Barriers to Establishing Partnerships in terms of Internationalization of Higher Education: The example of Türkiye - UK case

Armağan Erdoğan [1] & Betül Bulut Şahin [2]

[1] Beykoz University, İstanbul, Türkiye
[2] Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

Article Type: Research Article

Corresponding Author: Betül Bulut Şahin, sbetul@metu.edu.tr

Barriers to Establishing Partnerships in terms of Internationalization of Higher Education:
The example of Türkiye - UK case

Armağan Erdoğan [1] & Betül Bulut Şahin [2]

[1] Beykoz University, İstanbul, Türkiye
[2] Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

Abstract

Internationalization has become an increasingly important global target and process for the higher education sector. Higher education stakeholders aim to enlarge their benefits from this phenomenon, and policies and practices usually address the issue of quantity and visible tools such as numbers on student mobility. The growing interest in internationalization highlighted the importance of cooperation between countries at the national level. This study examined models, relationship, and ties between higher education institutions (HEIs) in Türkiye and the UK, focusing on the barriers to an effective partnership. Within the scope of the study, qualitative research methods were used to conduct semi-structured interviews with national policymakers and decision-makers in both countries, senior representatives of HEIs, and several focus groups with different groups of academics in the UK and Türkiye. In this article, we aim to present the primary analysis gathered from the intensive research conducted in 2021. This article identified the main challenges that have slowed the development of relations between the two countries. According to the results, the main barriers to partnerships are the structural and attitudinal barriers between the HEIs of the two countries. Recommendations for policy reform from the extensive research are shared at the end of the article.

Keywords: Internationalization of higher education, Türkiye, the UK, international partnerships in higher education, challenges

Introduction

Introduction

Internationalization in universities has been affecting higher education systems in all world countries since the 1990s. As a result of the increasing influence of this concept, it is possible to encounter a wide variety of internationalization practices in universities. Internationalization has become one of the most important strategic priorities for national authorities, higher education institutions (HEIs), and individual stakeholders. It is a broad term covering different approaches, tools, and rationales. The internationalization of higher education (IHE) is an increasingly important topic on the agenda of countries at national, institutional, and individual levels. Over the last few decades 30 years, the IHE has evolved from ad-hoc and marginal activity to a central component of higher education policy and an integral part of university strategies (De Wit & Hunter, 2014).

IHE is presented in various forms, such as internationalization at home, internationalization of research, internationalization of teaching and learning, joint degree programs, and branch campuses. Nevertheless, student mobility is the most well-known and mostly referred practice of internationalization (Van Damme, 2001). According to the OECD (2021), international student mobility has steadily expanded over the last 20 years. In 2019, 6.1 million higher education students traveled to another country to study, more than double the number of mobility students in 2007. In other words, the

---

number of international students in higher education increased by an average of 5.5 percent annually between 1998 and 2019.

Yang (2002) defines internationalization as the awareness and implementation of intra- and intercultural interactions through education, research, and community service functions, with the main goal of developing mutual understanding across cultural boundaries, and this definition is widely used. The most commonly used definition of IHE is 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of higher education' (Knight, 2003, p. 2). However, this definition was reviewed recently to make the concept more inclusive, purposeful, and integrated to society, in line with the philosophy of internationalization:

> "The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function, and delivery of post-secondary education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit et al., 2015, p.29).

With this revision, IHE is seen as a deliberate process that should guide HEIs' policy and practice by ensuring that all students, regardless of background, gain from internationalization efforts rather than only emphasizing mobility. This renewal in the definition led scholars to be more critical of the concept of internationalization. Inclusiveness is a hot topic in strengthening equal opportunity in internationalization discussions as well as in social policies. Although student mobility seems to be widespread in all universities around the world, it is not possible to say that student mobility is equally inclusive for all countries, universities, and indeed all students from different backgrounds, as stated in studies on inclusive internationalization (Bulut-Sahin & Brooks, 2023; De Wit & Jones, 2018; Janebová & Johnstone, 2020; Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022). Accordingly, De Wit and Jones (2018) state that 99 percent of the world's student population does not participate in physical mobility. Therefore, despite regional and international grant programs, international mobility is elitist (De Wit, 2020) and only accessible to a minority of students.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the main focus of IHE was on mobility and education abroad (De Wit, 2020); because of the limited number of students and staff who can move in this way. However, in the later decades, it became necessary to enlarge the definition beyond physical mobility. Although physical movement still receives the most attention within internationalization policy and practice, it is not inclusive and excludes most students worldwide (De Wit & Jones, 2018). As a result, alternative and more inclusive concepts have been developed, including 'internationalization at home" (Beelen & Jones, 2015), 'internationalization of the curriculum' (Leask, 2015), and 'virtual internationalization' (Lawton, 2015). The concept of 'comprehensive internationalization,' developed by Hudzic (2011), refers to embracing internationalization by the whole institution and its use as an institutional imperative rather than only a desired possibility.

The rationales driving HE internationalization can be academic, economic, political, and socio-cultural (Knight, 2004). However, economic rationales have received considerably more attention than others (Van der Wende, 2001; Jiang, 2008; Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). When the focus is only on economic benefits, only a small and elite subset of students and institutions tend to benefit from internationalization (De Wit & Altbach, 2020). The mobile student population worldwide is typically not diverse regarding social characteristics such as income, ethnicity, and disability. Thus, the employment advantages that often accrue to those who are physically mobile tend to reinforce social inequalities (Brooks & Waters, 2011).

Along with the aforementioned remarks regarding the significance of characterizing internationalization in more inclusive terms, some scholars have suggested that the sociocultural justification should have greater weight than the economic imperatives (Brandenburg et al., 2019). The majority of countries in the globe now prioritize internationalization policies for higher education, and numerous national governments, HEIs, and other stakeholders are creating and putting these policies into practice. These groups are categorized by Helms, Brajikovic, and Rumbley (2016) as national government entities, quasi-governmental and autonomous organizations, regional university associations, and other influencers like the EU and other regional government bodies. Consequently, and in line with the above

points about the importance of defining internationalization in more inclusive terms, various scholars have argued that more emphasis should be placed on the socio-cultural rationale and less on economic imperatives (Brandenburg et al., 2019).

Internationalization policies for higher education have become a priority for most nations worldwide, with many national governments, individuals, HEIs, and other stakeholders developing and implementing procedures in this area. Although internationalization is a priority for institutions and individuals, relations and dynamics between countries also play a very important role in the IHE. Facilitating practices or conflicts between countries directly impacts the processes of cooperation between HEIs. This paper, therefore, focuses on the relationship between the UK and Türkiye, two countries with a significant history of higher education partnerships. In the first part, information is provided on the Turkish and British higher education systems along with national priorities, and the method and results sections are followed by a conclusion and implications.

Higher Education System in Türkiye
Türkiye boasts a sizable higher education market and a centrally organized educational system. Both individual universities and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), as the regulating body, have been paying increasing attention to IHE. There are 208 HEIs, 129 public universities, 75 foundation universities, and four foundation vocational schools. Türkiye has the highest student population in the European Higher Education Area, with 6.952.142 (nearly half of them are enrolled in open universities) enrolled in the universities. Approximately 40 percent of universities are in Istanbul and Ankara, the country's two most populous cities (CoHE, 2024).

In public universities, the tuition fee is exempted for the national students; for the international students, the fees are defined by the Cabinet annually. The Turkish higher education system is coordinated in line with the Constitution and the associated Law (Erdogan & Toprak, 2012). The CoHE is responsible for the strategic planning, coordination, supervision, and monitoring of higher education and for establishing and maintaining quality assurance mechanisms in Türkiye (CoHE, 2019b). To facilitate access and increase system capacity, the higher education sector has rapidly massified and expanded during the past 20 years, as required by the National Development Plans and the Constitution (Erdogan & Toprak, 2012). Most Turkish universities are newly established:
- between 1991 and 2000, 43 universities were founded
- between 2001 and 2010, 77 universities were founded
- between 2011 and 2020, 58 universities were founded
-

Higher Education System in the UK
There are 165 institutions, slightly under 440,000 employees, and 2.52 million students in the UK's higher education system (HESA, 2021; UUK, 2021a). Hazelkorn (2015) notes that the sector is more vertically differentiated than in many other countries, with divisions usually made between
- larger, older, "research-intensive" universities (generally belonging to the "Russell Group" mission group)
- smaller, research-focused universities that were granted university status before 1992
- more contemporary, frequently teaching-focused institutions that were granted university status in 1992 or later

Every student in the UK is required to pay tuition to pursue higher education. However, the cost varies depending on the country, the level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate), and whether the students are classified as "home" or "international." Undergraduate tuition in England is restricted at £9,250 for "home" students; however, costs for overseas students are uncapped and can sometimes exceed three times the amount for "home" students.

Postgraduate tuition is unlimited for both domestic and foreign students; however, the sums each group pays are usually somewhat different. International students and postgraduates must pay fees comparable to those in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. However, Northern Irish students studying

in Northern Ireland are limited to £4,395 at the undergraduate level, while Scottish students studying in Scotland are not charged any fees (UCAS, 2021).

Türkiye's National Priorities in terms of Internationalization of Higher Education
Several official documents outline Türkiye's national priorities for the internationalization of higher education. The 12th Development Plan of Türkiye (2024-2028) includes various strategic aims to increase the attraction of Turkish universities for international students (SBB, 2023). The strategic aims to develop the internationalization of higher education are defined in the following ways (p. 164):

Article 685: The level of internationalization of higher education will be increased, and Türkiye will be made a center of attraction for qualified international students and academicians.

- 685.1. The quality of foreign language education programs will be increased.
- 685.2. The number of qualified international students will increase.
- 685.3. International cooperation among HEIs will be increased.
- 685.4. International recognition of the higher education system will be ensured through international graduates and effective promotional activities.
- 685.5. Efforts will be made to encourage and facilitate the employment of qualified foreign doctoral researchers and academicians.
- 686.2. Universities will be encouraged to open joint doctoral programs with competent universities abroad.

Published in 2018, the "Internationalization Strategy Document" (YÖK, 2018) covers 2018–2022. In this plan, two main strategies have been defined for higher education. The first primary strategy for internationalization is Türkiye's increasing attractiveness to international students. For the first strategy, some example sub-strategies are as follows:
- Policies to attract international students and staff,
- Increasing the visibility of Turkish higher education in the international arena,
- Development of international partnerships with partner universities and other states,
- Improving academic services for international students (e.g., courses offered in English, improving the English teaching capacity of academic staff),
- Improving support services for international students (e.g., accommodation).

The second key strategy is to improve the institutional capacity of universities. Some of the sub-objectives identified for the second objective to improve internationalization are as follows:
- Providing qualified human resources for internationalization in universities,
- Formation of official sections for internationalization,
- More cooperation among Turkish universities to follow internationalization trends,
- Sending representative faculty members to target countries.

UK's National Priorities in terms of Internationalization of Higher Education
The UK's 2019 International Education Strategy and its most recent update, released in February 2021 by the Departments of Education and International Trade, provide an effective summary of the country's current priorities for the internationalization of the higher education sector. The government's commitment to achieving the two primary goals outlined in the 2019 strategy is reaffirmed in the strategy update:
- raising the value of education exports, which include foreign students studying in the UK, to £35 billion annually (from £23.3 billion in 2018—the most recent data available)
- raising the number of international students studying in the UK to 600,000 annually (compared to just under 560,000 in 2019–20).

The revised plan also specifies a few steps that can be used to boost both the quantity of international students and the value of education exports.
- One is increasing the number of nations and areas from which international students are recruited. To achieve this, several "priority" nations and regions—India, Indonesia, Saudi

Arabia, Vietnam, and Nigeria—as well as "other important regional markets"—Brazil, Mexico, Pakistan, Europe, China, and Hong Kong—are identified for focused action
- creating enduring international partnerships in and beyond the priority mentioned above
- enhancing the experiences of overseas students from the time they apply for a UK degree to the time they start working
- launching a new international teaching credential to draw in students from all over the world who want to become teachers.

Cooperation between Türkiye and the UK in higher education

Türkiye and the United Kingdom have had long-standing cooperation based on various historical, cultural, and economic ties. On March 12, 1956, an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation for education and culture was signed, formalizing the two nations' partnerships. This agreement covers a wide range of subjects and activities and is still in effect. More recently, in the last ten years, several initiatives have been aimed at fortifying Türkiye-UK higher education alliances. 2011 saw the signing of the UK-Türkiye Knowledge Partnership, an intergovernmental agreement. The UK-Türkiye Higher Education and Industry Partnership Program, a cooperation treaty, was subsequently signed in 2012 by the Universities UK (UUK) and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) presidents.

To forge closer ties and increase levels of bilateral cooperation in higher education, the British Council and the Council of Higher Education signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2019. Following this agreement, five universities from Türkiye (Hacettepe University, İstanbul University, İstanbul University Cerrahpaşa, Middle East Technical University, İzmir Institute of Technology, Ankara University) have initiated partnership agreements with UK higher education institutions to deepen and expand collaboration. The British Council also reported on the use of English in higher education in Türkiye and collaborated with the CoHE to create qualifications and quality criteria for English in Turkish higher education (British Council, 2015).

Wider regional collaboration initiatives, like the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which has improved the comparability and transparency of higher education degrees and qualifications across member countries; the Erasmus+ mobility program; the European Research Area (ERA); and framework programs like Horizon 2020, have strengthened ties between the two countries. Furthermore, since its founding in 2015, the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC) have worked in close cooperation with the British Council in constructing a national quality assurance system similar to its foreign equivalents in terms of structure and function. Additionally, certain HEIs have created bilateral partnerships or collaborations for research, training, and education. Creating new partnerships is crucial for Türkiye and the UK, as the former intends to strengthen its research base, boost institutional cooperation and internationalization, gain from peer learning, and assist the many students who come to study in the UK every year.

All the above national level cooperation initiatives have led several bileteral agreements between the HEIs in different countries. Some of these bilateral agreements were signed as Memorandum of Understanding agreements (MoU) to establish general cooperation with student and staff exchange. However, most of these MoU agreements do not include any funding schemas for mobility and they had limited impact for further cooperation. The other type of agreements was signed under the Erasmus Program. However, the number of Erasmus agreements between the UK and Türkiye stay limited; Turkish HEIs concluded most of their Erasmus agreements with Poland and Germany (European Commission, 2022).

The research presented in this article seeks two main outcomes: one is to examine the current situation and challenges to develop long-term partnerships concerning teaching and research activities, and the other is to shed light on what has been accomplished thus far and what may be accomplished in the future for the benefits of both countries, thereby laying a solid foundation for such high-quality, long-lasting, and mutually beneficial advances for the partnerships with the other countries as well.

Method

This study is designed as a qualitative study. Unlike quantitative researchers, who strive for more significant numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance, qualitative researchers typically work with small samples of people, nested in their context, and investigated in depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Research Questions:
This article presents the findings from a research project funded by the British Council of Türkiye. The following three research questions were used in this project. This article only presents basic findings on the barriers to establishing higher education cooperation between the two countries.
- What do key stakeholders (national-level organizations, HEIs (HEIs), and individual academics and students) consider priority areas for UK-Türkiye HE institutional partnerships, and what form should these partnerships take?
- What are some of the current barriers to establishing UK-Türkiye partnerships?
- How can the conditions necessary for establishing institutional partnerships be improved, and how can the identified barriers be overcome?

Data Collection
The data was collected in Türkiye and the UK from November 2020 to February 2021. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, online semi-structured interviews were conducted with national and institutional authorities' representatives—semi-structured interviews developed by the researchers. One-on-one semi-structured interviews are arguably the most widely used qualitative method and have practically become the "gold standard," according to Barbour (2008). Compared to other qualitative methodologies, the quality of the data collected through interviews is higher, making it more convenient for the researcher.

Furthermore, online focus groups were conducted with academics and students who benefited from the partnership tools in both countries. All groups were conducted online, included between four and six participants, lasted approximately 90 minutes, and were recorded (with the permission of those taking part). Participants were asked about their experience in a higher education partnership between Türkiye and the UK and/or moving between the two countries for teaching and/or research. After each focus group, descriptive and analytic notes were taken by the researcher who conducted the group.

Research Participants:
As with most qualitative investigations, the purposeful sampling method was employed. According to Patton (2012), purposeful sampling yields a thorough understanding by choosing cases with a wealth of information. Maximum variation sampling is one of several sampling techniques that fall under the broad category of purposeful sampling. This sampling technique identifies and characterizes a phenomenon's key themes, essential aspects, and shared experiences (Patton 2012).
In this study, participants were recruited through social media advertisements placed by the British Council and the research team; some were also nominated by the HEIs participating in the study. There were three groups of participants in this research, both in Türkiye and the UK.
The represented organizations and the details of the focus groups are provided in Table 1:

Table 1. *The research participants and the represented organizations (alphabetically order)*

	National Organizations (Nos)	HEIs	Individual academics / students – Focus Groups
The UK	British Universities' International Liaison Association	Abertay University	two focus groups with Turkish students who had moved to the UK for the whole or part of their higher education
	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	Cardiff University	one focus group with Turkish academics who had moved to the UK for work

	Department for Education	Cranfield University	two focus groups with UK-based academics who had been involved in research or education partnerships with Türkiye
	Department for International Trade	Keele University	
			Continued
	Quality Assurance Agency Russell Group	Lancaster University Leeds Beckett University	
	University Alliance	Queen's University, Belfast	
	Universities UK International	Stirling University	
		University of Edinburgh	
		University of Liverpool	
		University of Reading	
		University of Sheffield	
		University of South Wales	
		University of Surrey	
Türkiye	Ministry of National Education	Abdullah Gül University	two focus groups with Turkish senior academics who had collaborations with the UK. two focus groups with UK academics working in Turkish universities.
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate of EU Affairs	Altınbaş University	
	Turkish Scientific Research Institution (TUBİTAK)	Anadolu University	
	Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC)	Atatürk University	
	Turkish National Agency	İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University	
	Turkish Education Attaché in London	Gebze Technical University	
	British Embassy Chevening Program	Hacettepe University	
	British Council Türkiye	İzmir Institute of Technology	
		Karabük University	
		Karadeniz Technical University	
		Koç University	
		Middle East Technical University	
		Ostim Technical University	
		Sabancı University	
		TOBB ETÜ University of Economics & Technology	

Results

This section of the article presents the main barriers or obstacles described by the research participants concerning establishing and/or sustaining HE partnerships between the two countries. The findings indicate various country-specific obstacles and some common barriers the interviewees identified on both sides. The main barriers presented in the article have been classified as structural (regulatory, academic, financial) and attitudinal (relating, for example, to cultural differences and views of the other country).

Structural barriers:
The first structural barrier is related to the regulatory frameworks. In Türkiye, due to the centralized system, CoHE plays an important role in international partnerships at the national level. On the other hand, in the UK, individual HEIs are autonomous in their decisions regarding internationalization. Some Turkish interviewees stated that having a national responsible body such as the CoHE and a central system can help universities coordinate and function more easily, but others said that if internationalization policies are too broad and regulations prevent varied and adaptable implementation, this could become a hindrance. (TR-Focus Group-2).

Moreover, the Turkish HE sector has grown over the past decade; therefore, there is variation among the universities in terms of experience, capacity, resources, priorities, and quality assurance issues. In this research, we have found that such differences are also reflected in the barriers identified by the interviewees. Respondents from Türkiye's more established universities pointed out that general obstacles to fostering international collaborations arise from the environment and ecosystem of higher education. They held the opinion that creative means/tools of internationalization are not allowed or not clearly defined by national legislation (such as branch campuses and some other forms of TNE) (TR-HEI-5,9, TR Focus Group-2). For this reason, in most cases, most universities have implemented similar and traditional internationalization models. For instance, participants discussed the imposition of recruitment targets for international students without establishing the prerequisites to guarantee sustainability and high-quality education without a long-term and concrete strategy. This issue was expressed as follows:

> *Let the number be more is not a sustainable and realistic strategy. This should be in line with the immigration policy for the selection of international students. Why do we want them to stay in our country as human resources, to go to another country, or to go back home? We need to specify our needs and goals consistently. (TR-HEI-9)*

> *It is not important to be praised only for the number of students without knowing the quality. Therefore, culture is very important, and secondly, it is necessary to adopt the tools very well. There is a problem with the internalization dimension. We need these tools, especially for a transparent and reliable education system. (TR-Focus Group-2)*

Another barrier was explained as the bureaucratic procedures in establishing joint degree programs. In Türkiye, joint degree programs were considered one of the most essential instruments for building a lasting and mutually beneficial relationship with the UK. When asked about their intentions to develop a joint degree program with a UK HEI, all Turkish HEIs expressed bureaucratic, legislative, and regulatory issues were the leading causes of the barriers that they consistently faced in this field. The majority of higher education officials surveyed stated that the USA was more adaptable and realistic when forming these kinds of alliances; nevertheless, because of disparities in academic standards and legal frameworks between the two nations, these alliances were not always recognized as best practices. The CoHE in Türkiye must approve the curricula of joint and double degree programs. While Türkiye has been implementing the Anglo-Saxon model of higher education and was able to easily establish a three-cycle system (bachelor, master, and doctorate) as part of the Bologna Process, there are differences between the UK and Türkiye in terms of program duration, type, structure, and administration. A prominent professor provided the following summary of the regulatory challenges associated with establishing a joint program:

> *We started a collaboration with a university that is suitable for our size so that it can work comfortably. We have developed many different models of cooperation: Exchange programs, joint project applications, joint programs, and top-up programs. It is not easy to harmonize*

different education models for three years and four years. In addition, the UK has a large number of seminars where students are more active than lectures. When you look at the evaluation of the exams, there is an external examiner, there is no such application in Türkiye. They have very established, written, and habitual models. As such, you will either follow it, which creates problems locally as a hegemonic structure emerges. It is also a long-term problem. It is difficult to overcome the rules brought by CoHE. It has no legal framework. The only framework of CoHE was State University of New York SUNY [State University of New York], a model they started with the USA universities. (TR-Focus Group-2).

The same discussion was also expressed from the perspective of the UK. The perceived complexity of Türkiye's regulatory environment about Transnational Education (TNE) collaborations, was cited as a significant barrier by three of the eight UK national organization interviewees (UK-NOs-3,4,5). They explained that the centralized structure in place and the time required to receive clearance for initiatives from central organizations had made doing business with Türkiye challenging. One respondent recounted the story of a UK HEI that, after two years of waiting for central approval, had given up on its ambitions to establish a TNE program with a Turkish university.

Interviewees also thought UK HEIs were discouraged from pursuing TNE cooperation because of Türkiye's unclear regulations and quality assurance situation. In establishing joint degrees (and other kinds of higher education partnerships) with the UK, most Turkish HEI interviewees and several from national institutions stated that the quality assurance environment was a crucial consideration (alongside place in international rankings). Furthermore, many people thought that program accreditation promoted international collaborations; however, there are distinctions between Türkiye's old and new universities. The Bologna Process and the foundation of the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council have made quality assurance more significant for the sector as a whole. Still, it has taken longer for the newer universities to institutionalize. This, combined with their generally lower international rankings, has made it more difficult for them to collaborate internationally. In summary, leaders of HEIs in both nations acknowledge that certain limitations imposed by the legislative framework, combined with a lack of adaptability, transparency, and information, hinder educational cooperation.

Academic participation is another structural obstacle, primarily with research collaborations. In both nations, research collaborations were typically viewed as the purview of individual academics rather than necessarily the institution. The research was usually included in internationalization goals in the UK, but in Türkiye, medium-sized or recently established universities prioritize international student recruitment and exchange programs. Therefore, this was not often explicitly stated. According to several interviewees, applications that do not align with Türkiye's specific development needs may not be funded, even in cases where the scientific excellence of the initiatives is relatively high (TR-NOs-1). Furthermore, a few Turkish respondents were perplexed about the UK's research management system. The various guidelines for these UK funding agencies perplexed Turkish research offices and researchers, who said that "every project is like a different program that we have to learn from the beginning for each application" (TR-Focus Group-1). Furthermore, as mentioned by one respondent, when UK colleges are solicited to be partners, they often don't know anything about the program in Türkiye (TR-HEI-8).

The last structural obstacle is financial. The respondents from UK national organizations discussed the disparity in pricing between public HEIs in Türkiye and the UK. In fact, individuals employed by UK HEIs particularly emphasized the value of financial incentives to interact with Türkiye—especially given the abundance of other nations eager to cooperate with them and the fact that national funding programs frequently encouraged cooperation with other countries instead. One interviewee specifically mentioned research when they said, "It is difficult to engage academics without funding as they have so many other priorities" (UK-HEI-4).

Financial difficulties were also seen as a deterrent to cooperation by the Turkish side. Despite being one of the top three destinations for Turkish students pursuing a degree on the go, exorbitant tuition costs were considered a major obstacle to collaboration. Turkish government offers merit-based scholarships

for postgraduate study overseas; nevertheless, other nations and areas have gained popularity over the UK for undergraduate study due to high tuition costs and currency rate fluctuations in recent years. A national institution representative emphasized that "our students pay the highest tuition fees, which are differentiated according to the regions. Although we attempt to work out exceptional arrangements for our students, these attempts are not always approved" (TR-NOs-8). Turkish participants also mentioned finances as a deterrent to joint/ degree programs. An example of this can be found in the following quotation: "We waive our tuition for joint degree programs, but UK universities still charge full tuition fees." (TR-HEI-4).

Last but not least, the strict visa regulations enforced by the UK were perceived as impeding Turkish nationals' ability to travel to the UK and negatively impacting collaborations in research and education.

Attitudinal barriers:
HEIs and individuals delineated a range of cultural or attitudinal variables that may impede collaborative efforts. A prevalent motif among the interviewees from the UK was their limited understanding of the Turkish higher education system and its potential to impede cooperative efforts. This was mainly because relatively few HEIs in the UK had previously collaborated with Türkiye. Additionally, these opinions were expressed at the institutional level. As was mentioned, several interviewees explained that they relied on the information supplied by central agencies because they lacked the time or resources to look into possible new partners (for instance, when governments were especially proactive and made their regulatory information readily available). The quotations that follow are typical:

> *We are responsive to moves made by others; we don't have resources to do data gathering ourselves. We don't know how to get a program approved in Türkiye. (UK-HEI-13)*

> *I don't know about the regulatory regime and fee levels in Türkiye – whether it would make financial sense for us. (UK-HEI-1)*

> *We lack knowledge about what Turkish universities actually want, and there are a lot of potential partner countries – we can only do a limited amount with resources we have. (UK-HEI-11)*

> *I know very little about Türkiye as a market as we do so little there. (UK-HEI-14)*

A few interviewees from the UK believed they knew a fair amount about Türkiye, but many students and professionals did not feel the same way. Those who had Erasmus+ partnerships with Turkish universities, in fact, usually talked about how hard it was to get UK personnel and especially students interested in them. Some blamed this on ignorance of the Turkish higher education system and educational standards or on the false belief that the Erasmus+ program only extended to EU member states.

Turkish students studying in the UK also remarked how hard it was to discover information about Ph.D. prospects and select a supervisor, mainly since education consultants frequently had limited knowledge of this field of study. Participants at the staff level noted that it was challenging to learn about work opportunities and immigration procedures in Türkiye. Regarding their Turkish colleagues, they also stated how challenging it was sometimes to locate a UK colleague who was also interested in the same research area and to learn about funding options for collaboration (particularly in the country's more recent universities).

A few scholars have mentioned a dearth of information regarding funds explicitly intended to support collaborations between Türkiye and the UK, such as the Newton-Kâtip Çelebi Fund. The interviews that were done in Türkiye mostly confirmed these ideas. Certain Turkish participants believed that UK staff either lacked adequate knowledge about Turkish universities or were swayed by false or biased news reports about Türkiye in the UK media. Several interviewees expressed optimism that this ignorance would be overcome:

> *When we start collaboration, they don't know about the education and research quality of Turkish universities, when our partnership develops, they appreciate it. (TR-HEI-11).*

> *Their attitude is distant to us, because they don't know how hospitable we are. We need to give them the opportunity to get acquainted, we also have prejudices. Some had prejudices about Türkiye, however, they were very satisfied after they came here and we received re-applications from the same university (TR-HEI-14).*

However, some individuals did not think that anything would change and instead chose to contact other regions and countries that have a positive attitude toward Türkiye:

> *We had experienced attitudinal problems with the UK universities. British universities have prejudices towards Turkish universities. Therefore, we started to approach to other countries. (TR-HEI-8,10).*

> *It is really difficult to contact a university in the UK. They do not reply, they forward from one office to the other. Demand is always from our side and most of the cases one-sided, at least they make you feel it that way. We can contact American universities easily. (TR-HEI-12)*

> *We approach the best universities in the UK on our scale. When we first approach them, none of them are welcome in the first insight. The network between faculty members is so important. (TR-HEI-4)*

Conclusion

This paper examines the existing status of higher education collaborations between Türkiye and the UK, as well as the potential for future development of these linkages, based on extensive qualitative research conducted in both countries.

A few of these were structural, namely having to do with financial and regulatory issues as well as immigration processes. Turkish respondents, for instance, talked about how their national laws frequently hampered international activity, forcing HEIs to prioritize student mobility over other types of partnerships and making it challenging to create collaborative programs with the UK. Similar opinions were seen in the UK data, where several participants voiced concerns about what they saw as a lack of information accessibility and openness regarding Türkiye's regulatory environment. Financial obstacles included the hefty tuition costs levied by UK HEIs and the comparatively meager funding allocated, especially for bilateral research collaboration between Türkiye and the UK.

There was also an explanation of several more cultural and attitudinal elements. These included a lack of awareness of higher education in the other nation (which UK interviewees mentioned more frequently) and a perception of a notable disparity in the two nations' experiences with and priorities for internationalization. These could cause issues with establishing a partnership and maintaining equal, respectful relationships.

Discussion and Implementation for the Future

Although research participants recognized numerous prospects for future cooperation working between Türkiye and the UK, they also identified certain specific impediments. For an effective and sustainable higher education partnership between Türkiye and the UK, the following suggestions were developed for national organizations and HEIs arose from the research questions to investigate national, institutional, and individual levels of international partnerships:

For research partnerships: It is recommended that national-level organizations maintain and, if feasible, expand funds allocated for Türkiye-UK partnerships, encompassing a wide range of subject areas; include doctoral students in funding schemes to enhance their ability to collaborate internationally; and

create a database of academics eager to collaborate with peers in other nations to expedite communication.

For education partnerships: It is suggested that national-level organizations consider whether the *Turing** and *Mevlana*** schemes can be used in tandem to promote reciprocal short-term mobility, ensure that national qualification frameworks in both countries articulate well with each other, provide seed funding to stimulate new educational partnerships and increase the number of scholarships and tuition fee waivers for study abroad. Furthermore, we suggest that educational partnerships between the two countries be widely publicized as examples of successful partnerships, that easily accessible information about education in the other country be made available to those interested in exploring potential future partnerships, that "match-making" activities be conducted for groups of institutions, bringing together staff members working at similar levels within HEIs. Participants also suggested that new forms of collaboration be developed, such as joint postgraduate programs, open universities, partnerships for lifelong learning, and more diverse forms of short-term staff and student mobility; that online learning be integrated into education programs to facilitate contributions from both countries; and that HEIs in the UK be more fully involved in English language teaching.

It should be noted that while some of these initiatives can be completed in the short term and are referred to as "quick wins," others will need more sustained effort and time. Action on both fronts is equally essential. One of the longer-term goals is to address the major obstacles identified. The "quick wins" will help to build momentum in this area and demonstrate that key stakeholders take this seriously.

*Turing scheme is developed by the UK government for supporting outgoing mobility due to the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus Program

**Mevlana is an exchange program scheme developed by the Turkish government to support incoming and outgoing student and staff mobility

References

Barbour, R. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research.* London: Sage Publications.

Brandenburg, U. & De Wit (2011) The end of internationalization. *International Higher Education*, (62). https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2011.62.8533.

Branderburg, U., de Wit, H., Jones, E., & Leask, B. (2019) Defining internationalization in HE for society. University World News, available online at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190626135618704 (Accessed 16/2/21).

Beelen J. & Jones E. (2015) Redefining internationalization at home. In: Curaj A., Matei L., Pricopie R., Salmi J., Scott P. (eds) *The European Higher Education Area*. Springer, Cham.

Brooks, R. & Waters, J. (2011) *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* Basingstoke, Palgrave.

Bulut-Sahin, B., & Brooks, R. (2023). Nation-bounded internationalization of higher education: a comparative analysis of two periphery countries, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42(*5*), 1071-1085, https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2193723.

Council of Higher Education (CoHE) (2024) *Statistics for higher education*. Available online at: https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/ (Accessed 5/1/2024).

Council of Higher Education (CoHE) (2019b) Higher Education System in Türkiye. Available online at: https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Yayinlar/Yayinlarimiz/2019/Higher_Education_in_Türkiye_2019_en.pdf (Accessed 16/3/21).

Council of Higher Education (CoHE) (2017) Strategic Plan for Internationalization for 2018-2022. Available online at: https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/AnaSayfa/Yuksekogretimde_Uluslararasilasma_Strateji_Belgesi_2018_2022.pdf (Accessed: 16/2/21).

De Wit, H. (2020) Intelligent internationalization in higher education: Evolving concepts and trends. In Godwin, K. & De Wit, H. (Eds.), *Intelligent Internationalization*, Brill: Netherlands.

De Wit, H. & Altbach, P.G. (2020) Internationalization in higher education: global trends and recommendations for its future, *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898.

De Wit, H. & Altbach P.G. (2021) Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future, Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 5(1), 28-46, DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898.

De Wit, H. & Hunter, F. (2014) Europe's 25 years of internationalization: the EAIE in a changing world. *International Higher Education*, 74, pp.14-15.

De Wit, H., Hunter, F. Howard, I. & Egron-Polak, E. (2015) *Internationalization of Higher Education*. European Parliament Policy Department: Brussels, Belgium.

De Wit, H. & Jones, E. (2018) Inclusive internationalization: improving access and equity, *International Higher Education*, 94, 16-18.

European Commission (2022). Erasmus statistics, Available online at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/statistics-and-factsheets (Accessed 21/2/21).

Erdogan, A. & Toprak, M. (2012) "Governance of higher education in Türkiye", *Leadership and governance in higher education for decision-makers and administrators*, C.3, Raabe –Berlin.

Hazelkorn, E. 2015. *Rankings and the reshaping of higher education* (second edition). London: Palgrave.

Helms, R. M., Brajkovic, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2016) National policies for higher education internationalization: What campus leaders & practitioners need to know?. *Internationalization of Higher Education,* Volume No. 3.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (UK) (2021) *Open data and official statistics.* Available online at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis (Accessed 21/2/21)

Hudzik, J. K. (2011) *Comprehensive internationalization: From concept to action*. Washington, DC: NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Janebová, E. & Johnstone, C.J. (2020). Mapping the dimensions of inclusive internationalization. Kommers, S. ve Bista, K. (Eds.), Inequalities in study abroad and student mobility (s.115-128). Routledge studies in Global Student Mobility, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855130.

Jiang, X. (2008) Towards the internationalization of higher education from a critical perspective. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 32(4), pp.347-358.

Knight, J. (2003) Updated internationalization definition. *International Higher Education*, 33, pp.2-3.

Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: definition, approaches and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8 (5), pp.5-31.

Lawton, W. (2015) Digital learning, mobility and internationalization in European higher Education. In de Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard, L. and Egron-Polak, E. (eds.), *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Brussels: European Parliament, pp.77-83.

Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the curriculum*. Routledge.

Miles,B.M. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook. Sage.

OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2021). See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes, https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterB.pdf.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, 3rd edition. Sage Publications: California.

Strategy and Budget Department of Turkish Presidency (SBB). (2023). 12th Development Plan, available online https://onikinciplan.sbb.gov.tr/ (Accessed 5/1/2024).

UCAS (2021) *Undergraduate Tuition Fees and Student Loans* https://www.ucas.com/finance/undergraduate-tuition-fees-and-student-loans (Accessed 13/2/21).

Universities UK (UUK) (2021a) *Higher education in numbers* https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/Pages/higher-education-data.aspx (Accessed 13/2/21).

Van Damme, D. (2001) Quality issues in the internationalization of higher education. *Higher Education*, 41(4), pp.415-441.

Van der Wende, M. (2001) Internationalization policies: about new trends and contrasting paradigms. *Higher Education Policy*, 14, pp.249-259.

Van Mol, C. & Perez-Encinas, A. (2022) Inclusive internationalization: do different (social) groups of students need different internationalization activities?, Studies in Higher Education, 47:12, 2523-2538, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2022.2083102.

Yang, R. (2002). University internationalization: its meanings, rationales and implications, Intercultural Education, 13(1), 81-95.

---o---o---o--- Article Notes ---o---o---o---

Ethical Clearance: This study is a review article; thereby, no requirement for ethical approval process.

Author Contributions: The authors contributed to this study equally.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The authors have no potential conflict of interest regarding research, authorship, or publication of this article.