evaluate the coherence between the program's aspirational theory and its actual consequences in alums trajectories. This integrated method strengthens the evaluation's explanatory power and places the Türkiye Scholarships Program within broader frameworks of educational aid and development cooperation.

1.6. Methodology

A case study evaluation approach was used to assess the program's effectiveness and contextual factors influencing outcomes. Based on the analytical framework revealing the logic of the Türkiye Scholarships program, which enables the understanding of how a program delivers on its aspired objectives and contributes to broader social

environment, a qualitative approach was chosen. Enabling effective capture of participants' perceptions, experiences, and post-program contributions, a qualitative method provides nuanced insights not attainable through purely quantitative measures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Van Maanen, 1979).

Due to the limited availability of systematic evaluations concerning the long-term developmental impacts of international scholarships, this research follows an exploratory pathway and employ a single-case study methodology to thoroughly investigate Türkiye Scholarships as a contextually bounded phenomenon. Being aware of the typical criticisms towards case studies regarding external validity and generalizability (Yin, 2009), the study is designed to produce rich, context-specific insights into Türkiye's scholarship program while simultaneously providing an evaluative framework applicable to comparative studies in other contexts.

The research draws upon three primary data sources:

- **Document Analysis:** A total of 37 official documents were analyzed, including national development plans, strategic documents, activity reports, and policy texts to identify stated and implicit developmental objectives.
- **Implementer Interviews and Official Statements:** Interviews were conducted with five key program implementers, complemented by official statements, to derive the Theory of Change (ToC) underlying Türkiye Scholarships.
- **Beneficiary Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 44 alums from three strategically selected countries—Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, and Egypt—representing Central Asia, the Balkans, and the MENA region respectively, with at least 12 participants per country. These interviews were conducted to evaluate outcomes and reveal empirical results for the Theory of Change.

Qualitative data obtained from documents and interviews were systematically coded and analyzed using MAXQDA, enabling thematic analysis and consistent interpretation. Furthermore, while the primary analytical approach is qualitative, descriptive statistical data was employed to complement the findings and support the analytical objectives.

Detailed methodological justifications, including in-depth descriptions of data collection techniques, interview protocols, coding strategies, and ethical considerations, are elaborated comprehensively in Chapter 3.

1.7. Limitations and Scope

One of the qualitative method's tools, interviews, has limitations, which are also observable in this study. As noted by Nicolson (2003) and Lowes and Prowse (2001), interviewees may tailor their responses to what they think the researcher wants to hear, misremember events, or respond inconsistently. Researchers, in turn, may influence participants, apply inconsistent coding, or misinterpret responses. Lamont and Swidler (2014) further highlight that interviews often produce overly coherent narratives, shaped by the retrospective nature of the setting. This can obscure the contradictions and complexities of real-life experiences. In response, a growing number of studies have proposed methods to address this issue. This research adopted one such approach suggested by Lamont and Swidler (2014) to ensure a more neutral and balanced interview process.

Beyond these concerns, accessing information on earlier phases of the scholarship programs proved difficult due to their 30-year history. During interviews with policymakers, it was not possible to reach officials who had been involved in implementing the program during the 1990s. Furthermore, due to the uncertain status of archival records, the study had to rely on a limited number of publicly available documents. In contrast, greater access was possible to both implementers and documents from the YTB, a younger institution that assumed responsibility for the program in the 2010s.

Selection of three regions was considered critical for the program in examining the outcomes. From each region, one country deemed representative was chosen, and interviews were conducted with – for saturation purposes justified in the methodology chapter– around 12 alums from these countries. It can be inferred that those who agreed to participate felt a certain degree of affinity or connection to the program, as suggested by the nature of the reasons cited by those who declined. Consequently, there are limitations concerning the generalizability of the findings.

1.8. Dissertation Structure Overview

Following the introduction—which provides the background on development assistance and presents the problematization and main objectives of the dissertation—the study is organized into six chapters.

Chapter Two focuses specifically on Türkiye’s educational aid, with particular attention to government-funded scholarship programs for international students, which constitute the core of this dissertation. It reviews Türkiye’s initiatives in the internationalization of higher education and presents relevant literature. Drawing from both Turkish and international scholarship, it introduces existing studies on scholarship programs and asserts their relevance to development. By outlining various approaches to evaluating the developmental impact of scholarships, this chapter lays the conceptual groundwork for the dissertation’s chosen methodology.

Chapter Three outlines the scope and research design of the study. As a single-case evaluation, it introduces the analytical framework and methods of data collection and analysis. The chapter details the plan for constructing a logical framework—namely, a Theory of Change—based on document analysis and interviews, and explains how interview data are formally evaluated through the Kirkpatrick model. It concludes with a presentation of interview protocols, criteria for country selection, a summary of participant profiles, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Chapter Four involves the reconstruction of the Theory of Change. It begins by identifying the program’s *inputs*—institutional supports and resources such as planning strategies, policy frameworks, and institutional commitments. Drawing on document analysis and interviews, it then maps the program’s *activities* and quantifiable *outputs*. Most critically, it presents an analysis of the program’s short-, medium-, and long-term *outcomes* and *intended impacts*. This model illustrates the *assumptions* behind the program, which are assessed in the empirical phase of the research. Evaluating whether the goals and assumptions of policymakers and implementers align with interview data constitutes the study’s second core objective.

Chapter Five presents the empirical findings from interviews with 44 alums in three countries, structured according to the Kirkpatrick model to test the Theory of Change and trace its causal logic. At the *Reaction* level, it assesses program satisfaction and participant reach; at the *Learning* level, it explores gains in knowledge, skills, technology, and changes in beliefs; at the *Behavior* level, it examines the practical application of these gains; *Organizational Results* focus on changes initiated by alums in their immediate environment; and finally, *External Results* investigate the program's contribution to broader development outcomes, the central concern of this dissertation

Finally, Chapter Six discusses the implications of the Theory of Change. It contextualizes the program's developmental impact in comparison with existing literature and reflects on the added and marginal contributions of Türkiye's scholarship program. Following a general synthesis of the findings, the chapter concludes with policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and developmental contributions of the program—thereby addressing the dissertation's third core objective.

1.9. Concluding Remarks

This introductory chapter has practically defined the core research problem, articulated the study's objectives, and justified the relevance of evaluating scholarship programs through a developmental lens. By presenting the rationale for the selected methods and theoretical frameworks, the chapter sets the foundation for a systematic and empirically grounded inquiry into how Türkiye's government-funded international scholarships function as instruments of development cooperation. Introducing the analytical frameworks to be employed—Theory of Change and the Kirkpatrick model, — it establishes the rationale for their application to assess causality and impact in a systematic manner. By providing a roadmap of the subsequent chapters, this first chapter offers the reader a clear understanding of how the study proceeds methodologically and analytically to investigate the nexus between higher education and international development in the context of Türkiye's public scholarship programs.

This chapter has theoretically presented an overview of foreign aid, describing its foundations, main actors, goals, and evolving mechanisms within the international system. Then, Türkiye is placed in this larger framework, tracking its evolution from a

recipient to an increasingly influential donor country. While adhering to standard donor aid frameworks, Türkiye has established distinct modalities reflecting its geopolitical orientation, historical connections, and normative goals. According to the reviewed literature, Türkiye's foreign aid behavior is shaped by a complex interaction of humanitarian principles, strategic interests, and cultural affinities. It also demonstrates that, while scholarly interest in Türkiye's aid policies continues to grow, much of the available research is still focused on donor motivations, with less emphasis paid to sectoral practices and aid outcomes in recipient countries.

Education stands up as a significant yet underexplored sectoral aid priority in Türkiye. Higher education assistance—particularly in the form of scholarship programs—plays a central role in this domain. These programs represent more than just symbolic acts of goodwill; they form part of Türkiye's broader internationalization strategy and might have long-term ramifications for development, diplomacy, and higher education. Despite their prominence in Türkiye's aid portfolio, international scholarships have received limited systematic analysis regarding their developmental value, implementation mechanisms, or alignment with global trends in education aid.

Recognizing this gap, the next chapter establishes a conceptual and analytical framework to assess Türkiye's scholarship programs as a form of education aid. It begins with a historical account of Türkiye's approach to international higher education and the institutionalization of its scholarship policies, followed by a synthesis of relevant literature on international scholarship programs, with a focus on how such programs are understood within the context of development cooperation and global education policy.

The following discussion, which draws from empirical research and international examples, emphasizes the significance of scholarship programs in advancing development objectives, particularly by increasing access to higher education, promoting equality, and supporting in the human capital development. Framing Türkiye's efforts within this context provides a clearer understanding of its aid model and offers insights into the developmental implications of using higher education as a foreign aid instrument. Finally, this analysis aims to adopt an evaluative approach based on sectoral analysis, moving beyond descriptive assessments of Türkiye's foreign aid. This study

intends to advance a more sophisticated and policy-relevant knowledge of the relationship between Türkiye's foreign aid policies and development results in recipient nations by concentrating on education, specifically scholarship-based aid.



CHAPTER II:

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS IN TÜRKIYE AND BEYOND

The introduction chapter outlined the general framework of foreign aid and examined Türkiye's emergence as a donor by analyzing its aid-giving behavior and characteristics through scholarly literature. It revealed a significant gap in empirical studies, particularly in sector-specific assessments. Among the various modalities of Turkish development assistance, education has emerged as the most stable and consistent. In light of this, the present chapter narrows its focus to education aid—specifically, higher education scholarships, which constitute the largest share of Türkiye's educational assistance.

This chapter begins by presenting the historical background and current landscape of Turkish scholarship programs. It then reviews the existing literature, which remains limited in the context of Türkiye but is more expansive in the global setting. While most studies on Türkiye have primarily emphasized the diplomatic and soft power dimensions of scholarships, international literature has evaluated such programs more broadly, including their developmental and educational impacts.

By focusing on higher education scholarships as a distinct form of development assistance, this thesis underscores the developmental role of education. Accordingly, it examines various approaches to evaluating scholarship outcomes in order to construct a conceptual basis for assessing Türkiye's own programs. This discussion leads to the methodological framework presented in the next chapter.

In this context, this study represents the first attempt to analyze Türkiye’s international scholarship program from a development perspective. The subsequent sections provide a historical overview of educational support, tracing the evolution and transformation of Türkiye’s scholarship program. This aims to offer the necessary background for understanding the broader policy landscape of Turkish education aid.

2.1. Turkish Foreign Aid in the Education Sector

Türkiye’s involvement as a donor in the OECD CRS in 2018 received special attention in the Global Education Monitoring 2021/2 Report as it led to a significant improvement in the achievement of SDG target 4.b (UNESCO, 2021). In 2018, total aid in the form of tertiary level scholarships, amounting to 225 million USD, constitutes a significant share of scholarship aid, which doubled globally between 2015 and 2019 on the way to the “substantial increase” targeted for 2020 (UNESCO, 2021, p. 343). However, Türkiye has been unilaterally implementing a comprehensive official scholarship program for international students since 1992, and it has been contributing to the training of human resources through support in the field of higher education since the early years of the Republic.

One notable example is that, during the 1920s, a significant number of Afghan students pursued their education in Turkish high schools and universities particularly in the domains of security and medicine under the provisions of the Turkish-Afghan Friendship Agreement. The Kabul University Faculty of Medicine was established with Turkish contributions in 1936 and supported by Turkish educators to bolster the Afghanistan’s human resources in the field of health based on the same agreement (Akbaba, 2015).

As the coming sections discuss in more detail, the education of international students in Türkiye through bilateral or multilateral agreements continued until the 1990s; leading figures of in their countries such as Mohammad Al Mangoush (prime minister between 1997 and 2000) from Libya and Mamdouh Saleh Hamad Alabbadi (current deputy prime-minister) from Jordan received education in Türkiye under such provisions. As of the 1990s, programs for international students began to be established, and following the

dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992, the Great Student Project (*Büyük Öğrenci Projesi*, Turkish abbreviation of which is *BÖP*) was announced with the aim of developing human capital for the newly independent countries and communities. In 2012, Türkiye Scholarships replaced *BÖP* with a more global scope and improved benefits.

In addition to YTB, the coordinator of Türkiye Scholarships, institutions such as the General Directorate of Foundations¹, the Police Academy², and the National Defense University³ provide higher education support either within their own organizations or offer specialist-training programs in their respective fields of expertise for international beneficiaries. Universities are also authorized to grant tuition exemptions to international students according to criteria and quota they can specify. The Council of Higher Education (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu*, and Turkish abbreviation is *YÖK*) also started to offer scholarships to international students in 2017, which are contingent upon them working for a period twice the duration of their scholarship at public institutions in their respective countries (Hürriyet, 2017). In addition, YÖK provides grants for international researchers visiting Turkish higher education institutions and studying Ottoman History, General Turkish History, Turkology, Turkish Language and Literature or Turkish Culture (YÖK, n.d). As an article co-authored by Birol Akgün –head of the Turkish Maarif Foundation since its establishment – underscores, international education in Türkiye has been used not only to support the academic training of students and professionals but also as a means of advancing cultural diplomacy by educating military, diplomatic, and political elites while promoting the Turkish language and culture (Çelik & Akgün, 2023, p. 125).

According to data reported by Türkiye to the OECD’s CRS, over the last five years (2019–2023), Türkiye has provided an average of USD 7.6 billion in ODA, with the

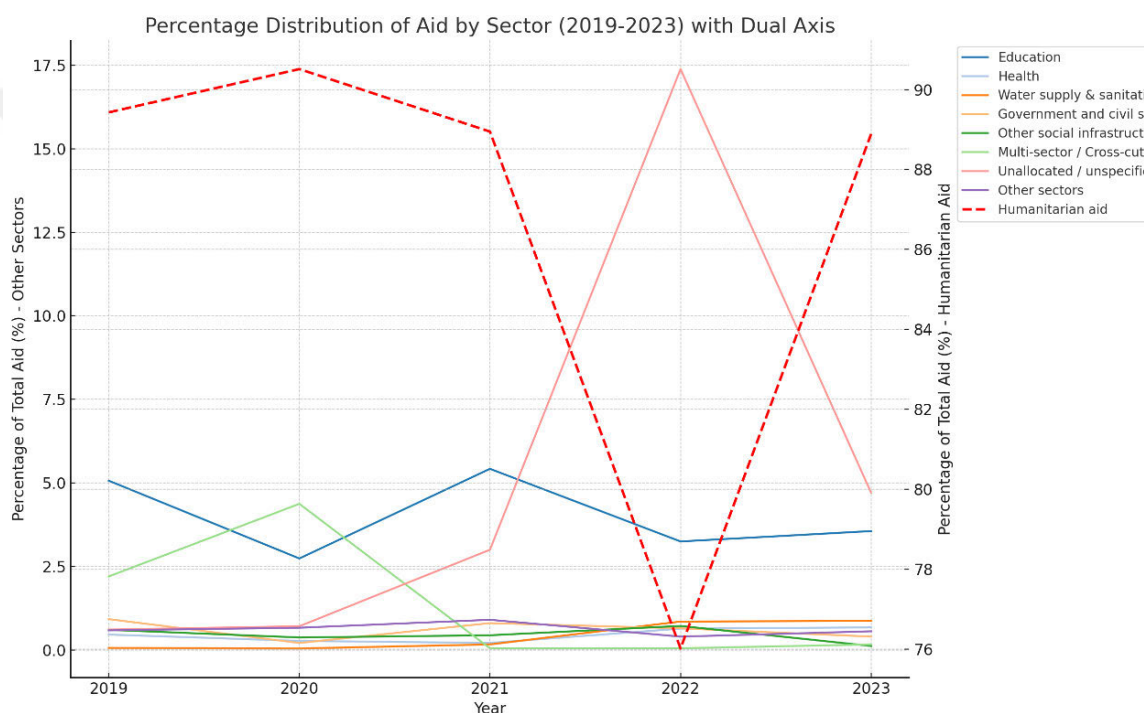
¹ Info on their website indicates that scholarships are awarded to international students studying in Türkiye (Ministry of Culture General Directorate of Foundations, n.d).

² Information published by the press service shows that more than 35, thousand participants from 75 countries have been trained in various security specialties, capacity building, management skills and combat reporting (Police Academy, 2019).

³ As of 2024, the institution offers training to officer candidates from 31 countries, the university’s rector informed Türkiye’s official news agency (Özdemir, 2024).

largest share allocated to humanitarian aid at 87% and education at 4%, as can be seen in the Figure 3. When humanitarian aid is excluded, educational assistance amounts to an annual average of USD 307.5 million, representing 31.2% of total assistance; of this, post-secondary educational assistance, namely scholarships, accounts for 20% of all assistance excluding humanitarian aid – corresponding to 62% of the educational aid.

Figure 3. Share of Humanitarian Aid in Total ODA (Left Axis) and Share of Different Sectors in Total (Right Axis)

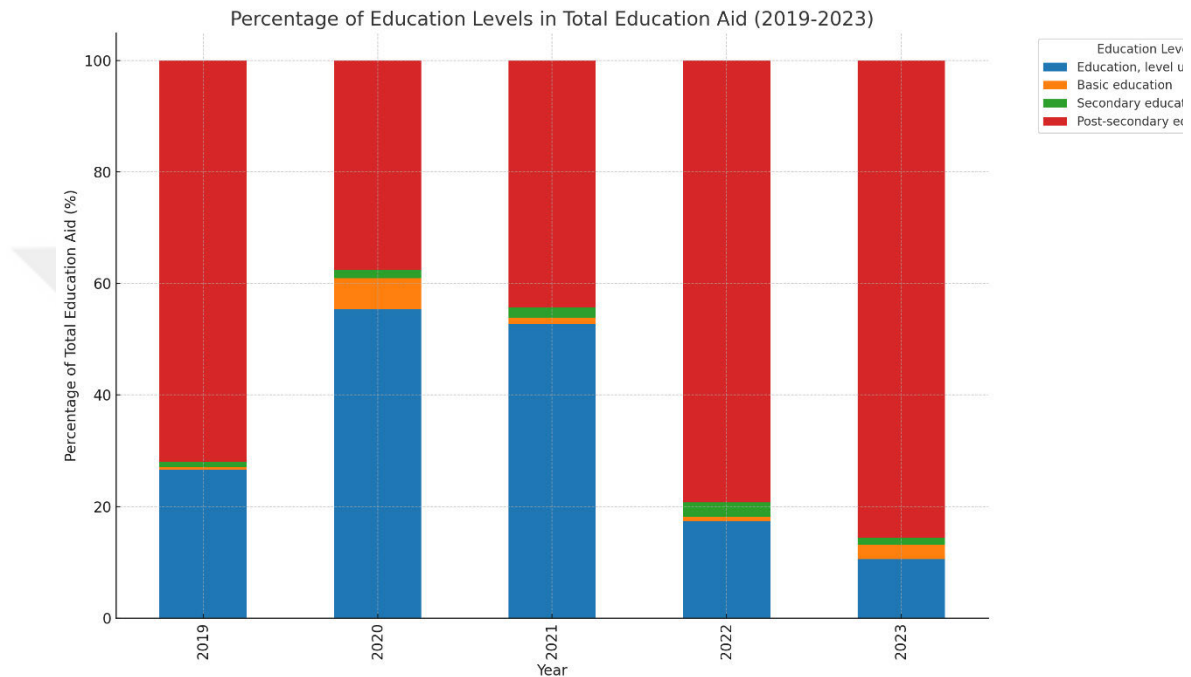


Note. Data is retrieved from OECD Creditor Reporting System (2025).

As also stated in the UNESCO Global Education Report (2021), the majority of Türkiye's development assistance in the field of education is allocated to higher education for international students. With that, Türkiye became the largest donor of scholarships for international students, surpassing all other countries reporting to the CRS in 2018. In 2019, it ranked 5th with 150 million USD, just above the United Kingdom (138 million USD) and below Saudi Arabia (162 million USD). Figure 4 shows the last five years' disbursement in education aid according to the levels, and it signifies that tertiary level constitutes the major part (40 percent at the least) of total Turkish education aid. Given these figures, the measurable outcomes in higher education

not only underscore the transformative potential of these initiatives but also serve as a compelling indicator of the broader impact and efficacy of Türkiye’s aid efforts.

Figure 4. Share of Aid Donated according to the Education Levels within Total Education Aid of Türkiye



Note. Data is retrieved from OECD Creditor Reporting System (2025).

These data provided to the OECD with the relevant breakdowns reflect only the values of the last five years. Yet, as mentioned, Türkiye has been contributing to the educational development of foreign countries over many years. Türkiye collaboratively established universities, which provide free education and train human resources, in Kazakhstan in 1993 (the International Hoca Ahmet Yesevi University), and in Kyrgyzstan in 1996 (Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University). According to their constituent agreements, Türkiye and the host countries jointly pay for these fee-free universities’ expenses up to this point.⁴ The Presidency’s Strategy and Budget

⁴ See Law No. 3904 “on the approval of the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan concerning the establishment of the International Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Turkish-Kazakh University in the city of Turkistan” for the International Hoca Ahmet Yesevi University, and Law No. 4144 “on the approval of the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic concerning the establishment of Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan” for Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University

Directorate in Türkiye determines the required budget, which is created by the General Directorate of Higher Education and Education Abroad of the Ministry of National Education in accordance with the universities' declarations.⁵

In addition to universities established and supported abroad, Türkiye also engages in academic activities through the overseas campuses of its universities. These include Turkish university branches in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Vocational Schools of Health Services in Somalia and Sudan, and various faculties affiliated with the University of Health Sciences—such as the Faculties of Medicine in Çobanbey (Syria) and Bukhara (Uzbekistan). Moreover, Türkiye supports faculties in several regions of Syria: The Faculty of Education in Afrin, the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Azaz, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences in Al-Bab, and the Cerablus Vocational School operated by Gaziantep University. After 2011, in response to the crisis in Syria, Türkiye not only increased its emergency and humanitarian assistance across a wide range of areas but also opened these educational institutions in stabilized parts of Syria.

Moreover, it has provided substantial support through imputed costs⁶ and scholarship programs specifically targeting Syrian higher education students—an important contribution to global development that has received limited recognition. After the collapse of the 61-year-long Ba'ath regime in Syria on December 8, 2024, – which caused the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the displacement of millions, – studying in the Turkish universities with public supports, Asaad al-Shaibani, who took office as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the newly established interim government, and Azzam al-Gharib, who was appointed governor of Aleppo province, have been notable examples of the efforts (İnce, 2025). Statistics from YÖK indicate that, among the 336 thousand international students currently studying in Türkiye, 60 thousand are Syrian, and over 15 thousand Syrians graduated from Turkish higher education institutions

⁵ Most recently, for example, the 2022-2024 Budget Preparation Guide published by the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye's Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye's Strategy and Budget Directorate notes the support to be provided to these universities under the International Education Cooperation and Study Abroad program (SBB, 2024, p. 177).

⁶ With the Decree of the Council of Ministers, it was decided that Syrian students displaced to Türkiye can apply to universities just as Turkish citizens and their tuition fees would be covered by YTB (Official Gazette, 31 August 2013).

between 2013 and 2023. Data obtained from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics also show that, after 2011, 36.6% of Syrians studying abroad received their education in Türkiye. This reflects Türkiye's significant contribution—primarily to Syria through the education of displaced populations, subsequently to the broader region through the stabilization of human capital flows, and ultimately to the global development—particularly given Syria's status as the country producing the largest number of refugees.

All that being said, while all efforts are worthwhile, international student scholarships have been Türkiye's most clearly structured, comprehensive, and systematically progressing aid program. International student mobility evolved significantly over the decades in Türkiye, initially relying on bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as student exchanges until the 1980s, later on through adopting unilateral scholarship programs to attract more international students in the 1990s, and finally with renewing the program and bringing additional measures in the 2010s. These programs were further refined to diversify target regions and increase its proportion among the all students choosing to study abroad, aligning with broader foreign policy and developmental objectives. The next sections reveal the background of Türkiye's programs and aim to emphasize scholarship program's instrumental role in in foreign policy openings to previously under engaged regions.

2.2. Background of Turkish International Education Programs

Türkiye's experience with international students goes back to the late Ottoman Empire. Various studies draw attention to the training of students sent by Arab, Albanian and Kurdish tribes at the Tribal School established in Istanbul (e.g. Bolat, 2017; Akın, 2020; Yavaş, 2022). The education of students from these tribes, who lived within the borders of the state but in distant provinces, was considered important in order to strengthen the government's ties with their tribes through these students, who were referred to as "foreigners" (Bolat, 2017), (Akın, 2020) and to utilize the trained human resources in public positions (Yavaş, 2022). Educational opportunities offered to international students with similar motives continued – albeit limited – in the early years of the Republican era.

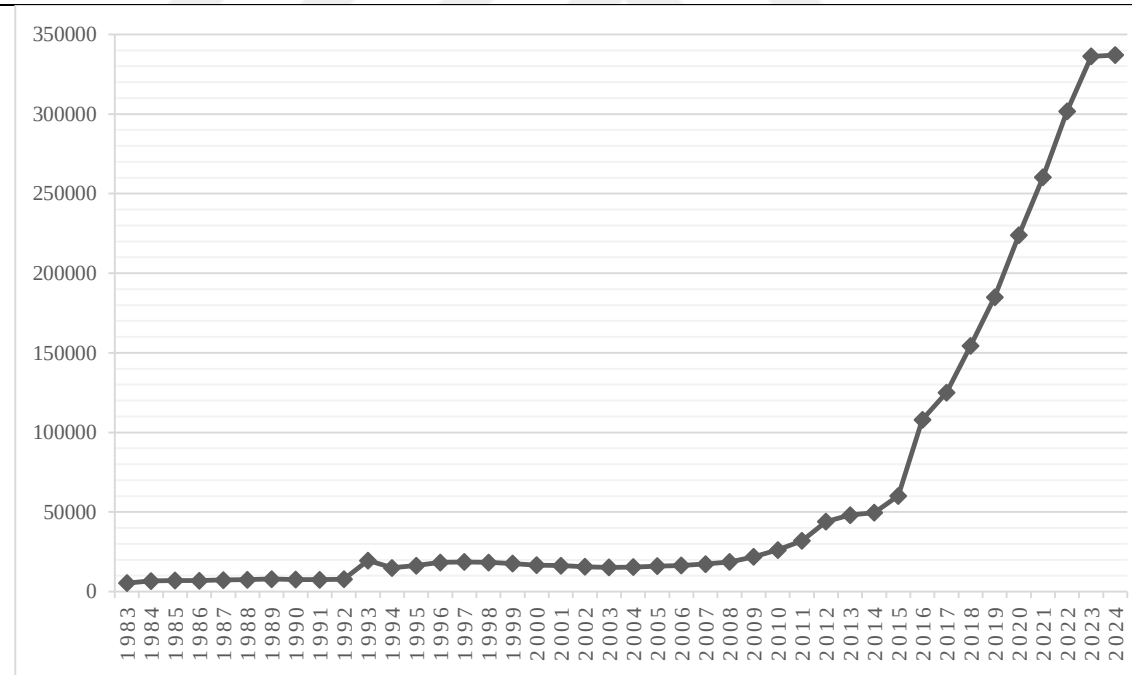
The republican Türkiye's interest to international higher education programs started after the Second World War. Bilateral and multilateral international scholarship programs provided the ground for the mobility of international students. Although a national program did not exist, agreements with foreign countries and international programs were diversified and increased in the 1950s and 1960s. Regional Cooperation for Development, which was established in 1964 among Türkiye, Pakistan and Iran, implemented many projects aiming to increase cooperation between member countries, as well as student and expert exchange and scholarship programs, granting the students and experts the opportunity to receive tertiary education (Yeşilbursa, 2009). In line with the cultural diplomacy policies of the USA during the Cold War period, a number of higher education students were sent to Türkiye within the framework of the Fulbright program and the Peace Volunteers project at this period (Erken, 2018).

Türkiye offered free higher education to international students and grants at tertiary level as part of multilateral cooperation and bilateral agreements until the 1980s. The Islamic Development Bank, of which Türkiye has been a member since its establishment in 1983, started higher education scholarships program for students from Muslim communities in non-member countries within the framework of its membership agreement with Türkiye, and the agreement made it possible for a small number of international students to receive scholarships in Türkiye during these years.

In 1983, Türkiye adopted its first official policy for international students with Law No. 2922, aiming to monitor and control these students due to the security sensitivities of the military regime, which marks as the first formal step towards higher education internationalization. Although the law was issued concerning security issues, its discussions brought the idea of international students' becoming cultural ambassadors and transmitters of academic knowledge, brain power and technological development. At the Consultative Assembly meetings, member Beşir Hamitoğulları pointed out that international students can be important partners to Türkiye in scientific, cultural and public diplomacy fields (*Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 1983). However, despite all these agreements and cooperation, there had not been a major presence of international students until the 1990s.

The new geopolitical environment that arose following the collapse of the Soviet Union changed this scene when Türkiye adopted independent foreign policy initiatives with the newly established Turkic states and in the Balkan sphere. In 1992, Türkiye launched *BÖP* for kinship communities with which it has historical and cultural ties. *BÖP* embraced the objectives of contributing to the development of human resources of the kinship communities, building close ties, disseminating the Turkish language and culture, and establishing bonds between these communities (Yarman Vural & Alkan, 2009). Scholarships offered within this project's scope were provided to students from the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia to study at universities in Türkiye. Figure 5 shows that the number of international students in universities, which was 7850 as of the year the program was implemented, jumped to around 20 thousand.

Figure 5. Total Number of International Students in Türkiye's Higher Education Institutions (1983-2024)



Note. Data are retrieved from YÖK Statistics.

Even though *BÖP* significantly contributed to internationalization in higher education in Türkiye, the project implemented between 1992-2011 could reach its goals only partially. The graduation rate among the scholarship holders from the programs they were enrolled was relatively low, which has made the efficiency of the program

questionable (Özoğlu, Gür, & Çoşkun, 2015). According to the researchers, the project did not fully reach the expected goals because the number of quality applications remained low, the universities were not actively involved in the process of scholarships promotion, and inefficiency of public services such as visa and health coverage, and inadequate support in Turkish language teaching and overall educational needs of the international students (Vural & Alkan, 2009; Özoğlu, Gür, & Çoşkun, 2015).

Fundamental change and centralization in international student policies came in 2012 with the reconfiguration of Türkiye's international student strategy and scholarship programs in line with new openings in foreign policy. As with foreign aid, student exchanges and scholarships have proven to be effective tools of foreign policy. Specifically, the increased interaction with the Turkic republics through incoming students demonstrated that grassroots diplomacy can similarly be used to improve relations with other regions and reap the benefits. A detailed discussion of these results is provided in the evaluations, which are based on interviews with scholarship program alums.

Scholarships via bilateral and multilateral agreements continued alongside unilateral program with all parts of the world. Publicly funded scholarship programs were determined to be coordinated under the Prime Ministry and were intended to acquire a global dimension. An international student strategy was introduced aiming at increasing the capacity of Türkiye to attract students from various countries.

In 2010, YÖK announced the decision to abolish the Foreign Student Examination (YÖS), which centrally regulated the recruitment of international students, and entrust the admission of international students at the universities' discretion, subject to the approval of YÖK (NTV, 2010). In 2011, the International Higher Education Congress was convened under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic and hosted by YÖK, with the subjects of internationalization and student mobility being addressed (Günay et al., 2012). Gökhan Çetinsaya, the then YÖK President, authored a book assessing the state of higher education and proposing a path for its renewal, and the title of his book included internationalization along with growth and quality as the main issues (Çetinsaya, 2014).

In this context, BÖP was replaced with the Türkiye Scholarships, which has been designed to align with the state's foreign policy, to serve the goals of public diplomacy and education diplomacy, to contribute to academic and scientific development in Turkish universities, to support the development cooperation policies and to contribute to the internationalization of higher education (YTB, 2012; Official Gazette, 2014, 17 June). Interviews with the policymakers of the program reveal needs for more nuanced strategies such as attracting students globally and hence providing candidates easy access to apply through an online system as a reason for the program transformation. Due to such changes, the number of international students in Türkiye has increased exponentially. The momentum of the increase in international students in Türkiye can be seen in Figure 5.

Annually 5 thousand international students receive scholarships; nevertheless, applications to receive limited awards has seen a sharp rise over the years, from 42 thousand in 2012 to about 122 thousand applications from 170 countries in 2024. About 15 thousand scholarship awardees are presently pursuing their studies under the program (YTB, 2024c). It is estimated that over 60 thousand individuals have graduated from Türkiye's scholarship schemes, which have been in place for more than three decades.⁷ Following chapters present further statistical insights and programmatic outcomes. Anchored in the experiences of alums, this study evaluates the effectiveness of the scholarship policy and offers recommendations for its improvement. The distinct contribution of this research becomes clearer when considered in relation to the existing body of literature on Türkiye's scholarship programs, which is reviewed in the next section.

⁷ An evaluation of BÖP indicates that the program produced approximately 40 thousand graduates between 1992 and 2009 (Yarman Vural & Alkan, 2009). Although YTB does not publicly disclose the exact number of graduates from the Türkiye Scholarships program, an approximate figure can be inferred from official statements. During the 2023 graduation ceremony, YTB President Abdullah Eren noted that nearly 2,000 international students graduate annually through the Türkiye Scholarships scheme (YTB, 2023b). Given that the program has been in operation for over a decade following its institutional rebranding in 2012, it is reasonable to estimate that the total number of graduates exceeds 20,000. This figure remains an approximation based on publicly available statements rather than official cumulative data.

2.3. Evaluations of the International Student Mobility to Türkiye

This section examines how Türkiye's scholarship programs have been addressed in the academic literature. By examining the main themes, analytical perspectives, and methodological approaches adopted by scholars working on these programs, this section attempts to highlight the limitations of the literature. These programs, which have been in place for over three decades and account for a substantial budget for a developing, middle-income country such as Türkiye, have received minimal scholarly attention. Despite the expansion and diversification of perspectives in the international literature, the existing studies on Turkish example, qualified but few, have remained within a specific framework, as summarized in Table 2.

Aras and Mohammed (2019) examine the Türkiye Scholarships as a soft power instrument within Türkiye's evolving foreign policy framework. Through mixed methods—combining surveys and interviews with scholarship beneficiaries—they assess the extent to which the program contributes to the diffusion of Turkish culture and enhances Türkiye's image abroad. Their findings affirm a correlation between students' satisfaction with the Turkish education system and their comfort with the language of instruction, though they find no significant relationship between length of stay and language satisfaction.

While the study successfully links international education to soft power outcomes, it places limited emphasis on the institutional and bureaucratic dynamics underpinning program delivery. Notably, many students expressed dissatisfaction with their interactions with YTB, the managing agency, pointing to communication gaps and perceived rigidity. These perceptions can undermine the soft power gains achieved through cultural exposure and public diplomacy efforts. Additionally, although the study contextualizes Türkiye Scholarships within Türkiye's regional ambitions, a more systematic comparison between official policy goals documented by the program design and executors' views, and student perceptions would strengthen the analysis. The article's use of a newspaper interview with the then president of YTB, Kudret Bülbül, as a key source for understanding institutional objectives provides useful insight but may fall short of offering a comprehensive account of policy intent. The possibility that

Türkiye's programs may have objectives beyond serving as instruments for enhancing the soft power of its foreign policy has been overlooked.

In another distinctive study on Türkiye's international scholarship programs, Kelkitli (2021) examines these programs—namely the Türkiye Scholarships, BÖP, the Mevlana Exchange Program, and the Turkish Diyanet Foundation scholarships—as instruments of soft power designed to improve Türkiye's bilateral relations by cultivating future elites in partner countries. Distinctively, the study adopts a quantitative approach, analyzing voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) from 1985 to 2018 across three periods: the Cold War years (1985–1991), the BÖP era (1992–2011), and the post-2012 phase during which Türkiye's new educational initiatives gained prominence.

By measuring alignment in voting patterns between Türkiye and student-sending countries, the study attempts to assess the effectiveness of educational exchanges in advancing foreign policy objectives. Kelkitli acknowledges that voting behavior at the UNGA is shaped by a range of factors—including shifting international dynamics and national interests—and therefore may not reflect the direct influence of scholarship programs. Her findings show limited convergence between Türkiye and the recipient countries, suggesting that international educational exchanges alone have not significantly shaped voting alignment or delivered clear diplomatic returns.

BÖP primarily targeted the Turkic Republics of Central Asia and Azerbaijan with the stated goals of enhancing academic standards, fostering skilled human capital, and strengthening cultural and social ties across the Turkic world (Yarman Vural and Alkan, 2009). Among these countries, Azerbaijan has historically maintained especially close political and societal relations with Türkiye. However, Kelkitli's (2021) empirical analysis reveals that, over time, there has been a noticeable divergence in UNGA voting patterns between Türkiye and the scholarship-sending countries, including Azerbaijan. Interpreting this trend narrowly through a soft power lens might suggest a failure in Türkiye's ability to shape foreign policy preferences through educational exchange.

Yet, such an interpretation risks overlooking the multidimensional nature of bilateral relations. Other studies emphasize the strength of Türkiye–Azerbaijan ties through

linguistic commonality (Pashayeva, 2018), shared cultural heritage (Sancak, 2016), and religious solidarity (Göksel, 2011). These findings illustrate that soft power, when narrowly defined as alignment in international fora, may obscure rather than illuminate the complexities of international educational diplomacy. While the Kelkitli's study (2019) contributes to the literature by introducing an underutilized empirical measure, it reflects the limitations of the soft power framework when applied as a singular analytical lens. The use of macro-level indicators such as UN voting alignment overlooks the micro-level dynamics that educational exchanges may affect, including long-term career trajectories, interpersonal networks, or informal influence mechanisms.

While Budak (2021a) analyzes Türkiye's international scholarship program in comparison to those of countries like the US, UK, Germany, China, and Japan to highlight such programs' use as a proactive public diplomacy tool aimed at cultivating future elites aligned with their foreign policy goals, in an article published the same year, Budak (2021b) evaluates such programs' from the lens of foreign aid and refers to the UN SDG 4.b on raising human capital. He suggests that the programs' strategic significance stems from its contributions to public diplomacy as it leads to economic development, personal growth, socialization and human resource development, and highlights the goals of official development assistance in connection to the international scholarship program, which is to promote growth through investing in human capital. Although it does not present an analytical investigation, the study is worth noting as one of the few works that approaches Türkiye's international scholarship programs from this particular perspective.

Another article (Budak and Terzi, 2021) looks into the scholarship programs of the Turkic Council Countries and the external states' programs in the region, again, in an attempt to frame the higher education mobility within the public diplomacy implementation among the Council members. The interviews with a number of students conducted for the article reveal that they choose to study in Türkiye for reasons like feeling close to Türkiye because of kinship, and that they were made aware of mainly economic opportunities between their countries and Türkiye during their studies. The results are interpreted that the scholarship programs are crucial for building human

capacity and hence improving bilateral and multilateral relations among the council members based on the capacity. However, the overlooked emphasis on economic opportunities in the students' statements and the fact that they provide the human resources in these relations point out the developmental capacity of these scholarship programs. An overarching point, which is not the main focus of this article, but which emerges from their interviews, is that the international students choose to study in Türkiye as a result of cultural and historical affinity, yet leave with ideas in mind to expand the relations through potential fields of investment and commercial activities.

Appreciating international scholarship programs as significant instruments in raising and training people and elevating social development, Köse (2022) analyzes the results of Türkiye's development assistance to Somalia. With a survey among the Somali alums of Turkish education institutions, he puts forth the contributions of international education to the human capital and hence to the processes of political, economic and social development. The study is significant in indicating the connection between international scholarship programs, development assistance, and human capital raise, although the connection is not built very strongly. In addition, it lacks the donor's perspective and its strategy in the disbursement of aid. While the recipient benefits from the assistance in the form of education scholarship in certain ways, the donor's policy behind aid must have also been fulfilled in order to continue donating.

Djamanca (2018) examines international higher education programs as a tool of foreign policy and identifies them as a key component of Türkiye's engagement with the Sub-Saharan Africa region. While the study offers valuable insights into the role of scholarships and education in fostering international cooperation, its analysis remains primarily situated within a soft power framework. This focus, while useful, results in a somewhat pragmatic and unilateral interpretation of Türkiye–Sub-Saharan Africa relations, which could benefit from a more multidimensional analytical perspective.

Similarly, focusing on Kyrgyzstan, Ünal (2019) assesses Türkiye's internationalization efforts through the lens of educational diplomacy. Drawing on survey data from Kyrgyz alums who studied in Türkiye since 1992, he argues that the scholarship program has been effective as a tool of public diplomacy, particularly given that some graduates have

attained high-level positions in public institutions and politics. However, not all alums become influential figures, nor do all maintain professional ties with Türkiye after graduation. Despite this, the education they receive represents a valuable form of state-funded support, contributing to the formation of skilled human capital. The competencies gained through international education may benefit the home country, Türkiye, or even third countries where alums eventually reside—an aspect often overlooked in evaluations of Türkiye’s international scholarship programs.



Table 2. Overview of Key Studies on Türkiye's Scholarship Programs

Study	Main Theme	Focus of Analysis	Methodology	Key Findings
Aras and Mohammed (2019)	Turkish scholarship program as a soft power instrument	Students' perceptions	Survey and Interview	• Affinity to Turkish culture • Discontent with the implementing institution
Kelkitli (2021)	Influence of Türkiye over scholarship recipients' countries' foreign policy decisions	Alignment of UNGA voting with the recipient countries	Quantitative modelling (Agreement Index)	• Limited convergence between Türkiye and the recipient countries • No clear diplomatic returns of the scholarship program
Budak (2021a)	Turkish scholarship program as a public diplomacy tool	Theoretically framing the program in comparison to different country programs	Qualitative comparative analysis using secondary data	• Missing framing and targeting in the context of soft power
Budak (2021b)	Comparative analysis of selected countries' scholarship programs as a mechanism of foreign aid	Alignment of scholarships with development strategies	Qualitative comparative analysis using secondary data	• Scholarships build human capital, aid development, support diplomacy, vary by country
Budak and Terzi (2021)	Scholarship programs as instruments of public diplomacy, and regional cooperation among Turkic Council members	Comparison of Turkic Council's and global program's implementations through beneficiary perceptions	Interview	• Increased cultural awareness, academic growth, and support for greater regional integration • Turkic Council countries' resources remain comparatively limited compared to global programs

Köse (2022)	Turkish scholarship programs as instruments of human capital and social development	Somali alums' perceived contributions to the country's processes of political, economic and social development	Survey (Results require very cautious interpretation as it includes only 30 respondents)	• Satisfaction with education • Positive impact of education on career • Positive contribution to the country's development (about 70%) • Positive contribution to bilateral relations with Türkiye (about 70%)
Djamanca (2018)	Education and cultural exchange as strategic tools for Türkiye-Sub-Saharan Africa cooperation	African students' perceptions	Interview	• Positive academic and personal development • Enhanced regional awareness and support for cooperation • Insufficient resources by the program and intolerant social environment
Ünal (2019)	Türkiye's higher education internationalization policies impact on public diplomacy	Post-graduation engagement of Kyrgyz alums of Türkiye Scholarships	Survey (380 respondents)	• High scholarship utilization and completion (92 percent) • Strong return rate (68 percent) and emphasized connection with Türkiye • Turkish language proficiency among graduates supports cultural and economic cooperation • cultural ambassadorship strengthening Türkiye-Kyrgyzstan relations and Türkiye's soft power.

In addition to the key studies focusing on the scholarship program outcomes outlined in Table 2, a range of other studies have examined different dimensions of Türkiye Scholarships and the country's internationalization strategy in higher education. These include assessments of the progress achieved in internationalization (Kireççi et al., 2016), evaluations of the limited implementation of YÖK's internationalization strategy document (Aydınlı and Mathews, 2021), analyses of international students' educational expectations and post-graduation career plans (Gündüz, 2012), the transition from BÖP to the Türkiye Scholarships in line with shifts in Turkish foreign policy (Öztürk, 2014), and access to scholarship opportunities in specific regions (Farah and Barack, 2019). Across these studies, public diplomacy emerges as the dominant conceptual framework. Scholarship programs and internationalization policies are frequently portrayed as efforts to “win hearts and minds” of international students in order to promote Türkiye's image abroad and enhance its soft power.

While this framing reflects one dimension of official policy, limiting analysis to soft power objectives risks oversimplifying the complex nature and broader implications. A singular focus on image-building or influence overlooks important aspects such as development cooperation, knowledge exchange, and human capital formation. As such, there is a need for more nuanced approaches that move beyond soft power to capture the multifaceted roles these programs play in both foreign policy and international education.

As a complementary to the studies focusing on the motives of the ruling AK Party government with this policy (Aras and Mohammed, 2019), the capacity to accomplish the presumed soft power objectives (Kelkitli, 2020), discussing the Turkish scholarship practice alongside the other country cases in the context of foreign aid (Budak, 2021b), this study aims to assess the process of internationalization promoted with the scholarships and the consequences of the scholarships disbursed. Once the objectives are explored and defined through a first-hand analysis on the related official documents, those objectives are compared and contrasted with the results of the scholarship program. Campbell and Neff (2020, p. 839) point out that “much historical research on scholarship programs focuses on how government-sponsored scholarships reflected a specific foreign diplomacy at the time,” at an extensive review of the scholarship literature. To discover

the specific foreign diplomacy of Türkiye with the scholarship and internationalization programs, a document analysis is conducted on the policy documents of Türkiye's official institutions organizing or overseeing these programs.

While the internationalization of higher education is widely recognized by states as a soft power instrument for fostering states' influence through cultural and social elements, scholarship programs are often treated as a distinct policy area, despite being shaped by similar strategic and analytical logics. In the case of Türkiye, policy documents —particularly those related to the Türkiye Scholarships—explicitly and official statements by program executors link the internationalization agenda with the use of scholarships to enhance higher education quality and visibility.

The reviewed literature on Türkiye's scholarship programs and internationalization strategy offers valuable insights into state motivations and policy implementation. However, these studies tend to remain bounded by a public diplomacy framework and are often limited to analyses either solely over official statements or recipients' perspectives. To fully understand the role and implications of scholarship programs in shaping international relations and development outcomes, it is necessary to engage with broader theoretical approaches and comparative contexts of program design, implementation and outcomes for recipients. The following section, therefore, turns to global scholarship on international education, with particular attention to conceptual and analytical approaches that examine similar programs in other national contexts or through comparative frameworks.

2.4. Higher Education Internationalization and Scholarship Programs

International student mobility has evolved along multiple trajectories. Beyond the traditional models of sending students abroad or attracting them through scholarships provided by universities, the private sector, or non-governmental organizations, there is a growing trend of students pursuing education abroad through self-financing. This is often motivated by the desire to access higher-quality education or to specialize in particular fields. Government policies play a pivotal role in shaping these mobility patterns. Through scholarship programs, states actively

attract international students or support their own citizens in pursuing education abroad, thereby influencing both the direction and scope of cross-border academic mobility.

It is well known that states and societies strive to use political, diplomatic, economic and cultural instruments effectively to manage and improve their relations with each other. International student mobility has become a significant strategy in relation to the goals to these ends, and there is an ever growing body of literature on such mobility programs and international scholarships in higher education. UNESCO Glossary defines international student mobility as the movement of students across international borders to engage in educational activities in a destination country which is different from their country of origin. According to this definition, international student mobility does not include transfers between educational systems that does not require physically crossing borders, such as distance learning and degrees from foreign institutions operating in origin country (UNESCO, n.d). International students enrolled in short-term studies through international exchange programs are also excluded for the purposes of this study, which looks for the effects of a degree acquired in a foreign country.

Internationalization policies have developed in the field of higher education, as in many other fields, in response to accelerating economic, cultural, academic and political developments in line with increasing globalization (Knight, 2012). Policies for the international student mobility and scholarships have been shaped and developed within the framework of internationalization in higher education and foreign policies of countries, and in line with their implementers' national, regional and global goals. Three main trends have emerged in the literature in approaching these government policies; (1) public diplomacy, including soft power, which is the most widely studied area under International Relations, (2) institutional development improvement through strengthening educational institutions, and (3) development assistance in terms of creating economic assets and contributing to the development of countries through the human capital building. The following sections delve into these trends.

Diplomatic and Political Aims

First and the most common trend assesses the international student mobility programs for their role in public diplomacy of states. They emphasize the role of international education in improving the national image, status, and soft power through disseminating its culture and values. Public diplomacy, emerging in the 1970s during the Cold War, is defined as a strategy that uses propaganda to influence foreign public opinion (Gregory, 2008). International education has been under review in parallel with the public diplomacy discussions as it helps, for example, familiarizing students with the culture of the society they are visiting and bringing their own culture to this society, which provides an inter-communal cultural rapprochement (Eide, 1970), and through this rapprochement creating an environment for interaction where diplomats and policymakers can understand the reactions of the foreign public to certain political moves (Fischer, 1972). The soft power framework that Joseph Nye (1990) builds refers to such programs as an example of the framework, using the Fulbright program as a case which was implemented during the Cold War to “win the hearts and minds” of targeted non-ally communities (Nye, 2004). This framework has become the benchmark for the assessment of education programs offered by governments to foreigners.

However, the Fulbright scholarship program of the USA, which is widely taken as an example in the policy practices of international student programs and is the most referenced in the literature, is emphasized to mirror the US foreign policy during the Cold War (Johnson, 2018). With the end of the Cold War, changes can be observed at the scholarship program following the US foreign policy approach, as well as differing before and after the War on Terror, which started upon the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 (Johnson, 2018, p. 174). Apart from the US case, the British Commonwealth of Nations (Kirkland, 2018) and the Soviet Union (Kurgat, 2014) adopted international education as an application of foreign policy which was determined according to the priorities of these countries’ politics and adapted according to their priorities changing over time.

Nevertheless, the scholarship programs, which have been a significant source of international student mobility, continued to be widely acknowledged for contributing to national security and

stability, promoting peace and mutual understanding (de Wit, 2002), influencing political perspectives through exposure the host country values and culture (Atkinson 2010; Chankseliani, 2018), and developing diplomatic sympathy and raising volunteer ambassadors (Bettie, 2015). Recent studies repeatedly emphasize that international scholarship programs enable graduates to return with positive perceptions and comprehensive knowledge of the host country (Kent, 2018) while also serving as a strategic foreign policy tool by developing leadership skills, enhancing soft power, and fostering global collaboration and “citizen diplomacy” (Hanada, 2022).

Aims for Educational Development

Second trend in analyzing the aims of government in applying scholarships and internationalization policies focuses on the educational development and takes the programs as a means of improving the quality of higher educational institutions and students’ training. Survey results reported for the International Association of Universities emphasize the role of internationalization in international cooperation of higher education institutions, capacity building, improving the quality of teaching and learning (Marinoni, 2019). A study assessing the role of higher education internationalization in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights its impact as a transformative tool for sustainable development (Ramaswamy et al., 2021). According to the article, internationalization fosters meaningful societal impact by integrating global challenges—such as poverty, universal health and education, and climate change—into research, curricula, and partnerships. It enhances institutional capacities in innovation and sustainability and promotes intercultural understanding and civic responsibility, cultivating a workforce committed to global equity and well-being. Additionally, capacity-building through internationalization, especially in the Global South, enables higher education institutions to influence public policies by aligning their initiatives with sustainable development mission and fostering greater societal engagement.

It stands to reason that internationalization, by building capacity for students and institutions, leads to progress not only in the field of education, but also in economic, social and societal areas. An article by Barbosa and Neves (2020) emphasizes that cross-border cooperation enhances scientific capacity and innovation, boosting institutions’ abilities to tackle local and

global challenges. It notes that internationalization strengthens human capital by equipping students and researchers with economically valuable skills while fostering social cohesion through intercultural exchange, which are significant, respectively, for economic and social development. According to the article, internationalization also helps higher education institutions align with global standards, improve quality, and contribute to public policies on education and research to support sustainable national development.

In relation to improving the educational quality at a country through the interactions built abroad, the internationalization and scholarships are evaluated also as part of education diplomacy. While the concept refers to establishing understanding and bridges between societies, stakeholders, and sectors (Childhood Education International, 2023), it has evolved to foster a positive image of the country, spread cultural values, and increase global engagement. Nazar et al. (2019) suggest that using education as a tool strengthens regional cooperation and enhances the soft power of the host country. High-quality education and robust institutional infrastructure are essential to this impact. Furthermore, student exchanges enrich institutional capacity by introducing diverse perspectives and encouraging research collaborations, fostering the growth of local educational institutions. Wang (2021) identifies key motivations for governments to engage in educational diplomacy: (1) promoting economic, technological, and scientific development domestically; (2) enhancing human capital in developing countries through educational support; and (3) building international relationships for diplomatic gains. The article highlights China's approach, which combines soft power with elevating its universities' global standing by attracting international students through scholarships and forming partnerships with prestigious institutions. To summarize, both publications emphasize the role of educational diplomacy as an effective strategy for strengthening soft power as well as the host countries' educational capabilities.

Aims of Development Assistance

Third trend in analyzing these program is to take their role in development into consideration, which has shared points with the second trend. Lacking sufficient qualified human resources, developing countries often send students abroad for education, with international scholarship programs providing crucial support when self-financing is not feasible (Boeren, 2018; Loerke,

2018). Such programs aim to transfer technical knowledge, cultivate leadership, foster social responsibility, and strengthen diplomatic and economic ties, while also enhancing the quality of the country's educational institutions (Baxter, 2018; Boeren, 2018). Studies highlight the significant outputs of scholarship programs, which contribute to the home country's development by improving human capital (Kajunju, 2018; Ünal, 2019). Referring to the SDG Target 4.b, calling to "substantially expand globally the number of scholarships" for international higher education until 2020, Campbell, Kelly-Weber, and Lavallee (2021) evaluate the international scholarship programs' contributions to sustainable development on program, organization, national and international levels. They posit that their impact at the organizational and national levels, knowledge sharing and capacity building serve to enhance human capital, which in turn contributes to institutional and societal change and development. According to their assessment, impact of scholarship programs at the international level is still manifest in key areas including the strengthening of diplomatic ties, the establishment of international networks and collaborations, and the enhancement of the host country's soft power.

Building human capital and institutional capacity, these programs prove to be pivotal for development. Development cooperation policies prioritize human capital formation, with scholarship programs playing a key role in promoting economic development and reducing poverty at overseas (Dassin, Marsh & Mawer, 2017). A study by Dong and Chapman (2008) conducted to understand the impact of the Chinese Government Scholarship Program (CGSP), presents the program as part of China's broader foreign aid strategy, supporting diplomatic goals. While providing valuable insights into the diplomatic and developmental impacts of international scholarships and China's evolving role in global education and foreign aid, the study shows the way to approach scholarship programs as a form of development assistance.

Another example of this trend by Baum et al. (2013) reviews the benefits of higher education and remarks the international scholarship programs for their role in promoting global education and economic development. Another study by Perna et al. (2014), which examined fellowship programs based on actual implementation, produced a typology of four categories of fellowship programs. The four types - (1) development of basic skills, (2) development of advanced

knowledge in developing nations, (3) development of advanced knowledge in developed nations, and (4) promotion of short-term study abroad - indicate that the goals of scholarship programs are mainly concentrated on the promotion of human capital.

In the literature assessing the reasons why governments develop internationalization and international student mobility policies, de Wit and Altbach (2021), two of the leading scholars in the field, argue that these reasons are (1) to create growth in the national economy by generating revenue, (2) to use it as a tool for soft power and public diplomacy, (3) responding to labor needs by developing human capital, (4) creating a competitive and attractive higher education system, (5) cultivating global citizens through cultural interaction, and (6) ensuring national security by promoting ideological influence and alliances. In this study they conduct to reveal the problems that internationalization faces and to chart a path for its future, they describe how political, economic and social motivations have transformed internationalization. Another study, by Campbell and Neff (2020), a systematic review of reputable academic studies published between 2010 and 2019, classifies the motivations pursued by governments in implementing international scholarship programs in six intersecting categories: (1) development of human capital and skills, (2) advancement of diplomatic relations and solidarity, (3) promotion of social change and justice, (4) support for sustainable and international development, (5) facilitation of university internationalization, and (6) expansion of access to higher education. Both studies suggest that these goals have an impact on the design, implementation and outcomes of scholarship programs and propose that understanding them can lead to improvements in programs.

Evaluating programs for possible improvements requires an analytical perspective. In line with the literature review above, it is possible to reduce the categories that de Wit & Altbach and Campbell & Neff have reached to three. Different studies have considered the goals of raising global citizens through cultural interaction or promotion of social change and justice (Bettie, 2015; Chankseliani, 2018; Hanada, 2022) and ensuring national security through supporting ideological influence and alliances (Atkinson, 2010; Kurgat, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Kirkland,

2018) in line with the goal of influencing the mindset of individuals and prompting them to act in the desired way, i.e., advancing public diplomacy and soft power.

Achieving growth in the national economy through income generation and developing human capital by increasing access to higher education are linked objectives in terms of policies for the adoption of international scholarships and internationalization as international development assistance. And institutional development is the underlying desire to build a competitive higher education system and internationalization. The following pages of the chapter address the context of development assistance individually to further contextualize these arguments. To exemplify this at the point, Türkiye's strategy documents for internationalization in higher education can be mentioned as they set internationalization as a goal precisely for institutional development and to ensure an internationally attractive higher education (YÖK 2017; 2021).

2.5. Scholarships as Development Assistance

Meeting the human capital needs of developing countries is one of the important programs evaluated in the field of development cooperation. In this context, countries implementing development cooperation programs aim to develop human resources, contribute to economic development, support capacity building and reduce poverty through international scholarship programs. Developing countries either send students abroad with their own means or try to benefit from international scholarship programs in order to receive the education they cannot provide at home. Since many countries do not have the means to finance education abroad, these scholarship programs serve an important function. As the major part of higher education internationalization, international student mobility and its driver, international scholarship programs, have been subject to scholarly attention in their contribution to individuals' educational and professional growth. The literature has also evolved to look at international scholarships as development assistance, moving the emphasis from the individual level to consider its wider developmental results.

Kehm's (2003) article, one of the early studies in the field, emphasizes that international education develops human capital by broadening students' perspectives, enhancing their cultural understanding, improving their language skills, and consequently enabling them to pursue

international careers. It highlights that, due to economic competition, international education can lead to brain drain and stresses the need to consider this issue in order to maximize the benefits such as economic integration and the development of a global outlook.

However, over time, perspectives like “brain circulation” or “brain gain” have emerged in response to concerns about brain drain. For instance, Pan Su-Yan’s (2011) article demonstrates that talents who receive international education and reside abroad can be encouraged to return with appropriate reforms and incentives. Even if this does not happen immediately, such individuals form a diaspora that transfers knowledge and technology to their home countries through education, consultancy, and collaborations. Pan describes this phenomenon as “storing strong brains overseas” (cited from Zweig in Pan, 2011, p. 117) to be utilized when needed. It is emphasized that China’s efforts to attract its human capital trained abroad—through incentives such as creating entrepreneurial spaces, offering competitive salaries, and providing research grants—can convert brain drain into brain gain in the medium term.

On the other hand, since the 1950s, China has implemented government scholarship programs as a tool for foreign aid, to improve its perception positively, build goodwill with recipient countries in the long term, and promote human capital development. Dong and Chapman’s (2008) article indicates that these scholarships provided by China, as a donor, have impacts such as fostering human resource development in recipient countries, introducing innovations, strengthening education, and improving governance and policymaking capacity through the leaders trained. For example, they report that over 200 graduates of the Chinese Government Scholarship Program, who have taken positions in university faculties in their home countries, contribute to the dissemination of knowledge, maintain professional and academic collaborations with China, and design joint ventures, technical support, and investment projects, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of the recipient country.

In another case, Nolan (2011) investigates the return of the Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) program, which seeks to increase human resource capacity in partner nations’ key areas, in line with Australia’s country program plans and own interests. According to Nolan (2011), the ADS program is designed to foster knowledge, technic and skill development, human capital

enhancement, and capacity building in the public sector for the development of the recipient country, thereby promoting economic growth. The program supports both individual and institutional development, with societal returns stemming from graduates' leadership roles, influence on policymaking processes, and mentorship to others. On the other hand, as the research indicates, differences in governance structures, economic contexts, and resource allocation among recipient countries can lead to variations in program outcomes, which is exacerbated with lacking clarity in strategies concerning partner countries.

Another study on scholarships provided by Australia, focusing on recipients from Kenya, Uganda, and Mozambique, revealed that while human capital, leadership, and institutional capacity improved, the impact on development was found to depend on local dynamics (Abimbola et al., 2016). On the other hand, this research highlighted that in the African context, scholarships had limited reach to disadvantaged groups and primarily benefited urban elites.

A study on the MasterCard Foundation's scholarship program in sub-Saharan Africa examined specifically the program's impact on access to education. It showed that scholarships were concentrated among women, rural populations, and economically disadvantaged groups, and compared to a control group that did not receive scholarships, participation in higher education increased by 37%, and studying abroad by 33% among these groups (Cosentino et al., 2019). While these figures may not indicate a substantial impact alone, other studies have demonstrated the developmental effects of increased participation in higher education (Dudzevičiūtė & Šimelytė, 2018; Trinh, 2023; Li et al., 2024). Beyond strengthening human capital and enhancing career opportunities, education has been highlighted as a human right that promotes equality, increases civic engagement, and contributes to development broadly. The importance of educational aid in achieving these outcomes has also been emphasized (Mercer, 2014; Heyneman & Lee, 2016).

A recent study by Kwak and Chanseliani (2024) investigated the impact of international student mobility on poverty alleviation and concluded that the mobility plays a role in it by contributing to systemic and transnational transformation in the long term. It was emphasized that graduates of international education have the capacity to influence institutional and societal transformation

by forming local and global networks, democratizing governance, transferring technical expertise and innovations, contributing to economic growth, and addressing societal issues such as inequality.

Development assistance, as a foreign policy tool, seeks to achieve similar objectives through international education and scholarships. For instance, a study on scholarships offered to countries in the former Soviet Union after its dissolution examined these scholarships as a form of aid in the education sector, and it found that such aid included programs targeting the transition process, with goals such as democratic reforms and adaptation to a free-market economy, as well as policies aimed at weakening Soviet Russia's influence and promoting decentralization (Takala & Piattoeva, 2012). In line with these policy goals, another study demonstrated that individuals educated in democratic countries were more inclined towards democratic governance and contributed to this transformation in the post-Soviet context (Chankseliani, 2018). Like aid, scholarships also function as tools to influence political dynamics, making their evaluation within the framework of aid both relevant and comprehensive.

Scholarships have recently been discussed in aspects addressing multiple dimensions of the SDGs. Campbell et al. (2021) notes that international scholarship programs are directly associated with SDG Target 4.b, which aims to increase educational opportunities for developing country populations, promoting equality of access to higher education. According to her, these scholarships help to build human capital, expand global networks, and transfer technical knowledge, all of which contribute to long-term economic growth and societal resilience. Ramaswamy et al. (2021) further emphasize that incorporating SDGs into scholarship schemes allows higher education institutions to take transformative measures such as building global citizenship, overcoming inequality, and encouraging cultural diversity. This way, scholarship recipients can be empowered to solve urgent global concerns such as poverty, inequality, and climate change through strategic collaborations, curriculum reform, and student mobility, while also implementing sustainable practices in local communities. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate how scholarships not only enhance individual capabilities but also promote broader institutional and societal change required for long-term sustainability.

In conclusion, international scholarship programs play a pivotal role in advancing global development by fostering human capital, promoting leadership, and strengthening institutional capacity in recipient countries. These programs not only enhance access to higher education for marginalized groups, such as women, rural populations, and economically disadvantaged communities, but also contribute to systemic transformations by addressing critical societal challenges like inequality and poverty. By enabling the transfer of technical expertise, innovations, and democratic values, scholarships empower recipients to become catalysts for governance reforms, economic growth, and the creation of inclusive networks at both local and global levels. Moreover, as evidenced by initiatives in regions like sub-Saharan Africa and post-Soviet states, scholarships serve as effective tools for aligning developmental goals with broader geopolitical and economic objectives. Ultimately, international scholarship programs underscore the importance of education as both a human right and a driver of sustainable development, demonstrating their capacity to shape not only individual trajectories but also the socio-economic and institutional futures of nations.

Overall, by focusing on these reasons behind the implementation of international student mobility and scholarship programs, the studies in these different trends show the importance of this issue in foreign policy implementation. The literature on the benefits of this foreign policy indicates how effective it has been. Fewer studies focus on outcomes. The findings in terms of host country outcomes usually include international students' satisfaction with their education and perceptions of the host country during their studies or upon their return (Byrne, 2016; Asada, 2019; Nazar et al., 2019; Aras & Mohammed, 2019). However, as the review of the literature above suggests, the objectives are varied and the outcomes should be varied accordingly.

2.6. Measuring the Outcomes of the Scholarships

Measuring the outcomes of scholarship programs based on their initial objectives is often referred to as impact analysis or program evaluation. For instance, an impact analysis report was published in 2019 for the Chevening program, which the UK has implemented since 1983. The report takes “bringing up community leaders” to its focus as it is one of the major aims, and attempts measuring this among alums through asking their time in volunteering, founding or leading any NGOS, number of such organizations alums involved, and highlighted the program's

outcomes through case studies based on national leaders and influential individuals who are program alums (Chevening, 2019).

Another example is the survey conducted by the Research, Evaluation and Learning (REL) Unit at the Institute of International Education (IIE) to evaluate the Fulbright Scholar Program's success on its goals of (1) strengthening bilateral ties through cultural and educational exchange, and (2) promoting global collaboration in education and cultural development. Evaluation results show that the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program has strengthened bilateral ties by enhancing scholars' professional reputations, leadership skills, and fostering sustainable international collaborations. It has also promoted international cooperation by improving scholars' intercultural and multicultural competencies, enabling them to support diverse communities and foster global understanding (Valuy, 2022).

IIE has become a leading institution for such research on international education policy and international student mobility, and has developed important methodological approaches for scholarship program evaluation and impact studies (IIE, n.d.). It has presented a revised model based on Donald Kirkpatrick's (1979; 1994) Four Levels of Evaluation model, creating a measurement of transformation from the individual to the institutional and societal level. This model is one of the main models used by IIE in program evaluations for the institutions it serves. Numerous articles and research studies have been conducted based on the dimensions the evaluation model is based. The article by Campbell et al. (2021) on the impact of international fellowships on sustainable development in the context of sustainable development goals draws on IIE's research and evaluation reports for the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program (IFP). While the IIE evaluation measured the program's progress and contributions to educational development, personal achievements and social justice for graduates, Campbell et al. (2021) assessed these outcomes through SDGs.

For UNESCO's annual Global Education Monitoring Report, IIE sought to develop a roadmap for measuring SDG 4.b, which is about increasing the number of international scholarships (IIE, 2017). It revealed that systematization, legal regulation and institutionalization for data collection, as well as how and how often to collect data, how to compile it, and how to manage

monitoring and evaluation processes are problems even for developed countries. It is evident that standardization in the measurement of the outcomes of international scholarship programs, which are becoming increasingly popular also in developing countries, is critical for monitoring at the global level.

On the other hand, the literature also reveals that monitoring and evaluations entail significant problems. Mawer (2017) points out that the relationship between objectives and outcomes is a problem in these evaluations. He points out that the objectives can change over time and that different lengths of time need to pass after the program for measurement. Another issue is the measure of the extent of the scholarship program's impact on outcomes. Attributing outcomes to scholarships, to which other factors may also contribute, is a major issue. Finally, there is the question of whether the intervention should necessarily be the particular scholarship program whose results are evaluated in order to achieve the outcomes. It was emphasized that it is crucial to know whether other scholarship programs or other policies could have achieved the same results with less cost or incidental consequences.

Martel (2017) reviewed the various methodologies employed to understand program outcomes and examined seven ways of conducting evaluations: Theory of Change, Counterfactual Approaches, Kirkpatrick Model, Social Network Analysis and the less systematized Contribution Analysis, Retrospective Alumni Study and Longitudinal Study. Although these methods do not address all the limitations pointed out by Mawer (2017), they provide an understanding of the effectiveness of scholarship programs in relation to their objectives and resources. These methods need not be used independently but can be used in complementary combination. While one method may be used for data collection and presentation, another may be used for their interpretation.

For example, Jonbekova et al. (2022), applying the extended Kirkpatrick Model as cited by Martel (2017), argue that this model aligns well with the objectives of the Kazakhstan scholarship program they examined, as graduates of international education have an impact on the environment in which they carry it out. By focusing on different levels of analysis, it provides an understanding of how graduates reflect changes in their lives that they perceive to be due to

the scholarship program in their organizational and social environments. The increased knowledge and skills and social awareness developed in graduates as a result of the training have implications for policy-making, improving workplace efficiency, and training and transfer to others, which in turn impacts social progress through roles such as mentoring, consulting, or advocacy. Findings of the study by Jonbekova et. al. (2022) and the trends reviewed in the literature above show that Kirkpatrick Model, as it provides different levels of analysis, is a very suitable framework to reflect the research results in interconnected levels of analysis.

A recent research conducting a systematic mapping and thematic analysis of articles examining the outcomes of international student mobility, Wang et al. (2024) organized the impacts on societal change under five categories: (1) they contribute to the growth of private sector firms through improved innovation capacity, management standards, job opportunities and investments; (2) they play a role in social transformation through their support for social pluralism and diversity and their engagement in development, equity and peace; (3) they contribute to institutional strengthening in higher education by building research capacity and transferring new knowledge; (4) they participate in the transformation of political culture by advocating for freedom and justice with a new awareness of political values; and finally, (5) they drive national economic growth by fostering private sector expansion and advancing industry through knowledge, technology, and skill transfer. This research, identifying also the variables influencing these effects, has significantly contributed to the literature by establishing a critical framework on the potential of international education.

Whereas Wang et al.'s (2024) study draws attention to the lacking geographical and thematic diversification in research on international student mobility, our analysis reveals that evaluations of outcomes are often conducted without adequately considering the strategies and objectives outlined during program design. Attempting to interpret international scholarship programs and student mobility solely through one lens – usually the lens of soft power approach – limits the depth of analysis regarding the specific goals of these policies and their effectiveness. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of international higher education as a tool of foreign policy, it is essential to examine the compatibility between the program's objectives and the broader foreign

policy aims, alongside students' perceptions and the experiences of graduates. Such an approach ensures a nuanced evaluation of how these initiatives function as instruments of diplomatic engagement and development cooperation.

As a result, in this study, retrospective data based on interviews with program graduates are analyzed using the Kirkpatrick model, which enables the classification of outcomes across multiple levels—from individual to societal. Complementing this, the Theory of Change framework is employed post hoc to evaluate whether the observed outcomes align with the intended goals and causal pathways of the scholarship program. This study integrates Kirkpatrick's model with a Theory of Change because while Kirkpatrick provides a structured typology for evaluation, the Theory of Change offers a causal interpretive framework to understand pathways and deviations in outcomes. The methodological approach, including the rationale for integrating these frameworks and other elements of the research design, is detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III:

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Türkiye has been implementing strategies of international higher education for 30 years at the time this paragraphs are written.⁸ Since then, it has consistently continued to implement its scholarship program and has awarded scholarships to 2940 international students annually to study in Türkiye on average.⁹ While providing scholarships for international students to come and study in Türkiye, it has been offering scholarships for Turkish nationals to study abroad and return with the information, skills, and capacity they acquired abroad to contribute to its development (Mathews, 2007). Türkiye has been part of the globalization of knowledge production with its programs with the number of international students increasing to more than ten times in the 30-years' time period it has embraced the strategy, indicating that the country has pursued progressive policies in this regard.

Beyond its international education statistics, Türkiye presents a notable case as a developing country proactively engaging in the global academic arena, and holds a unique position. It

⁸ Even though Türkiye had welcomed international students through bilateral and multilateral agreements of cooperation on various matters prior to the official scholarship program for international students introduced in 1992 – Great Student Project, – the Project can be assumed as the starting point of its internationalization policy as it constituted a step to promote the number of international students at the Turkish higher education institutions.

⁹ From the beginning of BÖP until the transition to the Türkiye Scholarships program in 2012, an average of 1500-2000 students were awarded scholarships, and with Türkiye Scholarships, over 4000 students have received scholarships annually. Figure 7 on page 113 shows the scholarship allocations.

exemplifies South-South cooperation and shows how developing nations can use education aid to contribute to global development. In addition to reflecting Türkiye's goals of strengthening regional and international ties, its scholarship programs are a noteworthy instance of policy innovation in supporting recipient states' capacity-building. This study investigates Türkiye's strategy in an effort to shed light on how a developing country handles the prospects and problems of helping its peers with their education. With this perspective, how Türkiye shapes scholarship policies, leveraging its historical, cultural, and geopolitical connections with recipient nations, is analyzed. This research aims not just to increase academic understanding, but also to provide meaningful policy suggestions to decision-makers in Türkiye and other countries involved in education-driven development efforts.

The Turkish scholarship program is examined as a single case rather than testing a prevalent theoretical approach in the Turkish context, offering a more thorough analysis and a more suitable foundation for comparison, since single-case studies empirically capture the whole and incorporate conceptual richness. As outlined in the introduction, Türkiye's unilateral scholarship initiative began in 1992 with the launch of *BÖP*, marking the country's first coordinated effort to use international education as a foreign policy instrument. Since then, various institutions—including the War College, the Police Academy, and the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation—have developed their own scholarship schemes, often targeting specific sectors such as security or religious education. YÖK also introduced comprehensive scholarship opportunities at the tertiary level (YÖK, 2017); however, this program is excluded from the present analysis due to its recent establishment and the limited number of graduates to date.

This study focuses on the Great Student Project and its institutional successor, the Türkiye Scholarships, as it constitutes the most comprehensive and systematically implemented state-led scholarship program in Türkiye's foreign policy history. Their scale, policy continuity, and evolution over time provide a rich basis for analyzing the broader political and developmental objectives underpinning Türkiye's international education agenda. By tracing this program, the analysis captures both the historical foundations and contemporary articulations of Türkiye's endeavors in international higher education.

To enable an extensive evaluation of the program, this dissertation is built upon a two-pronged research design. First, the program's goals and objectives are identified through an analysis of relevant policy documents and interviews conducted with policymakers. Building on this foundation, the study then seeks to understand the beneficiaries' perspectives on the program from a development standpoint, as well as its perceived impact on their lives following graduation. A rigorous evaluation requires comparing intended outcomes with actual effects.

To this end, the present chapter outlines the methodological tools employed in the analysis. Emphasizing the study's design as a qualitative evaluation, the chapter details the conceptual and empirical framework guiding the research. The Kirkpatrick Model and the Theory of Change are introduced as complementary approaches to assess program outcomes and trace the pathways through which they are realized. The study's data sources—comprising official policy documents, policymakers' discourses, and interview responses from program beneficiaries—are specified. Furthermore, the data sources and collection methods, the interview procedures, and identifying the participants are discussed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the sample selection, interview processes, and reflection on the research's limitations.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative and evaluative research design to examine the developmental outcomes of the Türkiye Scholarships program. Understanding the outcome of international higher education programs requires the contextual and interpretive approach as well as focusing on the experiences. A qualitative approach is particularly effective in uncovering the nuanced meanings that participants attribute to their experiences, perceptions, and actions—dimensions that often elude quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, its interpretive flexibility enables the researcher to engage with context-specific complexities, allowing for the emergence of multiple explanatory layers and deeper theoretical insights (Van Maanen, 1979). Whereas this study is also fed by quantitative variables, they reflect descriptive statistics to support the objectives of the analysis.

Given the limited availability of systematic evaluations focusing on the long-term developmental effects of international scholarship programs, the study is also exploratory in nature, seeking to

generate grounded insights into how such programs function in practice. Single case study is the most helpful methodology for exploring the features of a spatially and temporally bounded phenomena whereas it enables drawing causal links within cases (Gerring, 2006). For this purpose, Türkiye's scholarships offered to international students will be analyzed using a "case-based in-depth research strategy rather than a variable-oriented approach" (Blatter, 2008, p. 68). Given that single-case studies enable comprehensive empirical examination and allow for conceptual depth, the Türkiye Scholarships program is examined as a single case. Rather than applying a dominant theoretical framework to the Turkish context, this approach facilitates a more detailed analysis and offers a more contextually grounded basis for comparison.

Even though there are criticisms towards case studies because of an absence of general and systemic methodological guidelines (Yin, 2009), this study offers such a guideline through a program evaluation. When it comes to the external validity or generalizability issues that are emphasized as the single case studies' most critical shortages, the intention at this study is to reveal the particularities of the Turkish case and give a framework for assessing its outcomes so that the study can be repeated in other cases and comparisons can be made. The aim of discovery distances the study from research conducted to become generalizable and robust for external validity. As every research method entails compromises to consider, single case studies offer detailed and context specific information and opportunity to produce new hypothesis and theories (Willis, 2014).

This study is evaluative in nature, aiming to assess the extent to which the Türkiye Scholarships program fulfills its stated objectives—particularly those related to human capital development, institutional strengthening, and international cooperation. Among the multiple rationales for state-funded international scholarships identified in the literature, Campbell and Neff (2020) categorize four overarching objectives: foreign policy and diplomacy, development and cooperation, political economy processes, and the internationalization of higher education. The TÜBİTAK-funded DOSP-G20 project (no. 221K032), under which this dissertation is situated, adopts this framework for evaluating scholarship programs comparatively. In the case of Türkiye, both foreign policy goals and development cooperation objectives are prominent. However, while

existing studies have primarily focused on the program's foreign policy dimension, this research shifts the focus to its role as a development assistance mechanism.

This focus is both analytically justifiable and methodologically strategic, as evaluating a single objective allows for more focused and meaningful impact assessment. The selection is also grounded in findings from the document analysis and interviews (discussed in the next chapter), which highlight development cooperation as one of the most consistently articulated goals in Türkiye's international education strategy. Accordingly, this study analyzes the Türkiye Scholarships program through the retrospective accounts of its graduates, examining how their post-graduation experiences align—or fail to align—with the program's stated developmental objectives.

This study relies on three primary sources of data: (1) official documents, including legislation, strategic plans, annual reports, and Türkiye's core policy texts such as national development plans; (2) interviews with former and current officials who have served in institutions responsible for implementing the scholarship programs; and (3) interviews with former international students—most of whom have completed their degrees—who came to Türkiye through these programs and subsequently returned to their home countries. First, an overview of the documents and a thematic analysis of the interviews with the program practitioners were conducted to formulate the theory of change for Türkiye Scholarships based on the program's objectives and prospects. The second stage of the research was to measure the outcomes based on these goals. In order to understand the outcomes of scholarships as development assistance, scholarship recipients from low-income and middle-income countries were targeted and their remarks were analyzed according to the evaluation model embraced, benefiting the Theory of Change for Türkiye Scholarships and the Kirkpatrick Model.

3.2. Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

Publicly or privately funded programs targeting certain interests are at an increasing demand to be tested for their serviceability as the funds' expenses require accountability. As a result, program evaluations have grown to be an established methodological use for conducting this test (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). They are critical in supporting evidence-based decision-

making, improving program effectiveness, assuring accountability, encouraging learning, and enabling ongoing improvements in programs and policies. This research utilizes a form of program evaluation to understand the outcomes of Turkish scholarship program as a development assistance mechanism.

While the program is defined as an arrangement of resources and initiatives aimed at one or more shared goals, often executed by an individual or team (Newcomer et. al., 2015), program evaluation is the methodical use of scientific approaches to evaluate its design, execution, outcomes, and improvement. Information on a program or program using public or private funds grows increasingly significant in order to ensure the funds' necessity and efficient use. Hence, the program evaluation involves the systematic method of gathering, analyzing, and using data that addresses inquiries regarding projects, policies, and programs, notably their effectiveness and efficiency (Rossi & Freeman, 1993).

Although there are various efforts to study the outcomes of scholarship programs, a consistent and standardized framework has yet to be developed. In a review of different program evaluations and studies of outcomes, Matt Mawer (2017) provides an assessment of all these different approaches and indicates the most salient issues that remain challenging. According to him, the challenges in evaluating scholarship programs are first, the complexity of establishing clear, measurable aims aligned with outcomes, second, difficulties in attributing impacts solely to the programs amidst contingent factors, and last, the intricate comparisons needed between different program designs and alternatives for economic development, poverty alleviation, and effective governance, including recipient versus non-recipient analyses and evaluations across various program types with similar objectives. While the first and second problems are harder to overcome as they are related to dire problem of causality, the last challenge is attempted to be surmounted with focusing on the Turkish scholarships as a single-case study and its developmental aims.

When addressing the issue of causality, Lawrence Mohr (1999) suggests that qualitative research can reveal the operative reasons behind behaviors, thereby establishing causality by showing that a specific reason was present, significant, and active in producing the observed outcome. In this

study, a Theory of Change (ToC) model is first employed to articulate the program's intended goals, outputs, and causal pathways. Then, the Kirkpatrick Model is used to analyze the findings from in-depth interviews across its four levels—reaction, learning, behavior, and results. Based on this layered analysis, the study draws conclusions about the program's outcomes in reference to the operative reasons, articulated in the ToC.

3.2.1. Theory of Change (ToC)

In the emerging field of program evaluation for planning, evaluating and measuring the outcomes of specific interventions such as projects and programs in social areas including education, health, and urban infrastructure, Carol Weiss defines a holistic assessment of the process and initially targeted outcomes, implementation and outputs as a “theory of change” (elaborated in Msila & Setlhako, 2013 based on Weiss's various publications). Simply, the Theory of Change (ToC) describes how a program seeks to accomplish its long-term objectives by working backward from intended outcomes to determine the requirements and interventions. In relation to scholarship programs, Mika Martel (2017) draws attention to the role of the ToC in helping programs to recognize different connections between the scholarship recipients and their spheres of influence, including their peers, social environment in the home and host countries, and education institutions.

In this framework, objectives are ranked as short, medium and long term and constitute the steps towards achieving the program vision. Inputs, actions and outputs are identified to achieve these objectives. The success of the program is measured by showing the results of these interventions. Long-term results bring impact. Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impacts establishes the chain of logic and provides an understanding of causality (Msila & Setlhako, 2013).

During the formulation of the Türkiye Scholarships program, the logical framework on which program assessments or monitoring and evaluation studies are based was not shared with the public. And, any program evaluation for Türkiye Scholarships hasn't been publicly shared, except for a few key indicators measured for the YTB's Strategic Plans. While the acceptance rate – number of scholarships awarded and not been waived – and the achievement rate – the

number of degrees acquired among the scholarship holders are measured to depict the program success, the program's evaluation for its policy-wise objectives is highly limitedly reflected in these measurements. This evaluation therefore presents a ToC based retrospectively on official documents such as the regulations, activity reports, national development plans, and official statements including budget discussions, press releases, and interviews with some of the current and former implementers of the program.

For example, it can be seen in the documents and discourses that the primary goals are the acquisition of knowledge and skills by the students on an individual basis, the utilization of this knowledge and skills in the professional life after graduation on an institutional basis, the development of the institutions in which the graduates are involved nationally or internationally, the contribution to their home countries and the strengthening of Türkiye's image. Strategic planning, budget allocation and support from institutions such as YTB, YÖK and universities can be considered as inputs to these goals. Similarly, some of the actions derived from these documents and discourses are the publicity processes of scholarships, dissemination activities and the means offered within the scope of scholarships. The outputs include the activities of the students placed in the programs, the additional programs offered and the follow-up of the institution. According to this retrospective framework, interviews were conducted with alums to observe the outcomes of the scholarship program and to understand the marginal impact of the scholarship program and education in Türkiye on their lives. This theory of change framework is clearly outlined in the next chapter based on the analysis of the aforementioned document review and interviews. But a preliminary matrix can be seen at Table 3.

Table 3. Preliminary Theory of Change Matrix for Türkiye Scholarships Program

ToC Layer	Elements Identified from Documents & Discourses
Inputs	- Strategic planning by YTB, YÖK, and higher bodies - Public funding and budget allocation
Activities	- Scholarship promotion and global outreach - Application and selection processes - Provision of tuition, stipends, housing, language training

Outputs	- Enrollment of international students in Turkish universities - Participation in academic and enrichment programs - Students and alums tracking and reporting systems
Short-Term Outcomes	- Acquisition of academic knowledge and professional skills by students
Intermediate Outcomes	- Application of knowledge and skills in post-graduate employment
Long-Term Outcomes	- Alums contributions to institutional development (national or international)
Impact	- Socioeconomic development in home countries through alums leadership and capacity building - Strengthened bilateral relations and enhanced image of Türkiye internationally

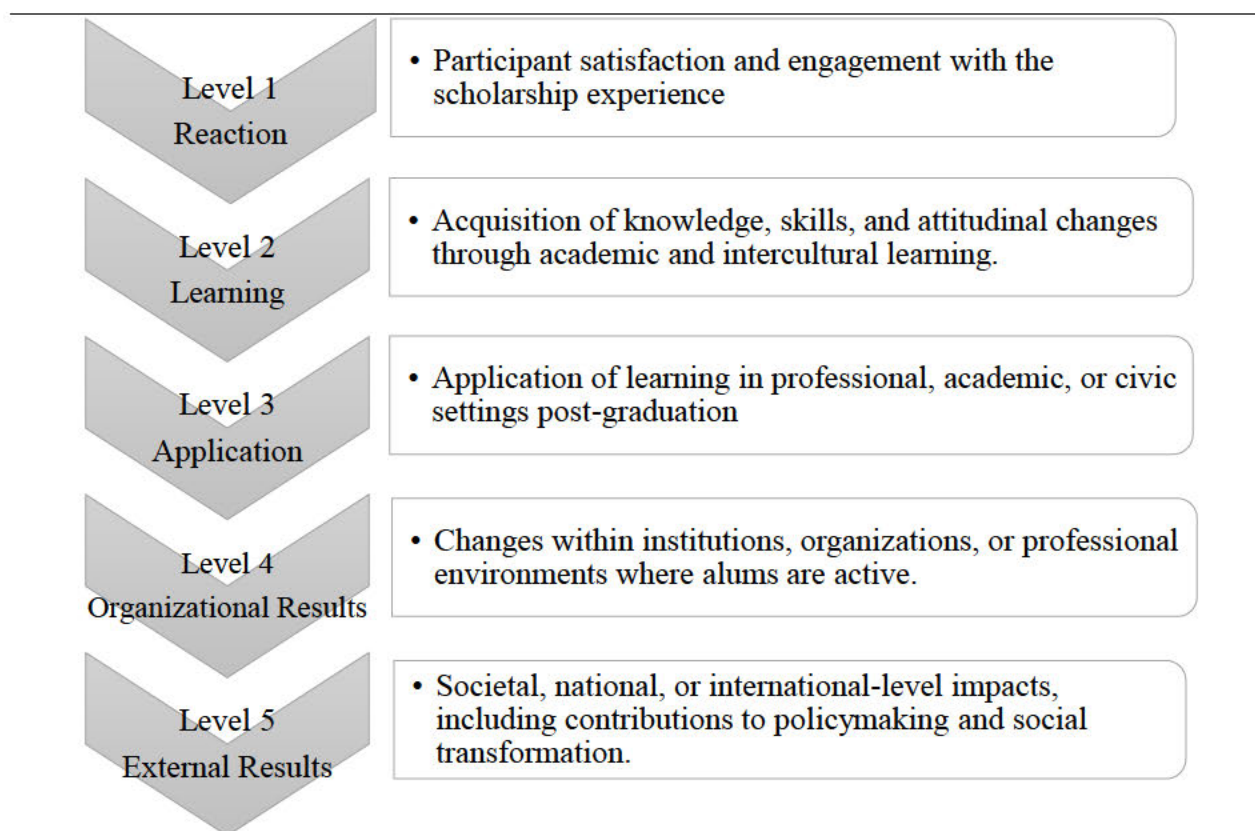
Such a framework enables outcomes to be interpreted in relation to program objectives, measuring the success of the program, identifying unintended outcomes, and showing which interventions have been more decisive in achieving particular outcomes. Such a chain of logic provides a causal understanding. Understanding causality ensures that the right contributions are made to improving program success and that meaningful change is possible (Rogers, 2007). Combining the Kirkpatrick Model, which will enable us to analyze program outcomes on a level-by-level basis, and ToC, tool that will enable us to make sense of the differences between levels, brings complementarity.

3.2.2. Kirkpatrick Model

In understanding the outcomes of educational programs, studies usually focus on the individual level (Martel, 2017). Donald Kirkpatrick's (1979; 1994) model also focuses on the ripple effects of individual outcomes on the wider context. International Institute of Education (IIE) has become a leading institution for research on international education policy and international student mobility, and has developed important methodological approaches for scholarship program evaluation and impact studies (IIE, n.d.). It is one of the main models used by IIE in program evaluations for the institutions it serves.

Kirkpatrick's (1994) Evaluation Model provides a four-tiered framework for measuring program outcomes, ranging from direct feedback to long-term effects. The first level, *Reaction*, measures participants' satisfaction and engagement, which influences their drive to interact with the program's content. The second level, *Learning*, assesses how well participants learn new knowledge, develop skills, or change their attitudes as a result of the program. The third level, *Behavior*, investigates whether participants use what they have learned in relevant circumstances, suggesting practical transfer of learning. Finally, *Results* evaluates the program's overall outcomes, such as improved performance, better decision-making, or behavioral modifications that are consistent with the program's goals. Together, these levels provide a complete technique for assessing both the immediate and long-term consequences of a program on its participants. IIE (n.d.) has added a fifth level, *External Results*, which is the impact of the change in the participant's behavior at the societal, national and international levels and its impact on policy making or social transformation. It also renamed the behavioral level as application. The levels and descriptions of the model I adapted for the evaluation of scholarship programs are given in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Outcome Evaluation Framework for the Scholarship Program based on IIE’s extended Kirkpatrick Model



A study by Jonbekova et al. (2022) applies this extended Kirkpatrick Model, arguing that this model aligns well with the objectives of the Kazakhstan scholarship program they examined, as graduates of international education have an impact on the environment in which they carry it out. By focusing on different levels of analysis, it provides an understanding of how graduates reflect changes in their lives that they perceive to be due to the scholarship program in their organizational and social environments. The increased knowledge and skills and social awareness developed in graduates as a result of the training have implications for policy-making, improving workplace efficiency, and training and transfer to others, which in turn impacts social progress through roles such as mentoring, consulting, or advocacy.

Given that international scholarship programs are complex initiatives designed at achieving both individual and societal change, the Kirkpatrick Model’s tiered framework fits well with their

varied objectives and allows for an evidence-based evaluation of their overall efficiency. According to this model, presenting the outputs at different levels will facilitate a more precise evaluation of the scholarship programs' gradational objectives and interventions. A level-by-level evaluation of scholarships is necessary to comprehensively assess the knowledge and skill development they provide to individuals, the reflection of this development on professional life, and the resulting outcomes, such as economic growth, technological transformation, and social change. Hence, this approach is particularly salient when scholarships are analyzed as development assistance.

3.2.3. Integrated Use of ToC and Kirkpatrick Model

The present study employs a combined analytical framework that integrates the ToC with the Kirkpatrick model to evaluate the developmental effectiveness of the Türkiye Scholarships program. These two models serve complementary purposes in the evaluation design. The Kirkpatrick model offers a structured typology for the classification and organization of outcomes across multiple levels, ranging from participant satisfaction to societal impact. This approach enables the systematic identification of individual, organizational, and broader developmental changes. In parallel, the ToC is employed to establish the program's intended logic by reconfiguring the causal pathways from inputs and activities to anticipated short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. While Kirkpatrick's model addresses the question of what changed and at what level, ToC enables the researcher to assess why and how those changes occurred and whether they align with the strategic goals embedded in the program's design. This dual application supports both empirical categorization and causal interpretation of the data collected. The analytical strategy is outlined in Table 4:

Table 4. Integrated Use of ToC and Kirkpatrick Model

Kirkpatrick Level	Theory of Change	Analytical Function
Level 1: Reaction	Inputs → Activities → Outputs	Assesses satisfaction with program delivery and support services
Level 2: Learning	Short-Term Outcomes	Evaluates knowledge, skills, and values acquired

Level 3: Application	Intermediate Outcomes	Traces application of learning to developmental contexts
Level 4: Organizational Results	Long-Term Outcomes	Analyzes institutional or sectoral effects of alums
Level 5: External Results	Impacts	Assesses broader policy, social, or bilateral development impact

ToC framework will be constructed and refined following a document and discourse analysis of Türkiye Scholarships’ policy texts and elite interviews with program implementers. The Kirkpatrick model will be applied to alums interview data. Then, the combined approach will be used to analyze the extent to which observed outcomes align with the program’s intended developmental logic. Having established this analytical framework, the following section turns to the data sources and collection strategies through which these outcomes will be examined.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

3.3.1. Document Analysis

To examine Türkiye’s internationalization of higher education and, more specifically, to analyze the design and objectives of its government-funded scholarship programs, a systematic review of official documents that is to be found in open sources was conducted. As a broader policy frame, the National Development Plans were reviewed—particularly the 7th, 8th, 10th, 11th, and the ongoing 12th Plan as they include references to international students, scholarship policy, and international higher education goals. The core analysis focused on documents produced by the Ministry of Education and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), the institutions responsible for administering the Great Student Project and Türkiye Scholarships. These included Ministry of Education’s Strategic Plan 2010-2014 (first ever plan produced depending on then changed institutional regulations), available and related Annual Activity Reports (namely for the years 2010 and 2011), the YTB’s Establishment Law/Presidential Decree, the Türkiye Scholarships Regulation, its Strategic Plans, Annual Activity Reports, and Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports. Additionally, strategy papers published by YÖK — particularly those on the internationalization of higher education were included as supplementary

material. In total, 37 policy and program documents were reviewed using MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis software enabling coding and categorizing.

Focusing on four major categories: program objectives, strategic goals, implementation actions, and expected output, a qualitative content analysis was conducted as it allows engaging with a wide variety of textual forms to explore meanings, realities, and underlying themes when coding and categorizing (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This structure was used to reconstruct the program's Theory of Change, including its short-, medium-, and long-term developmental ambitions. The analytical focus was placed on the stated intentions, expected impacts, and strategic priorities of the program, with the aim of situating the scholarship scheme within Türkiye's broader development and foreign policy approach.

3.3.2. Interviews with Policymakers

To complement the document analysis, interviews were conducted with program implementers to facilitate deeper interpretation of policy intentions, illuminate implicit assumptions, and understand priorities and expectations beyond those explicitly stated in official texts. These interviews were designed to contribute to reading "between the lines" of formal documents and to inform the reconstruction of the program's underlying logic.

A semi-structured interview was developed to explore the priorities, strategic choices, and institutional assumptions that guided the design and implementation of the Turkish scholarship program. The interview protocol, provided in Table 5, was shaped with input from the dissertation advisor and Thesis Monitoring Committee members. Prior to conducting any interviews, ethical approval was obtained from the Bilkent University Ethics Committee. Details regarding the ethical procedures are provided in the relevant section below.

Table 5. Protocol for Interviews with Policymakers

Design	1. Can you provide an overview of the scholarship program for international students? What was the rationale behind its creation? 2. What are the program's goals? Have the goals been changed over time? Do they differ in different circumstances?
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	3. How is the scholarship program funded, and how are funding decisions made? Are there any performance indicators that are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, and if so, what are they? 4. How were the eligibility criteria for the scholarship program determined? Have there been any changes to the eligibility criteria over time, and if so, why? 5. How does the scholarship program fit into broader policies and initiatives in terms of increasing diplomatic engagements, promoting international education, and reaching national or regional development goals?
Execution	6. Can you describe the application process for the scholarship program? What steps are involved, and how are applications reviewed and selected? 7. How are scholarship recipients monitored and supported during their studies? What kind of resources and services are provided to them, and how are these resources and services evaluated for effectiveness? 8. What are some of the challenges and limitations of the scholarship program? How is the program adapting to changing circumstances, such as shifts in global migration patterns or economic conditions? 9. Can you mention any recent or upcoming changes to the scholarship program, and what the rationale behind these changes is? How do these changes align with the program's overall goals and objectives?
Impact	10. How is the impact of the scholarship program on international students and on the higher education system as a whole measured and evaluated? What metrics are used to determine the program's success or failure, and how are these metrics collected and analyzed? 11. What are your observations in Türkiye's relations with the scholarship holders' origin countries? What are the possible contributions of the scholarship holders and other international students in these relations?
	12. Are there any other thoughts or comments you would like to share on the issue?

Interviews were conducted with a targeted group of five individuals who possess extensive institutional knowledge of the scholarship program:

- Two individuals who were involved in the initial establishment of the implementing institution and later held senior executive roles before leaving the organization.

- Two current officials who have advanced from expert-level positions to upper management and are still actively serving within the institution.
- Additionally, an interview was held with one senior policymaker who had served in an executive role in the predecessor to the Türkiye Scholarships program—the Great Student Project—thereby providing a historical perspective.

The Directorate of International Students at YTB, the department responsible for all stages of the program (promotion, applications, candidate evaluation, selection, scholarship disbursement, and students monitoring), also provided an official written response to the interview questions, ensuring institutional representation.

Table 6. Interviewees' List

Code	Affiliation	Position at Time of Interview	Role in Program	Years Active	Notes
SI-1	YTB (Former)	Former Senior Executive	Program design & institutional founding	2010–2017	Founding period representative
SI-2	YTB (Former)	Former Senior Executive	Program design & implementation	2011–2017	Involved in early reforms
SI-3	YTB (Current)	Current Senior Executive	Program implementation	2011–present	Active in current strategy
SI-4	YTB (Current)	Program Director	Policy coordination & monitoring	2011–present	Active in current strategy
SI-5	Ministry of Education (Ret.)	Former Senior Executive	Great Student Project (predecessor) program implementation	2005–2011	Historical link

All responses reflect the perspectives of individuals who have had the capacity to shape the design, implementation, and revision of the scholarship programs. Former YTB officials granted permission for audio recording during the interviews, whereas current YTB personnel and the former senior official involved in the Great Student Project requested that only written notes be taken. The transcribed audio recordings, the cleaned field notes and the official written response from the International Students Directorate were subsequently transferred to the MAXQDA software environment for coding and content analysis. Although thematic analysis, an

interpretivist technique that allows for more flexible coding of interview transcripts, is usually conducted (Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, 2013), this study attempts to establish a structured focus for program evaluation. Hence, the analysis of interviews was treated as complementary to the document analysis, and contributed significantly to the reconstruction of the program logic and the clarification of its Theory of Change.

3.3.3. Interviews with Alums

The results of the coding and mapping of program design and implementation on documents and official statements needed to be tested through the experiences of the beneficiaries of the program. The experiences and perceptions of the target groups of the program were used to understand whether the aimed outcomes have been achieved, whether the assumptions behind the policy formulation were correct, and whether unexpected outcomes have occurred. For this reason, interviews were planned with individuals who were accepted to the program, came to Türkiye, received training and returned to their countries - or, to a lesser extent, have stayed in Türkiye or moved to other countries.

The interviews were followed in a semi-structured manner and extended with questions related to their unique experiences or different dimensions of a particular topic, in addition to the protocol given at Table 7. The interview questions were derived from the extended Kirkpatrick model, adapted to various levels of analysis. At the individual level, the protocol aims to assess the extent to which scholarships enhance access for disadvantaged groups, contribute to personal and professional development, influence socialization processes, and are perceived as successful in achieving these goals. At the institutional level, the focus is on understanding the impact of skills and knowledge acquired through the international education and scholarship program on alums' participation in social and professional activities. At the societal level, the objective is to evaluate whether graduates have contributed to the international relations and development of their home country, host country, or the country they currently reside in and whether they have assumed leadership roles in social, political, and economic developments.

While the questions were designed to follow a chronological order in the participants' lives, responses to any question could reflect aspects of these issues, and coding over the interview transcripts was performed accordingly. Although the interviews were conducted within a predefined framework, thematic analysis was deemed the most appropriate method, as the aim was to interpret participants' experiences, convey their views and perspectives, and present these as part of an overall evaluation of the program.

Table 7. Protocol for interviews with alums

Prior to their arrival in Türkiye	1. Why did you want to study at university abroad? What were the reasons for choosing Türkiye for your studies? 2. How did you hear about the scholarship programs/higher educational opportunities in Türkiye? 3. What did you know about Türkiye before you arrived? 4. Do you have others in your family who have received university education and who have studied abroad? Would you have still been able to study abroad even without the scholarship program?
During their studies	5. How were the support or resources you received from the scholarship program during your studies? How did these resources help you achieve you grow academically and professionally? 6. Did you attend any extracurricular activity during your studentship? If yes, what were those? 7. To what extent did you engage with the local communities and other international students? 8. Have your views regarding Türkiye changed and, if yes, in what way? 9. Can you speak of any challenges or barriers you faced as an international student studying in a foreign country? Did the scholarship program help mitigate any of these challenges? 10. How have your experiences in Türkiye influenced you? Have your perspective changed in any way?
Upon their graduation	11. What did you do after returning from Türkiye? How did you decide on these? How has your experience with the government-funded scholarship program influenced your career goals or future plans? 12. How do your studies contribute to the work you do? Is your job related to Türkiye in any way? If yes, do you think that your studies brought the relation, and in what way?

	13. Do you continue the relationships you built in Türkiye? What motivates you to continue these? 14. Do you inform others about studies in Türkiye? 15. What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad for you? In comparison to your peers before your studies, what are your current strengths and weaknesses?
	16. Are you in contact with Türkiye alums in your area? Do you see a need for an alum network? What potential benefits could there be in establishing such a network? 17. Are there any other thoughts or comments you would like to share about the scholarship program for international students?
*This question, which had not been in the protocol originally, was added to the protocol in the midst of the field research once its significance was recognized. While studying abroad and the experiences as a foreigner in Türkiye are observed to lead to changes in attitudes and beliefs, the perceived change is sought to be clarified by asking the participants directly.	

The number of interviews was determined based on the concept of data saturation. In line with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) findings, twelve interviews were deemed sufficient for capturing the key themes among alums. Their study demonstrated that, by the twelfth interview, no new themes emerged, indicating saturation. Accordingly, this dissertation adopts twelve interviews per country as adequate within an existing analytical framework. Ensuring saturation in each country allows for a robust within-case analysis and enables meaningful cross-country comparisons.

Interviews were desired to be held face-to-face in a selection of countries, and also views from the stakeholders in international student mobility programs such as embassies, educational counsellors and other official representatives of Türkiye were aspired to be received. Therefore, a fieldwork was designed and support from YTB was sought. Under "Türkiye Alumni Program," YTB supported the project and provided grant for accommodation and travels. Visits paid to the determined countries, – North Macedonia between 1-5 March 2024; to Kyrgyzstan between 11-15 April 2024; and to Egypt between 1-6 May 2024 – were funded by this grant, and majority of the participants were met in person. Details regarding interviews and field research are provided in the coming pages.

3.4. Country Selection, Sampling, and Constraints

3.4.1. Determination of Countries

In determining the countries of origin and profile characteristics of alums to be interviewed, several criteria were considered, including the historical evolution of the scholarship program, the foreign policy relevance of specific countries to Türkiye, and insights drawn from prior academic research on international education and development cooperation. Additionally, guidance was obtained from the dissertation advisor as well as from interviews with current and former YTB officials. Informal consultations conducted during project development and application for research support also helped shape the participant selection strategy.

From a program evaluation perspective, it was considered essential to ensure representation across multiple dimensions, including the geographic regions where Türkiye Scholarships have been offered, academic disciplines, gender, graduation cohorts. Accordingly, while purposive sampling was used to deliberately capture variation along these lines, snowball sampling was also employed to expand the pool of participants. Current interviewees were asked to refer additional graduates within their networks, particularly from underrepresented ethnicities or profiles. The rationale for country and regional selection is explained in detail below, followed by a summary of participant profiles.

As mentioned above, at least twelve graduates from each region, Türkiye especially inclines with its scholarships; namely Central Asia and Caucasus, Middle East and North Africa, and the Balkans, were aimed at this research. The Central Asian Turkic Republics and Turkic communities at the Caucasus have been the focus of scholarships offered under the Great Student Project since 1992. Subsequently, the Balkans and the Middle Eastern countries were also designated as targets. While these regions are identified as the samples for this research, the sub-Saharan African region is excluded because it has only become prominent in development cooperation in the 2010s and has gained an important place in Turkish foreign policy with the African Opening Policy of 2005 - where student mobility is also encouraged (Atabaş & Köse, 2023). Countries from the three regions are chosen also in terms of income groups as the main approach of this research is development.

As per the general number of international students, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2023a) reveals that, on average, 29 percent of international students coming to higher education in Türkiye from 1998 to 2021 are from the Middle East and North Africa, 24 percent from Central Asia, and 10 percent from the Balkans. For the study, instead of Syria (12 percent), Azerbaijan (12 percent) and Greece (3 percent), which are the top sending countries from their regions, Egypt (1 percent), Kyrgyzstan (2 percent), and North Macedonia (1 percent) were preferred.

Türkiye was the first country to recognize the Turkic states of Central Asia when they became independent following the collapse of the Soviet Union (MFA, 2023). Ethnic and cultural ties and historical affinities form the basis of the relations between these countries. Ever since the introduction of the scholarship program, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been among the top ten countries sending the most students to Türkiye. Of these four countries, Kyrgyzstan, which is a lower middle-income country (Hamadeh, Van Rompaey, Metreau & Eapen, 2022), was specifically selected from this region. In this research, evaluating the scholarship program as development assistance, while developing and least developed countries could potentially be investigated, it was deemed appropriate to focus on the results for the more disadvantaged groups in order to understand the impact.

Azerbaijan's long-standing close relations with Türkiye (Guliyeva, 2023), the two societies' perceptions of partnership (Abedi, 2019), and the economic and cultural cooperation (Nurmammadov, 2016) were thought to pose challenges for tracking the marginal outcomes of the scholarship program. On the other hand, studies exist that demonstrate the contribution of Azerbaijani international students to the social transformation in their country upon graduation (Ergun & Kondakçı, 2021). The fact that the contribution of Turkish graduates to their societies has not been evaluated in Kyrgyzstan and that relations with Türkiye were initiated in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union through a series of initiatives, including the Great Student Project, makes Kyrgyzstan a suitable country study.

Founded in 1995, Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University demonstrates the high-level strategy of the two countries' cooperation in higher education and points to the diversity of Türkiye's

educational assistance through the support provided to the university. As Ünal (2019), one of the academicians of this university, stated in his research, more than 7 thousand Kyrgyz have graduated from Turkish higher education. Despite the fact, YTB lists no alum community in Kyrgyzstan, relevance of which is discussed below. In light of these findings, Kyrgyzstan was determined as the target country for the selection of research subjects among the countries in the region.

When it comes to the Middle East and North Africa region, Syria has been the country of origin for the most significant number of international students in Turkish higher education averaging over the last twenty-five years, even though the number of Syrian students studying in Türkiye had not reached 300 per year before 2010. It constitutes an anomaly as the primary target of Türkiye's aid activities, notably because of the civil war. Egypt, which ranks sixth among the Middle East and North Africa countries sending the highest number of students to Türkiye, was chosen due to its central role in the region, dynamic population and their high demand for higher education, historical and cultural ties with Türkiye, as well as the absence of an alum network among the alum associations listed by YTB.

According to the OECD CRS database 2019, which provides country-specific data on scholarships, Egypt received 1.54 percent of the scholarships offered. According to UNESCO UIS data, 1.89 percent of the 153,822 students enrolled in higher education in Türkiye in 2019 were from Egypt. Egypt ranks thirteenth among the countries of origin of scholarship students and eleventh when all students with or without scholarships are considered. When these statistics are assessed, the importance of maintaining the proportion of students from Egypt, at least as of 2019, is observed. Egypt, one of the countries from which Türkiye attracts the most students from the African continent, is also a lower middle income country (Hamadeh et. al., 2022). It is also a gateway country between the Middle East and Africa, and was set as a target as it can be considered representative in this regard.

Finally, the Balkans, a region to which Türkiye attaches special importance in each period of its foreign policy due to historical and cultural ties, and with which Türkiye continues to improve relations, should be considered when implementing scholarship programs. All countries in the

Balkans, except Greece and Romania, are in the upper middle income group. Although Greece sends the most students to Türkiye under the scholarship program, the majority of these students are ethnic Turks, aligning closely with the program's objective of supporting ethnic Turkish communities in the Balkans. According to the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita data in which this classification is made, North Macedonia has the lowest GNI per capita with 2022 data, and determined as the case.

North Macedonia was chosen as the sample country also to assess the broader goals of the program and to reflect greater diversity. It encompasses a mixed demographic, including ethnic Turks, Albanians, and Bosniaks from the Muslim population, as well as Macedonians from the Christian population. This diversity provides a more comprehensive understanding of how the scholarship program serves varied ethnic and religious groups in the region. Furthermore, the absence of an accredited alum association in North Macedonia offers an additional dimension to analyze the program's long-term impact in a context without formal alum networks.

YTB's official website for Türkiye Alums (Türkiye Alumni, n.d.) lists 34 alum associations from 30 countries and states that YTB has supported more than 100 projects run by these associations. The associations and these projects portray a picture of the state of the alums. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that, according to the YTB network, there are associations in the countries that send the most students from the specified regions, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iraq, Yemen, Albania, and Serbia, while there is no organization representing alums in the preferred countries for this study, which also send a large number of students. The importance and contribution of these organizations can briefly be understood from the fact that alum networks provide a platform for building solidarity and support for social and economic reforms and promoting advocacy on these issues (Jonbekova, 2024; Campbell, 2016); and their absence may signal a challenge in program goals and outcomes.

YTB provided invaluable assistance in reaching the interviewees in the designated countries. Given the risks of identity disclosure, bias, or non-diversity in interviewing YTB-nominated alums, each subsequent candidate interviewee was selected after determining whether the interview would address these issues. Support was also sought from the Turkish institutions

visited, and alums with whom the institution was in contact were reached. The alums interviewed were consulted for new participants. This snowball sampling was followed until the intended number was reached. Individuals who had received scholarships in various years during the 30 years of the scholarships and from different fields of study and diverse professions were interviewed.

3.4.2. Participant Profiles

The list of interview participants, along with the anonymized codes used to refer to them throughout the study, is provided in the Appendix A at the end of the dissertation. Each code includes the year of graduation, which was intentionally included to distinguish participants and to observe potential effects based on the time elapsed since completing the program.

Among the participants:

- 12 individuals came to Türkiye under the Great Student Project;
- 2 participants were in Türkiye during the transitional period between the two programs;
- 30 participants studied under the Türkiye Scholarships program.

Although interviews were conducted with approximately 50 alums from three countries, only 44 interviews were included in the final analysis. This is because the study specifically focuses on individuals who were direct beneficiaries of the state-funded scholarship program. Notably, while all are referred to as alums, one individual from each country had left the program without graduating. These interviews were still included in the analysis to assess whether holding a degree influenced developmental outcomes or trajectories.

In terms of academic levels:

- 16 participants completed a master's degree;
- 6 completed doctoral studies;
- 22 received undergraduate education;
- Among these, two individuals received multiple degrees (e.g., BA + MA).

This observation aligns with program implementation data, which suggests that repeat scholarships to the same individual are rare.

Regarding disciplinary background:

- 21 participants studied in the field of economics and administrative sciences;
- 10 in STEM disciplines;
- 8 in Turkish language and related fields;
- 4 in journalism and media studies.

Although data from both the Great Student Project and Türkiye Scholarships indicate that economics and administrative sciences students typically constitute a smaller proportion of overall beneficiaries compared to other social sciences and STEM, this discipline is overrepresented in the sample. This divergence is acknowledged as a sampling limitation, and the findings should be interpreted accordingly.

In addition, the cities in which participants studied have been noted, as alums experiences indicate meaningful differences between studying in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir versus relatively less central cities such as Eskişehir, Gaziantep, or Sakarya. These urban versus peripheral educational experiences are discussed in greater depth in the findings chapter.

3.4.3. Reflections on Field Interviews and Research Challenges

Conducting field interviews across multiple data sources—elite interviews, alums interviews, and institutional document analysis—presented several methodological and practical challenges.

Limitations arose in terms of access to current officials, variations in consent procedures (such as restrictions on audio recording), and the overrepresentation of certain disciplines within the alums sample. Additionally, logistical constraints, differing degrees of institutional responsiveness, and the sensitivity of discussing state-administered programs required constant adaptation in the field. These challenges, while expected to some extent in qualitative research on public institutions, shaped both the depth and structure of data collection and are reflected in the interpretation of findings.

During the visit in North Macedonia, 15 face-to-face interviews with alums were completed in three cities. Due to the presence of non-scholarship alums among the interviewees and to ensure gender and ethnicity diversity, 3 more interviews were conducted online after the field visit was completed. In total, 15 interviews were included in the analysis. In addition to the interviews with the alums for the results, the Embassy of Türkiye in Skopje, the Education Counsellorship of Türkiye in Skopje, the Project Coordination Office of TİKA in Skopje and the Union of Turkish Civil Society Organizations in Macedonia (MATUSITEB) were also visited and interviewed to learn about their experiences and observations on the scholarship program and student mobility to Türkiye.

In Kyrgyzstan, 17 graduates were interviewed and included in the analysis. In addition, the Embassy of Türkiye in Bishkek, Türkiye Maarif Foundation Bishkek Educational Complex, TİKA Bishkek Project Coordination Office, and Türkiye Bishkek Education Counsellorship were visited. Their views on the impact of Türkiye's publicly funded scholarship programs on bilateral relations, as well as the observations on the socio-economic status of Türkiye's graduates and their contributions to their communities, were obtained from these stakeholders.

Lastly, during the 5-day visit to Egypt, 4 alums who received scholarships were interviewed. The visit coincided with May 3-6, when the May 1st Labor Day holiday was postponed, and the Easter holiday was combined with the weekend, which prevented the interviews from being conducted. In the meantime, interviewing alums who were out of the city or wanted to spend their vacations resting could not be possible. In addition, a small number of alums declined to participate in the study—a contrast to previous fieldwork experiences. This reluctance may be attributed to a general atmosphere of caution, possibly influenced by Egypt's political environment and the sensitivity of its bilateral relations with Türkiye. Online tools were used to continue the interviews after the visit to reach the number of interviews required for the research. Another 4 alums who reside in Egypt, 3 alums who continue to stay in Türkiye, and 1 alum who migrated to a third country were interviewed. In addition, the Turkish Embassy in Cairo, the Turkish Education Counselor's Office in Cairo, and the Yunus Emre Institute were visited during the fieldwork.

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

As required by the researcher's institution, Bilkent University, for research with human participants, an application was made to the Human Research Ethics Committee, and the Decision/Meeting file of the Committee numbered 2023_05_02_01 reported its approval of the application. Participants were provided with information and consent forms explaining the details of the research, the conditions of participation, and how their data was to be used. This form, an example of which can be seen in the Appendix B, was presented as a hard copy in face-to-face interviews and collected after being signed. In the online interviews, while the interview was being recorded, confirmation was requested that they had read and understood the soft copy form and agreed to participate in the study. These signed and verbal confirmations are to be preserved by the researcher for five years and then destroyed.

The names of the graduates who participated in the study are kept anonymous. Yet, the information relevant to the study, such as year of graduation, field of study, and occupation were provided to accommodate the comparison of academic formation, years of experience, and occupation, and judge their comments based on their background.

Sample selection may raise questions about the applicability of the study's findings to other countries not included in the research and even to other graduates in the countries included in the research who were not included in the interviews. While the in-depth analysis of each graduate's situation through interviews yields context-dependent results, this research does not claim that its results apply to the entire universe of international graduates. However, this does not mean it contradicts scientific knowledge's generalizability. The fact that the data obtained in qualitative research produces knowledge that is potentially valid under similar conditions rather than producing universal generalizations shows the primary value of qualitative research (Drisko, 2024). Qualitative research has its own methods for generalization, and the transfer of findings from case to case is one of them (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014).

While interviews provide essential insights into people's meaning-making, emotional states, and cultural repertoires, they have considerable methodological constraints. One such concern is the inherent subjectivity that both the interviewer and the interviewee experience. Interviewees may

provide comments they believe are expected rather than those that reflect their actual opinions, misremember prior events, or produce inconsistent responses despite repeated questioning (Nicolson, 2003; Lowes & Prowse, 2001). Simultaneously, the interviewer may unintentionally influence responses, use inconsistent coding for qualitative data, or misread the meanings expressed by the participants. These difficulties are exacerbated by what Lamont and Swidler (2014) refer to as the tendency of interviewees to yield artificially cohesive life narratives. Participants are prompted to create simplified narratives that may mask the contradictions, ambiguities, and complexity that define actual social experiences due to the interview's structured and retrospective format. When taken as a whole, these problems highlight the interpretive and epistemological difficulties inherent in the interview technique, which continue to be major topics of methodological discussion.

To alleviate such problems, the researcher used open-ended questions — repeating them in varied forms when necessary— to capture the participants' experiences and perceptions extensively. Following the recommendations of Bergelson et al. (2022), trust was attempted to be established through that the research objectives were introduced in full detail, informed consent was obtained based on anonymity, and interviews were conducted privately in settings preferred by the participants. During the coding of interview transcripts, an evaluative framework based on the Theory of Change and the Kirkpatrick model was applied, which is aimed to reduce normative interpretation. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these measures remains open to interpretation.

3.6. Concluding Remarks

This study undertakes a systematic evaluation of the Türkiye Scholarships program, focusing on its design, implementation, intended goals, and developmental outcomes. Centering the analysis on the program's beneficiaries—its alums—the research examines their current socio-economic status in relation to their perceptions of the program's contribution. The analysis unfolded in two complementary phases. First, a qualitative content analysis of official documents was conducted to extract the program's stated objectives, assumptions, and strategic priorities. Second, thematic analysis was applied to interview data to identify patterns of alignment, deviation, and contribution to development goals.

All interview transcripts were coded using MAXQDA, with categories derived from an integrated framework combining the ToC and the Kirkpatrick model. An analytical matrix is used to map alums-reported outcomes against the program's intended change pathways, enabling a structured comparison between design expectations and actual results. Findings from documents, elite interviews, and alums narratives are then triangulated to evaluate the program's effectiveness and its alignment with Türkiye's broader development cooperation objectives.

The following chapter examines the policy objectives of the Türkiye Scholarships program, drawing from thematic analysis of official documents—such as annual reports, strategic plans, and regulations—as well as interviews with current and former institutional executives. These objectives can be broadly grouped under three domains: foreign policy, development cooperation, and higher education policy. Given the diversity of these aims, this study focuses specifically on the program's development cooperation dimension, offering a clearly defined and analytically feasible lens for impact evaluation. As emphasized by the OECD Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation (2014), impact analyses often target a restricted and strategically relevant set of outcomes.

This approach aligns with broader international development frameworks. For instance, the World Bank has long emphasized that tertiary education enhances a country's capacity to engage in a knowledge-based economy, contributing to poverty reduction, human capital formation, civil society strengthening, and social cohesion (World Bank, 2002). In line with these principles, scholarship programs are seen as tools to support the transfer of knowledge and technology, improve employment prospects for disadvantaged groups, and enhance social capital in the recipients' home countries. Similar criteria have been adopted by NORAD to evaluate the developmental impact of its graduate scholarship initiatives (Andersen & Tobiassen, 2007). Analyzing the Türkiye Scholarships program as a mechanism of development assistance is therefore both analytically justified and aligned with international practice in evaluating higher education's role in global development cooperation.

CHAPTER IV:

THE TÜRKIYE'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM'S THEORY OF CHANGE

This chapter reconstructs the ToC underpinning Türkiye's state-funded international scholarship policy, with particular focus on *BÖP* and the Türkiye Scholarships Program. Based on a systematic analysis of program documents, strategic plans, and elite interviews, it seeks to make explicit the mechanisms, intended outcomes, and assumptions that guide the design and implementation of the program. Given the limited availability of data on BÖP, the first section provides a provisional reconstruction of its logic and objectives. The second section develops a more detailed ToC framework for the Türkiye Scholarships Program, drawing on comprehensive data and institutional records.

The chapter does not offer an evaluative assessment but rather conceptualizes the program's intended causal pathways—from inputs and activities to outputs, outcomes, and anticipated long-term impact. In doing so, it maps how Türkiye has positioned its scholarship policy as an instrument of development cooperation, capacity building, and public diplomacy. This reconstructed ToC serves as the analytical foundation for the next chapter, which evaluates the extent to which the program's implementation and effects align with its intended design.

4.1. Great Student Project Era, 1992-2011

This section constructs a preliminary Theory of Change for the Great Student Project (*BÖP*), drawing on policy documents and an elite interview with a former policymaker. The objective is to identify both continuities and ruptures between *BÖP* and its successor, the Türkiye Scholarships Program, while also illustrating the conditions under which the need for transformation emerged. By mapping the underlying assumptions and mechanisms of the earlier initiative, this section provides the analytical basis for understanding the evolution of Türkiye's international scholarship policy.

There was no mention of a vision or objective for international students in the development plans which are the overarching policy document showing the national vision for the designated period, prior to the Seventh Five Year Development Plan (1996-2000) (DPT, 1995). Being the first document to touch upon these issues, the Seventh Plan included the title of "Opening to Overseas and Integration to the World (Adjustment to European Union) Project," where "activities such as student exchanges, scholarships, etc. undertaken in the field of education with" Turkic Republics were planned to be continued (DPT, 1995, p.86). This statement can be argued to be an indication of that the student exchange and scholarship programs promoted within the scope of *BÖP* with Turkic Republics are deemed significant for Türkiye to foster its international relations and strengthen its globalization.

Similarly, in the Eighth Plan, under the heading of Economic Relations with Countries in the Region and Other Countries, this subject was covered in the context of Relations with Turkic Republics. *BÖP* was explicitly referred to and the number of those who received training within this scope was specified, and the continuity of the implementation was identified as a goal for the respective period (DPT, 2000, p.52; Paragraphs 383 and 390). It is plausible to consider the coverage of the program within the framework of economic relations as an implication of the program's relevance for these relations.

As of 2010, public institutions started to prepare strategic plans in parallel with the Development Plan periods as mandated by the Public Financial Management and Control Law No. 5018. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the executor of

BÖP, prepared its first strategic plan for the 2010-2014 period and set out its goals and objectives for this scholarship program. In 2010, YTB became the secretariat agency of the International Student Evaluation Council by the Deputy Prime Minister with the participation of all relevant ministries and agencies made policy decision. The executing organization continued to be the MoNE, when YTB was an observer of the implementation of the program. However, the problems in the distribution of tasks and the necessity to renew the scholarship program led to the complete transfer of the program to the management of YTB in 2012.

Prior to this unanticipated transition, the MoNE 2010-2014 Strategic Plan addressed the scholarship program within the framework of the theme of “improving relations with Turkic Republics, and Turkic and related communities” (MoNE, 2009). In this context, different educational collaborations such as the organization of various language and culture activities and textbook support were emphasized, while increasing the use of scholarship quotas was stated as a clear goal for the scholarship program (MoNE, 2009, p. 198). The low usage of scholarship quotas indicates a limited interest in scholarships. This can be attributed to the shortcomings in the promotion and operation of the process, rather than a lack of interest in pursuing scholarships for study in Türkiye.

In addition, a review of MoNE’s 2010 and 2011 annual reports on the design and operation of the scholarship program revealed very limited coverage of the program. For example, only one page of the 177-page annual report was devoted to the program (MoNE, 2011, p. 137). This limitation can be related to the level of the institution’s embracement of the project and the significance attached to the program. This problem, among others, led to the complete transfer of the project to the coordinating board within two years. In addition, the limited interest to activities at the higher education level by the MoNE also shapes the conclusions of this study.

The 2010 activity report provided various details regarding the background, resources, and administration of the scholarship program, while also highlighting activities such as graduation ceremonies. However, one point that remains unclear in the reports is the distinction of responsibilities between the Directorate General for Foreign Relations and the Directorate General for Overseas Education with respect to BÖP. Although several

documents identify the Directorate General for Overseas Education as the responsible unit, the official mandate—described as managing “all duties and services related to foreign students who come to Türkiye either through scholarships provided by foreign governments and organizations or granted by the Republic of Türkiye, as well as those who come on their own account” (MoNE, 2011, p. 21)—suggests that the Directorate General for Foreign Relations may hold primary responsibility.

The 2011 Activity Report presented that the Directorate General for Overseas Education was dissolved, and EU-related tasks were merged under the Foreign Relations Directorate. It also indicated that this unit was responsible for students arriving or departing within the framework of “Government Scholarships” established by bilateral or multilateral agreements (MoNE, 2012). BÖP, however, appeared to operate under a different arrangement. Even so, the report only briefly mentioned the program, referring to a plan of transition to a digital system for receiving applications and tracking student and alums’ status (MoNE, 2012, p. 87).

These framework documents on the design and execution of the scholarship program during the BÖP period, the analysis based on the interview with the senior manager of the program, and the layers of Theory of Change constructed within this context are presented below in Table X. In essence, according this Theory of Change, the main goals include building skilled human resources and contributing to the regional development models among other soft power aims, first in the Turkic States right after their independence and later in the Balkans and the Middle East. While supporting developing capacity in different sectors and creating a transnational alum network of professionals, Türkiye also expects to promote its higher education internationalization, which would contribute to its global expansion economically as well as politically.

The scholarships program sought to achieve its goals through a set of coordinated instruments that integrated education with development and diplomacy. Efforts to promote the program included various outreach methods, ranging from media advertisements to official diplomatic channels. While entrance exams such as the TCS were introduced to standardize selection, in countries where such exams were not held, students were identified through selection committees. Beyond academic admission, the

program aimed to facilitate linguistic integration and academic preparedness through one-year Turkish language education at Turkish and Foreign Language Research Center (*Türkçe ve Yabancı Dil Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi – TÖMER*), alongside providing accommodation, healthcare, and guidance services. To complement academic access, student unions, cultural activities, graduation ceremonies, and alum meetings were organized to reinforce public diplomacy objectives. Activity reports also showed that the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were gradually established by tracking scholarship quota utilization and graduation rates.



Table 8. Theory of Change for the Great Student Project

Content Topic	Findings	Document Source	Mapped ToC Layer
Institutional Support and Resources	Development of strategic policy documents; funding by state institutions; bilateral education protocols; hosting capacity in Türkiye; coordination of inter-institutional efforts; exam design and implementation; determining state quotas; diploma recognition support; legislative regulations; deployment of online application systems and regional application offices	MoNE Activity Reports (2010, 2011); Seventh and Eighth Development Plans; YTB Activity Reports (2010, 2011); Personal communication, SI 5	Inputs
Program Implementation Practices	Implementation of selection exams (TCS); embassy engagement; promotion; student orientation and mentorship programs; monitoring and guidance by provincial directorates of MoNE; graduation ceremonies; improvement of bursaries; Turkish language programs; country representation and national associations.	Personal communication, SI 5; MoNE Activity Reports (2010, 2011); MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; YTB Annual Reports (2010, 2011)	Activities
Quantitative Program Reach	Reaching to 57 countries; 1,500 scholarships annually; allocation of 42 thousand scholarships in total until 2010; 21,948 international students enrolled in Türkiye, of whom 10,473 (47 percent) were bursary recipients in the 2009–2010 academic year; increase in the share of international student pool in higher education (from 54 percent in 2006 to 64 percent in 2010)	MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; YTB 2010 Activity Report; Personal communication, SI 5	Outputs
Immediate Educational Adjustments	Turkish language acquisition; placements to academic programs and monitoring trajectories; vocational training for underqualified entrants; access to social and administrative support, and enhanced social adaptation; graduation ceremonies	MoNE 2010 Activity Report; YTB 2010 Activity Report; Personal communication, SI 5	Short-Term Outcomes

	and alum gatherings to contribute to the development of a positive image of Türkiye among students and their families		
Graduate Pathways and Employment	Continued engagement with Türkiye through further education or employment; returning home countries and professional integration to home sectors in public administration, academia, or private enterprises; development of local human capital; contribution to Türkiye's higher education internationalization	MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; YTB 2010 Activity Report; Personal communication, SI 5	Intermediate Outcomes
Geopolitical and Diplomatic Strategy	Human capital development; linguistic and cultural integration; enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation; higher education internationalization	Seventh Development Plan; MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; Personal communication, SI 5; YTB 2010 Activity Report	Stated Long-Term Goals
Embedded Objectives	Economic and institutional transformation support in post-Soviet domain; strengthened transnational socioeconomic networks; expansion of Türkiye's cultural and political influence	Personal communication, SI 5	Intended Impacts
Underlying Causal Logic	-Providing access to education will trigger development-oriented change in the sending states. -Recipients will maintain long-term ties with Türkiye.	Seventh Development Plan; MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; Personal communication, SI 5	Assumptions
Monitoring and Evaluation Tools	Tracking of quota utilization; graduation rates; students' satisfaction and effectiveness of services	MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; MoNE 2010 Activity Report; YTB 2010 Activity Report	Evaluation Logic

Developmental and Cultural Vision	Strategic response to regional educational and cultural responsibilities arising from Türkiye's historical, cultural, and geopolitical ties with Turkic and cognate communities; a means of cultural integration, human capital enhancement, developmental tool, and regional leadership; a vehicle of mutually beneficial engagement	MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014	Normative Framing
International Competition and Risks	Russia's regional influence; global trends in international student mobility; the shift in institutional regulations and capacity	Personal communication, SI 5; YTB 2010 Activity Report	External Factors

The only known public evaluation of the program reveals that 27,112 out of the 39,232 quotas allocated for scholarships were utilized, with 5,377 of these students continuing their education and 7,464 graduating among those enrolled from 1992 to 2008 (Yarman Vural & Alkan, 2009). Consequently, while the utilization of the quota reached 70 percent, the graduation rate remained at 35 percent, according to calculations that excluded those who continued their studies. While this situation in the graduation rate points to a critical problem, the fact that scholarships “continued despite the Marmara Earthquake in 1999 and the economic crisis erupted in 2001, even if the number of scholarships decreased” (personal communication, SI5) shows an important resilience. Facing certain problems such as these, institutional restructuring and changes in foreign policy led to the renewal of the program. The scholarship program, which had been a resilient practice, has begun to be addressed more comprehensively under the name of Türkiye Scholarships. The official documents analyzed in the following section and the elite interviews included in the analysis reveal continuity and changes in this policy. Highlighting these aspects contributes to the relevance of a holistic program evaluation by identifying the shared goals and objectives as well as implementation methods.

4.2. Türkiye Scholarships Era, 2012-Present

As previously noted, the challenges highlighted in interviews regarding the implementation of BÖP necessitated the program’s revision. In addition to foreign policy considerations—which called for a more adaptable programming model capable of responding rapidly to Türkiye’s new regional engagements and shifting contextual needs—key operational issues were identified. These included inconsistencies and shortcomings in the selection of scholarship candidates, allocation of university and departmental placements, and monitoring of student academic performance (personal communications with SI 1, SI 2, SI 3 and SI 4). Although all interviewees emphasized that the scholarship programs are intrinsically linked to Türkiye’s broader foreign policy objectives, high-level policy documents provide only a limited conceptual framework regarding the conduct of these programs.

The issue of international students, previously absent from the Ninth Development Plan, gained prominence in Türkiye’s policy agenda with the Tenth Development Plan (2014–

2018). It recognized international higher education as an opportunity and set goals to diversify institutions and attract international students and scholars (Ministry of Development, 2013: Paragraphs 57 and 165). The plan also introduced a “Program for Improving International Cooperation Infrastructure for Development,” aiming to offer academic programs for students and academics from least developed and transitional countries, though YTB was not listed as a responsible actor (2013, pp. 198-199). The plan thus framed international student policies within the context of development cooperation and capacity-building rather than scholarships.

The Eleventh Development Plan (2019–2023) continued this trajectory, linking the internationalization of higher education to development cooperation. It specified placement of students from priority development countries (SBB, 2019: Paragraph 838.1) and facilitated work permits for qualified international scholarship students (Paragraph 838.2), emphasizing both education and labor market contributions to Türkiye’s development strategy.

The Twelfth Development Plan (2024–2028) further strengthens this approach by continuing Türkiye Scholarships under internationalization goals (SBB, 2023: Paragraph 973.3), institutionalizing the Türkiye alum network to maintain strong ties with graduates (Paragraphs 790.4, 973.4), and focusing less on scholarships as an end in itself and more on leveraging graduates as actors in Türkiye’s broader foreign policy and development objectives.

The official documentation of YTB has articulated a more comprehensive vision for Türkiye Scholarships, integrating public diplomacy, higher education internationalization, and development cooperation. As outlined in the 2010 Establishment Law (Official Gazette, 6 April 2010), YTB was tasked with defining the national strategy for international students, establishing general policies for their education and social integration, and ensuring continuity of relations post-graduation. This mandate was operationalized through detailed procedural regulations in the Türkiye Scholarships Regulation (Official Gazette, 14 June 2014), which formalized a systematic model comprising planning, promotion, application, selection, placement, language

instruction, cultural and academic guidance, scholarship administration, and alums coordination.

While the Regulation on Türkiye Scholarships issued by YTB in 2014 required “scholarship students to return to their countries within a maximum of six months after their graduation” without any exceptions (Official Gazette, 14 June 2014), the amendment to the regulation in 2021 has extended the period to one year and excluded “those who are deemed appropriate to work in our country by issuing work permits within the scope of the qualified workforce needed by our country” (Official Gazette, 30 July 2021). This regulation, in line with the framework policy document of the period – the Eleventh Development Plan, – has included the support of raising skilled labor and its utilization within Türkiye among the program’s objectives.

The recent development plans, particularly the Eleventh and Twelfth Development Plans, conceptualize international higher education as a strategic field for cultivating qualified human capital and leveraging this capacity for national development. Within this framework, the legal and institutional basis of the Türkiye Scholarships Program aims to establish Türkiye as a central hub for international education. The program is designed to foster long-term cultural, economic, and diplomatic linkages through scholarship ties with international students. This approach reflects an international higher education policy that is explicitly aligned with Türkiye’s international development cooperation objectives while simultaneously serving national interests.

4.2.1. Inputs

One of the coordinated endeavors directed towards the newly independent Turkic Republics was the introduction of scholarship programs. Türkiye unilaterally initiated the provision of scholarships to international students for the first time as part of this foreign policy initiative. The initial plan to offer 2,000 scholarships was augmented by Turgut Özal, the president at the time, who intervened to increase the number to 10,000, with the aim of “elevating the program to a level befitting Türkiye’s reputation” (personal interview, SI 1). After that, despite a decade of rule by the same party that came to power in 2001, and despite its various diplomatic initiatives and openings, scholarship programs for international students were hardly on the agenda. The minimal

presence of the program in top policy documents, and especially the limited coverage in the strategy of the responsible institution, the Ministry of National Education, which is normally responsible for the national education strategy and works on the basis of basic education level, provides insight into the extent of ownership of the program. In the meetings of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), BÖP has only been referred to a few times in its latest years, only by Reşat Doğru, a representative of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party, who argued that the program should be paid more attention (TBMM, 2008, December 18; 2009, May 5; 2009, December 1; 2010, July 14; 2010, December 14).

The situation indicates a weak political commitment to the program by the government. This was confirmed by the senior bureaucrats in charge of the program, who acknowledged that measures were undertaken to guarantee the continuity of such initiatives, as a result of their awareness and acknowledgment of such programs' significance, as well as to the recognition of their potential to yield long-term benefits for foreign policy (personal communication, SI 1, SI 2, and SI 5). The formulation of the strategy, the legislation, the establishment of program goals, and the efforts to assess its outcomes were all developed under the auspices of the bureaucracy overseeing the program. The interviews indicated that the YTB demonstrated commendable responsibility and effectively embraced the program.

Beyond ownership regarding the planning of the program, the inputs required for its execution include the budget, legal framework, institutional arrangements, and external partnerships. As the primary input, the public budget is allocated to cover tuition fee exemption, monthly stipend, one-time round-trip airfare, accommodation, health insurance, and Turkish language education, similar to the BÖP process. In addition, various forms of assistance have been intermittently provided, including supplementary annual payments, such as clothing and stationery allowances during the BÖP period (MoNE 2010 Activity Report, 2011, p. 137), and the "Outstanding Achievement Scholarship," which encompasses additional allowance payments for students demonstrating exceptional academic performance in recent years (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2023, p. 46).

In 2012, when the program was transformed, monthly stipends were significantly enhanced and set at 500 Turkish Lira for undergraduate students, 750 TL for master's students and 1000 TL for PhD students (equivalent to 278, 417 and 556 US Dollars, respectively, according to the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye benchmark exchange rate as of end-June 2012) (YTB, 2013). While these generous stipends served to the competitiveness of the program, they could only be updated to 1000 TL for undergraduate, 1400 TL for master's and 1600 TL for doctoral students (60 USD, 85 USD and 96 USD according to the end-June 2022 exchange rate) in 2022 (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2023). Yet, in addition to the monthly stipend, the overall expenditure on supplementary benefits represents a significant commitment for a middle-income country such as Türkiye. The evaluation of BÖP led by the Ministry of National Education indicates a total of USD 128,755,553 allocated during the 15-year implementation period until 2007 (Yarman Vural and Alkan, 2009, p. 12). For the program under the purview of YTB, the value expended between 2011 and 2024 amounted to 591,267,000 USD.¹⁰

The legal and institutional framework of Türkiye Scholarships originates from the founding law of YTB (Official Gazette, 6 April 2010) and its subsequent restructuring under Decree No. 4 (Official Gazette, 15 July 2018) following Türkiye's transition to a presidential system. While the original law established the International Students Evaluation Board to coordinate policies and strategies with key governmental stakeholders, this board was not reinstated under the decree, leaving questions about decision-making processes until the Türkiye Scholarships Regulation was amended in 2021. Another key framing development was the renaming of the Department of Foreign Students to the Department of International Students, signaling a conceptual shift towards a more inclusive and globally oriented program structure. The 2018 decree also

¹⁰ The total expenditure on international students between 2010 and 2024 was calculated by summing the annual realized amounts allocated under the budget item "Current Transfers" (*Cari Transferler*), which is the primary mechanism through which Türkiye Scholarships and related international student support are disbursed by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). For years where direct data on international student expenditures was not reported, an estimate was produced by applying the average ratio of international student spending to 'Transfers to Households' observed in years with available data. This provides a reasonable approximation aligned with the institutional budget structure and spending patterns. Exchange rates for conversion to constant US dollars were taken from annual averages as reported by the Central Bank of Türkiye and IMF databases."

codified previously informal practices of providing academic, financial, and social support, thus formalizing a comprehensive programmatic framework that integrates student services within the broader administrative structure of YTB.

The Türkiye Scholarships Regulation, first enacted in 2014 and subsequently revised in 2021 (Official Gazette, 17 June 2014), provides the legal and strategic framework for the program's implementation. It outlines core elements including strategic objectives, scholarship processes, student and institutional responsibilities, and mandatory Turkish language instruction, regardless of university language requirements. In parallel, instead of students returning to their universities in other provinces after attending Turkish language centers in certain cities in some cases, language centers were established in each relevant province, enabling students to make a single effort to settle and adapt (personal communications with SI 1 and SI 2). The revised regulation also highlights Academic and Vocational Guidance (Article 17), promoting additional certification, internships, and seminars to enhance students' professional skills. Social and Cultural Guidance (Article 16) seeks to foster familiarity with Türkiye's cultural heritage and mutual cultural exchange through extracurricular activities tailored to students' needs. Notably, the regulation mandates Alums Coordination (Article 19), emphasizing sustained engagement between graduates and YTB through structured activities and alums networks, thereby reinforcing long-term connections and program impact.

Alums engagement also finds its place among the formal goals and objectives of the program released with the Presidency's Strategic Plan (2019-2023), further structures the formal institutional framework of Türkiye Scholarships (YTB, 2021). The plan sets measurable performance indicators across three core areas: strengthening Türkiye Alum networks; enhancing the quality and international alignment of scholarship programs; and improving student services and extracurricular development. The inclusion of quantifiable targets, such as the number of alum associations, country-specific reports, and student satisfaction rates, provides a structured basis for internal planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

The subsequent 2024–2028 Strategic Plan reaffirmed and expanded this framework with more detailed performance targets and operational measures (YTB, 2024b). Key inputs

include the Türkiye Scholarships Information System (TBBS), call centers, university offices, and a wide array of student services ranging from stipend payments to academic guidance and cultural activities (YTB, 2024b). While the applications have been collected through an online system since the YTB's coordination start, to strengthen the technological and organizational infrastructure of the scholarship program, a comprehensive data management system, TBBS, was established (YTB, 2017, p. 46). This platform centralizes application processes, scholarship tracking, academic monitoring, and alum relations, thereby facilitating institutional capacity building and responsiveness (personal communication, SI2; SI3). In addition to TBBS, a multilingual Türkiye Scholarships Call Center and a Mobile Application were launched to support students during their application and educational processes (YTB, 2019, p. 15). These platforms enable students to access information, submit documentation, and receive assistance efficiently, reflecting an institutional commitment to accessibility and ease of communication (personal communication, SI4).

The program introduced cultural and social guidance activities aimed at fostering the social integration of international students across multiple cities. Orientation programs and reception services were organized in collaboration with universities and local partners, emphasizing the responsiveness of the institution to student needs (personal communication, SI2). These initiatives were designed not only to ease the students' adaptation process but also to strengthen their ties to Türkiye, ensuring that their educational experience would be both academically and socially enriching.

The critical institutional input of the Türkiye Scholarships Program is the structured alum engagement policy, which aims to maintain and strengthen ties between Türkiye and its international graduates. YTB reports note consistent institutional support for the establishment of alum associations and their activities across various countries, aimed at fostering sustained engagement and expanding Türkiye's cultural and educational influence. Alum events and associations have become integral tools for maintaining global networks and promoting Türkiye's higher education and international cooperation agenda. In order to enable regular contact and facilitate alum engagements, as ordered by the Türkiye Scholarships Regulation (Article 19), the Türkiye Alum Portal was

established to track, organize, and support alum activities globally. The 2024–2028 plan also formalizes alum activities, including the Türkiye Alumni Portal and increased numbers of alum meetings and engagement projects. The Twelfth National Development Plan strategizes the further engagement of alums.

Lastly, the establishment of strategic internal and international partnerships to enhance program reach and specialization constitute one of the major inputs to the Türkiye Scholarships Program. Co-funded scholarship programs have been developed with major international and national partners, including UNHCR’s DAFI, the EU’s HESP, SPARK, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and Baykar Technology. Additionally, YTB has signed protocols with universities and institutions for tailored programs, such as with the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation for Islamic studies and with TÜRKPATENT and Ankara University for intellectual property law education. These partnerships contribute to operational efficiency and support program goals and objectives.

An important institutional input that distinguishes Türkiye Scholarships from comparable international programs is the direct placement of scholarship recipients into higher education programs, conducted in cooperation with YÖK. This arrangement not only streamlines admission but also aligns with YÖK’s strategic objective to enhance Türkiye’s attractiveness as a center of higher education. YÖK has played a notable role in shaping Türkiye’s internationalization policies. The establishment of the International Relations Department in 2017 and the publication of the higher education internationalization strategies demonstrate this commitment. Key measures include bilateral agreements with over 50 countries to promote academic exchanges, the launch of dedicated programs such as the Foreign Academic Staff Training Program, and the easing of residence and work permit regulations for international graduates through agreements with Türkiye’s Ministry of Interior. YÖK’s focus extends to addressing structural and procedural issues such as visa, residence, and academic integration processes.

4.2.2. Activities

The program's activities, as outlined in the official activity reports and other publications of the Ministry of National Education and YTB as well as the interviews with program elites, reflect an increasing scale, diversification, and professionalization of its operations. These can be categorized as (1) student selection and admission processes, (2) academic and linguistic preparation, (3) orientation and integration support, (4) academic, cultural, and professional development activities, and (5) alums organizations.

The promotional strategies for announcing the program in each country have evolved over time from announcements by embassies, consulates and other local partners to newspaper advertisements (personal communication, SI5), radio programs (personal communication, SI 1), and, with the impact of digitalization, the use of the online platforms. Similarly, the process of receiving applications has also shifted from paper applications to Türkiye's representative offices to the digital environment. It was emphasized that this had an immediate effect of increasing the number of applications (personal communication, SI 1); while the number of manual applications was 1,174 in 2012, the number of online applications was 41,000 (YTB, 2013, p. 38).

Thus, strategies for selection from the growing number of applicants began to be developed. Firstly, during the BÖP period, the Turkic Republics Examination (*Türk Cumhuriyetleri Sınavı - TCS*) was first planned and implemented in 1996 to ensure an objective selection. The TCS, which was last administered in 2011 in 14 countries and 18 centers (MoNE, 2011), was abolished and replaced by a system in which, after a preliminary assessment of the completeness and authenticity of documents, specialists evaluate each applicant on paper and shortlist them for interviews. Interviews are conducted mostly face-to-face and in some countries through online tools, by committees consisting of academics and representatives of stakeholder organizations in addition to YTB specialists (YTB official response to interview questions; Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). As a result, selected students are placed in universities in line with the quotas and strategy determined by the International

Students Evaluation Board, which existed until the system change in 2018, and since its abolition, by the senior management of YTB in line with the specifications provided by the stakeholder institutions (Türkiye Scholarships Regulation, 2021; personal communications, SI2 and SI3). The involvement of scholars in interview committees, particularly for graduate placements, was institutionalized to ensure merit-based selections and to sustain the program's global competitiveness (personal communication, SI3). Nevertheless, in response to the sharp increase in applications in the second half of the 2010s, pre-assessment exams have been reintroduced for undergraduate applicants in selected countries in order to uphold the program's academic quality (Türkiye Scholarships, 2020, p. 38).

Following the transition to the Türkiye Scholarships system, the Turkish preparatory program has become mandatory for all students, regardless of their chosen language of study. This is because insufficient internationalization in universities and language barriers in the social environment can affect students' academic success (personal communication, SI 1). In recognition of the shortcomings of the one-year program, courses in academic Turkish and research report writing in Turkish were introduced (YTB, 2017; 2018). Additionally, in partnership with the Yunus Emre Institute, A1-level Turkish courses have been implemented for newly awarded students in 15 countries (YTB, 2016; 2017). Turkish language acquisition is also reinforced through formal courses and cultural immersion activities (personal communication, SI2). Additionally, students' overall academic performance is systematically monitored; any academic decline may result in warnings or scholarship suspension (personal communication, SI2).

Various activities were carried out to orient and integrate incoming scholarship students. Students were welcomed at the Ankara, Istanbul, and Konya airports with orientation materials and transportation to the universities and dormitories was facilitated (YTB, 2017; 2020). Similar practices were followed during the BÖP period. Additionally, support was planned for the psychological and social needs of students through the assignment of a representative from each country to the Ankara headquarters of the MoNE, the program's responsible body, and the establishment of a unit for scholarship

students in the provincial directorates (personal communication, SI 5). Under YTB, TBBS and a multilingual call center receive student requests and offer problem resolutions (YTB, 2016; 2017). Additionally, country student associations have been supported from the inception of the scholarship programs to the present day to promote solidarity. These associations participated in international student programs organized to promote intercultural understanding and cohesion among students (YTB, 2016; Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report; 2020).

Academic, cultural and professional activities, which are listed among the offerings of the program, help to enhance students' experiences and strengthen their skills and knowledge. The fact that similar activities were also conducted during the BÖP period underlines their virtue in the orientation of students and promotion of talents. Examples of such activities include institutionalized programs such as the International Student Academy, launched in 2012 and made permanent, and the International Diplomacy School, which has been running since 2017. In addition, talks with prominent Turkish figures, sports tournaments, artistic workshops and excursions provide students with the opportunity for social and cultural engagement. Such events continue to be organized almost every year and all students are invited to these programs.

Finally, alum-related organizations have started since the BÖP period, and alum gatherings and business people-alum meetings have been held occasionally until today (personal communication, SI 3 and SI 5). High-profile events such as the Türkiye Alum Business World Workshop, which was first initiated in 2011 (personal communication, SI5), was held in the BÖP period, and regional alum meetings have continued to be held in different places and times. Such organizations later expanded to larger gatherings such as training summit for alum associations in 2017 with a thousand alums (personal communication, SI1), and the Türkiye Alum Forum held in January 2023 with participation from 60 countries (personal communication, SI3). Additionally, with the support of the establishment of alum associations, institutionalized, permanent and effective communication has started to be targeted (YTB 2017 Activity Report). The number of associations whose establishment and activities were supported also by TİKA reached 34 by 2025 (YTB, 2020; 2025). Moreover, the Türkiye Alum Information

system was established in 2017 to systematically register and monitor over 150,000 graduates worldwide by 2024 (YTB, 2018; 2025).

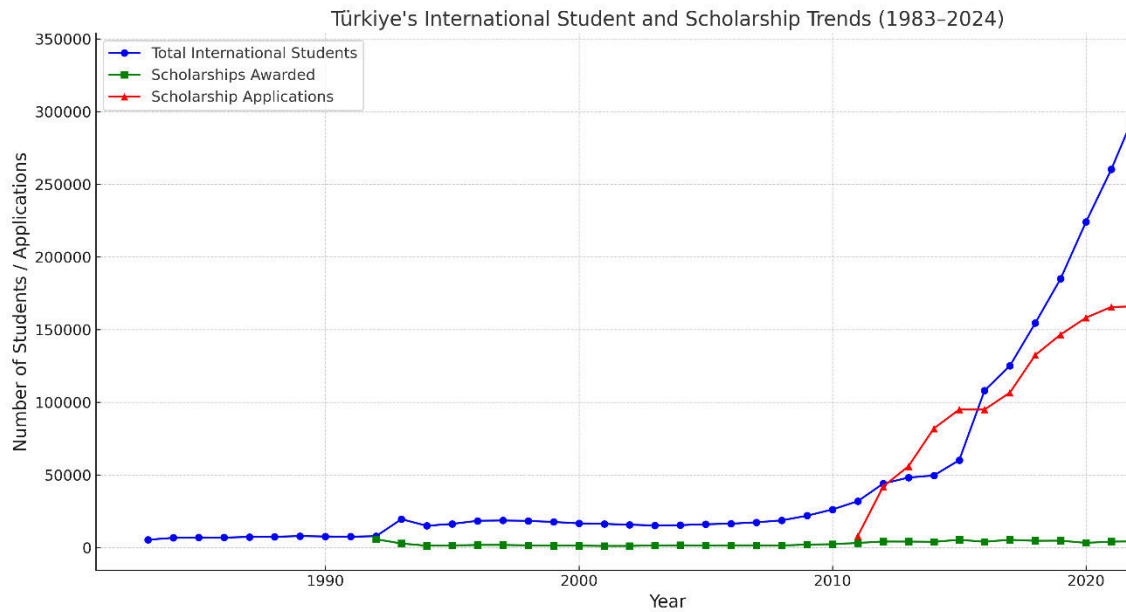
4.2.3. Outputs

Outputs are the immediate, quantifiable results of Türkiye Scholarships activities, such as student placements, coordinated events, active alum networks, and logistical support. They illustrate the program's direct results as a forerunner to its envisioned outcomes of human capital development, soft power, and international cooperation. Here, the outputs encompass the statistical distribution of scholarship holders by year, region of origin, field of study, and level of education (undergraduate or graduate). These figures, presented alongside general international student trends, constitute a key set of direct deliverables of the program and are systematically recorded and reported by the relevant institutional actors.

Although the internationalization of higher education in Türkiye had been an ongoing phenomenon for a long time, it was formalized and started to be monitored with the “Law on Foreign Students Studying in Türkiye” enacted in 1983 (Official Gazette, October 14, 1983). Therefore, the number of international students was recorded as of this year. Although there were international students studying with IsDB scholarships and scholarships under bilateral agreements until the beginning of the general scholarship program BÖP in 1992, it was not possible to access annually distributed data.

With the inception of BÖP, records and details regarding the students who received scholarships were kept. In its inaugural academic year, 5,733 students received scholarships, falling short of the targeted quota of 10,000. In the subsequent years, between 1,500 and 2,000 new scholarships were awarded annually. While the number of international students increased after the program, it remained at a certain level. Scholarship students constituted an average of 40 percent of the total international student population until 2010. The data presented in Figure 7 illustrates these trends.

Figure 7. New Scholarships through Public Funded Programs, Annual Total of International Students, and Applications for Türkiye Scholarships (1983-2024)



Note. Data are retrieved from YTB Activity Reports (2010-2024, Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports (2019-2022), YÖK Information Management System

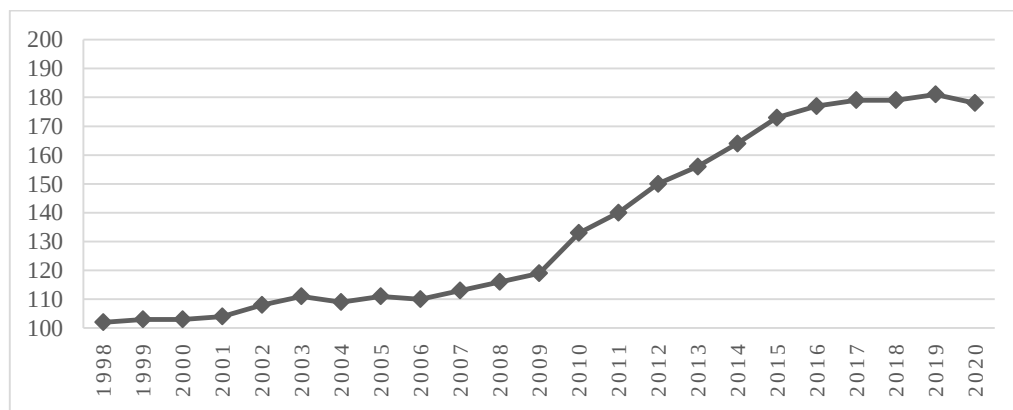
YTB's 2010 Activity Report reveals that when other scholarships are taken into account, scholarships have attracted more international students to Türkiye than this rate. Of the 21,948 international students studying in Türkiye in the 2009-2010 academic year, 10,473 – or 47 percent – were under Türkiye's publicly funded scholarships such as BÖP and Türkiye Diyanet Foundation Scholarships, as well as scholarships from multilateral organizations such as the IsDB (YTB , 2011). Scholarships have played an essential role in attracting more international students to Türkiye by providing international recognition of Turkish higher education.

However, this situation changed dramatically in the 2010s, when scholarships shifted to YTB's responsibility, more assertive promotional strategies were pursued and YÖK adopted new policies on international students. The number of applications to the scholarship program and the increase in the total number of international students are in parallel. Despite the limited scholarships provided, such a large number of applications demonstrates that the program promotes higher education in Türkiye in a far-reaching

manner and appeals to a more significant number of higher education candidates. The number of international students increased 10-fold – from around 30,000 in 2011 to more than 300,000 – within ten years, which has placed Türkiye among the top 10 countries hosting the highest number of international students.¹¹ The significant increase in international students has gradually reduced the percentage of scholarship recipients among all international students. As of 2024, the number of international students with scholarships is around 16,000, which constitute about 5 percent of all international students.

The number of sending countries is also critical indicator here. While Türkiye had already attracted students from over 100 countries by the late 1990s, the momentum accelerated in the 2010s. Following the establishment of the Türkiye Scholarships program in 2012, which replaced BÖP, the number of countries of origin expanded rapidly from 136 in the 1992–2011 period to 178 by 2021 (YTB, 2021). Türkiye Scholarships received applications from 131 countries in its first year (YTB, 2012), and this number consistently exceeded 150 annually between 2014 and 2024, peaking at 181 in 2019. Figure 8 shows the number of countries sending international students to Türkiye between 1998 and 2020, compiled from the UNESCO Information System (UIS).

Figure 8. Number of Sending Countries (1998-2020)



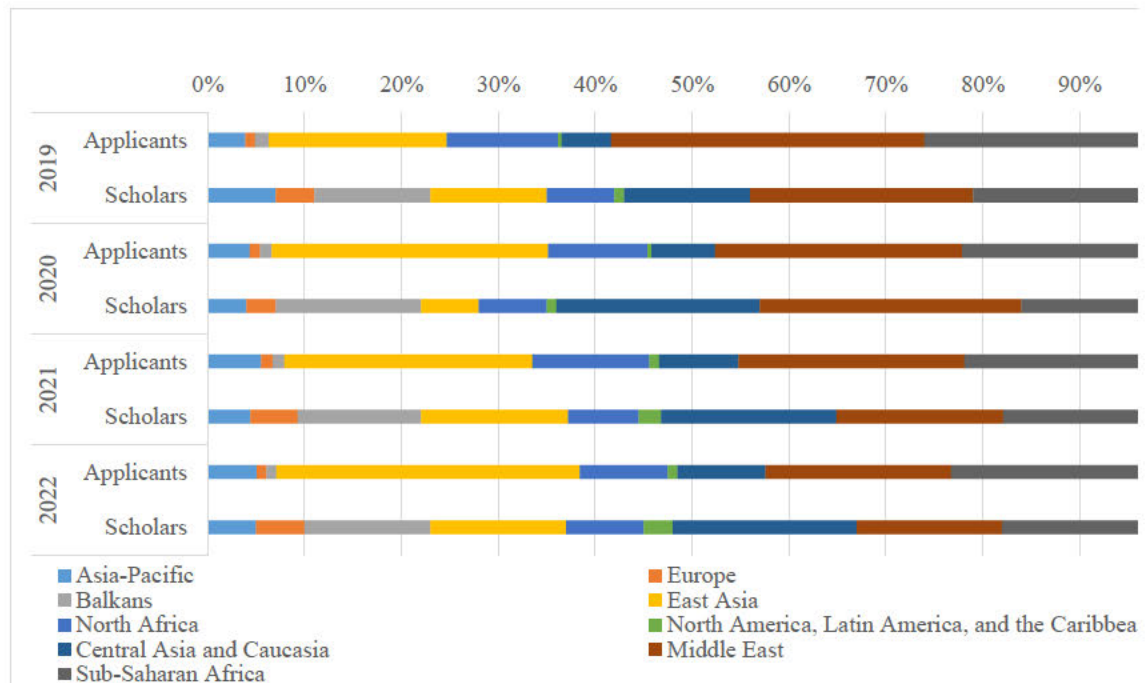
Note. Data compiled from UIS

¹¹ Data from YÖK and UNESCO shows that Türkiye has emerged as the eighth largest host country globally in terms of international student numbers, with over 336,000 international students by 2024 (YÖK, 2024).

The data also reveal regional diversification linked to Türkiye's foreign policy objectives, including the African Opening policy launched in 2005. Somalia, for instance, ranked among the top ten sending countries from the 2010s onward, reflecting Türkiye's targeted scholarship outreach in strategically prioritized regions. Meanwhile, proximity and cultural-historical ties continue to shape student inflows, as Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Iraq constituted the largest student groups in 2023–2024 (YÖK, 2024). The civil unrest in Syria, which started in 2011 and caused a significant wave of migration to Türkiye, has led students from affected countries to choose Turkish higher education. This is reflected in scholarship applications and allocations.

For the scholarship program, 100,000 applicants have applied for an average of 4,500 scholarships since 2012. African countries take the first place in the number of applications, followed by Middle Eastern countries. Türkiye also receives a significant number of scholarship applications from South Asian countries. However, the rate of applications does not necessarily correspond to the number of scholarship awards granted, as can be observed in the Figure 9 below. An overview of the last four years of the compilation of the Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports reveals that Africa and the Middle East are followed by Central Asia and the Caucasus in terms of scholarship award rates. Similarly, and more strikingly, although the applications received from the Balkans region for Türkiye Scholarships did not exceed 1.5 percent in each of the four years under consideration, their share of the scholarship allocation varies between 12 and 15 percent.

Figure 9. Scholarships Awarded by Region



Note. Compiled from Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports

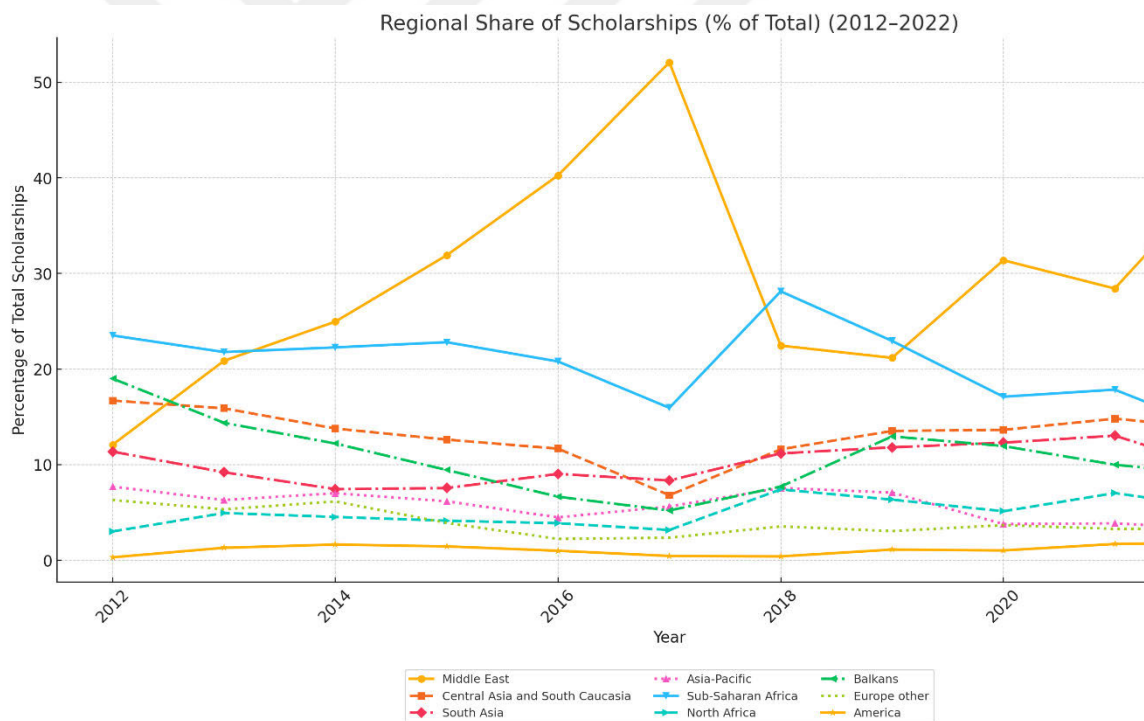
In line with the principle of compatibility with Turkish Foreign Policy, which is emphasized as a rationale for the renewal of the program and as its objective in official policy documents, foreign policy priorities are considered to influence the regional distribution of scholarships. The prioritization of the Central Asia, Caucasus, and Balkans regions, which were the focus of the BÖP can be interpreted as reflecting a foreign policy priority also with Türkiye Scholarships.

During the interviews, former YTB executives acknowledge the scholarships' alignment with foreign policy - especially with the transition to Türkiye scholarships, which broaden the scope beyond the traditionally emphasized Balkans and Central Asia. Yet, they relate the proportional differences in applications and scholarships for certain regions not to a prioritization, but to differences in the quality of the students who applied (personal communications with SI 2 and SI 4). The information compiled from the 2022 Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, – that only 600 out of 51,306 South Asian applicants (1.16 percent) were deemed qualified for scholarships, compared to

560 out of 1,898 applicants (29.5 percent) from the Balkans region – corroborates this argument.

While the regional breakdown of the number of applications is only available in the Annual Reports of Türkiye Scholarships published for the given four years, allowing a comparison between applications and awards, the regional breakdown of the number of scholarships was obtained from the data requested within the scope of the TÜBİTAK-funded DOSP-G20 project (no. 221K032), of which this dissertation is a component. Accordingly, the distribution for the period of Türkiye Scholarships can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Share of Scholarships Awarded to Indicated Regions from 2012 to 2022



Note. Compiled from data provided by YTB upon request

The Middle East region demonstrates a sharp and consistent rise in its share of awarded scholarships, reaching over 50% in 2017 and remaining dominant in 2022 with over 40%, suggesting sustained prioritization. Conversely, Sub-Saharan Africa, once holding nearly a quarter of the total share, has gradually declined to below 20%, indicating a relative deprioritization despite continued significance. Central Asia and South Caucasasia

and South Asia maintained a relatively stable presence, generally ranging between 10–15%, showing Türkiye’s ongoing engagement with neighboring and historically connected regions. The Balkans, a traditional foreign policy focus, have witnessed a moderate decline in share, potentially indicating diversification in Türkiye’s scholarship diplomacy. Lower-tier regions such as Asia-Pacific, Europe other, and America consistently accounted for marginal shares (mostly below 5%), underscoring their limited strategic weight in the scholarship program. Notably, North Africa shows a slight recovery post-2018, while America, despite small absolute numbers, exhibits a subtle upward trend in proportional terms.

These shifts in distribution aligns with Türkiye’s broader development cooperation strategy, strategically prioritizing countries such as Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and Afghanistan –when crises erupted in these countries – as well as sub-Saharan African countries facing development issues. As evidenced in official documents and interviews, Türkiye places particular emphasis on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and those experiencing humanitarian crises.

Between 2012 and 2016, 5,250 students from LDCs were awarded scholarships, and by 2017, an additional 1,108 students from this group had been funded (YTB, 2018). In subsequent years, Türkiye Scholarships reached 88 percent of the LDC group defined by the United Nations Committee for Development Policy, providing scholarships to students from 47 of those in 2018 (YTB, 2019). The share of scholarships granted to LDC students represented 32 percent of the total in 2019, followed by 23 percent in 2020, 24 percent in 2021, and 25 percent in 2022 (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). This consistent allocation pattern highlights Türkiye Scholarships’ role as a targeted instrument within Türkiye’s broader framework of humanitarian and development-oriented foreign policy.

Türkiye Scholarships has also served as an instrument of humanitarian response to regional crises, especially after the civil war erupted in its adjacent neighborhood and which also affected itself. In 2014, a dedicated initiative under the program awarded full scholarships to 1,026 Syrian students affected by the civil war (YTB, 2015). The scope expanded in 2017 to include 105 students from Yemen and 54 Rohingya Muslim

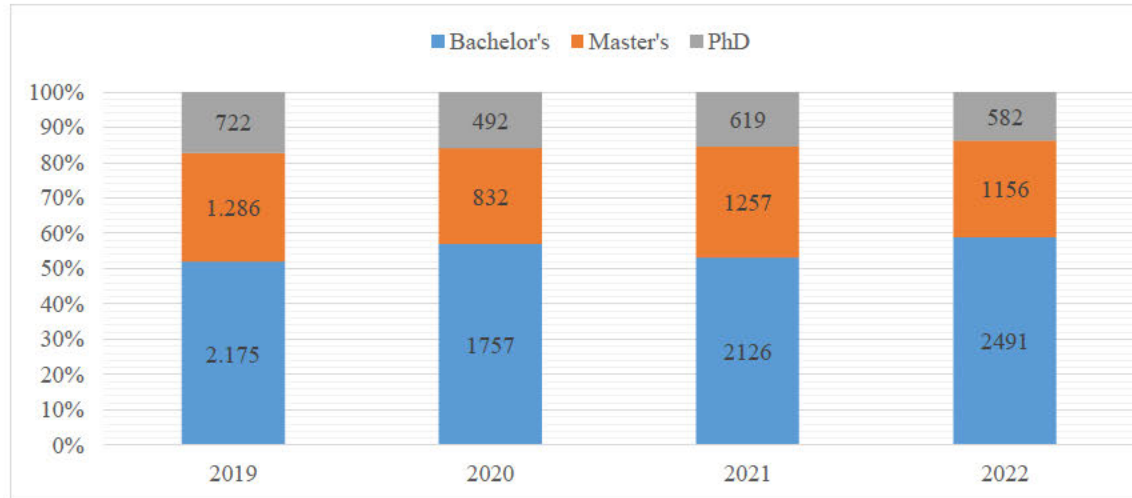
students from Myanmar, both suffering from severe conflict and displacement (YTB, 2018). In the same year, over 15,000 Syrian students were provided tuition fee waivers, with 4,000 of them receiving full scholarships. The share of scholarships awarded to students from conflict-affected regions remained significant in the following years: 8.5 percent in 2019, 18.7 percent in 2020, 14 percent in 2021, and 11.5 percent in 2022 (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). Most recently, in the 2024–2025 academic year, 378 Palestinian students were reported among Türkiye Scholarship beneficiaries, reflecting Türkiye’s ongoing commitment to supporting students from humanitarian crisis regions (YÖK, 2024).

Türkiye Scholarships has systematically aimed to ensure access for disadvantaged groups. The program explicitly promotes gender parity and has steadily increased female participation over the years. In 2019, while female applicants constituted only 35 percent of all applications, 45 percent of the awarded scholarships went to female students (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020). Subsequent years witnessed further narrowing of the gender gap. In 2020, 1,490 women and 1,771 men were awarded long-term scholarships, while short-term program supported 164 women and 255 men (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2021). Similar trends were observed in 2021 and 2022, with near parity reached in both long- and short-term allocations (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2022; 2023). Notably, by 2023, the proportion of female scholarship holders reached 47.4 percent, and in 2024, for the first time, it exceeded male recipients at 53.54 percent, marking a significant achievement for gender inclusion within the program (YTB, 2024; YTB, 2025).

Another input is related to the level of studies, which scholarships target. Analysis of 2023–2024 enrolment data indicates that 70.9 percent of international students study at the undergraduate level, followed by associate degree (16.5 percent), master’s (9.4 percent), and doctoral (3.3 percent) levels (YÖK, 2024). In contrast to this pattern, Türkiye Scholarships has deliberately prioritized graduate education in its award allocations, with over 50 percent of scholarships consistently granted at master’s and doctoral levels, which is visible in Figure 11 (YTB, 2024b). This strategic choice

reflects Türkiye's aim to foster academic research cooperation and high-skilled human capital development in partner countries.

Figure 11. Scholarships by Levels of Degree

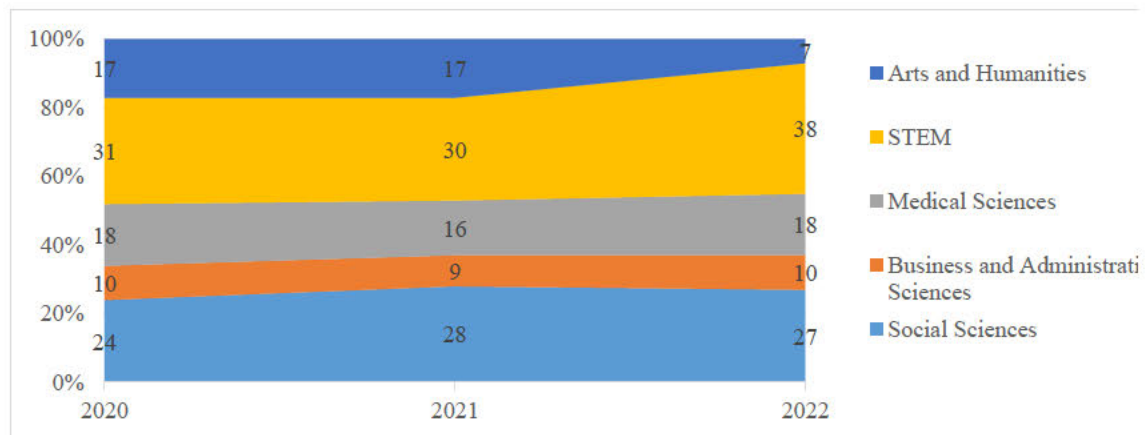


Note: Compiled from Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports

To maintain a clear focus on full-degree sponsorship outcomes, language courses and research grants have been excluded from the present analysis, as these are short-term or activity-specific interventions that are not directly linked to the comprehensive financing of formal higher education. While such targeted grants provide valuable contributions, the core comparative relevance of Türkiye Scholarships lies in its balanced commitment to both undergraduate and graduate-level degree program, distinguishing it from many other national scholarship schemes. Despite a declared intention to gradually reduce undergraduate funding, Türkiye has continued to maintain a dominant share of undergraduate scholarships as part of its strategic objective to cultivate qualified human capital. Between 2019 and 2022, undergraduate awards consistently constituted the majority: 51.8 percent in 2019, 55.6 percent in 2020, 51.7 percent in 2021, and 56.1 percent in 2022 (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). In 2023, the share of graduate-level awards (master's and doctoral combined) was reported at 40 percent, with a modest increase to 43 percent in 2024, falling below the policy target of 47 percent (YTB, 2024a; 2025).

The departments of the scholarship students are not presented in further detail than the broader fields of study, which are available in open sources only for the three years indicated at Figure 12. Although insufficient to identify a trend, the figure shows the placements in these fields. The share of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, with the largest share of scholarship recipients, increased further in 2022, while the share of Arts and Humanities shrinks.

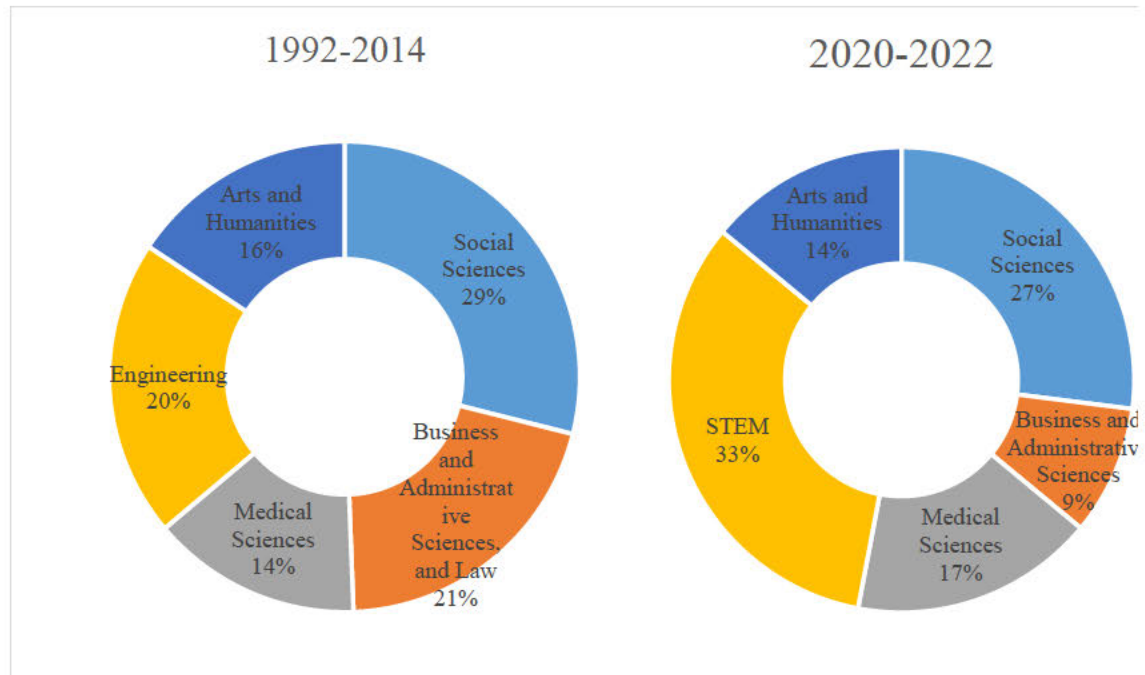
Figure 12. Scholarships to Disciplines (Percentage)



Note: Compiled from Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports

Compared to the overall field distribution during the implementation of BÖP, available data indicate a notable decline in the share of Business Administration, Administrative Sciences, and Law, alongside a marked increase in Engineering and Natural Sciences. According to interviews with program administrators, field allocations are informed by both national needs and student preferences (personal communication, SI 3 and SI 4). However, other interviews revealed that Türkiye Scholarships introduced a significant policy shift by prioritizing the sending countries' labor market demands in determining eligible fields of study (personal communication, SI 1 and SI 2). Students are limited to applying in areas where their countries face human resource shortages. This approach is particularly evident in placements from Least Developed and Developing Countries, as emphasized in Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports. Given this focus, the growing share of Engineering and Natural Sciences appears to reflect a deliberate alignment with development priorities, which is visible in the Figure 13.

Figure 13. Fields of Scholarship Awarded by Great Student Project and Türkiye Scholarships



Note. Prepared from YTB publication titled “Türkiye Scholarships 2014 Statistical Yearbook” among the documents presented by the former institution executive interviewed.

Beyond academic training, the program has involved extracurricular programming to support the holistic development and social integration of international students. Chief among these initiatives is the *International Students Academy*, coordinated annually across various cities. Since 2015, this program has expanded in scope, engaging thousands of students through seminars, cultural activities, and professional development workshops. Notably, in 2020, despite disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the academy adapted through online platforms, maintaining participation and certification for over 1,700 students (YTB, 2021). The program continued to evolve, with nearly 6,200 applications recorded in 2024 across 17 cities, reflecting its continued relevance and student demand (YTB, 2025).

Another critical initiative is the *International Student Internship Program*, launched in 2021 to enhance professional readiness and practical skills. Initially piloted in three cities, the program was later expanded to seven major cities by 2023, offering internship

placements in dozens of public and private institutions. In 2024 alone, over 1,000 applications were received, and 270 students successfully placed (YTB, 2025). These extracurricular activities aim for not only fostering employability and local engagement but also serving as vital mechanisms for building social capital, networking, and fostering a sense of belonging within the host society.

YTB has increasingly pursued strategic partnerships with national and international organizations to expand its reach, particularly in addressing humanitarian crises and promoting inclusive higher education. As the implementing partner for UNHCR's DAFI and HESP programs, Türkiye supported hundreds of Syrian and other vulnerable students annually—636 under DAFI in 2021 and 1,221 under HESP in 2022. Collaborations with IsDB and SPARK, funded by the EU, similarly enabled the co-financing of over 1,400 students in 2022, while country-specific initiatives like the Yemen Pioneer Program addressed localized crises. Additionally, public-private cooperation with Baykar Technology supported 200 students in high-tech fields in 2022, illustrating how Türkiye aligns scholarship diplomacy with its national strategic priorities. As noted in one of the stakeholder interviews (SI 4), approximately 1,000 to 1,500 scholarships annually are financed through such collaborative programs, reflecting a significant share of Türkiye Scholarships' annual placements.

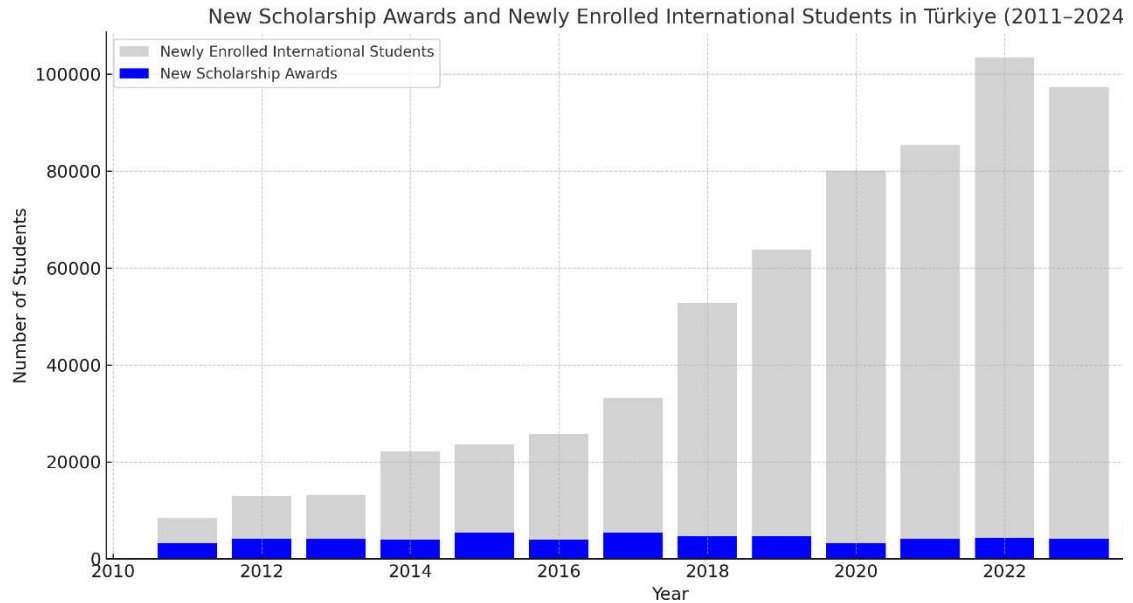
Finally, Türkiye Scholarships has gradually built a large and diverse alum base, with structured efforts to institutionalize its relations with international graduates. Major graduation ceremonies held in Ankara—such as the one in 2015 attended by the President of the Republic—symbolize the program's emphasis on celebrating educational achievements and maintaining long-term engagement. Annual reports show, thousands of scholarship recipients have joined the Türkiye Alum community, including 2,230 in 2020, 2,294 in 2021, and a significant 4,199 in 2022 through long-term scholarship tracks. Most recently, in 2024, graduation events were held in multiple cities, including Ankara, İstanbul, and Konya, with approximately 800 participants. Beyond ceremonial gatherings, Türkiye Scholarships has strengthened alum outreach by expanding its graduate database. By 2024, the registry included over 137,000 alums (YTB, 2025).

4.2.4. Outcomes

While this thesis is an empirical study involving field research on outcomes, documented outcomes are also tracked in order to extract the framework of the Theory of Change. In accordance with the stated objectives, developments in the areas under observation, as well as the responses of the elites interviewed, indicate short and medium-term outcomes in specific domains. In line with the goals and objectives detailed below, the outcomes based on the statements of the beneficiaries of the program, according to the program evaluation set out by the Theory of Change, are presented in the next section, categorized according to the Kirkpatrick Model. While some of the purported outcomes must be verified by the beneficiaries, others can be substantiated by empirical data.

One such outcome is the internationalization of higher education. The scholarship program has made a significant contribution to the internationalization of Turkish higher education. In addition to promotional activities, the development of public services for international students and improvements in Turkish language education, such as the opening of a center in every province and workshops organized to improve the field of Turkish language learning for foreigners, have created a more favorable environment for international students (personal communication, SI 1, SI 2 and SI 4). The advent of YÖK's internationalization policies, in conjunction with these influences, has led to a sevenfold increase in the number of international students in the decade following 2013 (YÖK, 2021; YÖK, 2024). Türkiye's growing appeal among prospective international students has, in return, led to heightened competition for scholarships, resulting in an increased ability to attract academically accomplished students (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020). This phenomenon is evidenced by Figure 14, which illustrates the number of new students enrolled in Turkish higher education each year, as well as the number of publicly funded scholarship recipients within them.

Figure 14. Number of New Enrollments By International Students in Turkish Higher Education Institutions and Scholarship Awards



Note. Data compiled from YTB activity reports and YÖK database.

In addition to the increasing student qualifications, the implementing institution's monitoring of the system, the feedback it received through the surveys it conducted with students, and the expertise gained over the years, as well as the efforts to overcome the program's deficiencies and program improvement efforts have helped the program become more qualified (personal communications, SI 3 and SI4; YTB, 2021b; YTB, 2024b). The research titled "Türkiye Scholarships Program Institutional Development and Impact Analysis Study" implemented by the institution to determine the quality of the program shows that the satisfaction rate increased from 65 percent to 90 percent (YTB, 2024b, p.58). Perceptions and satisfaction with the quality of the program on different topics were also examined qualitatively through in-depth interviews in this study, for which the next section provides details.

A further outcome that was demonstrated through quantitative measurements was the rate of graduation. The graduation rate of students selected for the scholarship program exhibited a notable increase from 15-20 percent at the end of the BÖP period to 68 percent in 2023 (personal communication, SI 4). In addition, former scholarship recipients who participated in the program but did not complete their studies were

interviewed to identify the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. As alum associations have been aimed to be more functional during the period of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan and the Twelfth Development Plan, it is imperative that the program is able to meet its targets in this regard. The 34 alum associations, their activities, and the contributions of alum are increasingly emphasized (YTB, 2021a; Türkiye Scholarships Annual Report, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023).

Finally, the alignment of the Türkiye Scholarships program with strategic planning and overarching policy frameworks has emerged as a significant outcome. The program's planning, candidate selection, and promotional strategies have been refined to respond more directly to national and regional qualified labor market needs. For instance, while the Eleventh Development Plan (2019–2023) explicitly encouraged the retention of qualified international graduates in Türkiye to contribute to the domestic labor force, the YTB Activity Reports (2022, 2023, 2024a, 2025) notes that 141 students were selected specifically for qualified workforce development—surpassing the program's target of 100 students as set in the 2019–2023 Strategic Plan (YTB, 2021b). The retention of skilled labor in Türkiye to work in sectors such as nuclear energy, information and communication technologies, and defense industry, as discussed in the interviews, is likely to yield varied outcomes for sector development in the medium to long term.

However, the Twelfth Development Plan (2024–2028) does not reiterate this objective, and the new strategic plan of YTB omits any direct reference to retaining graduates in Türkiye. Initial planning consciously avoided creating incentives that may encourage brain drain, according to interviews with program officials (SI 2 and SI 3). Instead, efforts have been made to prioritize the developmental and human resource needs of the students' home countries, particularly in regions affected by humanitarian crises and among Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The share of scholarships allocated to students from LDCs consistently ranges between 23 percent and 32 percent in recent years. The share of scholarships granted to students from humanitarian crisis zones fluctuates between 8.5 percent and 18.7 percent. These reflect an approach in the Türkiye Scholarships program that is not only responsive to Türkiye's own development

priorities but also sensitive to vulnerability and humanitarian needs, consistent with its international development cooperation framework.

4.2.5. Stated Goals and Intended Impacts

As in the literature on international higher education and scholarship programs, objectives of Türkiye's scholarship programs can also be classified under three main domains: foreign policy strategy, internationalization of higher education, and development assistance. In foreign policy, the program has acquired a global character in line with Türkiye's evolving foreign policy strategy. From the 2010s onwards, increased promotional efforts have aimed to attract highly qualified candidates, aligning with Türkiye's foreign policy openings and contributing to the internationalization of higher education. Furthermore, special attention has been devoted to human capital development, and LDCs and other regions experiencing humanitarian crises, which is accentuated by hosting the Least Developed Countries conference in 2011 and the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 in line with this foreign policy (Coşkun Türkmen, 2020). These dimensions are reflected in the objectives of the scholarship programs. The intended outputs and desired impacts in this regard are outlined below, with reference to relevant documents and interview data.

Foreign Policy Goals

1. Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

- a) Fostering Türkiye's cultural, political, and economic ties via international student engagement (Türkiye Scholarships Regulation, 2014; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028).
- b) Using Türkiye Scholarships as an instrument under foreign policy priorities to expand their effectiveness (Personal communication, SI 1, SI 2, SI 3, SI 4 and SI 5; Türkiye Scholarship Annual Reports 2019–2022).
- c) Enhancing Türkiye's image through alums networks worldwide (YTB Official Response to Interview Questions; YTB 2017-2024 activity reports).
- d) Training qualified students in line with Türkiye's vision of international relations (Türkiye Scholarships Regulation, 2014; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028; Personal communication, SI 1)

- e) To disseminate the Turkish language (Personal communication, SI 5;)

2. Strategic Partnerships and Diaspora-Creation

- a) Strengthening relations with kin and related communities abroad (MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-14; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028; Personal communication, SI 2 and SI 5).
- b) Aligning scholarship allocation with foreign policy priorities in conflict zones or fragile states (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports 2019-2022; Personal communication, SI 3 and SI 4).
- c) Creating “sympathy diaspora” from international students and supporting the diaspora relations through alums networks (Personal communication, SI 1, SI 2, SI 3 and SI 4).

3. Alum Engagement

- a) Developing “Türkiye Alum” concept, preserving the alums’ relations with Türkiye, and promoting alum associations (YTB 2015-2024 activity reports; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028; Twelfth Development Plan).
- b) Encouraging alums to act as voluntary ambassadors (YTB 2015–2024 activity reports; YTB Official Response to Interview Questions).
- c) Facilitating leadership development and diplomatic relations through alums (YTB 2015-2024 activity reports; YÖK 2017 Strategy Document).

Higher Education Internationalization Goals

1. Attracting International Students

- a) Increasing Türkiye’s share of the global international higher education market (YTB 2010–2015 activity reports; YÖK Strategic Plans 2017, 2024–2028; Personal communication, SI 1)
- b) Making Türkiye a global higher education hub (YÖK Strategic Plans 2018-2022, 2024–2028).

- c) Increasing the number of successful international students in Turkish higher education (YÖK Strategic Plans 2018-2022, 2024–2028; Twelfth Development Plan).

2. Institutional Capacity and Visibility

- a) Improving university infrastructure, research universities, and English-medium education with international students and staff (YÖK 2018-2022, 2024–2028 Strategy Documents).
- b) Increasing international collaborations and joint projects and improving the visibility of Turkish higher education (YÖK 2018-2022, 2024–2028 Strategy Documents)
- c) Enhancing the competitiveness of universities and facilitate their rise in academic rankings (Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Development Plans; YÖK 2018-2022, 2024–2028 Strategy Documents)

3. Student Development and Support

- a) Enhancing student experience with structured guidance, accommodation, and academic services, and language and cultural orientation (YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028; Türkiye Scholarships Regulation, 2014).
- b) Increasing satisfaction with education services (MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014; YTB Strategic Plan 2019–2023)

Development Assistance Goals

1. Human Capital Development

- a) Contributing to the human resource development of partner countries, particularly countries in the post-Soviet space and the LDCs (Seventh, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Development Plans; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028; Personal communication, SI1, SI3 and SI5).
- b) Development of additional skills and capacities through extracurricular training, internships, and support for research activities (YTB Activity Reports 2016-2024, Türkiye Scholarships Reports 2019-2022)

2. Capacity Building in Target Regions

- a) Support identity, language, and institutional continuity of kin communities (personal communications, SI3; SI5; MoNE Strategic Plan 2010-2014).
- b) Provide targeted scholarships for conflict-affected countries (Türkiye Scholarship Reports 2019-2022; Personal communication, SI 1, SI 3, and SI4).
- c) Supporting individuals from minorities and disadvantaged groups for the empowerment of their groups (Personal communication, SI 1, SI 2, and SI 3).

3. Structured Development Cooperation

- a) Creation of more opportunities for access to higher education through cooperation with national and international organizations (YTB Strategic Plan 2024–2028).
- b) Focusing scholarship programs at the undergraduate level to meet the target country's human resource needs, unlike equivalent programs from other countries (Personal communication, SI 3 and SI 4).
- c) Design scholarships as part of Türkiye's official development cooperation model (Tenth and Eleventh Development Plans; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024–2028).

4. Preventing Brain Drain

- a) Ensuring their return to home countries with mechanisms such as return agreements (Türkiye Scholarships Regulation 2014; Personal communication, SI 2 and 3).
- b) Facilitating the retention of exceptional talent in critical fields (e.g., nuclear energy, IT, defense) to encourage graduates to stay in Türkiye rather than move to a third country (Eleventh Development Plan; YTB Strategic Plans 2019–2023, 2024-2028; Personal communication, SI 1, SI 3, SI 4).

The Türkiye Scholarships program is normatively framed as a soft power instrument, primarily designed to cultivate international students as cultural envoys and voluntary ambassadors of Türkiye after graduation. The official documents and strategic plans

(YTB, YÖK, Development Plans) emphasize its dual role in advancing international cooperation by contributing to human capital development, while simultaneously promoting Türkiye's academic prestige and international reputation.

The intended impacts of the program are articulated in official papers, strategy documents, legal texts, and institutional reports, as well as corroborated by elite interviews conducted within this study. From its inception, Türkiye Scholarships has been conceived as an instrument of public diplomacy and foreign policy outreach. The program was first established with a focus on fostering human capacity in the newly independent Turkic republics (Tenth Development Plan, 2014–2018; MoNE Strategic Plan 2010–14). In an interview with one of the former managers of the program, it was stated that the main objectives of the scholarships included supporting the development processes of the countries to which the scholarships were offered by raising qualified personnel, helping to raise Türkiye-friendly generations and making Turkish a common language in the Turkic geography (personal communication, SI 5). Subsequent policy documents and YTB reports show the continuity of this goal and the extension of such ambitions to target students from conflict and post-conflict zones such as Palestine, Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan, with an implicit aim of contributing to post-conflict reconstruction efforts and thereby enhancing Türkiye's strategic presence in these regions (Türkiye Scholarships Reports; Personal communications, SI 1, SI 2)

The program's origins and evolution also reflect Türkiye's commitment to development cooperation, particularly through education. Initially focused on supporting the Turkic republics, ethnic Turkic minorities and other culturally or historically affiliated groups referred to as kin and related communities, the program subsequently broadened to include students from low-income and fragile states (MoNE Strategic Plan; YTB Establishment Law; YTB Activity Reports; personal communications, SI 1, SI 2 and SI 5). Scholarships are intended to develop human capital, enhance local capacity, and promote self-sufficiency in recipients' home countries, thereby aligning with Türkiye's broader international development cooperation strategy (*Intended Impact 1*).

The program also retains an implicit expectation of return and contribution, consistent with Türkiye's broader development cooperation policies. Alums are envisioned to

assume leadership positions in their home countries, contributing to economic development and serving as facilitators of trade and bilateral cooperation. The Türkiye Scholarships Reports and interviews document active collaboration with business networks such as DEİK and TÜSİAD to explore the role of alum in promoting international commerce and business relations. In parallel, YÖK's Strategy for Internationalization of Higher Education (2018–2022) highlights the significant economic potential of international student mobility. The document points to international students' direct and indirect economic contributions, including tuition fees, living expenses, and knowledge of Türkiye's institutional and cultural systems, which are seen as assets for fostering future trade and investment partnerships between Türkiye and students' home countries.

Graduates are envisaged as natural interlocutors who maintain lifelong emotional and professional ties with Türkiye, contributing to deepened bilateral relationships and more durable diplomatic engagement (*Intended Impact 2*). Strengthen Türkiye's lobbying capacity is referred in the interviews as an intended impact (personal communications, SI 3 and SI 4), and the emphasis on the scholarships and education is moved to the alum networks in the most current strategy documents to cultivate this lobbying power (Twelfth Development Plan; YTB Strategic Plan 2024-2028).

Türkiye Scholarships are also designed to address the intended impacts in Türkiye's internationalization strategy in higher education. The strategic plans of YÖK consistently frame the program as a mechanism to attract highly qualified international students, thereby contributing to the elevation of the academic standing, institutional capacity, and global recognition of Turkish universities. Interviews with key institutional actors (SI 1, SI 2 and SI 4) also highlight the program's promotional impact. It serves as a visibility and outreach tool, with millions of applicants worldwide over the years being exposed to Türkiye's higher education offerings. Even unsuccessful applicants are systematically engaged through targeted communications, introducing alternative study pathways and contributing to the overall branding of Türkiye as a preferred international study destination.

These expectations and intended outcomes also reflect the underlying assumptions of the program's Theory of Change. It is assumed that the selected students possess strong academic qualifications, that the quality of higher education provided in Türkiye is sufficient, and that the education they receive will contribute to building the human capital needed in critical sectors—particularly in LDCs and regions affected by humanitarian crises. The identification of national sectoral needs and the development of country-specific expertise are regarded as essential measures to ensure alignment between educational investments and local development priorities.

It is further assumed that graduates will return to their home countries rather than migrate to third countries, and that they will participate actively in the labor market, contributing meaningfully to institutional and societal development. Embedded within this assumption is the belief that alum will act as informal representatives of Türkiye, advancing mutual interests in economic, diplomatic, and academic domains. In this sense, alums are expected to enhance Türkiye's soft power and long-term international partnerships.

Given these assumptions, it is anticipated that the inputs and activities of the program will produce the desired outputs and outcomes. The previous section has briefly discussed selected outcomes as identified in official reports. The subsequent chapter will present an empirical assessment of the program, informed by fieldwork data, and will critically examine the causal pathways and layers of impact within this framework.

4.3. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has drawn a ToC for Türkiye's international scholarship programs, first outlining the legacy BÖP and then focusing in greater detail on the Türkiye Scholarships scheme. Utilizing programmatic documents, strategic plans, legislative records, and elite interviews, the chapter has mapped the program's inputs, activities, outputs, and projected outcomes and impacts. This analytical endeavor aims to clarify the rationale that underpins Türkiye's international scholarship program agenda while also laying the framework for an empirical assessment in the following chapter.

Drawing on official policy documents, strategic plans, and elite interviews, it delineated the program's layered structure: inputs such as institutional mandates, scholarship infrastructure, legal and strategic frameworks; activities including outreach, selection, preparation, and integration; and outputs such as student and country participation rates, gender balance, level and field distribution, and alum networks. Together, these layers aim to generate targeted outcomes—ranging from the internationalization of Turkish higher education and the cultivation of human capital to the formation of developmental partnerships. That is, the reconstructed ToC shows that the Türkiye Scholarships program is more than just a cultural or political soft power initiative. It is also a structured development cooperation tool that focuses on human capital development, particularly in LDCs and humanitarian crisis-affected countries.

The program's intended outcomes reflect both national and partner-country developmental goals through improvements in its international higher education. These include supporting human capital development in countries with constrained educational infrastructures (*Intended Impact 1*), and cultivating and reinforcing bilateral relationships, ensuring the safeguarding of its values and interests through an alum group committed to Türkiye (*Intended Impact 2*).

The developmental framing of the scholarship program is not only observable in official documentation but also frequently echoed in elite discourses. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly emphasized the cultivation of future global leaders, scientists, and cultural figures through these programs (e.g., AK PARTİ, 2024, May 6). In his remarks at the 8th Graduation Ceremony of International Students, he called for strengthening Türkiye's cultural and economic ties through international alum (YTB, 2019, July 4). Similarly, YTB President Abdullah Eren highlighted that 50 percent of Türkiye's alum are actively involved in trade relations between Türkiye and their home countries—a concrete reflection of the program's impact on economic diplomacy (YTB, 2022, July 6).

These narratives, when read alongside Türkiye's national development documents such as the Eleventh Development Plan and YÖK's Internationalization Strategy, lend strong support to the hypothesis that Türkiye Scholarships functions primarily as a

development assistance mechanism. These documents cite human capital development, the promotion of science and technology, and the establishment of sustainable partnerships with priority countries as explicit goals. In addition, the scholarship program is noted as a facilitator of brain circulation—encouraging students to return to their home countries after graduation rather than migrate to third countries, thus promoting knowledge transfer and national capacity building in line with Türkiye’s development cooperation principles.

This emphasis on development cooperation—rather than solely foreign policy influence or higher education internationalization—underpins the analytical framework of this dissertation. While foreign policy and soft power goals are not dismissed, the evaluation in the following chapter will be guided primarily by the program’s developmental objectives, as these were both frequently invoked by policymakers and are measurable through a more technical lens. Unlike foreign policy metrics, which often rely on diffuse or long-term effects, development cooperation outcomes—such as graduation rates, sectoral employment, and alum impact—can be directly tracked and empirically evaluated.

Moreover, while higher education internationalization remains a core component of the program’s logic, it is largely validated through established metrics—such as the number of international students, their countries of origin, and their distribution across fields and levels of study. As these goals are relatively well-documented and already monitored through YÖK’s statistical systems, more novel contribution of this research is to assess the program’s developmental efficacy.

In conclusion, the Theory of Change reconstructed in this chapter reveals the roots of Türkiye Scholarships as a multidimensional initiative in international development cooperation. It draws on the program’s formal goals, strategic documents, and implementers’ discourse to lay out a structured impact pathway: from targeted inputs and inclusive activities to measurable outputs and developmental outcomes. The chapter has illustrated that Türkiye envisions these scholarships as investments in future professionals who will advance their countries while sustaining long-term relations with Türkiye—economically, academically, and diplomatically.

The next chapter operationalizes this framework through fieldwork. Based on nearly 50 interviews with alum from three countries across different regions— the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Middle East—it seeks to empirically test whether Türkiye Scholarships has achieved its developmental ambitions. Evaluated through the lenses of the reconstructed Theory of Change and the extended Kirkpatrick Model, the analysis will explore how these scholarships influence individual careers, institutional capacities, and bilateral relations in practical terms.



CHAPTER V:

UNDERSTANDING THE POST-GRADUATION IMPACT OF THE SCHOLARSHIPS

Türkiye's strategies and policies on international student mobility programs were discussed in the previous chapter. The implementation details of international student mobility and its most powerful driver, the scholarship program, were presented, and a general picture was drawn through interviews with practitioners and other stakeholders. Outputs were explored, which leads to the occurrence of program outcomes. As observed or measured by the institution and its representatives, some of the outcomes were stated also in the earlier chapter.

This chapter details the outcomes of the scholarship program with the empirical findings obtained from the fieldwork. Depending on the information gathered from open sources and data obtained from YTB as complementary to the research, this chapter examines how the scholarships affected the lives of alums in their post-graduation experience. In the overall framework, a program evaluation of the scholarship program is conducted to show the program's contributions to social and economic development and how these contributions have emerged are presented in this chapter. Themes and categories produced through the revised version of the extended Kirkpatrick model based on its levels are offered. The themes and categories are delivered inclusively for all cases and are fed with observations from the ground and comments of participants.

5.1. Presentation of The Program Evaluation with the Extended Kirkpatrick Model

The four steps of Kirkpatrick's model for evaluating training programs - reaction, learning, behavior (rebranded as application), and results (1979) are expanded with IIE (n.d) to include broader impact of the education programs and results are treated under organizational and external levels. This approach constitutes the basis here for analyzing the outcomes of the reconstructed ToC for Türkiye's scholarship program.

Within the assessment framework developed for the analysis, coding was conducted according to the themes identified in the process of conducting the interviews and later on during the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. With comments from the thesis supervisor on these themes, codes and sub-codes were re-evaluated and reconstructed. The interview transcripts were analyzed using an approach that integrates the ToC and the Kirkpatrick Model.

Table 9. Presentation of Findings

Kirkpatrick Level	The Reflected ToC Layers	Components
Level 1: Reaction	Inputs → Activities → Outputs	Recipients' views on the execution of the scholarship program and the resources provided; their experience of Turkish language learning; their satisfaction with the quality of education and the educational institutions; maintenance of ties after graduation; and the contribution of the scholarships to increasing access to education among the target group
Level 2: Learning	Short-Term Outcomes	Strengthening knowledge, skills and technical capabilities; personal development such as building self-confidence; tolerance and political awareness; mastery of the Turkish language and the field of Türkiye
Level 3: Application	Intermediate Outcomes	The use of Turkish in employment and expanding opportunities due to it; professionalization commonly in education and research, entrepreneurship, the public sector, and intellectual production; benefiting from the social and professional network provided by Türkiye; and challenges to applying what has been learned in practice

Level 4: Organizational Results	Long-Term Outcomes	For professional and social change, graduates' contributions to the private sector; their efforts for the advancement of civil society; and their role in fostering cooperation with Turkish institutions
Level 5: External Results	Impacts	To influence policymaking and social transformation, diplomatic and developmental contributions

Accordingly, Level 1: Reaction in Kirkpatrick's model, including the inputs, activities and outputs of the ToC layers, covers the participant satisfaction with such components of the program and engagement with the scholarship experience. Level 2: Learning includes short-term outcomes such as acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudinal changes through academic and intercultural learning. While Level 3: Behavior is related to the intermediate outcomes of application of learning in professional, academic, or civic settings post-graduation, Level 4: Organizational Results involve long-Term outcomes, i.e., changes within institutions, organizations, or professional environments where alums are active. Finally, the added fifth level by IIE, External Results, incorporates societal, national, or international-level impacts, including contributions to policymaking and social transformation. This chapter continues to explore the implications at each level more comprehensively, also highlighting differences among the countries.

5.1.1. Level 1: Reaction

Kirkpatrick (1970; 1996) offers that the trainees' response to the training program shows their willingness to learn and adopt the content to their practice as well as that the reaction to the program signals shorthand measures to take to increase program effectiveness. While the literature on the Turkish scholarship program primarily focuses on beneficiaries' satisfaction, this research also involved questions regarding the issue to present a complementary evaluation. Questions number 5 and number 9 in the interview protocol (see Table 7) directly sought alums' reaction to the scholarship program. The inputs, activities and outputs were presented in the previous chapter. Whereas the interviews did not include separate questions to evaluate satisfaction with each of them, the question of how they heard about the program was used to assess the success of

promotional strategies, and the question of the extent to which they were engaged in extracurricular activities was used to understand the perception of different activities.

The coding related to issues such as the coverage of the scholarship, institutional support, language training, university education, constituted a higher proportion than other levels, as they were widely referred to in alums' retrospection on the scholarship program and studies in Türkiye. Overall, interviews show an overall positive approach towards the scholarship program, its implementing organization – YTB, and the Turkish universities, society and government.

The perceptions and satisfaction regarding the scope and implementation of the scholarships, Turkish language training, universities and the quality of education, social environment, and post-graduation experiences are examined in detail below.

Additionally, the program's claimed sensitivity to humanitarian crises and focus on disadvantaged groups have been assessed at this level to assess these assertions.

5.1.1.1. Scope and the Conduct of the Scholarships

The analysis reveals both positive outcomes and areas requiring improvement. Initially, participants in the program during the Ministry of National Education's overseeing noted scholarship insufficiency, forcing many to work. However, conditions improved significantly after 2012 when YTB took over the program, with some students able to take vacations, buy gifts, and even remit money to their families. Despite these initial advantages, recent inflation has eroded the stipends, leading to financial strain. Some students, expecting full financial independence, have reported returning home due to insufficient support. This indicates a need for urgent adjustments to address inflation and maintain stipend adequacy.

Furthermore, there were mixed perceptions about the social, academic, and professional support offered to scholarship recipients. While half of the graduates appreciated these activities, others, particularly those in cities far to the centers, reported a lack of support beyond financial assistance. One graduate in Gaziantep described feeling neglected, stating, "They sent my acceptance letter: 'Good luck!' After that, I didn't see anyone from YTB. They were always in Konya, Ankara, Istanbul" (2019 Alum 2). In contrast, a

graduate in Erzurum expressed satisfaction with the program despite limited activities, highlighting positive communication with YTB (2022 Alum 4).

Concerns were also raised regarding the selection process, especially the Turkic Republics Examination (TCS). While some scholars appreciated the transparency of this process, there is a call for standardized and transparent criteria in both initial selection and re-granting of scholarships. Graduates' contribution to their home countries can be ensured through a criterion such as re-application for another scholarship in return for a work requirement completed in their home countries.

5.1.1.2. Turkish Language Training

Not surprisingly, Turkish is a problem for almost all scholarship recipients initially coming to Türkiye as foreign language competency -principally English- is not widespread in the local community. The legal processes they must follow to stay in Türkiye could pose critical problems upon their arrival. During these processes, it has also been reported that people have lost money and had their credentials stolen by being directed to the fake websites and through other internet fraud.

“Now, from my point of view, getting a residence permit is something that YTB or I don't know, the university should take care of, if you bring a student with a scholarship. The student who comes already does not speak the language. They don't know the documents requested, they don't know what they should do or the way they should follow. Fortunately, I didn't experience this myself. Somehow a person came up to and helped me every time. But my other friends had a lot of difficulties. Some of them were deported because they didn't understand what to do” (2020 Alum 3).

In order to avoid such situations, students should be provided with detailed information packages. As part of the scholarship program, it is perceived as a positive practice for all students to attend a Turkish preparatory program regardless of their language of instruction. However, to avoid such problems and relieve the tension experienced at the day of arrival in Türkiye, Turkish courses that students can take online before they arrive can be offered.

5.1.1.3. Universities and the Quality of Training

Most graduates spoke positively about the education they received. They stated that they received education at top universities, from qualified and helpful academics, and in strong curricula.

“For example, we were going to the best schools. I mean, for example, I am very happy with Mimar Sinan [University]. I mean, after studying at Mimar Sinan, after graduating, many doors opened for me. I mean, I was one notch, one step above everyone else.” (2021 Alum 5).

“Belgin [advisor of the alum] is kind of my Turkish mother. My Turkish was very weak. She tolerated me a lot. She helped me a lot. So she is like my stand-in mother.” (2012* Alum).

“In my time, we had courses on law, we had courses on economics, we had courses on the way we speak, psychology, social psychology. All these courses seemed a bit strange to us initially. I was wondering why we were taking these courses. All those courses helped me a lot when I was working as a reporter and journalist. I saw that these issues were not covered at the university where I taught and that it was a significant deficiency.” (1999 Alum).

Especially those who studied in Türkiye in the earlier years of the program, expressed strong satisfaction, whereas more recent comments reflect weaker satisfaction regarding the quality of education. Some alums – especially those from Egypt – feels less impressed by the studies in Türkiye. One example suggests:

“Education in Türkiye is fine, yes, but I see that the differences between the two countries are small. I mean, for example, I studied at Cairo University. Cairo University exceeds ASBU in terms of ranking, I mean a lot. ASBU was established in 2013, so I might be unfair. The quality of education is high but it is not very difficult. It was more difficult for me in Egypt. Of course, my opinion is not enough. Some students study at Ankara University or METU. They have different views.” (2022 Alum 1).

There are also negative views regarding the faculties, which is discussed below in relation to the alums' social environment.

5.1.1.4. Social Environment

Regardless of all their experiences, positive or negative, almost all graduates defined Türkiye as their “second homeland.” Cultural affinity has been a facilitating factor for most graduates for life in Türkiye, which is associated with the regions selected for the research. While there were graduates who said that they “felt at home”, there were also graduates who stated considering Türkiye as a new home and that they felt the desire to visit and see it again. Especially the recognition of Kyrgyz people as cognates in all groups of the society, and the warm welcome of North Macedonia and Egypt for having a common history due to the legacy of the Ottoman Empire had a great impact on the graduates during their studies.

“I failed the class on History of Turkish Revolution. Only two of my questions were correct, I got seven points. One of our friends cried for me. ‘Even we don’t understand these things, how can they [referring to international students] do?’ She was that nice.” (2015 Alum 2).

“For example, I have traveled to every region of Türkiye. My friends invited me to Samsun, they invited me to Ağrı, Hatay, Izmir, then Mersin. I mean, I have been to every region and as I said, people are good. We became very close with the people there in every respect. And I’ll never forget, the thing I’m most impressed by is the people. And there are a few names here [pointing to her head] that I never forget.” (2015 Alum 1).

However, negative experiences are difficult to overlook, and have raised significant concerns. The rise in xenophobia in Türkiye in recent years has particularly impacted Egyptians, who have reported instances of verbal attacks due to being “mistaken for Syrians.” The following example highlights how challenges within the social environment can profoundly affect the lives of graduates:

“The professors are somehow not sympathetic to foreigners. At first, we have a very bad psychology, too. There was a professor, for example, who

used to say things like ‘what are you doing here’ at every now and then. Let me tell you this, we were three foreigners, and one of them dropped out. She stayed for a month or two, she left because of the professor... I mean, for example, in my own country I was more proactive, I was participating in things, protests and things like that. But when you go to a foreign country, something breaks inside you. I mean, when you see something, you don’t object at all.” (2016 Alum 1).

Unfortunately, such situations occur in institutions that are among the best and well-established in Türkiye. Similar stories have been repeatedly heard from those recently graduate.

5.1.1.5. Post-Graduation Experiences

Graduates mainly express their satisfaction with their education and report that securing decent employment opportunities as a result of it. However, problematic issues affect the program success despite the satisfaction. One striking issue is the feeling of lack of support upon the completion of the program. Although YTB organizes alum gatherings occasionally and supports alum associations in some countries, graduates compare themselves with the participants of other international scholarship programs and express that they feel being left alone. The anticipated support involves maintaining communication and creating opportunities for alums to apply their qualifications in service to Türkiye. Despite their willingness to contribute voluntarily, many alums face a lack of demand from Türkiye, and in many cases, their presence remains unrecognized.

For some graduates, the time spent in Türkiye can be a disadvantage compared to peers who stayed in the home country. Problems were reported such as lack of networking, unfamiliarity to the professional life of the home country, or the fact that the scholarship status or the education of Turkish institutions was not appreciated as much as expected. Another unexpected effect was expressed as follows:

“After returning, you are a fish out of water at first, so to speak. So it is a different environment. You forget the language completely. You completely forget the local languages here, Macedonian, Albanian. You forget the

environment. People don't recognize you. Because you spent 6 years in Türkiye. In those 6 years, you only visited your hometown 2-3 times. And that too for 1-2 weeks, 3 weeks. So you start from scratch, from zero.” (2005 Alum 2).

This situation is also observed among different ethnic groups in the multilingual context of North Macedonia. When asked about the issue of Russian, one of the official languages in Kyrgyzstan, a Kyrgyz respondent explained that they do not face the same challenge. To prevent this from becoming a significant obstacle for international students studying in Türkiye at the undergraduate level, the issue should be addressed. Furthermore, an examination of how Kyrgyz students continue to use Russian after their studies in Türkiye could offer potential solutions.

5.1.1.6. Accessibility Promotion

Türkiye, particularly after the management of the scholarship programs was transferred to YTB, has made significant strides in increasing accessibility among its awardees. The stories shared by the interviewed alums highlight key aspects of this development. Sensitivity to humanitarian crises has been evident since the program's inception. Additionally, while efforts were emphasized to be made to support relatively disadvantaged communities, the targeting and scholarship allocation processes have not been clearly defined. Therefore, an attempt was made to assess whether access to opportunities for graduates have increased based on their familial background in higher education. In this regard, it can be stated that Türkiye's scholarship programs have performed well.

Response to Crisis

Türkiye's launch of the Greater Student Project was a direct response to a crisis. The motivation of 'supporting the newly independent Turkic republics' expressed by the program managers and the limited literature, in fact, offered an exit for the people in the midst of the crises that these countries faced after the Soviet dissolution. A graduate, who was one of the first participants of the project, gives a testimony to this:

“I graduated in 1990. At that time, of course, there was no such idea that the country would open up to the outside world, or that Türkiye would offer scholarships. At that time, I was planning to go to Moscow. Of course, that was the very last years of the Soviet Union, it was about to fall apart. There were also internal conflicts, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Just as we were graduating, there were inter-ethnic conflicts here in the south. When I was on my way to Moscow, about to leave - I was about to buy a ticket - my mother stopped me and said, ‘You’re not going.’ My father said, ‘The situation is not well now; there are conflicts everywhere. They will kill you there.’ I had another option, I was going to go to Almaty, but they didn’t want that either.” (1997 Alum 1).

A graduate from North Macedonia, who arrived in Türkiye in 1992, mentioned that individuals affected by the Bosnian War were given the opportunity to study in Türkiye. Although he was admitted to a state university with rights just as Turkish citizens, he did not participate in the government scholarship program discussed in this dissertation, so his interview was excluded from the analysis. However, another graduate who joined the scholarship program the following year shared the how it went:

“There were ethnic Albanian students or ethnic Turkish students, enrolled in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And that is why they came from there. I mean, they are Macedonian citizens, but they are studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that time, there was actually no concept of Macedonian citizenship, mostly because of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. We declared our independence as a Republic in 1991, but it is not something that can be created immediately.” (1997 Alum 2).

Different interviews showed that the turmoil of the period in North Macedonia caused tension among ethnic groups. Among the groups who felt discriminated in this setting, some mentioned that Türkiye was an option to overcome this disadvantage for them:

“In the high school I attended, there were 1400 students. 1394 were Macedonians, only 6 were Albanians. And I was among those 6. Albanians were rarely admitted to universities at that time. For example, our university

was close to here. At that time there was only one state university. So when you become a second class citizen, you have to find a solution. I didn't think they would accept me here, because the competition was fierce." (1999 Alum).

"I did a lot of research on the universities here. There is a geostrategic situation, there was a war in Macedonia in 2001, and this year is my entrance year. I could get into Macedonian universities on the Macedonian side, but I don't know if I could have finished because the political situation was complicated. I chose Türkiye both for quality and because of the circumstances of that time." (2001* Alum).

However, supporting the disadvantaged is not necessarily conducive to positive outcomes in terms of social mobility. While we focused on scholarship programs as one of Türkiye's international higher education initiatives, there were also discussions with alums about other initiatives. On Manas University, established by Türkiye and being the only free university in Kyrgyzstan:

The researcher: "[Türkiye] is actually doing something better. Something to eliminate inequality."

2017 Alum 2: "But it's partly because of that. That's one of the reasons why Manas graduates don't get to the top positions. They are not people with a network. They are not people who come to university with a Ferrari. I am saying this because I saw it at the American University."

While other universities in Kyrgyzstan charge fees, Manas University offering education completely free of charge. Although this situation is considered to alleviate inequalities between income groups for access to higher education, one of its graduates –and also becoming a Türkiye Scholarships awardee in his graduate studies– argued that inequalities persist in professional life.

Support to First-Gen Students

“First-generation” or “first-gen” refers to individuals who are the first in their family to attend college or university, meaning neither of their parents or guardians have completed a higher education degree. Out of 44 graduates interviewed, 32 were the first in their families to study abroad, and half of these were the first to receive university-level education in their families. The majority of these first-gens were from North Macedonia. The Great Student Project and the subsequent Türkiye Scholarships have been particularly significant in creating accessibility opportunities for these students in the country.

Even among those whose parents had received education, there were individuals who stated that it would not have been possible for them to earn a degree abroad without the scholarship program, or to even attend higher education in their own country. Ten participants responded in this manner. In the newly independent Turkic republics, where economic conditions were highly unfavorable, families were unable to support their children attending university. For example, a graduate (2006 Alum) who came to study in Türkiye during this period stated that it was not possible for him to receive support from his parents, even though both of them were physicians.

Below, Table X presents the integrated Theory of Change (ToC) elements aligned with Level 1 (Reaction) of the extended Kirkpatrick model. It highlights participants’ immediate responses to key program inputs, activities, and outputs—capturing their perceptions of resources, implementation processes, and early-stage outcomes. These reactions, drawn from alums testimonies and institutional observations, reflect how students evaluated the quality, accessibility, and relevance of what the program offered. While a more detailed assessment is provided above, the table summarizes key concerns and appreciations regarding financial support, accommodation, selection procedures, language instruction, extracurricular programming, and institutional placements.

Table 10. Program Evaluation According to the Level 1: Reaction in Kirkpatrick’s Model

ToC Layers	Program Elements	Evaluation
Inputs	Monthly stipend	Initially adequate, stipends were scarce during the BÖP era, generous in early Türkiye Scholarships years, but increasingly insufficient in the 2020s due to inflation.
	Accommodation	Dormitory provision is generally positive. However, graduate students expressed dissatisfaction with shared rooms and inadequate housing support after dormitory tenure ends.
	Student support systems (online portal, call center, mobile app)	Mixed feedback: while some students reported accessible support, others felt isolated and struggled with bureaucratic procedures.
	Inter-agency board for scholarships	Its abolition caused coordination issues. YTB advocates for its reinstatement. YÖK is creating a similar body, suggesting overlapping roles and institutional misalignment. Yet, no influence over alums was observed.
Activities	Student selection and admission	Under BÖP, exams were introduced for standardization but only applied in select countries. Türkiye Scholarships abolished exams to broaden access, which raised fairness concerns among alums. The exam is now being reintroduced regionally to handle high number of applications.
	Turkish language support	Language acquisition remains a major challenge despite eventual fluency. Participants highlighted insufficient instructional support and noted risks (e.g., fraud) linked to language barriers.
	Extracurricular programs (cultural, social, academic, professional)	Widely appreciated under both BÖP and Türkiye Scholarships. Such activities often enhanced employability. Yet, students outside major cities (e.g., İstanbul, Ankara, Konya) reported limited access.
	Alum networks	Alums value a sense of community and engagement with Turkish institutions. Some attempted to establish associations, but reported YTB’s lack of follow-up support, potentially due to political concerns over leadership affiliations.
Outputs	University placements	Alums from the BÖP era generally accepted placements positively. Türkiye Scholarships alums were more critical, citing poor academic quality, unfriendly staff, and lack of support. The policy allowing students to select “any placement” sometimes led to disappointment.

	Quotas	Lack of transparency around quotas created suspicion and discomfort. Some students who discovered high quota numbers felt discouraged and perceived themselves as less competitive.
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5.1.2. Level 2: Learning

5.1.2.1. Knowledge or Capability Growth

Among the individual outcomes of international education, an essential role in the growth of knowledge and capabilities is the opportunity to be exposed to different or more comprehensive approaches than in the home countries. It is related to the quality of university education, the provision of different social and professional activities, and the possibility of finding a field of practice. For example, one graduate of medicine emphasized that she saw a large number of patients during her studies and that this was what really prepared her for the profession.

Apart from acquiring new skills, knowledge, and technological expertise, scholarship recipients define an equally significant benefit of international education as the broadening of horizons and the capacity to develop new perspectives. Graduates expressed that the strong philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the university education in Türkiye empowered them in their fields. While studying technical subjects, they also learned about the intellectual foundations, which they saw as an advantage that distinguished them from their peers.

“I think it is something related that Türkiye has a tradition to do science. And when I say this, it is important to highlight this: when we say science, you say analytical thinking, you say critical thinking. And we all know that universities are motors of... our centers of knowledge and matter of development of the society. When you say society, it means economics, it means politics, it means everything. And I have found it out that the higher education in Türkiye, it’s much more developed than in my country.” (2018 Alum).

“The education I received at METU and my ability to think critically showed itself every day, every working day. Of course, the confidence of

having received such an education and trying to do work with this confidence also had significant effects on my psychology.” (2010 Alum 2).

In other cases, scholars who had the chance to volunteer or work in civil society organizations and the Turkish offices of international organizations participated in field research and gained valuable experience. To mention the unique contribution of the scholarship program, seminars, training programs and internship opportunities provide a more fulfilling education period than other international students. They are invited to international congresses organized by public institutions, where they can acquire valuable insights and experience.

A graduate commented on the situation in Türkiye regarding his field of study as follows:

“We watch Turkish TV series here. I used to sleep at night, download the TV series in the morning and watch them that way. My friends here watch Turkish TV series live at night without sleeping. Then they sleep the next day, because there is no work. I said, ‘Well, I watch it from the record, so I can skip the commercials.’ My friend replied, ‘Turkish commercials are not boring, either.’ He said, ‘I mean, they are worth watching.’ In fact, I am actually happy that I studied advertising in Türkiye. It is much more advanced than in our country. This may be because Türkiye adopted the capitalist regime earlier.” (2017 Alum 2).

While alums testimonies indicate gains in knowledge, skills, and exposure to advanced academic and technological resources as well as enhancing critical and analytical perspectives, such statements were not widely referred across interviews. Nonetheless, these outcomes are perceived to result from the program’s design—particularly its emphasis on more selective student recruitment and strategic placement in institutions aligned with individual academic goals. This targeted matching is intended to enhance knowledge and capacity-building outcomes. However, the relatively modest frequency of these reflections suggests that the program’s intended learning objectives may not be uniformly realized, indicating a need for closer alignment between institutional

placements and the specific developmental trajectories envisioned with the program design.

5.1.2.2. Personal Growth

Building Self-confidence and Sense of Empowerment

The alums' experience underscores the transformative impact of international education in personalities, and break the molds of behavior resulted from pre-existing culture, value, norms and biases. Having to "stand on their own feet" away from their families increased the students' self-reliance and strengthened their independence. Many graduates reported feeling extremely overwhelmed in the first days of their arrival in Türkiye and wanting to go back. They said that coping with these feelings of being away from home, loneliness and being immersed in an unknown situation helped them to develop personally. It was highlighted in different interviews as a process that affected their character, such as being more outgoing in social situations:

"Being in Gaziantep, Türkiye is also something really influential. Before, I was rather cold, more distant. But when I came back to Kyrgyzstan, I realized that I changed; I became more outspoken, more assertive, more sociable. For example, our mindset has changed. This time we are having a hard time getting used to this place." (2019 Alum 2).

"Studying abroad keeps you away from your negative complexes. You become more social, you are not afraid. You can also interact with strangers. That is the biggest advantage of it." (2011 Alum).

One of the interviewee's reflections on her educational journey in Türkiye reveal the impact of cross-cultural experiences in reshaping individual identity and perspectives. Moving to Türkiye right after high school, 2010 Alum 1 states that "we are fundamentally shaped by our experiences in Türkiye, developing our own thoughts and personal principles as we are exposed to the Turkish culture." This immersion into a new culture led her to form a unique blend of ideas, combining elements from both her native and adopted environments. She points out to a significant divergence from the perspectives of her peers who stayed and studied at the home country.

The demanding conditions of education and the fact that the continuation of scholarship is based on success create pressure to keep studying. This situation, which may not be favorable during studentship, was deemed valuable in their retrospective views, and expressed to be an influence on the graduates to improve themselves in terms of discipline.

“Those were difficult times. I remember that I did a lot of reading for 1-2 years at that time. I had not read much about Türkiye’s process, world history, Ottoman history. I hadn’t read much; I didn’t know the history of modernization in Türkiye. I went with a completely different perception. ...I realized that I was sweating a lot in class. Because I questioned ‘why I came here?’ Especially from an educational perspective. ... I spent four years in a very good environment. When I look back, I can see that. There was a great challenge ... at the university.” (2022 Alum 2).

Transformative impact of international education also reflects on the professional behaviors of alums. Especially those who came from Kyrgyzstan in the early years and some of the North Macedonian graduates were observed to have developed new business ideas and entrepreneurship. Contrary to their educational background and family stories, graduates took their chances in the private sector and some of them have been successful and some continue to do so. As one of them recounted:

“I think probably the fact that I have been in Türkiye has a big contribution, because entrepreneurship in Türkiye is a bit more advanced. I’m not saying that everyone can do it, but Turkish entrepreneurs are really assertive.”
(2006 Alum)

The fact that they arrived in Türkiye in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of socialist systems and became part of an economic climate that experienced the transition to a free market economy at an earlier stage than their home countries explains their entrepreneurialism. Familiarized with the private sector and entrepreneurship, they were motivated to take risks contrary to the expectations of the social environment and cultural molds.

Multicultural Socialization and Building Tolerance

One of the most consistent themes emerging under Level 2—Learning— that relates to the personal growth students experienced during their scholarship years in Türkiye is exposure to a multicultural environment and encounters with diverse worldviews. Beyond academic learning and professional training, the scholarship journey contributed to the formation of civic awareness, cross-cultural empathy, and reflective thinking. These non-cognitive gains are central to international scholarship programs' logic, as they cultivate globally conscious individuals equipped to contribute meaningfully to their home societies.

Numerous alums have emphasized the significant influence that formative experiences abroad, such as friendships, interactions with diverse individuals, and social engagements, had on their personal development during their early youth in a foreign country. International students benefit not only from exposure to the host country's culture but also gain insights into the cultures of other international students with whom they closely interact. Such experiences promote cultivating a mindset that is tolerant of differences, receptive to new ideas, and appreciative of multicultural environments.

“You don't only learn about Turkish culture. I have friends from Morocco, Algeria, Sudan. Every nation is there. I just thought that I'd come here, do my master's degree and do my job related to that. We went to Türkiye, we did our master's degree, but we also learned completely different things. There are completely different cultures there. That is very interesting. For example, there is a situation, 'we do it like this.' Then the Iranians come and say 'no, we do it like this.' Then we go to Algeria and they say 'no, we do it like this'. These cultures are very different.” (2023 Alum)

The multi-faceted nature of socialization is not solely related to exposure to the cultures of different nationalities. The social contexts in which the scholarship students were first introduced also had a profound impact on them. One graduate from an ethnic minority and from a low-income background described difficulties in following lectures and

adapting to discussions. He realized that over time, as he participated in more diverse social activities, he became more familiar with the topics of his field, Political Science. In addition to this:

“As a team, as a student group, maybe because it is such a qualified group of students, you learn something from that team. In other words, you learn something from the comments they make in the classroom environment you are in, not just from what the professor is telling you.” (1997 Alum 2).

Another alum made the following comment, which explicitly reveals a similar situation:

“For example, Bishkek is the capital, since it is a slightly bigger city, it is a more cosmopolitan city. Russians live there, Turks live there, there are Kyrgyz, Uyghurs... The city where I lived is very mono ethnic. Only Kyrgyz people live there; a small city with a population of around 40 thousand. At first it was a shock for me to leave there and go directly to Türkiye, to Istanbul. I became involved in a city of millions. I adapted with great difficulty. But since I had friends with me, we stayed in the dormitory, we somehow got closer to each other and became more adapted.” (2006 Alum)

These factors collectively create a conducive environment for fostering people-to-people relations among various nations. Awareness of other cultures and an understanding of differences brings about changes in behavior for international graduates.

“I came here when I was 22 years old. And it was the first time I went alone to a country I didn’t know and I was doing my master’s degree there. Then I met students from all over the world, I met very different cultures. When I say that this changed my thinking, I mean, there are different people, there are different cultures, there are different lifestyles, I saw that and the world is really not just for us. I mean not for one nation. There are many nations and we can all live very well in one place even though we are different. This has also changed in me. I have become a bit open-minded.” (2018 Alum 1)

To give a concrete example of how it shapes behavior:

“It’s because my life in Istanbul and the program of scholarship there, I know exactly how to treat an international student. So that is something that I have learned there from the perspective being a student there in a foreign country and now I’m in the position where I’m the local one and there are international students here. So I know exactly how to welcome them.” (2018 Alum 2)

Additionally, it should be noted that characteristics such as open-mindedness, empathy, and being sharing enhance sensitivity in these matters, and that individuals are more negatively affected when this sensitivity is not reciprocated in their interactions. This situation underscores the importance of the social environment during the education of international students.

Civil/Political Consciousness and Patriotism

Exposure to a multicultural environment and encounters with diverse worldviews often contribute not only to greater cross-cultural understanding but also to increased self-awareness and civic consciousness among international students. This phenomenon is evident among graduates of the Türkiye Scholarships program, many of whom describe gaining a deeper appreciation for social engagement, political participation, and national identity during their studies in Türkiye. These shifts represent learning that extend beyond academic formation.

For instance, several graduates reported that their stay in Türkiye inspired them to reflect on the nature of political life and societal participation in their home countries.

“Our perspective is a bit different. When you go to Türkiye, you meet political parties in Türkiye. You see that political parties are not just parties that some people set up for one day for benefit, and political life affects the socio-economic life in Türkiye directly, that the mechanism of governing the state is generally affected by the grassroots... Unfortunately, we still haven’t reached those things. For example, in the last presidential election, the turnout rate was 30 percent, which is a really bad result. Personally, this makes me sad. Because when I see those participation rates in Türkiye...

You know, because you enter a grocery shop; they talk about politics. You have tea somewhere; they talk about politics. People play football, and after football they talk politics again” (2004 Alum).

Another graduate shared how studying in Türkiye offered new perspectives on governance and leadership. She recalled, “in Türkiye, I witnessed how emotional decision-making often leads to poor governance. Through my education there, I learned that leadership requires education, discipline, and critical thinking. Good people alone do not necessarily make good leaders” (2021 Alum 4).

Such insights extend beyond political awareness and reflect a broader civic consciousness. Graduates noted that their experiences in Türkiye made them more attentive to issues of social inclusion and public infrastructure. One graduate from Egypt observed, “I was deeply impressed by the yellow tactile paths in Ankara for the visually impaired. In Egypt, such infrastructure is almost nonexistent. Seeing people with visual impairments move independently in Türkiye made me realize how far we still have to go” (2015 Alum 1).

Another alum was struck by societal attitudes toward youth when she was a student in Konya: “I offered my seat to two elderly men on the tram. They insisted I sit instead because I was young and a student. This respect for youth was deeply moving and unlike what I had experienced in Kyrgyzstan. It showed how Türkiye values education and young people” (2021 Alum 3).

These accounts support sociological findings on the role of cultural immersion in shaping identity and social behavior. Interactions with host communities often serve as mirrors through which individuals reinterpret their own norms and values. In the context of Türkiye, many graduates developed heightened national consciousness after observing the strong civic symbols embedded in daily life—such as the reverence for the flag, the national anthem, and Atatürk. For example, one graduate said, “I started realizing how important it is to speak my native language after spending time in Türkiye. My Turkish friends would ask me the Kyrgyz word for something, and I could only think of its Russian. It made me feel disconnected, and I started paying more attention” (2022 Alum 4).

These sentiments are not isolated. As another alum pointed out, “Among international graduates in our country, Türkiye alums tend to be more patriotic. Even alums of Japan or Korea say, ‘You Türkiye alums have a different kind of national spirit’” (2004 Alum).

This dynamic is particularly pronounced in Kyrgyzstan, where shared cultural and historical ties with Türkiye seem to reinforce the effects. Almost all graduates interviewed in Kyrgyzstan, when asked how their experiences had changed their perspectives, highlighted an increased sense of patriotism. In North Macedonia, on the other hand, graduates noted a sense of ethnic and communal empowerment, while in Egypt, discussions focused on national unity and the potential of fostering inter-Arab cooperation. Here, nationalism is not viewed as exclusionary but rather as a means to achieve greater cohesion and collective progress.

These gains—introspective, relational, and frequently transformative—represent not only individual growth, but also establish the basis for broader developmental contributions that may emerge in later stages of the Theory of Change. They serve as significant intermediary steps in connecting program inputs with eventual social outcomes.

5.1.2.3. Learning Turkish and Türkiye

Learning the Turkish language is an invaluable asset for scholarship holders who have graduated from relevant departments in their home country. It is possible to learn not only the rules and vocabulary of the language but also its perception, culture, and implied or non-verbal expressions while using the language in daily life. In addition, all graduates who work in this field mentioned that it is also more appreciated for academic work. For example, students in Egypt were asked to write their theses in Arabic in order to speak to the intellectuals in the Arab world, whereas, in Türkiye, they wrote their theses in Turkish, which they emphasized was crucial in terms of strengthening the student’s command of the language. They pointed out that there are only a few professors in the Turkish departments who speak Turkish correctly and can convey the language along with its culture, and overwhelmingly, these are those who were educated in Türkiye. Moreover, learning Ottoman Turkish, visiting the Ottoman archives, and

exploring historical artifacts proved highly convenient for those studying in fields such as history and art history.

For students studying in different fields of social sciences, studying in Türkiye provides a chance to examine the country as a case study. For example, one graduate noted that in daily life in Egypt, people are not interested in politics, whereas in Türkiye, due to the intense interest, it is possible to learn about the political process and gain perspective on policy matters. The number of alums following the agenda and developments in Türkiye was surprisingly high. The reason for this can perhaps be understood through the following comments:

“Sometimes when I talk to my friends, I say, ‘We have seen this in Türkiye for 30 years; in Kyrgyzstan we will see this only now.’ I make comparisons with Türkiye because I watch public opinion in Türkiye and I have taken courses such as Political History etc. The Turkic republics in Central Asia are very similar to Türkiye. For example, in Central Asia, we are the country with the highest number of people emigrating. This is what happened in Türkiye in the 1950s...” (1997 Alum 1).

“Since I work in politics, we inevitably discuss social issues every day. The examples given are usually from the region, because they know the region. But I can give very different examples from Türkiye. Türkiye is an incredible laboratory for someone studying social sciences. It is a country where a wide range of issues related to social sciences are discussed, from the secularism debate to how interventionist the state should be, from human rights debates to sects and congregations, and where problems and transformations related to them are experienced every day.” (2010 Alum 2).

At these points, being able to meet or learn from the most prominent names in the field has also been highlighted and referred to as highly significant opportunity for international students, which is among the activities of Türkiye Scholarship and for its ToC, relates to attaining the aspired outcomes.

5.1.3. Level 3: Application

This section indicated the evaluation of the application of learning in professional, academic, or civic settings post-graduation. According to the Kirkpatrick model, those are included in the Learning stage, manifest themselves in daily life in the Application stage. Therefore, there are overlaps with the previous sections, where intermediate outcomes of the acquired knowledge, skills, techniques, personal traits, and even network are reflected.

The assessment was made basically based on the employment opportunities the scholarship recipients have had attained upon their graduation. All interviewed graduates started working immediately after graduation. While a more comprehensive survey of graduates is necessary to judge, the fact that all graduates in the sample included in this study are in employment is a positive indicator. Graduates were also asked to compare themselves with graduates of universities in their home region or other countries and to assess their ability to benefit from employment opportunities and their career progress.

Some of them even started working part-time during their years as students. Given that the vast majority of individuals selected for the scholarship program came from disadvantaged backgrounds and have a sense of social responsibility or, as discussed above, developed it during the education process, it is not surprising that they pursue the return on their education by participating in employment.

While an alum (2005 Alum 2) with fifteen years of experience in government offices in North Macedonia noted that graduates of Turkish higher education had shown superiority and today many of them are in managerial positions especially in the private sector, he emphasized that recent graduates do not have very distinctive characteristics. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan, superior qualifications of Türkiye alums over graduates from other countries and local schools have become increasingly negligible over time. As mentioned earlier, in Egypt, the entire group of graduates reached for this research completed their studies within the last ten years and, therefore, could not be compared with previous generations.

While a large number of Türkiye graduates are in employment at different levels of education, the second most popular vacancies are in the private sector. Türkiye-related

economic activities are followed by Türkiye-related public services. This section will then review the experiences of graduates working in generally popular professional fields, including education and research, entrepreneurship, the public sector, and intellectual production.

5.1.3.1. Turkish Language's Relevance to Employment

Use of Turkish as an asset upholds the alums in their professional lives, and its reflection in their surroundings reinforces entrepreneurialism, public administration, and intellectual production – popular occupations among the alums. For graduates specializing in International Relations, Political Science, Journalism, History, and, naturally, Turkish Language and Literature, Turkish is essential for their professional development. After the 1980s, when the Turkish economy was opened outwards, Türkiye increased its trade partnerships through its international students and reinforced its economic engagement in the 2000s, when it participated even more actively in globalization. While Turkish has become an accepted language for business, with the intensified interaction between regions, direct translation between Turkish and other languages such as Russian, Arabic, and Albanian has become critical.

Due to their familiarity with the language and the business environment, some of the alums have become involved in trade and investment with Türkiye, even if their education is not directly relevant. In particular, Kyrgyz graduates predominantly work in the private sector, with earlier graduates often becoming entrepreneurs. Individuals who studied abroad have become key actors in the market and its transformation in a country transitioning from a closed economy to a free market economy. This situation has persisted until recently:

“When I was in Türkiye, I was exporting [to Kyrgyzstan]. After coming here, we are engaged in imports [from Türkiye]. Thus, I changed direction.”

(2019 Alum 2)

Among North Macedonian graduates, there are those who have ventured into import-export with Türkiye and are planning initiatives in new business areas, such as health tourism. In Egypt, the prominent private sector operation involves outsourced offices for

companies doing business in Türkiye. Egyptian graduates who speak Turkish are particularly active in sectors such as human resources, customer service, and banking.

Furthermore, Turkish institutions have become a significant source of employment for graduates not involved in the private sector. Among the 44 individuals interviewed, 12 are currently employed by Turkish institutions. Organizations such as embassies, consulates, TİKA project coordination offices, the Maarif Foundation Schools, and the Yunus Emre Institutes often hire Türkiye alums due to their proficiency in Turkish and their ability to facilitate operations at the local level through their language skills and networks. However, these institutions have a limited employment capacity, which appears to be nearly saturated.

One of the graduates, shared her initial challenges and eventual employment experience:

“Initially, I struggled to find a job. In 2015, I had recently started wearing a headscarf, which was met with some reactions locally. I faced judgments everywhere I went, and this affected me significantly. Despite teaching is my graduation field, I didn’t want to teach due to low salaries and uncertainty about professional development. I experienced depression and was unemployed for about three months. Through connections from my education days, I was recommended to apply for a secretary position at the Turkish Anatolian High School. I started there at the end of 2015 and worked for about four years. Then, I took over this position [at another Turkish institution] from a colleague who left to get back to school.” (2015 Alum 2)

Leveraging their Turkish education, part of the alums – especially those studying Public Administration, Political Science, and International Relations – found employment in the field related to their studies and has become natural nexuses in relations between their country and Türkiye.

Graduates, especially those do not work in the field they studied with the support of scholarships have found translation and consultancy services to be significant employment areas, particularly due to their language skills, social networks, and insights

into the business world gained in Türkiye. Even during their studentship, they provide translation services between people of their home country and Türkiye, sometimes at high level visits and other times on more everyday issues. Those residing in Türkiye have worked in non-governmental organizations and local offices of international organizations. Notably, Egyptians have assumed critical social responsibilities as Arabic speakers in providing translation services for the influx of Syrian refugees arriving in Türkiye (2015 Alum 1 & 2017 Alum 1).

In addition to graduates who pursue these services professionally, others interviewed also provide consultancy and translation services and assist in networking for individuals wishing to conduct business between Türkiye and their home countries.

Some work in educational consultancy or establish firms in this field. For example, a graduate from Kyrgyzstan begun to commercially utilize their international education experience by establishing a consultancy firm to guide new generations (2022 Alum 3). An Egyptian graduate facilitates business delegations from Türkiye, providing guidance and translation services to help them act effectively in establishing local business partnerships on a freelance basis (2017 Alum 3). Another graduate has made extra income by creating subtitles for Turkish TV series since they first began airing in North Macedonia (2001* Alum).

Providing information about studying in Türkiye, voluntarily or professionally, a role undertaken by all alums, was also coded as promoting the scholarship program and Turkish higher education has significant repercussions for both Türkiye and the host country regarding the expansion of tertiary-level education and studying abroad for low-income groups. Nuances such as that Türkiye Scholarship recipients can recommend applicants also support the view that this is a significant intermediate outcome of the program.

While support in the scholarship application process is a professional activity of alums who have established a business in educational consulting, all the remaining alums voluntarily promote the scholarship program and Turkish higher education, either by advising their personal circles or informing wider groups of students at the request of YTB, their home country's educational NGOs, or alma maters. For example, an

Egyptian couple who met while studying in Türkiye on the scholarship and got married helped seven applicants apply for and receive scholarships to study in Türkiye (2019 Alum 1). A Macedonian academic also advised and guided five people to study in Türkiye with scholarships (2019 Alum 6). Another graduate reported engaging in informal outreach upon returning to Egypt—giving talks to students, advising peers on studying in Türkiye, and encouraging relatives to apply for Türkiye Scholarships—while also noting interest from others in trade opportunities, reflecting positive word-of-mouth influence (2016 Alum 1).

As mentioned regarding education quality, even if Egyptians are less satisfied, they recommend their friends to visit Türkiye, which they greatly admire for its historical, cultural, and artistic aspects. In general, all graduates interviewed recommend studying abroad as an experience that broadens horizons, builds self-confidence, and provides a new language and cultural, social, and political insight into another country. Accordingly, they consult younger generations for education abroad, in Türkiye particularly.

5.1.3.2. Popular Employment Fields

Teaching & Research

Half of the interviews are made with alums completing graduate studies in Türkiye, majority of whom pursue academic career. Of the 44 interviewees, 12 were academics and 4 were teachers. During the “Türkiye Alumni Forum” organized by YTB in Istanbul on 19-20 January 2023, the portal created for these alums was introduced. According to the data on this portal where 42 thousand of the total number of graduates, estimated to be around 150 thousand, have registered, 21 percent of the alums are teachers and 14 percent are academics (Alumni Türkiye, 20 January 2023). The fact that education is the most popular sector in which Türkiye’s graduates work is also reflected in this research.

All teachers participating in this study are employed in schools established by the Turkish Maarif Foundation within their respective home countries. Consequently, these participants are regarded in this study as employees of a Turkish public institution. Similar to those employed in other sectors, the employment opportunities provided by the Maarif schools for Turkish graduates align with the broader trend of Turkish

graduates working in enterprises whose financing are from Türkiye. However, it is essential to acknowledge that not all of the 8,852 Turkish graduate teachers are employed by the Maarif schools (Alumni Türkiye, 2023).

Among Türkiye's graduates, the second most popular career, and the most popular within the scope of our research, is academia. This trend has developed as a response to the input of balancing scholarship awards to graduate and undergraduate studies. These graduates contribute to the production of scientific knowledge, the enhancement of research capacity, and the training of professionals in their own countries, Türkiye, and third countries. However, a significant issue has been highlighted regarding doctoral graduates who aim for academic careers but cannot find employment in Türkiye. A graduate reported receiving numerous offers to teach part-time at a nominal hourly wage but noted that universities are reluctant to offer full-time positions. Consequently, the graduate has begun working outside academia and expressed, with regret, that she had to distance herself from the academic world (2016 Alum 1).

Entrepreneurialism

Alums have the opportunity to observe the gap and need in the market both in their home countries and in Türkiye, start businesses, or help the business in which they are involved to expand into the Turkish market. In this way, they enable their workplaces to thrive and their countries to diversify economic cooperation. This has impacted development through bilateral economic contributions, and as such international education has yielded significant outcomes also at a macro level. A graduate familiarized with the automobile spare parts industry and the textile industry, which have an essential place in Türkiye's exports, has strengthened interaction with these industries in his home country, even if his education is not in this field:

“At a family-owned company, I worked as a sales manager, selling auto parts, automotive spare parts. But there were continuous sales from Türkiye. Cashmere carpet, I later became the manager of the company there in Macedonia. We were constantly traveling back and forth to Gaziantep in Türkiye.” (2001* Alum)

Another interviewee, who seized the opportunity to live in an industrial city while he was still studying, explains his motivation for doing so as follows:

“The state gave me a scholarship, they paid for our insurance, they paid for the dormitory where we stayed. The reason why I started working early was that if Türkiye contributes to me, I should at least contribute to them as much as I can. With these things in mind, we did export, we sold carpets to Russia so that we could earn foreign currency. We earned dollars to bring Türkiye.” (2019 Alum 2)

In putting their experience, knowledge, and skills into practice, alums have consciously pursued a path that has helped improve both their economic situation and the private sector of home and host countries. The fact that 10 percent of the more than 42 thousand alums who participated in the Alumni Türkiye platform identified their profession as entrepreneurship (Alumni Türkiye, 20 January 2023) shows that this is considerably widespread.

Public Administration

In addition to those employed in Turkish public institutions, thirteen interviewees are working in public institutions or political positions in their home countries. Some graduates have left such roles to start their own businesses or transition to the private sector. Twelve graduates pursuing academic careers are considered separately. Graduates in this field report that they have significantly benefited from their education and internships. A municipality employee who did an internship at TİKA continues to generate projects (2011 Alum); a Public Administration graduate who was an assistant to an MP applied her theoretical knowledge of legislation to practice, in her earlier profession (2017 Alum 4); a Political Science graduate who works at the country’s presidency can provide estimates from the Turkish context on the outcomes of policy-making processes (2010 Alum 2). International Relations graduates working in representative institutions such as embassies put their education into practice (2021 Alum 4 & 2021 Alum 3).

Graduates leverage their educational and internship experiences in Türkiye to enhance their professional competencies, build networks, and apply innovative solutions in their public sector roles, thereby contributing to more dynamic governance and practical administration. As in the case of the graduate working in local government, involved in promoting her province and increasing its tourist potential (2011 Alum), they help strengthening ties with Türkiye, as well.

Intellectual Production

As noted, twelve of the graduates interviewed are academics, and two freelancers are active in the media sector. Among these graduates, some have founded and managed think-tanks, or conducted research at one. This group designs courses, train students and researchers, publishes reports, and develops projects. They leverage their networks and education in Türkiye by participating in conferences and symposia and collaborate with friends among other international graduates or their former professors to publish internationally. Many of the academic graduates are highly active in teaching, advising theses, translating books, and managing projects. One academic shared that she published an article with the support of her advisor in Türkiye while still a masters' student, which she believes was a good start to her career (2018 Alum 2).

Journalists work to inform their communities and, thus, contribute to intellectual development. One graduate who studied journalism in Türkiye at the early years of scholarship program quickly advanced in his career, taking on managerial roles in media organizations and spearheading the first website launch of a national news agency (1999 Alum). Another younger graduate with a background in journalism, unable to find work in the field due to limited opportunities and a lack of relevant network, co-founded a local news portal with his friends, voluntarily publishing in the local language (2014 Alum). Through this platform, example of which had been previously unavailable, they succeeded in drawing local attention to specific issues.

These experiences highlight the professional trajectories of graduates in academia and media, who contribute significantly to intellectual production both locally and internationally by utilizing their education and networks.

5.1.3.3. Networking

As part of the intermediate outcomes, the network of alums made through education in Türkiye serves as a significant function to expand the results from individual level to organizational and social levels. Almost all alums reported that they have formed lasting friendships with both local and other international students and continue to maintain these relationships, and alums can benefit from these relationships beyond friendship. When participants returned to their home countries or relocated elsewhere, they established contacts with these networks or even met other Türkiye alums to build further connections. These relationships provided benefits in many areas of professional life, including vacancy search, business development, and entrepreneurship. In addition, some academic graduates continue their studies with their professors and conduct joint academic research.

“Sakarya has 89,000 students. In terms of the number of students from abroad, it ranks among the top in Türkiye. I have friends from African countries, European countries... We are in constant contact with them. We talk, we know who is doing what. It is very good in terms of networking. For example, I have contacts from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan. If I want to go to Uzbekistan, I just need to say ‘hello’.” (2021 Alum 4)

Student unions from each country have been established by students in Türkiye, and supported by YTB, has generated crucial results. Graduates have stated that at these unions’ meetings and other events where scholarship recipients are invited, meeting other scholars from their own and other cities who are from their country is seen as a significant opportunity. They emphasize the importance of maintaining these connections when they return to their countries. The contributions of the transnational network among graduates to tourism should also be recognized from the example of this alum’s experience, where she attended one of her friend’s wedding in Greece with another friend from Palestine, and she invited a Tunisian friend to her city another time, all of whom are Türkiye alums. She stated that “it’s not only relationship, it’s a little bit more with some of them” (2018 Alum 2).

5.1.3.4. Problems in Finding an Employment

While many graduates report enhanced awareness, critical thinking, and social consciousness during their time in Türkiye, the translation of these capacities into professional or civic engagement post-graduation has not been without challenges. A recurring theme across interviews is the difficulty of reintegration into home country systems, especially when it comes to entering the job market. Several graduates stated that, despite the valuable experiences and knowledge gained abroad, their time in Türkiye limited their access to the local social networks often formed at domestic universities, putting them at a disadvantage in professional circles.

This issue was particularly salient among Kyrgyz graduates, especially those from the early cohorts. Some faced persistent challenges with the recognition of Turkish university diplomas, pushing them toward private sector employment or entrepreneurial activities. Similar concerns were echoed by Egyptian alums, who also reported institutional hurdles in diploma recognition. The director of an organization established by Türkiye alums (2004 Alum) explained that while these challenges were initially restrictive, they have eventually produced alternative pathways: in both Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia, the emergence of multiple cohorts of Türkiye graduates has led to informal support networks and alums solidarity, which have helped compensate for early professional setbacks. As one graduate remarked, “we had difficulties finding jobs and adapting to social life back home, but other Turkish graduates understood us, as they had experienced the same” (2010 Alum 1).

The strength of the networks developed during study in Türkiye, however, also contributed to retention problems. A 2014 graduate stated that despite wanting to stay in Türkiye for work, restrictive work permit regulations prevented him from continuing his career officially, ultimately forcing him to return. Conversely, a 2020 graduate described how limited opportunities in his home country and the absence of a supportive social environment led him to remain in Türkiye despite initial plans to return (2020 Alum 3). These examples reveal that personal and professional reintegration is not only shaped by the individual’s capacities and achievements but also by legal, institutional, and sociocultural contexts in both Türkiye and the home countries.

Finally, political conditions were also cited as influential factors. In some cases, the alignment of a graduate's field of expertise or employment preferences with the political agenda of the home country was reported to have affected employability. One alum from North Macedonia articulated this concern: "It was a bit difficult because this recruitment process in Macedonia can change a little bit. For political reasons, sometimes getting a job that does not fit the policies of the governments at that moment." (2019 Alum 5).

In sum, while the Türkiye Scholarships program appears to equip students with knowledge and values leading to a stronger professional and civic engagement, structural constraints —ranging from credential recognition and legal limitations to political volatility— continue to vary the extent to which these capacities can be exercised. These barriers are important considerations for evaluating the program's behavioral outcomes and understanding the broader conditions under which its developmental goals are actualized.

5.1.4. Level 4: Organizational Results

This section evaluates long-term outcomes at the organizational and institutional levels by examining the environments in which alums are professionally active. As previously noted, all interviewees were employed, allowing for an assessment of the changes they introduced in their workplaces and broader professional circles. These include institutional innovations and structural adjustments influenced by their education in Türkiye.

A significant proportion of alums interviewed (13 out of 44), including six who founded their own companies, are employed in the private sector. Their contributions to this domain are particularly emphasized in this section, highlighting how newly acquired knowledge, skills, and technical competencies translated into innovative practices and organizational improvements. These alums often introduced new visions and methods in their fields, contributing to capacity building and institutional adjustments.

Another prominent area of long-term outcomes pertains to alums engagement in civil society. The growth in national consciousness and political awareness observed among alums has often manifested as increased involvement in social responsibility initiatives.

These efforts extend beyond personal career advancement, shaping broader organizational and community development processes. Thus, this section focuses on how alums serve as agents of change not only within their immediate circles but also across institutional structures.

5.1.4.1. Private Sector Contributions

Graduates of Turkish higher education institutions have leveraged their expertise gained during their studies to develop and start innovative businesses. Those working in the private sector have incorporated Türkiye into their professional portfolios, introducing innovations to their workplaces or initiating new business ventures.

One graduate (2019 Alum 5), played a crucial role during the establishment of a laboratory in his country, and played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic. He shared, “I was responsible for PCR tests in the field of molecular biology. The lab essentially started with me. I began as an employee, and all subsequent biologists received training through me. The entire PCR operation, including scheduling and mechanisms, was under my responsibility. We worked extensively on PCR at Hacettepe University, though I never imagined using it for COVID-19 at that time. PCR has broad applications beyond COVID, including genetic testing and gene analysis.”

Another alum, a computer engineer (2019 Alum 3), who contributes to the upskilling of junior professionals through the workplace training he offers, states that he returned to his home city with this goal in mind. He emphasized his commitment to practical education: “I came back to Skopje to work with my people and help them. We take young interns, work with them, prepare them, and present our software solutions. Over the past three years, I have trained 15 people on real-world problems, and they have all started their careers.”

Other younger graduate (2022 Alum 3), along with a former housemate from Türkiye from his study years, established a consultancy firm specializing in international education. Based on their own experience of being international students, they saw an opportunity to offer consultancy services for students wishing to study abroad.

While, the younger graduates have contributed to their country's private sector through their initiatives and transfer of skills, graduates from earlier years, who have more career advancement opportunities, have been able to have a stronger impact. A graduate who returned to Kyrgyzstan (2005 Alum 1) began offering private tutoring and later established a specialized education center to help students prepare for university entrance exams or receive different trainings than taught at schools such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) workshops. While studying as a student in Türkiye, she attended courses at other institutions and learned basic programming, graphic design and web design, among other things. She used these skills to develop and promote her business and within three years she had one of the leading education centers in the country and started employing other teaching staff.

A graduate who held executive roles at various television channels for many years and contributed to the establishment of a national TV station also founded North Macedonia's first online news platform (1999 Alum). Another graduate is a co-founder and manager of an information technology company that provides services for the digitalization of public sector operations (2004 Alum). This graduate, who maintains strong ties with other alums, emphasized that the challenging conditions of continuing higher education in both Türkiye and his home country have fostered an entrepreneurial spirit, resulting in many entrepreneurs among their peers.

These examples demonstrate how graduates have successfully applied their Turkish education to develop and start businesses, thereby contributing to their communities and professional fields. In the case of other graduates, even if starting a business is not conceivable, there is a strong desire to improve a business or to increase societal benefit by introducing innovation into the organizations of their home country. Especially young alums aspire to promote societal benefit and contribute to such a vision, representing a diverse group of professionals committed to making meaningful contributions to their communities.

One such alum (2020 Alum 2) is an Egyptian doctor who seeks to enhance the acceptance of psychiatry in the country. By promoting mental health awareness and advocating for psychiatric services, this doctor aims to address the stigma surrounding

mental health issues and improve the well-being of the population. Another graduate (2017 Alum 1), formerly worked at an NGO, aspires to serve societal well-being through art therapy. She has participated in several workshops, describes her motivation: “I want to do something beautiful for myself and others rather than working in corporate settings.”

An economist (2022 Alum 1) working on a doctoral project on Islamic finance focused on increasing investments for the benefit of the poor aiming to contribute to societal welfare by promoting economic growth and reducing poverty. By developing a project to direct resources collected as *zakat* towards entrepreneurs from disadvantaged communities, this economist seeks to enhance social equity and improve living standards.

Another graduate (2005 Alum 2) played a key role in expanding access to vocational training and diplomas through Anadolu University’s Open Education Faculty in the Balkans. After a visit to his former professors in Türkiye, he initiated the Balkan Program in 2011, beginning with North Macedonia and Kosovo. Today, the program serves over 500 students across the region, with the highest enrollment in North Macedonia, providing certifications for employment in sectors requiring practical, industry-specific skills in the region.

Such initiatives illustrate how graduates leverage their education to implement institutional innovations, increase social well-being, alleviate inequality and expand educational access. Their work not only reflects entrepreneurial spirit but also a commitment to improving societal welfare and contributing to human capital development in their home regions.

5.1.4.2. Civil Society Involvement

International students, having faced various challenges, have developed a sense of empathy that motivates them to address both their own difficulties and broader social issues. To offer guidance and support in such a situation, many have formed student associations to assist newly arrived peers in Türkiye. In all the countries surveyed, graduates emphasized the importance of forming solidarity networks with fellow

students from their home countries during their studies, often by joining student associations and organizing events. Several participants (2018 Alum 1, 2017 Alum 1, 2015 Alum 1, 2022 Alum 1, 2021 Alum 4, 2017 Alum 2, 2004 Alum, 2005 Alum 1, 2010 Alum 2, 2005 Alum 2) played a leading role in establishing and managing such associations.

Several alums have taken initiatives to organize civil society efforts that strengthen Türkiye's ties with their home countries. In North Macedonia, 2010 Alum 2 and 2005 Alum 2 played key roles in establishing alums associations aimed at fostering bilateral relations and serving as platforms for networking and advocacy. As 2005 Alum 2 remarked, "We thought such a big project should not go to waste... Our idea was to gather graduates under one roof, create a data bank, and introduce them to the private sector and the state here." The Türkiye Alumni Association in Kyrgyzstan, founded in 2009, exemplifies structured alums engagement. As described by 2004 Alum: "We began uniting to show how our Türkiye education could serve Kyrgyzstan's socio-economic life... We even started a career project to help new graduates integrate more easily." These examples reflect how alums contribute to civil society by creating institutional platforms that support professional integration, community building, and long-term cooperation between Türkiye and partner countries.

Plans are also in place for one of these alum associations to evolve into a research center or think tank. Recognizing the impact of civil society in generating knowledge, disseminating information, and influencing society, other graduates continue to establish and lead similar organizations. Some graduates (2022 Alum 2 and 1997 Alum 2), driven by a desire for regional influence, are working to strengthen relationships with various organizations in their regions.

Voluntary alums associations established by Türkiye graduates play a significant role in fostering solidarity, preserving shared experiences, and supporting post-graduation engagement. Many alums interviewed expressed a strong desire to remain connected with fellow graduates, emphasizing the value of maintaining bonds forged during their

time in Türkiye. While these associations may not function as formal lobbying bodies, they serve vital social and symbolic roles.

In North Macedonia and Kyrgyzstan, alums have formed associations independently, driven by shared goals. However, these groups have not been formally recognized among the 34 officially listed by Türkiye Scholarships (Türkiye Mezunları, n.d.). In both cases, limited alignment with YTB's institutional framework appears to have restricted official support. In Kyrgyzstan, political dynamics have also hindered formal cooperation, leading one alums group to reposition itself as a business association. Meanwhile, a separate group is working toward establishing an officially supported association in coordination with YTB, though collaboration between the two remains limited.

Aside from these, some formed and worked in associations that convened business people and some established think tanks or contributed to the research of such establishments. As mentioned above, graduates working in international organizations and charities in Türkiye have been helpful because of their language skills. With the motivation they acquired and the tasks they have undertaken, civil movements within innovation and organizational arrangements are the most prominent characteristics of Türkiye alums. These cases highlight the alums' initiative in institutionalizing social responsibility and knowledge transfer. Despite divergent trajectories, such organizations reflect alums-led contributions to long-term organizational outcomes in line with Türkiye Scholarships' developmental aims.

5.1.4.3. Supports from Türkiye

The social groups and institutions the alums became familiar with during their studies in Türkiye served as a support resource for them to provide for the organizational environment. Being informed about the work of Turkish institutions operating abroad or their international organizations and events, they initiated efforts to receive support from those in their field of work or studies. The alums benefitted from Anadolu Agency and TRT in the media field and YTB and TİKA in NGO support. For example, one alum applied to TİKA and implemented a project for capacity building in his home country through free vocational courses in ICT (2017 Alum 2).

Another alum (1997 Alum 2) illustrated the strategic advantage of accessing Turkish institutional support when establishing a think tank in North Macedonia. In the early 2000s, the graduate and his colleagues founded one of the country's first think tanks whose research mainly focuses on European Union integration. TİKA's supports were drawn for different research projects. This experience underscores how graduates can effectively engage with Turkish institutions to foster significant initiatives in their home countries.

Another graduate, a career counselor (2021 Alum 1), encouraged the students at the school where he works to apply to Teknofest, a festival organized with the support of the Ministry of Industry and Technology in Türkiye, where projects in the fields of aviation, technology, and space technology compete and innovations are exhibited. Eighteen projects from across the school were submitted, and three that qualified to compete in the finals were invited to Türkiye for their presentation with a coverage of their accommodation and travel expenses. This graduate attended the festival with the students who visited Türkiye for the first time, even a few of whom went abroad for the first time. He reported that there was much more interest in the next competition, and through his initiative, students' interest in technological innovations has increased at the institution.

5.1.5. Level 5: External Results

This section evaluates the broader societal, national, and international impacts of the Türkiye Scholarships program, corresponding to the final stage of the Theory of Change framework—impact. Within the extended Kirkpatrick model, these outcomes reflect whether the program has contributed to structural or policy-level changes beyond individual or institutional domains.

The findings indicate a direct relationship between the time elapsed since graduation and the graduate's ability to exert broader developmental influence. Alums who have accumulated significant professional experience and progressed in their careers are more likely to generate meaningful contributions in areas such as social transformation, political development, and bilateral relations —particularly between Türkiye and their home countries. In contrast, more recent graduates, such as those from Egypt, who

constitute a younger cohort in this study, have had limited time and opportunity to effect change at such levels. This has resulted in lower representation of these themes in their interviews.

To maintain analytical coherence with the study's objective of evaluating the program as a tool of development cooperation, impacts in this section are categorized by developmental domains. While 40 of the 44 interviews contained relevant insights, only 25 were thematically coded with sufficient depth to support conclusions on long-term impact. These cases form the evidentiary base for assessing Türkiye Scholarships' external results.

Prior to exploring developmental outcomes, the findings of this study are presented in terms of diplomatic outcomes in the context of "soft power," which frequently becomes the framework for scholarly works analyzing scholarship programs as a means to achieve these objectives. The subsequent discussion will elaborate on the identified impact through the examination of selected case examples drawn from the domains of social and human development, economic development, political development, and technological development.

5.1.5.1. Diplomatic Roles

States are traditionally motivated to implement international education programs by their diplomatic contributions. The Türkiye Scholarships program has also proven to be an instrument of diplomatic influence through soft power, particularly as demonstrated by alums engagement in various public spheres. In the findings of this study, 30 out of 44 interviews were coded in the categories related to diplomatic roles. For example, Kyrgyzstan, which has had students coming to study in Türkiye through a scholarship program for more than 30 years, has started to send diplomats who were educated in Türkiye and can speak Turkish to its Turkish missions, which directly contributes to bilateral relations. While not all forms of influence fall under formal diplomatic categories, graduates' activities across their societies contribute to Türkiye's visibility, legitimacy, and cultural resonance abroad, aligning with the long-term impact goals in the ToC framework.

Many graduates assume the role of informal ambassadors, shaping perceptions of Türkiye through everyday interactions and public representation. The notion of “voluntary ambassadorship”—a term explicitly used by several interviewees—reflects their self-identification as advocates for Türkiye. For instance, an alum stated: “We are voluntary ambassadors of Türkiye here... we advertise Türkiye in a way that Türkiye does not expect or believe” (2005 Alum 2). This sentiment was echoed by graduates who defended Türkiye against misinformation, clarified cultural misunderstandings, and actively engaged in portraying a more accurate and positive image of the country.

The political influence of alums has also been tangible. In countries such as Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia, alums have reached influential positions within political parties and public administration. One graduate returned home and co-founded a political party composed largely of Türkiye-educated peers, which went on to win local elections (2022 Alum 3). Others entered public service, attributing their career paths and civic ethos to their formative experiences in Türkiye (2005 Alum 2, 2001* Alum). Their continued emotional connection to Türkiye, often described as a “second home,” has translated into sustained affective loyalty. This loyalty, shaped not only by institutional inputs but also by lived experiences of hospitality and cultural integration, inspires alums to promote Türkiye organically in their professional and personal lives.

The promotion of Türkiye’s image is often informal but consistent. In addition to promoting Türkiye in its entirety, the scholarship recipients carry its cultural elements to their home countries, and adopting some aspects of the culture and daily habits, they have mainly acted as representatives by promoting and understanding their culture in Türkiye. In exchange, they became representatives of their cultures and helped Turkish communities and other international students to understand their home country values, customs, and traditions. They voluntarily taught the ethnic dances to the Turkish children (2019 Alum 4); they drew their Turkish friends to their countries for tourist visits (2020 Alum 3); and they showed the multiplicity of their countries’ culture and even educated Turks on their shared history (2014 Alum).

Promoting Turkish institutions and higher education, establishing cooperation between their home institutions and Turkish ones, contributing to the organization of events such

as conferences, panels, symposia, or participating in international events where presentations are made, representing both their home country and the host country institutions, and other such actions reported by former scholarship recipients in the interviews are considered to be meaningful contributions to diplomatic roles especially in the education sector. Specific examples include one alum (2022 Alum 3) founding an educational consultancy firm and advising prospective students to study in Türkiye based on their familiarity with the academic environment and positive student experiences, and another graduate initiating EU–Türkiye academic partnerships through his institution, facilitating research and mobility exchanges that bolstered Türkiye’s academic credibility (1997 Alum 2).

Finally, a number of graduates have also played intermediary roles in economic relations with Türkiye, especially in Kyrgyzstan. Alums were active in establishing business associations linking Turkish and local firms. Through business-to-business meetings and trade facilitation, they enhanced bilateral commercial ties, serving as trusted partners who understood both markets. These alums viewed themselves not merely as economic actors but as “bridges between countries,” (2006 Alum & 1997 Alum 1) fostering mutual investment and development. The reciprocal impacts of economic intermediacy serve best to understand the scholarship programs from the lens of international development cooperation.

In sum, the Türkiye Scholarships program’s soft power impact manifests in a range of diplomatic contributions by its alums. While many operate outside formal diplomatic channels, their activities influence public opinion, foster institutional collaboration, promote educational pathways, and strengthen bilateral ties. These outcomes align with the program’s stated and implicit diplomatic objectives and validate the broader aspirations of the ToC framework. Through alums, the program cultivates a lasting international presence for Türkiye, grounded in personal relationships, shared knowledge, and mutual respect.

5.1.5.2. Contributions to National Development

Moving from the External Results level in the extended Kirkpatrick’s model, the role of graduates in fostering development across diverse sectors has emerged as a critical area

of inquiry, offering valuable insights into the broader impacts of international education. Out of 44 interviews conducted, 32 were coded under the theme of development, with 14 providing significant insights in the thematic analysis. The contribution to national development was explored comprehensively, addressing its various dimensions, including social, human, economic, political, and technological aspects. The efforts of graduates were assessed, highlighting their impact across multiple sectors.

Social and Humanitarian Contributions:

Individuals receiving scholarships, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, grasp the meaning of the opportunity provided to them and, in return, have a sense of social responsibility towards others who may lack similar opportunities. While all participants expressed such views, at a macro level encompassing social, national and international impacts, it was only possible to make concrete contributions for the older generations who could advance further in their careers. One participant from the younger generation stated that she felt a responsibility to provide bursaries for young people in her country and would do so when she had the opportunity (2020 Alum 2). Another (2015 Alum 2) expressed a desire to spread the patriotism she saw and was impressed by in the Turkish people among her community, and a teacher (2022 Alum 4) reported that she strives to instill this in her students so that they become people who are committed to their community. A young participant also aims to empower his social group through communication channels by putting his education, which he did not have the opportunity to do professionally, into practice through a volunteering project (2014 Alum). All this demonstrates the broad impact potential of the scholarship recipients for social change through activities such as increasing access to education, serving to own community, advocating for rights of minorities.

One example of this potential fulfilled, as mentioned, is that of an academic who, after his studies in Türkiye, completed his postgraduate studies in the US on Fulbright and advanced in his career (1997 Alum 2). The 16 projects that he has implemented by utilizing the opportunities of regional and international funding sources have led to the training of a significant number of graduate students and have yielded outputs with new knowledge, valuable insights, and concrete recommendations through research on topics

such as digital transformation, universities' role in the future, and social change. They contribute to their state's development through innovative fields such as "citizen science" by succeeding in obtaining funds with meager acceptance rates, i.e., highly competitive, for project support. The project teams also contribute to improving the educational capacity in their countries, enhancing the universities they work with through regional collaborations, and providing critical feedback to the EU institutions with which they interact.

This professor, who lives in a multicultural and multiethnic country, worked within an NGO with the idea that the fight against polarization must also be waged. Another academician (2022 Alum 2), also from North Macedonia, leads a research and training center with similar concerns. They have offered trainings reaching thousands of students, organized congresses and symposiums attended by hundreds of researchers, and created an intellectual hub bringing together dozens of professors, and hence aim to foster dialogue, knowledge and research-based interaction and regional prosperity and stability for the entire Balkans. The concrete outcomes of these efforts would be a valuable case study. Other academics interviewed in the region emphasized the value of such efforts.

Technological Contributions

Technological development is deemed as the production or development of new goods and services and scientific, mechanical, or digital innovations, as well as the creation or encouragement of human resources that can contribute to these. In this context, the graduates' roles in innovation and organizational adjustment are evaluated here as it finds a more widespread resonance. For example, the contribution of the graduate (2005 Alum 1), who established a private education center and organized STEM workshops, to the organization of an inter-school STEM Olympics is an initiative that attracts attention to this field, enables more students to be trained in the field, and contribute to the development of the work of individuals who are interested in this field further through competition. Developing the skills of new generations in STEM is a crucial step towards technological development.

A graduate (2004 Alum) who is the director of a company that develops products in the field of information technologies helps to enhance his country's utilization of technology through specific projects carried out by his company to facilitate public services. This graduate stated that they turn to their network in Türkiye if they require an increased capacity in contracting operations, such as creating major software, databases, or IT centers, which increases technological engagement in their country's public sector and strengthens technological cooperation between the countries.

Educational advancement can also be an input for technological contributions to national development. Academics say that the postgraduate education they received in Türkiye has considerably enriched their skills, and they perceive themselves to be ahead of their peers:

“We make a difference. I mean, both the current rector and the former rector I worked with told me this: ‘Those who come from Türkiye make a difference’ because we have a few at our university who graduated from Türkiye. For example, right now, in the last few months, I am constantly being invited to television, panels, conferences, and so on.” (2020 Alum 1)

A businessman (2005 Alum 2), who has various enterprises, participated in establishing a university in his city. It was reported that opening this university with other academics who are graduates of Türkiye, as an initiative to increase educational opportunities for the city's young population, was considered a valuable vision for developing education, quality, and hence technological innovation, despite its limited financial return.

Economic Contributions

Professionals with international higher education experience serve the economic growth of their countries through key roles in attracting investment in the country, contributing to national income by boosting the country's exports and tourism, facilitating foreigners in the private sector through projects to improve the investment landscape and organizations that connect business circles. The ties established with Türkiye are clearly mutually beneficial. For example, graduates whose work promotes health tourism to Türkiye play a role in supporting Turkish economic growth. Different individuals

working internationally and engaging in bilateral economic and business cooperation with Türkiye have a similar impact.

A graduate working in local government is involved in project design for regional development (2011 Alum). They support socio-economic development by producing projects and seeking support from funders for issues such as increased participation of women in social life, enhancing the touristic value of the region, and supporting small businesses for intellectual property. In addition to her education in International Relations, it can be said that her internship at TİKA, Türkiye's aid agency that implements project-based development cooperation programs, provided the graduate with a critical formation in this field.

Another graduate (1997 Alum 1), who observed noteworthy parallels between Türkiye's socio-economic structure and that of Kyrgyzstan, saw opportunities for Kyrgyzstan's economic development. He recognized that the dispersed ownership of agricultural land had influenced agricultural methods and equipment used in Türkiye and that Kyrgyzstan, which was in a similar situation, could benefit from these methods and equipment. Advising others, he encouraged Turkish investors to do business in Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyzstanis to trade with Türkiye. With a significant volume of business, he has become a pioneer in the sector in Kyrgyzstan and was among the highest taxpayers. Given this situation, he emphasized that he prefers to import goods and services from Türkiye unless there are substantial price differences compared to the markets of China or Russia. He stated that the connections he established in Türkiye and familiarity with the business environment, as well as a sense of personal affinity, have played a role here.

Another graduate describes the impact he aims to make in the business world:

“We established an organization called the [...] Business Club. I am currently serving as the general secretary there. This role involves establishing connections with businesspeople, facilitating their collaboration, organizing meetings, and arranging B2B discussions. When entrepreneurs from Türkiye who are interested in working or investing in Kyrgyzstan visit, we introduce them to our club members or connect them

with Kyrgyz businesspeople in relevant sectors. In this way, we strive to be a bridge between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan in the business sphere.” (2006 Alum)

In addition to his efforts to promote economic growth, he also contributes significantly to Kyrgyzstan’s promotion through his involvement in the tourism sector. He organizes tours for international visitors, offering them the opportunity to experience Kyrgyzstan’s natural landscapes and authentic rural life. He notes that Kyrgyzstan is increasingly attracting interest due to its developing tourism industry.

Another graduate mentioned being involved in a project aimed at enhancing her country’s investment ecosystem through academic research (2022 Alum 1). This graduate, included in the project due to her achievements, exemplifies how individual efforts can contribute to promoting growth. Graduates bring their skills and vision in various forms to such efforts and help ensure that the scholarship programs deliver valuable outcomes.

Political Contributions

On an individual level, study abroad has been discussed as developing civic consciousness and raising nationalist sentiments among Türkiye Scholarships’ holders. At the institutional level, this has led alums to participate in or initiate social responsibility activities, and those taken role in state organization to embrace a more conscious approach. Moreover, alums organized to act collectively have been able to exert more influence and contribute to the political change in their countries, generating a macro level outcome.

The example, a graduate from Kyrgyzstan (1997 Alum 1) provided, is a highly significant attempt in this direction. In Kyrgyzstan, which has around 1 million citizens living in the diaspora, the alums presented a practice they know from Türkiye to their policymakers in order to develop policies to maintain the connection of this diaspora with the homeland. The Blue Card program was developed for Turkish citizens living in countries where dual citizenship is considered invalid and there is a demand for the revocation of second citizenship, and all citizenship rights such as property ownership,

inheritance, and stay in Türkiye for unlimited period are secured with the Blue Card in case they renounce their Turkish citizenship. This program was presented to the Kyrgyz authorities by a group of Türkiye graduates in order to prevent the challenges that the Kyrgyz diaspora would also face in case they need to revoke Kyrgyz citizenship and to continue the connection and contributions of the diaspora to the homeland.

Another graduate (2001* Alum) took a position in the management of a public enterprise employing 650 people after the political party he was involved in was elected to the government, where he contributed to critical projects in the public service for 15 months. He stated that the process they conducted to prevent the energy crisis after the COVID-19 pandemic from affecting the country was successful. Another graduate (2004 Alum), who is the director of a private company, contributes to strengthening governance by providing digital transformation services to the public sector. Finally, an alum (2022 Alum 2) was involved in the establishment and management of a research center to advance the study of the Balkans region, has organized thousands of trainings, and contributed significantly to building a network of scholars in the Balkans region through journal publications, symposia and conferences. He stated that they aim to contribute to regional stability and prosperity by increasing dialogue.

While these are singular examples, they have deeper implications due to the social, political, and academic contexts in which they are situated. Providing effectiveness in public services, enhancing public service capabilities, and establishing intellectual grounds for regional peace are critical contributions to development of the governance. All examples, like these, illustrate the impact of the scholarship program in terms of development that extends beyond the recipient.

5.2. Concluding Remarks

As an evaluation study, the findings of this thesis are interpreted within the reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) model discussed in the preceding chapter. Certain measurable outcomes align with Türkiye's internationalization of higher education objectives. As previously described, these include: (1.a) increasing the number of international students, (1.b) improving Turkish higher education's position as a preferred destination, and (1.c) attracting higher-quality students. Further, goals such as

(2.a) strengthening university infrastructure, establishing research universities, and enhancing English-language provision for international students and staff; (2.b) expanding international partnerships to improve visibility; (2.c) improving place in global rankings; and (3.a) enhancing students' experiences through institutional services and (3.b) improving satisfaction with these services, constitute trackable and tangible targets. These aims fall under the domain of higher education policy, and while relevant for contextual understanding, they are beyond the scope of this study, which evaluates scholarship programs as instruments of development assistance, which is elaborated as part of foreign policy.

However, scholarly works have shown that these goals set by policymakers and reflected in the official documents of the relevant institutions encounter problems in the implementing institutions, i.e. universities; these internationalization goals are set irrespective of the needs, capacities and social environment of the implementing institutions (Aydınlı & Matthews, 2021) and the implementers have varying understanding in relation to “internationalization” (Bulut-Şahin & Kondakçı, 2022). This reflects a notable discrepancy between policy goals and their implementation. While metrics such as the rising number of international students and Türkiye's ranking among the top ten host countries suggest success, they may overlook underlying challenges. For instance, Karabük University, a leading institution in terms of internationalization, has faced public scrutiny due to tensions surrounding its growing international student population—equivalent to 5% of the city's residents. Incidents in 2023 and 2024 involving unverified allegations and xenophobic reactions (Soykan, 2023; Kızılkoyun & Koç, 2024) have highlighted the importance of aligning internationalization efforts not only with institutional capacity but also with broader societal readiness.

Although foreign policy goals are not the primary focus here, the use of scholarship programs as tools of foreign policy draws significant attention in the literature; therefore, warrants brief evaluation. According to the reconstructed ToC, core soft power and public diplomacy objectives include: (1.a) strengthening Türkiye's cultural, political, and economic ties abroad; (1.b) contributing complementarily to foreign policy decision-making; (1.c) improving Türkiye's image via alums networks; (1.d) raising qualified

students internationally who internalize Türkiye's international relations vision; and (1.e) promoting Turkish language use. Strategic partnerships goals include: (2.a) deepening ties with Turkic and related communities; (2.b) aligning scholarships with foreign policy priorities regarding conflict-affected and fragile states; and (2.c) creating a diaspora of graduates. Finally, alums engagement goals include: (3.a) institutionalizing alums relations, (3.b) encouraging voluntary ambassadorship, and (3.c) fostering leadership and advancing diplomatic relations through alums.

Empirical evidence supports progress toward some of these goals. Notably, all but one of the interviewees from the earliest cohorts to recent 2024 graduates conducted interviews in Turkish, suggesting substantial success in promoting Turkish language acquisition. Türkiye's sustained provision of scholarships to conflict-affected and fragile contexts—such as during the Yugoslav Wars, Kyrgyzstan's early independence period, and Egypt's post-Tahrir political transition—demonstrates its continued commitment to foreign policy objectives, even amid periods of diplomatic sensitivity, as in the case of Egypt. These examples can be considered desirable and intentional outcomes aligned with Türkiye's foreign policy.

In terms of alums engagement, nearly all graduates reported strong emotional and symbolic ties to Türkiye and reflected this in their daily lives. Many also participated in formal or informal alums associations or institutional partnerships. While some expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of institutional support from Türkiye, the depth of alums loyalty and continued engagement suggests a solid foundation for further advancement of alums-focused goals.

That said, assessing broader foreign policy outcomes—such as enhancing Türkiye's diplomatic reach or public diplomacy influence—poses methodological challenges. It requires an understanding of Türkiye's foreign policy direction, tools, and priorities. Quantitative assessments of soft power typically include indicators such as the number of embassies, multilateral engagement, and foreign aid flows; governance quality indicators such as institutional strength and civil liberties; cultural influence measured through UNESCO sites, global media presence, and language dissemination; academic influence through international student flows and publications; and

technological/economic metrics such as FDI inflows, patent registrations, and internet penetration (Yavuzaslan & Çetin, 2016). However, the marginal contribution of scholarship programs to such metrics is difficult to isolate, owing to attribution and causality problems noted in the literature (Mawer, 2017).

Kelkitli (2021) assessed Türkiye's scholarship policy by examining convergence in UN General Assembly voting as an indicator of soft power. While acknowledging other influencing factors, the study linked this metric to Türkiye's foreign policy goals—particularly those identified as 1.a, 1.b, and 2.a in the reconstructed Theory of Change. However, the findings revealed increasing divergence in Türkiye's voting alignment with most sending countries, with only post-Soviet and some African states showing greater convergence in the 2010s. Concluding that the soft power impact of the scholarships has been limited, the study highlights the inadequacy of one-dimensional metrics in evaluating such a complex and multilayered policy tool.

At the face of such problems, this qualitative study allows for a perception-based assessment. On the education front, while the number of international students and scholarship applicants continues to rise, interview data reveal a perceived contribution of Türkiye's education system to students' knowledge, skills, and analytical thinking capacities. These are viewed by graduates as positive program outcomes. Yet, over time, perceptions appear to have weakened. Alums from earlier cohorts used stronger expressions of appreciation (e.g., “invaluable” from a 1999 graduate) compared to more recent ones (e.g., “well” from a 2014 graduate), indicating a possible decline in perceived quality and satisfaction—a deviation from the intended objective.

A study based on beneficiaries' perceptions (Aras & Mohammed, 2019) demonstrated that Türkiye's soft power objectives—such as strengthening its international image and fostering intercultural connections—were partially achieved by assessing the satisfaction levels of scholarship recipients and examining their integration into Türkiye's cultural and social environment, who were still pursuing their studies at the time of the research. The study identified several challenges faced by students, including difficulties in learning Turkish, concerns regarding the quality of education, and exclusionary attitudes in social contexts, in line with the findings of this dissertation, and separately, pointed

out to institutional rigidity caused by bureaucratic complexities within the implementing agency, YTB. While these issues are presented as obstacles to the effective exercise of soft power, the authors recommend measures such as increasing admission to institutions offering instruction in languages like English and French to mitigate the challenges associated with Turkish-medium education. The lack of engagement with policy documents and policymakers who shape the objectives of the scholarship program has resulted in the marginalization of Turkish language instruction as a core goal. From the perspective of soft power conceptualization, the diffusion of language is among the most tangible outcomes of cultural and educational initiatives (Yavuzaslan & Çetin, 2016). Accordingly, this dissertation identifies the acquisition of the Turkish language as one of the most significant outcomes of the scholarship programs and recommends more effective measures to overcome the challenges in Turkish language education.

It is evident that comprehending foreign policy objectives and evaluating their outcomes to propose measures that will yield more effective results is a complex issue. Given such complexities, more sophisticated and context-specific tools are required to evaluate foreign policy outcomes. For this reason, the thesis centers on assessing the developmental outcomes of the scholarship program, which is an impactful and more technical aspect yet remaining underexplored. A comprehensive discussion of the development outcomes, integrated with the relevant literature, is presented in the final chapter to conclude the study.

CHAPTER VI:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The scholarship programs of Türkiye have attracted limited scholarly attention despite its long-standing history, dating back to the immediate post-Cold War era through to the 1990s and beyond, its ability to attract a record number of international students in the 2020s, and its contribution to Türkiye's emergence as a popular international higher education destination. The number of Turkish higher education's international graduates now exceeds 150 thousand, which underscores the program's role in supporting the country's broader institutional aspirations in this area. While the limited studies scrutinize the soft power and public diplomacy indications of the program (Kelkitli, 2021; Budak & Terzi, 2021; Aras & Mohammed, 2019), its developmental aspects are neglected despite its significant contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals Target 4.b (as indicated in the Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2 [UNESCO, 2021, p. 341]). It can also be argued that the scholarship program contributes to other developmental goals and targets that are presented under different SDGs. The objective of this thesis is to produce an evaluation of the program, treating it as a development assistance, with the aim of demonstrating precisely these developmental contributions.

With this objective in mind, this dissertation draws on annual reports, legislation, and strategy documents produced by the relevant institutions. It also complements these sources with interviews of current and former executives who played an active role in designing and implementing the program. The goal was to Theory of Change to identify the program's explicit and implicit goals, intended impact, and the pathways (inputs and activities) presumed to lead to these goals. Based on the theory of change, a method for evaluating processes, expected outcomes, and implementation in stages to bring about

desired change (Weiss, 1995), drawing a logical framework of the program was preferred as it provides a structured overview.

Similarly, to provide a structured overview of outcomes, interviews with program beneficiaries — scholarship recipients — were analyzed using Kirkpatrick's extended model, which allows for different levels of evaluation. This approach provides an empirical and analytical view of how the inputs and activities indicated by the ToC correspond to short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes or objectives. This approach strengthens the causality of attributing outcomes to the scholarship program across different temporalities.

Conducting this work in three distinct regions and with different generations facilitates a comparison of forward and backward stages of the program, and reveals when regional differences can and cannot be ignored. For instance, comments from older and younger participants in Kyrgyzstan regarding national consciousness and political awareness reveal that these have been short-term outcomes and not disappeared in the longer term. The program's objective was to promote this outcome (input), and the participants said they gained it through interaction in social settings, such as with other students, student associations of their own nationality (activity), and the local community in their city. This suggests the program was successful in this regard. Moreover, the in-depth interview technique of eliciting comments that compare participants with their peers and engage them in self-reflection indicates that attribution can be possible.

Another goal of the program was to support and empower minority or disadvantaged groups through scholarship recipients. This goal was achieved by developing national consciousness and political awareness among North Macedonia's different ethnic groups. This was not as evident in Egypt's predominantly Arab and Muslim geography. Although Christian respondents were interviewed in Egypt, no ethnic minority respondents agreed to participate in the research. While religiosity was observed among the Christian participants, no comments or signs could be attributed to the scholarship program or studying in Türkiye. This section presents such exemplary comparisons and the long-term consequences of personal growth in relation to development.

Following this introduction, this chapter presents the results of the program evaluation, including cross-country comparisons and syntheses of findings. Subsequent to the comments on impact, policy implications are documented, and policy recommendations on institutional development and implementation are proposed.

6.1. Evaluation of Effectiveness

6.1.1. Leveled Evaluation of the Program from Developmental Aspect

At the extended Kirkpatrick's Model, the *Reaction Level* (Level 1) involves the program beneficiaries' satisfaction and the extent to which they engage with the program. As outlined in the preceding chapter, the scholarship recipients have expressed an overall positive response regarding their experiences in Türkiye with respect to their education, the scholarship programs, their academic and social environment, and current ties with Türkiye. It is acknowledged that positive memories may supersede negative ones when revisiting the past, prompting individuals to recall these memories with satisfaction and disseminate their favorable impressions to others. It is evident that their satisfaction and positive impressions have implications for Türkiye's public diplomacy. However, the significance of this phenomenon for the promotion of international cooperation should also be acknowledged, as their professional connections with Türkiye persist and they derive substantial benefits from this relationship, which is elaborated in the level of application.

Yet, the satisfaction with the educational quality was found out to be lower and weakening over time, compared to their other experiences. The quality of education contributes to the development of stronger perceptions. Well-selected students sent to reputable universities are able to build a stronger foundation through skill development and knowledge accumulation. Graduates who are asked to compare themselves with others often perceive themselves as leading in terms of analytical, critical, and technical knowledge. They also comment that their contributions at the meso and macro levels are greater. As one alumnus clearly expressed:

“Former graduates have reached prominent positions. Many of my friends, including myself, are in senior management roles, and in academia, they are doing well. ... There was a clear quality difference at the beginning.

Especially in the education sector back in the early 2000s, in Macedonia as well, the quality of universities was high. However, now, as quality declines worldwide, university standards are falling in every region” (2005 Alum 2).

The *Learning Level* (Level 2) shows the developing knowledge, skills, capacity and personalities based on the education abroad and scholarship program resources. From this perspective, “Learning” indicates that alums have not only gained technical and academic knowledge but also learned to navigate diverse cultural environments. This multicultural learning contributes to their ability to engage in international relations and economic activities with a heightened sense of awareness. Although it is not a direct expected outcome of the program for Türkiye, results of this evaluation indicates to the broader vision of international higher education in fostering “global citizens.” This suggests that Türkiye’s program has been successful in this regard. However, cases of racism and social exclusion have also been reported. While these experiences were not overwhelmingly harmful in the alums narratives, they nonetheless created an impression of insecurity. The use of Türkiye’s alums network, their contribution to bilateral relations, and their strategic engagement in economic activities based on these relationships highlight the need for a two-way treatment of this issue. The impact on development also underscores the importance of fostering greater tolerance in alignment with Türkiye’s broader cooperative frameworks. For instance, Türkiye’s aid to Somalia has raised significant concerns within the Turkish public (e.g., Cuğ, 2024), and this has been discrediting such cooperation.

Again, in terms of personal development, the broader impact of international education is evident in the increased proactivity, willingness to take risks, and the ability to introduce new perspectives and ideas to graduates’ home countries. This is particularly noticeable among early scholarship recipients from countries where the private sector was newly developing, but the entrepreneurial spirit is also strong among more recent graduates. These alum, leveraging the knowledge, technical competencies, and other skills they acquired, are making significant contributions to societal and economic transformation. While it is challenging to observe the marginal effects, insights from specific cases reveal the importance of these contributions.

For instance, one graduate (1997 Alum 1) identified key similarities between Türkiye's socio-economic structure and that of Kyrgyzstan, which led him to recognize opportunities for Kyrgyzstan's economic development. Drawing from Türkiye's agricultural advancements, he encouraged Turkish investors to engage in business in Kyrgyzstan, fostering trade relations between the two countries. His efforts not only made him a pioneer in his sector but also a leading taxpayer in Kyrgyzstan. He emphasized that his deep connections in Türkiye and understanding of its business environment had been crucial, stating, "I prefer to import goods and services from Türkiye, even though the prices are a bit higher compared to China or Russia."

Another graduate (2005 Alum 2) played a pivotal role in expanding access to vocational training and diplomas through open education in his region. Reflecting on his journey, he shared: "In 2011, I visited Anadolu University, my alma mater to meet my former professors and today, I coordinate the Anadolu University Open Education Faculty here, providing employment opportunity for our citizens all around Europe." His initiative, which started with Macedonia and Kosovo, now serves over 500 students across the Balkans, with Macedonia having the highest number.

From the perspective of the ToC and Kirkpatrick's model, this highlights the behavioral changes in graduates and intermediate outcomes referring to the *Application Level* (Level 3) in Kirkpatrick's extended model, where acquired knowledge and skills translate into tangible contributions in their home countries, promoting development. The entrepreneurial mindset shaped through their education serves as a key enabler of these transformations, with graduates becoming agents of change. While 6 out of 44 graduates interviewed had such an enterprise, 10 percent of the 42 thousand graduates registered on the platform for Türkiye alums (Alumni Türkiye, 2023) defined their profession as entrepreneurship. This aligns with the expected impact of international scholarship programs, which is to foster not only intellectual growth but also the capacity for innovation and leadership in diverse professional contexts leading to development.

In the two cases above, support from the Turkish network is evident. In other cases, Turkish institutions or organizations doing business with Türkiye have created

opportunities for these graduates by requiring the human resources needed to support their operations. They were preferred for these jobs not only because they are familiar with Türkiye's social and professional environment, but also because they can speak Turkish well. This includes familiarity to beyond the rules and vocabulary of the language; to their perception, culture, implied and non-verbal expressions, and daily habits. During fieldwork, meetings with the representatives from Turkish institutions, such as the Embassies, the Maarif Foundation schools, TİKA Project Coordination Offices, and Yunus Emre Institutes, revealed these reasons for preferring to work with graduates from Türkiye. Of the 44 graduates interviewed, 12 are employed in these institutions, which coordinate and contribute to the cooperation of Türkiye with the sample countries.

Another key finding at the Application Level reveals that many alums have entered professions closely tied to education and training. This domain not only demonstrates the effective transfer of acquired knowledge and skills but also signals a multiplier effect in shaping organizational and social change, pointing to education's contribution to development in line with this thesis's argument. Of the interviewees, 16 are employed as teachers or academics, and Türkiye Alumni Platform data corroborate this trend, with approximately 20% of registered alums working in primary or secondary education and 15% in higher education. The developmental value of such placements extends beyond individual career success; alum contribute to national capacity building by serving with pedagogical skills, transferring knowledge, integrating Turkish educational perspectives, and in some cases, fostering international academic collaboration. Examples include co-authorship with Turkish scholars and participation in Türkiye-based academic conferences. These activities constitute a bridge between education and institutional transformation, also indicating *Organizational Results Level* (Level 4) in Kirkpatrick's extended model.

However, this multiplier potential is not without limitations —especially within Türkiye itself. Despite the emphasis on the internationalization of higher education, structural constraints continue to impede the long-term integration of international alums into Turkish academic institutions. Several doctoral graduates reported a disconnect between

their academic qualifications and available opportunities in Türkiye. One graduate recounted receiving numerous part-time teaching offers with minimal remuneration but being consistently denied full-time academic positions. This individual ultimately exited academia, underscoring an underutilization of trained human capital (2016 Alum 1). While alums could contribute meaningfully to the diversification and global visibility of Turkish academia, regulatory barriers—such as the restriction of foreign academic staff to under 2 percent—limit this potential. Thus, despite Türkiye’s investment in developing international scholars, its own institutional frameworks may hinder the realization of the very developmental benefits the scholarship program aspires to produce.

Alums’ influence in policymaking and social transformation, and their diplomatic and developmental contributions, i.e. *External Results* (Level 5), vary in relations to the local contexts and constraints. The case of Egypt illustrates the capacity of international education and language diplomacy to sustain development-relevant ties even amidst political rupture. Following the 2013 coup and the ensuing diplomatic freeze—during which ambassadors were withdrawn and official relations were suspended until 2023—cultural and educational exchanges persisted. Türkiye’s scholarship program continued uninterrupted, and Turkish language and cultural activities in Cairo remained active, notably through the Yunus Emre Institute, which reportedly became the most frequented among its global network of 80 branches (personal communication with institutional staff, 4 May 2024). This continued engagement not only reflects Türkiye’s commitment to fostering people-to-people connections beyond formal diplomacy but also highlights Egyptians’ sustained interest in Turkish language and culture. According to institutional data submitted to this research, a significant share of scholarships—nearly all under the Great Student Project and around 15 percent under YTB—was allocated to Turkish language-related departments. Although not statistically representative, 7 of the 12 Egyptian interviewees were graduates from such programs, providing meaningful insight into this linguistic affinity.

The Turkish language further functioned for the graduates as a channel for development-related gains, particularly in employment. Graduates fluent in Turkish were largely

employed in sectors tied to Türkiye, including education, translation, commerce, and cross-border business services. Many found roles in Egypt-based branches of Turkish companies or in translation and liaison capacities within Türkiye, where they facilitated financial transactions, trade partnerships, and services for Arabic-speaking migrants. Additionally, the growing demand for Turkish instruction created further employment opportunities in language education. However, this labor market advantage appears to have plateaued. Several alums reported saturation in Turkish-language-related employment and difficulties in securing positions aligned with their academic qualifications. While Turkish language competence initially offered access to economic opportunities and regional connectivity, the long-term sustainability of this benefit remains uncertain without diversification of employment pathways and deeper institutional integration.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye Scholarships have shown the capacity to be embedded within a broader educational cooperation strategy, contributing to long-term developmental outcomes. Over a 30-year period, Kyrgyzstan has been one of the most consistent recipients of Türkiye's scholarship support. UNESCO data (1998–2022) indicate that an average of 15 percent of Kyrgyz students studying abroad chose Türkiye as their destination (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023a). Fieldwork findings further emphasize the country's demographic advantage—45 percent of the population is under 25—and its strong societal emphasis on education, which makes it a fertile ground for educational diplomacy.

Türkiye has met this demand not only through scholarships but also by investing in Turkish high schools and university collaborations. Turkish schools, particularly those in Bishkek, enjoy a strong reputation for quality and accessibility, often targeting disadvantaged students from rural areas through scholarships and dormitory support. A significant number of Türkiye Scholarship recipients were graduates of these schools, and interviewees confirmed that this pipeline facilitated their access to higher education they otherwise could not afford (personal communication at the Turkish Educational Counsellor's Office, 11 April, 2024).

Many alums from Kyrgyzstan now occupy prominent positions across government institutions, NGOs, and the private sector. They serve as key liaisons for Türkiye's development and diplomatic activities in the country. Institutional representatives consistently reported favoring alums in recruitment, recognizing their skills and alignment with Turkish cooperation goals. Beyond technical contributions, the alums have shown remarkable civic engagement, mobilizing around causes of educational reform and social development. This demonstrates how Türkiye Scholarships, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, have fostered a network of actors capable of advancing both bilateral cooperation and domestic transformation, illustrating the strategic depth of scholarship-based development assistance.

The case of North Macedonia demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of Türkiye Scholarships in fostering long-term developmental impact. While ethnic Turks in the country have historically maintained close ties with Türkiye, broader segments of the population have developed an increasing interest in Türkiye over the last 15 years. This interest has been driven not only by geographical proximity and shared history but also by the widespread popularity of Turkish media and growing familiarity with the Turkish language. Türkiye has thus emerged as a leading destination for higher education among North Macedonian students.

Nevertheless, Türkiye's engagement strategy in North Macedonia has remained largely framed through the ethnic Turkish minority, which functions as a natural conduit in bilateral relations. While this aligns with Türkiye's cultural diplomacy priorities, it inadvertently narrows the broader outreach potential of its scholarship program. Interviews with alums suggest that a more inclusive approach—targeting other ethnic communities—could significantly enhance Türkiye's visibility and influence, especially given the country's extensive economic footprint in the region.

Professionally, alums in North Macedonia make substantial contributions, especially in the public education sector. Many serve as teachers, lecturers, and administrators at various levels of the educational system. While a significant number of scholarships have been allocated to economics and administrative sciences, there is notable demand for postgraduate opportunities, with many alums pursuing academic careers and

contributing to intellectual and human capital development. However, the stagnation of the private sector and constraints within the public sector have limited employment prospects for returning graduates. As a result, brain drain —particularly among highly educated alums—has become a growing concern, echoing similar trends observed in Egypt.

Particularly for international graduates studying in the sciences and engineering, which are in increasing demand globally, this leads to them not returning to their home countries. Egypt's Ministry of Higher Education has made recognition requirements more stringent, especially in the health sciences, forcing those studying abroad in this field to seek employment in the host country or a third country. Currently, graduates in these fields stay abroad due to unfavorable job conditions and economic returns. However, it is increasingly recognized in the literature that international graduates do not cease to be an asset to their home or host countries (Yu, 2021; Ho, Seet & Jones, 2018; Ma & Pan, 2015). The fact that the views on brain drain should increasingly be reclassified as “brain circulation” is also seen in the contribution of this group, as also covered in Diaspora Studies, to their home countries (Rizvi, 2023).

In summary, the cross-country assessment structured through the extended Kirkpatrick Model offers a multi-layered view of the developmental outcomes achieved by the Türkiye Scholarships Program. Initial reactions (Level 1) reveal a generally high level of satisfaction, albeit with generational and contextual differences, indicating shifts in program delivery, occasional mismatch of students' success and educational institutions' quality or wavering economic and political landscape at home or host countries. Learning outcomes (Level 2) affirm the program's role in enhancing academic capacity, language proficiency, and critical thinking, yet point to varied institutional alignment and reactions from social environment. At the application level (Level 3), alums have transferred their competencies into diverse roles, although challenges such as diploma recognition in Kyrgyzstan, limited labor market absorption in North Macedonia and political climate in Egypt temper the full realization of skills. Notably, organizational contributions (Level 4) emerge strongly, as many alums join educational institutions, establish NGOs, and promote innovation through entrepreneurial ventures—

demonstrating education's multiplier effect. Finally, external results (Level 5) reflect alums' embeddedness in civic engagement, and business ventures, with the Turkish language and cultural familiarity functioning as enduring bridges. Country-specific insights from Egypt, Kyrgyzstan, and North Macedonia illustrate differentiated pathways of influence, yet together affirm the scholarships' long-term potential as tools for socio-economic transformation and development cooperation.

6.1.2. Assessment of the Program ToC with the Leveled Evaluation

The goals and intended developmental impacts of the scholarship program, as reconstructed within the ToC framework in Chapter 4, were evaluated across multiple levels in Chapter 5. A synthesis of those findings with a development-focused lens has been provided above. This section now presents a systematic comparison between the program's objectives and its observed outcomes within the ToC structure. While the assessment of inputs and activities was primarily based on beneficiary satisfaction, this section focuses on observed changes—categorized as outputs, outcomes, and impacts—and aligns them with the extended Kirkpatrick evaluation model. The table that follows summarizes this integrated assessment.

Table 11. Assessment of the Program ToC with the Leveled Evaluation

Integrated Kirkpatrick Levels & ToC	Program's Developmental Goals	Evaluation
Learning Level: Short-Term Outcomes	Promote Turkish language proficiency (FP 1.e)	Turkish language proficiency improved markedly among alums.
	Enhance academic and soft skills through internships, extracurriculars (DA 1.b)	Alums acquired professional, technical, and research skills—though experiences vary depending on institutional placement
	Support conflict-affected and disadvantaged groups (DA 2.b, DA 2.c)	Personal and civic development widely reported: reflective thinking, cross-cultural awareness, and empowerment (especially among minority and disadvantaged groups).
	Address human resource gaps in partner countries (DA 3.b)	Strong alignment between alums career paths and fields of study, especially in education and public services. However, at the mismatch of human resource needs of the sending country and recipients' skill-set, entrepreneurship and translation offer careers.
	Retain qualified international talent in Türkiye (DA 4.b)	Voluntary retention in Türkiye hindered by structural issues (e.g., work permits, limited academic posts).
Application Level: Intermediate Outcomes	Cultivate leadership aligned with Türkiye's global vision (FP 1.d, FP 3.c)	Many serve as intermediaries in economic, cultural and diplomatic affairs.
	Foster alums relations and network sustainability (FP 3.a)	Alums networks support information-sharing, career mobility, and regional cooperation. Yet, support from home institutions is not sufficient.
	Encourage return migration for national development (DA 4.a)	Return-to-home rates vary; some hindered by limited job markets or re-integration difficulties in their home countries, lacking or losing network.

Organizational Results Level: Long-Term Outcomes	Strengthen partner countries' human capital and institutional capacities (DA 1.a)	Alums build local capacity by mentoring, hiring, or initiating new services.
	Promote the identity and resilience of kin communities (DA 2.a)	Civil society and professional organizations emerged from alum efforts in support on these.
	Expand access to education via partnerships (DA 3.a)	Besides institutional collaboration-seeking, alums contribute as educators, founders of training and research centers, and academics.
	Position scholarships as tools of development cooperation (DA 3.c)	Turkish development institutions benefit from alums as employees, and alum-mediated access and credibility in target regions.
External Results Level: Impacts	Enable long-term human capital development in target countries (Intended Impact 1)	Alums act as agents of societal change, advancing inclusive education, public service, and political participation.
	Leverage alum networks to safeguard Türkiye's interests and values (Intended Impact 2)	Economic impacts include entrepreneurship and bilateral trade facilitation. Promote values such as democratic governance and social cohesion inspired by Türkiye's example.

Foreign Policy (FP) goals such as promoting Turkish language proficiency globally (FP 1.e), cultivating leadership in line with Türkiye's global vision (FP 1.d, FP 3.c), and fostering relations with alums (FP 3.a) are also included in this evaluation as they leverage and complement Development Assistance (DA) goals. As previously mentioned, Turkish language proficiency contributes to employment opportunities and strengthens communication with Türkiye in professional settings. This can also be seen as contributing to the outcomes of other objectives and the benefits of leadership roles. While in short term, this directly supported both integration in Türkiye and future employment tied to Türkiye-related roles in home countries. In the intermediate term, alums can act as knowledge brokers or community leaders as a result of their roles in policymaking, media, and education sectors.

Developing competencies of alums based on extracurricular programs and internships (DA 1.b) brought about career readiness and transferable skills for alums. While outcomes varied depending on institutional quality and city location, all participants of this research found employment and many graduates, joining particularly in business and consultancy, promote economic ties with Türkiye (Intended Impacts 1 & 2). Their entrepreneurial ventures and professional networks demonstrate tangible economic spillovers.

In addressing human resource gaps in partner countries (DA 3.b), alums from strategic sectors—such as public administration, international relations, and education—returned to fill workforce gaps and some rose to leadership positions. The program's alignment with national development needs was particularly visible in Kyrgyzstan. Due to their unique circumstances –and partly because of the mismatch in education offered and countries' human resources needs, North Macedonia and Egypt are environments where young people encounter problems in participating in employment in the field they have been trained.

Moreover, the program had a meaningful impact on personal empowerment, civic engagement, and reflective thinking, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (DA 2.b, DA 2.c). In regions with kin communities (e.g., the Balkans),

graduates have supported cultural preservation and community capacity-building (DA 2.a). This goal was met most visibly through civil society initiatives and community-focused service built by alums.

Alums widely contribute to national development (DA 1.a) by founding schools, NGOs, and businesses. Their mentoring roles and organizational leadership demonstrate a multiplier effect in skills and institutional innovation. This effect is also the product of the fact that alums in academia and training sectors have created new opportunities for education and research, including founding centers, mentoring students, and enhancing access in underserved areas (DA 3.a), especially in Central Asia.

Despite some students' willingness to stay, Türkiye's regulatory environment (e.g., restrictive work permits, lack of academic positions) limited the program's capacity to retain talent (DA 4.b). This remains a critical gap for leveraging international graduates in Türkiye's own development. While this aligns with the goal of encouraging return migration for national development (DA 4.a), barriers such as limited local employment opportunities and administrative burdens prevents alums effectively contributing to their home societies despite their intentions. Incentives and reintegration mechanisms could bolster this goal.

Alums networks serve as durable platforms for professional collaboration and policy engagement (FP 3.a). While alums express a desire for more institutional support, the networks function effectively in sustaining ties with Türkiye and among graduates. Sustaining relations with alums also serves to the goal of positioning scholarships as tools of development cooperation (DA 3.c). Graduates facilitate institutional partnerships and legitimize Türkiye's presence in recipient countries, reinforcing soft power objectives.

As a result, alums function as agents of change in their societies—expanding education, fostering civic values, and building institutional capacity. Their sustained engagement contributes to national development across sectors. Graduates exposed to pluralism and state-society engagement during their time in Türkiye carry back an implicit model of

governance. Although influence varies by context, many express commitments to dialogue, participation, and public service (Intended Impact 2).

In conclusion, the integrated evaluation shows that Türkiye's scholarship program produces significant developmental benefits at several levels, albeit to varying degrees of efficacy. At the learning level, language acquisition and personal growth objectives are broadly met, particularly for underprivileged populations. Application-level outcomes in alums leadership, network sustainability, and soft diplomatic engagement are positive, but return migration remains variable due to institutional challenges. At the organizational level, graduates bring significant contributions to human capital development and institutional innovation, generally spearheading educational and civil society initiatives. Finally, external results show broader societal consequences such as entrepreneurship, inclusive government efforts, and improved bilateral relations. These findings support the value of scholarships as development cooperation instruments, while also revealing areas—particularly returns, talent retention, and program sustainability—that require policy adjustment for greater long-term impact.

6.1.3. Discussion with Literature

Although scholarship programs have been in place in various countries since the 1950s (e.g. USA, Japan, Korea), their consideration is quite common in the post-Cold War context from the perspective of soft power, which is the ability of a country to influence the public opinion of a target country through its culture, values and institutions in order to promote its diplomatic and political interests (Nye, 1990). Türkiye's international higher education programs started in parallel with the global trend and became institutionalized in the 1980s. The scholarship programs targeting the post-Soviet countries were planned as a contribution to the economic transformation of these countries and the training of the human resources they needed, and the revitalization of relations with these countries based on shared history, culture, and values became part of the foreign policy framework. In this context, Türkiye's program also aims at the effects discussed in the literature, such as influence from the political perspective of the host

country (Atkinson, 2010) and adoption of political culture due to socialization in this country (Chankseliani, 2018).

However, it cannot be said that Türkiye aims to adopt democratic values or play a role in spreading them at home, which these studies also emphasize. “Democratization” is not a focal point in the documents, elite interviews, or political discourse regarding the program’s objectives. The goal of empowering minority or disadvantaged groups has been to strengthen civil society rather than to support democratic ideals such as increasing representation or promoting pluralistic systems. Nevertheless, regarding outcomes such as civic consciousness and patriotism, participants’ statements focus on political awareness and participation, as well as strengthening public services, which can be considered the development of ideals toward democratization.

Studies often emphasize that international students develop tolerance for differences and an appreciation for multiculturalism when they get to know different cultures in their host country and may even become global citizens (Knight, 2004; Hendershot & Sperandio, 2009; Horn & Fry, 2013; Ghosh & Jing, 2020). The findings of this study suggest that the program in Türkiye helps to achieve this while also building patriotism. Studies of programs in developed countries have found that international students adopt principles of liberalism and democracy. However, Türkiye, as a developing country, has increased civic awareness and social responsibility. Horn and Fry (2013) demonstrated that students from developing nations are more interested in volunteering. The findings of this thesis also lend credence to this study, showing the importance that graduates place on civic projects in their home countries.

A study conducted by Ergun and Kondakçı (2021) among Azerbaijani higher education alums substantiates this argument by demonstrating that studying at universities in the United States or Europe fosters multiculturalism and liberal values, whereas studying in Türkiye tends to reinforce nationalistic sentiments, primarily due to the cultural and linguistic proximity between Turkish and Azerbaijani identities. This dissertation supports the argument by revealing that this effect is most pronounced in Kyrgyzstan, a country sharing similar cultural and linguistic ties with Türkiye. Nevertheless, it also

demonstrates that studying abroad enhances civic awareness and political consciousness among scholarship recipients from culturally distant countries such as North Macedonia and Egypt, as well. Therefore, as Ergun and Kondakçı argue, the benefits of higher education for international students in Türkiye are significantly shaped by the linguistic and cultural affinity that renders Türkiye a “semi-international” experience for students from culturally and linguistically proximate countries like Azerbaijan; however, this is not the sole factor influencing outcomes.

The provision of this scholarship program by Türkiye, a nation classified as a developing country, is of particular significance from the perspective of development assistance, a central concern of this thesis. It has been posited that the beneficial impacts of the internationalization of higher education on global development, including knowledge sharing, technology transfer, intercultural understanding, cooperation, and the cultivation of global citizens, are impeded by the commodification of education, further privileging of certain students and institutions, and the exacerbation of inequalities (Ramaswamy et al., 2021). State-funded scholarship programs for international students address these challenges by facilitating access to higher education for underprivileged populations. The adoption of such programs is a pivotal step for countries experiencing development challenges, such as Türkiye.

In 2022, Türkiye provided 169 scholarships for Egypt,¹² which has 3.5 million students enrolled in higher education and 35.5 thousand of them studying abroad (UIS 2023a). In addition to the scholarship program, as a result of the processes facilitated through the internationalization policy, Türkiye became the third most preferred country for Egyptian students to study abroad in the 2020s, after Russia and Germany (UIS, 2023a). For Kyrgyz students, Türkiye has been the most popular educational destination after Russia for over 25 years (UIS, 2023a),¹³ offering scholarships for around 150 of these students annually.¹⁴ North Macedonia, with a small and relatively aged population, has

¹² Information was provided upon request from YTB as part of the author’s research project application.

¹³ During the field research, it was discovered that neighboring China is also highly favored, yet an accurate assessment of the situation cannot be made as China does not share data with UNESCO, and Kyrgyzstan lacks publicly available data on outbound students.

¹⁴ Averaging from the information provided to the author by YTB for the research project.

56 thousand higher education students according to 2022 data, with 10 percent of its higher education students choosing to study abroad (UIS, 2023c). Averaged over the last 25 years, Türkiye has been the most popular study destination after Bulgaria, and an average of 40 of its students since the early years has been offered scholarships.¹⁵

Studies evaluating scholarship programs in terms of human capital development show that providing international students with cutting-edge knowledge, technology, and skills contributes to the development of their home countries by strengthening their human resources (Kehm, 2003; Perna et al., 2014; Boeren, 2018). In this respect, although Türkiye is not a country where cutting-edge knowledge, technology, and skills are generated or further developed, it shares its capacity with countries that are behind it on the development path. Almost all of the graduates who participated in the research stated that their education improved their abilities and that they use these abilities in their work. In some cases, it was also observed that they passed these qualifications on to their colleagues, interns, and trainees.

Campbell et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of scholarship programs in promoting sustainable development. They argue that SDG 4.b, which aims to increase access to education, overlooks the essential role that graduates of international scholarship programs can play in national development by teaching in higher education and citizenship education. This thesis emphasizes the multiplier effect of raising educators and highlights the role of graduates as teachers and academics. Dong and Chapman (2008) also emphasized the training of academics as a contribution to human resource development in recipient countries. They considered the development of educational institutions, due to relations established by these academics with host countries, as a contribution to recipient countries' socio-economic development. In this study, Türkiye's alums were found to be powerful intermediaries in cooperation with Turkish institutions. Thus, this study underscores the role of Türkiye's scholarship program as a form of development cooperation.

¹⁵ According to information provided to the author by YTB for the research project.

The local capacity-dependent nature of scholarship program outcomes has been demonstrated through various examples. Abimbola et al. (2016) indicate that scholarship programs have succeeded in enhancing human capital and institutional capacity; however, inequalities within countries are reflected in access to these programs. Challenges such as difficulties in reintegration into professional environments after graduation, unequal access to post-graduation support services—including mentoring and integration into academic and professional networks—and systemic institutional problems in home countries hinder meaningful social transformation.

Similar challenges are evident among the outcomes of Türkiye's scholarship programs. A significant portion of scholarship recipients come from disadvantaged backgrounds, suggesting that the scholarships positively support educational access. However, unlike the Australian scholarship programs discussed by Abimbola et al., Türkiye lacks structured post-graduation support mechanisms. Beyond alums associations supported by the YTB, there is little evidence of systematic individual support, mentoring programs, or initiatives fostering academic and professional networking for graduates. Considering frequent alums comments about insufficient support and the limited backing for some alums-led associations, it is clear that Türkiye has substantial room for improvement in establishing institutional arrangements to enhance post-scholarship support, which is also among its official strategies. On the other hand, the Turkish case – its scholarship recipients – reveal that contribution to positive social change is not completely bound by local context and institutional constraints, as the ripple effect by the alums' efforts is observed in their social and professional settings.

Campbell and Mawer (2021) critique SDG Target 4.b for its ambiguity regarding the foundational basis on which scholarships should support students. They point out that in the rationales of different scholarship programs, either social justice and equity or the quality of education and the nature of scholarship provision tend to be sacrificed in favor of the other. They propose that evaluating scholarships through a human capabilities approach would enhance holistic alignment with the SDGs and better recognize the agency of scholarship recipients as well as the transformative potential of education. Based on an integrated assessment of the legal framework, documentary reflections, and

testimonies of implementers alongside outcomes, Türkiye demonstrates a more holistic approach in promoting human capital development and educational equity. However, its engagement with global development issues is largely confined to scholarships targeted at least developed countries. There is a lack of conscious reflection on broader global development challenges and an informed attitude toward solutions such as the SDGs.

In this respect, it is similar to how Turkish foreign aid in general is simultaneously aligned with and deviates from the international aid regime, particularly the DAC framework (Tüyoğlu, 2021; Üçkuş, 2022). The special attention to humanitarian crisis-affected regions and least developed countries in the scholarship policy is in line with Türkiye's humanitarian crisis and emergency-first aid behavior. Program designers and implementers expressed the principle of adapting the scholarship programs, which currently occupy a significant share of Turkish foreign aid, to foreign policy priorities (personal interviews, SI1, SI2 and SI3). Moreover, although goals regarding gender equality have not been explicitly embraced at the strategic plans, legal documents or in the words of program implementers, Türkiye Scholarships annual reports highlight a deliberate stance against “gender inequality in education,” underlining gender-balancing in allocating scholarships at the face of a gap with significantly higher share of male applicants (Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports 2019, p. 33; 2020, p. 37; 2021, p. 38; and 2022, p. 40). Again, this approach of “social inclusion,” referenced in relation to the UN SDGs (Türkiye Scholarships, 2022, p. 38), aligns with global objectives and international norms; yet counteracts with Türkiye's stated position of avoiding value judgments or normative impositions in its aid provision (Türkiye'nin Dost Dost Eli: İnsani Diplomasi, 2022, pp. 36-37).

Overall, analyzing scholarship programs as a development assistance mechanism – in the Turkish context, – the reformulation of these programs and their expansion to new geographies in parallel with the intensification of the use of different foreign policy instruments and the emphasis on developing relations with new regions (Atabaş & Köse, 2023) reflects an alignment in goals and policies. Scholarship programs are a significant channel for developing in-depth cultural and humanitarian ties in Türkiye's practice of international relations and diplomacy. At the same time, scholarships focus on human

capacity building and knowledge transfer, while other forms of Turkish development assistance are often geared towards tangible and visible objectives such as physical infrastructure and humanitarian crisis management. This reflects a qualitative and long-term perspective. The reconstructed ToC in this thesis, built to measure the effectiveness of scholarship programs, shows that these programs are not only limited to the educational process, but also anticipate positive impacts on development and relations after the graduates return to their home countries. In the long-term, it is observed that the change that graduates bring as they progress in their professional life with the knowledge, experience, skills and qualifications gained in Türkiye can provide concrete contributions to their national development and play a role that emphasizes cooperation with Türkiye in their national development due to the bond strengthened by learning the Turkish language and culture and networking here. This contribution to human capital development through an initiative that emphasizes equality in access to education is a critical intervention for the sustainable social and economic development of developing countries (Perna et al., 2014; Weiss, 2015; Barua, 2021).

6.2. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The efficacy of the program as a development assistance mechanism must be prioritized, and there are several avenues through which it can be enhanced. Achieving optimal beneficiary satisfaction with the program is critical to accomplishing the objectives of the program, as defined by its inputs, activities, and outputs. The inputs, activities, and outputs, particularly the ones that presenting challenges, according to beneficiaries' comments, indicate the presence of areas that require improvement in the implementation of the program.

1) The experience of international students should be enriched.

- a. Almost all of the studies assessing the Turkish scholarships or international higher education programs have reported challenges in learning Turkish. These challenges were also mentioned in the alums' feedback provided in this study. YTB's annual reports pay special attention to this issue, and reflect programs where students commenced their Turkish language learning in their home

countries in cooperation with Yunus Emre Institutes prior to relocating to Türkiye to pursue their studies (YTB, 2016; 2017). It is recommended that this practice be expanded for all students. Turkish education can be provided more economically through online programs. The initial anxiety experienced by individuals can be reduced through the practice of dialogues that they may engage in upon their arrival in Türkiye.

- b. Detailed information packages should be provided to scholarship recipients to prevent any further problems they may experience upon their first arrival in Türkiye. In order to avoid the problems reported, such as instances of fraud related to complicated processes, including the student visa process, simplified video trainings can be prepared and orientation can be offered through the online system they register for the scholarship.
- c. Socialization with the local community, other international scholarship students and representatives of implementing agencies is critical during the study period. The findings have highlighted the importance of the network and social environment, with the observation that not all scholarship recipients were able to benefit from the events organized by the institution. Rather than conducting events in all cities, sponsorship could be provided for the scholarship students to participate in these events for further socialization.
- d. The development of national consciousness and patriotic feelings, highlighted as specific to the case of Türkiye, was attributed to students' participation in civil society and a new perspective on their relationship with their home country. This can be strengthened through the dissemination and support of national student associations. These associations, which can benefit all international students beyond the scholarship recipients, will extend the outcome to all these students.

2) The quality of the education of scholarship recipients should be improved.

- a. While a minimum grade point average of 70 percent is considered an application criterion for scholarships, this criterion should also be considered in the local entrance score success of Turkish universities. Students who could have attended the best schools in their home countries but chose to pursue their studies in

Türkiye should be placed in schools with a higher ranking than those schools in their home countries. To develop their human capital, it is essential that they receive an education that challenges their capacities.

- b. It is recommended that the number of scholarship recipients and country-specific quotas be reduced to ensure more targeted support for highly qualified candidates. Concentrating resources on a smaller group would enhance the quality of educational opportunities, increase per-student support, and strengthen the program's capacity to cultivate future elites. In countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Egypt—samples of this dissertation—an annual average of 150 recipients suggests that scholarships may extend beyond top-tier candidates. A more selective approach, combined with placement in Türkiye's highest-quality universities, would help preserve the program's academic and strategic effectiveness.

In consideration of the fact that the program focuses not only on the educational process but also on post-education alums relationships and their contributions to the development of their home countries, it is recommended that regulations in this area be strengthened. Although there is an increasing emphasis on interaction with alums during program implementation, additional measures could be taken to regulate alums' return to their home countries or continued stay in Türkiye, as well as the professionalization of alums networks.

3) Return should not be merely compulsory, but should also be encouraged.

- a. In countries with high youth unemployment and limited private sector development, grants can be provided for start-up projects undertaken by scholarship graduates, and support can be planned for SMEs that employ these graduates.
- b. In countries where the public sector offers limited employment opportunities or cannot provide competitive salaries, bilateral agreements can be signed to provide salary support for graduates' first year of employment.

4) The graduates willing to stay in Türkiye should have the opportunity that competitively applies to all of them.

- a. In the policies developed for the internationalization of higher education, the employment rate of foreign academics can be improved, and Ph.D. graduates can be granted residence permits that allow them to stay in Türkiye for a certain period after graduation to seek positions at Turkish universities.
- b. Work permits can be granted to scholarship recipients who are offered internship opportunities within the scope of the scholarship program provided that they can obtain sponsorship from their internship workplace.

5) Support for alums should be expanded.

- a. Instead of focusing on all international students, special attention should be given to alums scholarship recipients affiliated with the institution. Their civil society organizations, including alums associations, should be supported. These alums can receive mentorship from Türkiye, and a system can be created to provide guidance to other alums who have graduated and returned to their country through the structures they have established.
- b. Graduates should be encouraged to form sectoral associations or unions. Programs can be organized to strengthen their networks with national or international business organizations and relevant sectoral representatives in Türkiye.

In addition to these implementation recommendations, structural adjustments are required to ensure the sustainability of the scholarship program and to strengthen its efficiency as a form of development assistance. The management of the program with different stakeholders and a restructuring could be improved, as could the incorporation of its objectives into framework policy strategies and communication.

1) Diplomacy towards the Turkish public should be developed.

This study and others on international students in Türkiye highlight the negative public sentiments and attitudes toward them. Faced with exclusionary treatment, including from academic staff at their universities, international students — especially those who are highly qualified and selected for scholarships — experience difficulty in establishing strong ties with Türkiye. It is essential for the Turkish governing authorities to engage in domestic public diplomacy. This includes the communication of its international student policy, scholarship program goals, development assistance activities, and foreign policy strategies in general, with a view to seeking public support for these policies. The participants of this study emphasized that they were most impressed by the public acceptance, warm welcome, and helpfulness of the society in which they lived. However, the fact that this varies over time and by origin country, and has declined significantly in recent years, weakens the program’s impact. The sustainability of the program is contingent upon public support. Strengthening the program’s visibility aligns with the principles of transparency and accountability in governance and is crucial.

2) Key contacts for communication with Turkish alums should be identified in Türkiye’s foreign missions.

The strategy documents of the YÖK on the internationalization of higher education in Türkiye (YÖK, 2017, p. 69; YÖK, 2025, p. 55) propose the establishment of an “academic counselor” or “higher education counselor” position in Turkish diplomatic missions abroad. The role of this position includes promoting Turkish higher education internationally, mediating in international academic collaborations, supporting students and academics travelling abroad from Türkiye, as and maintaining communication with alums of scholarship programs in the respective country. Based on the comments made by alumni, who have indicated the presence of weak ties with Türkiye, and in consideration of the observations that scholars from different countries are more closely connected with their respective country’s representative offices, this thesis concludes that relations should be strengthened by focusing on these offices. In line with the policy plans for alums engagement outlined in top policy documents, such as the current National Development Plan and government programs, efforts could be planned to maintain communication with Türkiye alums in foreign policy modalities, such as public

diplomacy and international development cooperation, in the countries where they are based. These efforts could support the development of their contributions through people in such roles.

3) Inter-agency coordination and sectoral approaches should be developed.

To enhance the developmental effectiveness of Türkiye Scholarships, it is essential that institutional alignment and coordination are strengthened. Current implementation reveals limited inter-agency collaborations among governmental bodies involved in international development cooperation, which limits the scholarships' alignment with local development needs in recipient countries. A well-coordinated, sector-wide approach—as practiced by Australia—can significantly address these structural barriers. For instance, Australia's bilateral country partnership agreements explicitly integrate education and scholarship programs within broader development cooperation frameworks, ensuring comprehensive alignment with partner countries' developmental priorities (DFAT, n.d.).

With a similar strategy, it is recommended that Türkiye establish coordinated country-specific partnership frameworks. These frameworks should clearly articulate joint objectives, strategic priorities, and implementation mechanisms among relevant institutions. Regular dialogues, accountability mechanisms, and joint monitoring processes would help Türkiye's scholarship programs to systematically respond to recipient countries' educational and developmental gaps. By embedding scholarship efforts within broader, cohesive and integrated development strategies, Türkiye could maximize the impact of its program, strengthen institutional partnerships, and optimize resource allocation. A sector-wide approach, coordinated through periodic inter-agency reviews and clearly defined joint action plans, would thus substantially elevate Türkiye Scholarships' effectiveness as instruments of development cooperation, reinforcing their long-term impact on partner countries' human capital and sustainable development goals.

4) A standalone institution specializing in international higher education should be established.

Within the scope of the DOSP-G20 project (no. 221K032), a comparative analysis of G20 countries reveals that the organizational structure of scholarship programs for international students is markedly different from that of Türkiye. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, South Korea, and Japan, the responsibility for such programs lies with central government bodies tied to foreign affairs or education: the U.S. Department of State, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), China's Ministry of Education, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), South Korea's Ministry of Education, and Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)—a diaspora diplomacy agency—administers the Türkiye Scholarships as a consequence of institutional restructuring. Following the dissolution of the former State Ministry, responsibilities for relations with Turkish citizens abroad and historically/culturally affiliated communities (“related communities”) were transferred to YTB, alongside the scholarship program (Personal Interviews, SI 1 and SI 5). While YTB has effectively integrated scholarship administration into its mandate using a “affinity diaspora” approach and has achieved specialization in this field, its broad portfolio creates institutional complexity. On one hand, communities with ethnic-historical ties may misunderstand the extension of scholarships to other international groups and foreign communities, and may feel further dissatisfaction over perceived lack of post-scholarship support. On the other hand, the state apparatus tends to view YTB's primary role as the management of kin relations. This perspective has the potential to sideline the scholarship program and alums engagement.¹⁶

¹⁶ In the Turkish Grand National Assembly, during the briefing sessions held by the specialized commissions on oversight matters, the institution has been invited to sub-commissions of the Foreign Affairs Commission and the Human Rights Commission, where topics such as Turks living abroad or the rise of racism and Islamophobia in Europe are discussed. However, issues related to the scholarship programs offered to international students are rarely brought to the agenda in these commissions (e.g., TBMM, 2024a; TBMM, 2024b).

Previously, when the Ministry of National Education managed the scholarship program under general state coordination, challenges in coordination and inadequate institutional ownership led to the transfer of full responsibility to YTB, as mentioned in the Chapter 4 when analyzing the program design and implementation. As such, despite this responsibility residing within education ministries in other countries, a return to Türkiye's Ministry of National Education is not recommended due to such past inefficiencies. Moreover, since this ministry is assigned with developing and sustaining a national education system and focuses primarily on basic education, it lacks the institutional design to handle issues related to higher education and international student management. Nevertheless, the international scholarship programs require such a strong pedagogical approach, and therefore, alternatively their delegation to the YÖK, which operates the legal framework of higher education and oversees universities, would introduce new challenges.

Thus, considering that multiple public institutions—including YTB, YÖK, MoNE, and even TİKA—have engaged with the scholarship program in various capacities, it is essential to underline that these agencies have developed considerable institutional memory and human resources specialized in scholarship-related matters. Over the years, these agencies have trained officers with specialized knowledge in scholarship management, international education, and development cooperation. Rather than fragmenting responsibilities or reassigning them to agencies whose core mandates do not align with international higher education, these specialized capacities should be consolidated. Establishing or designating a standalone institution exclusively responsible for managing Türkiye's scholarship programs would enable the systematic accumulation, integration, and strategic use of these experiences. This would not only ensure continuity and professionalism but also enhance the coordination of Türkiye's development assistance and higher education diplomacy efforts. Such a structure would strengthen program outcomes, institutional learning, and long-term developmental impact across both partner countries and Türkiye.

6.3. Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has examined the developmental outcomes of Türkiye's international scholarship programs by guided by the central research question: *How effective are Türkiye's scholarship programs in achieving their developmental objectives?* To answer this, the study identified the stated and implicit objectives of Türkiye's scholarship policies through document analysis and elite interviews. The extent to which these objectives have materialized was then assessed empirically by drawing on the experiences of alums from three countries – Egypt, Kyrgyzstan, and North Macedonia – representing three geographically and politically distinct regions. The analysis was structured around an integrated analytical framework combining a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) with Kirkpatrick's five-level evaluation model, enabling a comprehensive assessment of inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts.

The research first employed documentary analysis and elite interviews to create a ToC framework, identifying the connections between program resources, implementation processes, and anticipated outcomes. Subsequently, 44 in-depth interviews were conducted with alums from the sample countries to empirically test the developmental impact of the scholarship program.

This dual-layered analytical approach has provided findings that reveals the generation of tangible personal, organizational, and, to a limited extent, societal benefits by Türkiye's scholarship programs. These include language proficiency and skill development, application of acquired skills in the professional contexts, alums-led institutional adjustments, and broader but limited developmental contributions to public service, civil society, and economic transformation. The study shows that while the programs have succeeded in many of their aims, structural and institutional constraints—such as employment barriers, lack of post-graduation support, and barren organizational environment —hinder the complete realization of developmental objectives.

Despite these contributions, this study has inherent limitations. As a qualitative inquiry relying on personal accounts, the findings reflect subjective experiences shaped by

individual, institutional, and national contexts. They are not statistically generalizable to all alums, all recipient countries, or to international scholarship programs in general. The selected country cases, while diverse and theoretically illustrative, may not capture the full spectrum of regional dynamics or long-term trends. Furthermore, due to data access limitations, some institutional perspectives—particularly from the host country side—could not be incorporated in a comprehensive manner.

Nonetheless, the study offers key strengths. In contrast to earlier research, which predominantly focused solely on soft power or policymaker motivations, this dissertation employs an analytical and empirical approach. Rather than exploring solely why and how scholarship policies are made, with a Theory of Change lens, it systematically investigates the logical pathways through which program inputs and activities lead to intended developmental impact. Furthermore, by incorporating Kirkpatrick's extended evaluation model, commonly employed in training and educational assessments, the research rigorously evaluated empirical outcomes across multiple dimensions—from immediate personal learning effects to broader institutional and societal impacts. This analytical integration constitutes a novel methodological contribution, presenting a holistic evaluation that bridges policy intent with empirical outcomes.

Moreover, by situating scholarships within the broader paradigm of education-driven development assistance, the study positions Türkiye's programs as more than instruments of foreign policy or public diplomacy. Rather, it reveals their potential to function as long-term investments in human capital, institutional transformation, and regional cooperation—albeit with caveats that call for improved implementation, policy coherence, and follow-up mechanisms.

In terms of future research, several directions are worth pursuing. First, comparative studies could be conducted across different sending countries (e.g., Türkiye, China, Australia, EU member states) to evaluate how scholarship programs differ in terms of design, coordination mechanisms, and developmental impact. This would provide a more systematic understanding of how scholarships function as tools of development assistance across different geopolitical and institutional contexts. Second, quantitative or

mixed-methods approaches may complement this study by measuring impact at scale. Surveys targeting a broader alums population could enhance generalizability and allow for longitudinal analyses of outcomes. Third, research focusing on institutional perspectives in recipient countries could complement this alums-centric approach. Understanding how employers, higher education institutions, civil society organizations, or governmental bodies in recipient countries perceive and leverage alums contributions would provide critical external validation of the program's developmental impact. Finally, ethnographic or institutional studies examining the internal dynamics of Türkiye's scholarship-implementing agencies, such as YTB, YÖK, universities, would further clarify operational constraints and opportunities, offering pragmatic insights for policy improvement.

In conclusion, this dissertation has moved beyond conventional analyses of scholarships as mere tools of soft power or diplomacy, positioning them instead within a rigorous developmental evaluation framework. Although constrained by the inherent limitations of qualitative research, its methodological innovation—combining Theory of Change and Kirkpatrick's model—provides a structured, empirical foundation for assessing and improving international scholarship programs. Future research efforts are recommended to pursue comparative, methodological, and institutional dimensions, further refining our understanding of scholarships as significant instruments for global human capital development and international cooperation.

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APPENDICES

I. Appendix A: List of Alums Interviewed

Code	Sex	Nationality	City Of Studies	Field Of Studies under Scholarship	Current Employment
2020 Alum 2	F	Egyptian	Ankara	Medicine	Doctor of Medicine
2016 Alum 1	F	Egyptian	Ankara	Economics (Master's)	Academician
2019 Alum 1	F	Egyptian	Konya	Turkish Language and Literature	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2017 Alum 1	F	Egyptian	Ankara	International Relations	Freelancer
2015 Alum 1	F	Egyptian	Ankara	New Turkish Literature (PhD)	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2016 Alum 2	F	Egyptian	İzmir	Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (Master's)	Academician
2022 Alum 1	F	Egyptian	Ankara	Islamic Economics (Master's)	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2018 Alum 1	F	Egyptian	İstanbul	Turkish Language and Literature (Master's)	Academician
2015 Alum 2	F	Kyrgyzstan	Eskişehir	Computer Education	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2010 Alum 1	F	Kyrgyzstan	İzmir	Business Administration	Employee at an NGO
2022 Alum 4	F	Kyrgyzstan	Erzurum	Mathematics	Teacher
2021 Alum 3	F	Kyrgyzstan	Kocaeli	Journalism (Master's)	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2019 Alum 4	F	Kyrgyzstan	İstanbul	Political Science and International Relations	Private Sector Employee

2017 Alum 4	F	Kyrgyzstan	Sakarya	Political Science and Public Administration	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2005 Alum 1	F	Kyrgyzstan	Ankara	Physics (Master's)	Firm Owner
2021 Alum 4	F	Kyrgyzstan	Sakarya	International Relations	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2003* Alum	F	Kyrgyzstan	İstanbul	International Business Administration (Master's)	Teacher
2018 Alum 2	F	North Macedonian	İstanbul	Political Science and Public Administration (Master's)	Academician
2021 Alum 5	F	North Macedonian	İstanbul	Architecture (PhD)	Academician
2011 Alum	F	North Macedonian	Ankara	International Relations	Employee at a National Public Institution
2017 Alum 3	M	Egyptian	Ankara	Turkish Language (Master's)	Freelancer
2015* Alum	M	Egyptian	İstanbul	Islamic History and Arts (Master's)	Academician
2023 Alum	M	Egyptian	Samsun	New Turkish Literature (Master's)	Private Sector Employee
2020 Alum 3	M	Egyptian	Ankara	Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (Master's)	Employee at a Turkish Public Institution
2021 Alum 1	M	Kazakhstan	Kocaeli	Biology (Master's)	Teacher
2022 Alum 3	M	Kyrgyzstan	Sakarya	Political Science and Public Administration (Master's)	Firm Owner
2017 Alum 2	M	Kyrgyzstan	İstanbul	Public Relations and Advertising	Firm Owner
2021 Alum 2	M	Kyrgyzstan	Ankara	Modern Turkish History (PhD)	Academician
2019 Alum 2	M	Kyrgyzstan	Gaziantep	International Trade and Logistics	Private Sector Employee
2004 Alum	M	Kyrgyzstan	Ankara	Geology Engineering	Firm Owner
2006 Alum	M	Kyrgyzstan	İstanbul	International Trade	Firm Owner
1997 Alum 1	M	Kyrgyzstan	Ankara	Public Administration	Firm Owner
2019 Alum 5	M	North Macedonian	Ankara	Biology	Teacher

2014 Alum	M	North Macedonian	İstanbul	Journalism	Private Sector Employee
2005 Alum 2	M	North Macedonian	Eskişehir	Economics (Bachelor's and Master's)	Academician
2010 Alum 2	M	North Macedonian	Ankara	International Relations	Employee at a National Public Institution
1999 Alum	M	North Macedonian	İzmir	Journalism	Freelancer
2019 Alum 6	M	North Macedonian	İstanbul	International Law (PhD)	Academician
2021 Alum 6	M	North Macedonian	Ankara	Journalism	Private Sector Employee
2020 Alum 1	M	North Macedonian	İstanbul	Political Science and International Relations (PhD)	Academician
2019 Alum 3	M	North Macedonian	İstanbul	Computer Engineering (Master's)	Private Sector Employee
2022 Alum 2	M	North Macedonian	Ankara	International Relations (Master's and PhD)	Academician
1997 Alum 2	M	North Macedonian	İstanbul	International Relations	Academician
2006* Alum	M	North Macedonian	İstanbul	Computer Engineering	Freelancer
* The year in which the individual would have graduated, had they completed their education, is indicated. However, the individual did not complete their education.					

II. Appendix B: Participants Consent Form

Institution: Bilkent University
Faculty: Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences
Department: International Relations

Project Title: “Scholarships as Development Assistance: An Empirical Analysis of the Outcomes of the Turkish Government Funded Scholarship Programmes”

Type: Ph.D. Dissertation

Name of the Researcher: Hacer Atabaş

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Introduction:

You are being invited to participate in a study that aims to assess the consequences of the scholarships disbursed by the Turkish government. The purpose of this consent form is to explain the study to you and to seek your consent to participate in it. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether or not to participate. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Description of the Study:

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. The interview will be conducted in person, over the phone, or via video conference, depending on your preference. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes, during which time you will be asked about the following;

- Your earlier perceptions of Türkiye,
- Your reasons for choosing to study in Türkiye,
- Your social, academic, and professional activities during their studies,

-
- Your present socio-economic status,
 - Your current views on and relations with Türkiye.

The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy purposes, and the recording will be transcribed for analysis. The researcher will ensure the confidentiality of the recording and the transcript.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. However, some individuals may find it uncomfortable to discuss certain topics or to be audio-recorded. The potential benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to share your experiences and perspectives on the topic of interest, which may help to advance understanding in the field.

Confidentiality:

All information collected during the study will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the data. The audio recording and the transcript will be identified by a code number to protect your anonymity. Your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Some personal information related to you, including your graduation year, institution, department and home country, will take place in the study in a way that cannot be associated with you.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected up to that point will be destroyed.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the researcher, Hacer Atabaş at [REDACTED] If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Bilkent University Ethics Committee at [REDACTED]

Consent:

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. I agree to participate in the study and understand that I may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____