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International and Domestic Challenges of MoNE Scholarship Students Abroad: A Ranking-Based Analysis with Policy Implications

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ABSTRACT

Identifying the challenges faced by postgraduate students studying abroad is of critical importance for both academic success and student well-being. In this study, the difficulties experienced by students enrolled in the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) overseas postgraduate scholarship program were examined using a ranking judgment-based scaling method. Employing both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques, qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with 200 scholarship recipients in the first phase were systematically analyzed and classified into 12 themes. Subsequently, students ranked these problems according to their perceived importance and developed solution proposals. The data were analyzed using the ranking judgment-based scaling method to calculate priority scores for the problems, while the solution proposals were evaluated through content analysis based on students' views. The findings indicate that the most critical problems include insufficient scholarship amounts relative to the cost of living in the host country, housing difficulties, psychological stress arising from fear of failure and compensation obligations, challenges to family unity, and inadequacies in healthcare services. In particular, the insufficiency of scholarship amounts to cover living costs and psychological stress stand out as issues requiring the most urgent intervention for students. The findings were also associated with international scholarship programs, demonstrating that similar challenges are encountered in both the Global South and high-income countries. Policy recommendations include revising scholarship amounts, increasing transparency in administrative processes, strengthening academic advising mechanisms, providing psychosocial support services, and developing culturally adaptive orientation programs. The study offers a student-centered and evidence-based foundation for redesigning MoNE scholarship policies.

Keywords: Postgraduate students studying abroad, student experiences and encountered challenges, ranking judgment based scaling, scholarship recipients' solution proposals

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Introduction

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) of Türkiye annually supports a significant cohort of postgraduate students by providing fully funded scholarships to leading universities worldwide. This initiative, known as the selection and Placement of Candidates for Overseas Postgraduate Scholarship Program (YLSY), is designed to enhance both the academic and professional development of individuals, strengthen Türkiye's scientific productivity, and address the demand for highly qualified personnel in public institutions (MoNE, 2016). The program comprehensively manages all aspects of international education, including application, admission, study, evaluation, and compulsory service placement, making it one of the most structured state-funded mobility programs in Türkiye.

Comparable government-sponsored programs exist globally. For example, China's China Scholarship Council (CSC), South Korea's Global Korea Scholarship (GKS), and Brazil's Science Without Borders initiative aim to foster international academic collaboration and build national capacity (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Perna et al., 2015). Comparative studies reveal that although such scholarships expand educational opportunities, they also introduce challenges related to academic adaptation, cultural integration, and post-study employment obligations (Marginson, 2011; Montgomery, 2017). Positioning YLSY within this international framework provides a clearer understanding of its strengths and limitations.

YLSY recipients pursue master's, doctoral, and postdoctoral studies in approximately 50 countries, with the United States and the United Kingdom being the most common destinations (MoNE, 2018). While host universities generally rank among the top 500 globally, institutional prestige alone does not guarantee student success. Academic performance is also shaped by factors such as supervision quality, housing opportunities, and family adjustment (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014).

In Türkiye, empirical studies indicate that YLSY scholars face challenges extending beyond academic competence and financial support. Social, cultural, psychological, and bureaucratic barriers significantly affect students' experiences and outcomes (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019; Erden, 2013). These findings parallel experiences reported in the Global South scholarship programs, where students often struggle with cultural adaptation, administrative processes, and reintegration upon returning to Türkiye (Gupta, 2019; Lee, 2020).

Given this context, there is a clear need for systematic evaluation tools to capture the multifaceted challenges faced by scholarship recipients. Ranking judgment-based scaling methods offer a robust approach to transform subjective perceptions into measurable data (Guilford, 1954; Stevens, 1946). This study employs such a method to assess the relative importance of challenges encountered by YLSY scholars and to examine their proposed solutions. By integrating students' lived experiences and recommendations, the study contributes to both the international scholarship literature and the improvement of the YLSY program.

Literature Review

State-sponsored scholarship programs are widely recognized as strategic investments for developing skilled human capital and fostering international academic collaboration. Countries including China, South Korea, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia have implemented large-scale initiatives that fund postgraduate education abroad with the expectation that recipients will contribute to national development upon return (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Perna et al., 2015; Li & Bray, 2022). China's CSC sends thousands of students abroad annually; GKS promotes both outbound and inbound academic mobility, and Brazil's Science Without Borders

program aims to expand national capacity in science and technology (Knight, 2015; Montgomery, 2017).

While these programs enhance educational opportunities, research highlights several challenges affecting students' academic and social experiences. Common difficulties include cultural adjustment, language barriers, insufficient academic supervision, housing shortages, and financial pressures (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Montgomery, 2017). Psychological stress, family responsibilities, and bureaucratic obstacles further influence outcomes (Gupta, 2019). In particular, Global South scholarship recipients frequently face additional difficulties related to return obligations, including limited career opportunities or mismatches between skills acquired abroad and local labor market needs (Li & Bray, 2022).

Empirical studies on Türkiye's YLSY program indicate that students encounter similar problems, such as financial insufficiencies, administrative hurdles, cultural adaptation challenges, and limited access to social support networks (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019; Erden, 2013). However, there remains a gap in systematic and empirical studies that both prioritize the severity of problems and incorporate students' solution-oriented perspectives.

By situating YLSY within the broader international literature, this study addresses that gap. The ranking judgment scaling method captures the perceived importance of challenges while integrating student-driven recommendations, offering a dual contribution: advancing comparative research on state-funded scholarships and providing evidence-based insights for enhancing Türkiye's YLSY program.

Purpose and Significance

This study aims to identify and prioritize the challenges faced by scholarship recipients of Türkiye's the selection and Placement of Candidates for Overseas Postgraduate Scholarship Program while studying abroad. In addition, the solutions proposed by students to address these challenges are analyzed. By situating the program within the context of global scholarship systems, the study seeks to contribute to comparative research on international academic mobility and provide practical guidance for prospective candidates and policymakers. The significance of this study lies in its application of the rarely used ranking judgment scaling method and its integration of students' experiences with solution proposals, offering evidence-based recommendations to enhance the program's effectiveness.

Research Questions

The study specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the scale values and rankings of challenges encountered by students pursuing master's and doctoral degrees through the YLSY program?
2. What solutions do postgraduate students propose to overcome these challenges?
3. Based on the ranking judgment results, what implications can be drawn for improving the scholarship program?

Method

This study adopts a descriptive research design to prioritize and systematically examine the challenges faced by postgraduate students studying abroad under the YLSY program, as well as to analyze the solutions proposed by students.

The study employs the ranking judgment-based scaling method, a measurement technique that converts participants' perceived importance of issues into quantitative data. This approach allows individuals to determine the relative priorities among different options or challenges, enabling researchers to identify which issues are the most critical in quantitative terms.

The implementation process was carried out as follows. First, in the initial phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 200 YLSY scholarship recipients to identify the challenges reported by the students. Subsequently, the collected data were categorized into 12 main themes through content analysis. Next, students ranked these challenges according to their perceived importance and provided potential solutions for each issue. Finally, the ranking data were analyzed through the ranking judgment-based scaling method to calculate priority scores for each challenge, while students' proposed solutions were examined through content analysis. At the same time, the document analysis method, a process that enables the analysis of information and content in written materials, was also used (Yiğiter & Boduroğlu, 2024).

This method allows for the direct measurement of students' perceptions and provides evidence-based recommendations regarding areas for improvement in the scholarship program. Moreover, the ranking judgment method is a rarely used but powerful research tool that effectively quantifies students' priorities.

Study Group

The research sample consisted of 200 postgraduate students aged 23–36 who were pursuing master's or doctoral degrees in various countries. The participants were distributed across gender, marital status, level of study, and country of study, as detailed in Tables 1–4.

Table 1. Frequencies of Participants by Gender

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	70	35
Male	130	65
Total	200	100

Table 2. Frequencies of Participants by Level of Study

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Master's	87	43.5
Doctoral	113	56.5
Total	200	100

Table 3. Frequencies of Participants by Country

Country	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Country	Frequency	Percentage (%)
United States	110	55	India	2	1
Germany	23	11.5	Scotland	2	1
United Kingdom	18	9	Argentina	2	1
Jordan	10	5	Iran	2	1
Russia	5	2.5	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	1
China	4	2	Italy	1	0.5
France	3	1.5	Poland	1	0.5
Azerbaijan	3	1.5	Hungary	1	0.5
Netherlands	3	1.5	Japan	1	0.5
Malaysia	3	1.5	Finland	1	0.5
Canada	2	1	Serbia	1	0.5
Total				200	100

Table 4. Frequencies of Participants by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	56	28.0
Single	144	72.0
Total	200	100

Of the 200 participants in the study, 70 (35%) were female and 130 (65%) were male. Regarding the level of study, 87 participants (43.5%) were enrolled in master's programs, while 113 (56.5%) were doctoral students. In terms of marital status, 56 participants (28%) were married and 144 (72%) were single. Participants were pursuing their studies in 23 different countries, with the majority studying in the United States (n = 110), followed by Germany (n = 23) and the United Kingdom (n = 18). Other countries represented included France, Russia, Azerbaijan, China, Jordan, as well as several other European and Asian nations. The study was limited to students who began postgraduate education abroad with a MoNE scholarship during the 2018-2019 academic year. Variations in host-country education systems and cultural contexts may influence the experiences reported by participants. Additionally, because data are based on participants' subjective evaluations, generalizations should be made with caution. Although the ranking judgment method captures perceived relative importance, it does not establish causal relationships, suggesting the value of complementary mixed-method approaches in future research.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured instrument was developed to quantitatively assess the challenges faced by MoNE scholarship students studying abroad and the solutions they proposed, based on a ranking judgment-based scaling approach. Initially, students were asked to freely list the difficulties they encountered during their studies. Based on these responses, the most frequently reported challenges were categorized into 12 thematic areas.

To ensure content validity and comprehensiveness, the draft instrument was evaluated by doctoral-level experts in educational sciences, who provided feedback on the clarity, relevance, and coverage of the items. Minor adjustments were made to improve wording and ensure that all relevant aspects of student experiences were captured. No major categories were added or removed, as the original 12 categories already reflected the most critical challenges identified by the students.

Participants were then asked to rank the 12 problem categories from most to least significant and provide proposed solutions for each category. This ranking judgment scaling method enabled the quantification of subjective judgments, reflecting the relative importance assigned to each problem. The integration of qualitative insights from the pilot study into a quantitative framework aligns with a mixed-methods approach and allows both the identification and prioritization of student-reported challenges.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the collected data, the ranking judgment scaling method, a judgment-based scaling approach that considers observers' (students') relative importance judgments toward various stimuli (problem categories), was employed. This method requires individuals to rank perceived magnitudes, enabling the quantitative modeling of subjective judgments (Anil & İnal, 2017; Guilford, 1954). In other words, scaling is a useful method that allows data at the classification or ordinal scale level to be elevated to the interval scale level, which is the higher scale level (Yiğiter & Gelbal, 2022). Participants were asked to rank 12 key problem areas, previously identified through qualitative preliminary work, on a scale from 1 (most important) to 12 (least important). Additionally, participants provided open-ended responses regarding their own proposed solutions for each problem area.

The ranking data were analyzed in accordance with the ranking judgment scaling technique. Initially, a rank frequency matrix was constructed based on each participant's rankings. This matrix indicates how many times each stimulus was ranked higher relative to other stimuli. The fundamental equation used for pairwise comparisons is as follows:

$$n(S_{ji} > S_{ki}) = f_{ji} \cdot (f_{k<i} + \frac{1}{2} \cdot f_{ki})$$

Where:

- j and k, refer to the stimuli (issue topics) being compared,
- i, refers to the given sequence value,
- f_{ji} is the number of times stimulus j is ordered at degree i,
- $f_{k<i}$ indicates the number of times stimulus k is ranked lower than i.

The ratios matrix (P) was calculated by dividing the total rank frequencies by N^2 , obtained by summing all rows of the $n(S_{ji} > S_{ki})$ frequency matrix. These ratios express the relative importance level of each stimulus compared to the others. Then, the z matrix was created by calculating the unit normal deviation (Z) values based on the ratios matrix. The scale values (S_j) corresponding to each stimulus were determined by taking the arithmetic averages of the column sums obtained from this matrix. Finally, the smallest of the scale values was taken as a reference and set equal to zero, and the other values were rearranged as standardized scale values (S_c) accordingly. The solutions suggested by the students for each problem area were also analyzed qualitatively, and the most frequently mentioned solution for each topic was identified and included as the representative suggestion. The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Numerical operations were carried out through spreadsheets to ensure the systematic application of scaling equations. This method allows students' subjective perceptions to be ranked on a scientific basis and prioritized for policymakers, and also allows thematic classification of solution proposals (Anıl & İnal, 2017; Stevens, 1946).

Findings

Findings for the First Research Question

Participants studying abroad were asked to rank a set of twelve predefined problem categories, assigning each a score from 1 to 12 based on perceived importance. Following this process, frequency values corresponding to the students' rankings were calculated and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Rank frequency matrix of students (F)

Rİ	ri	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	Total
1	12	18	21	2	3	14	4	14	9	40	16	41	18	200
2	11	7	16	11	9	24	14	16	28	27	18	15	15	200
3	10	10	16	4	7	20	15	27	23	20	14	16	28	200
4	9	6	25	1	14	10	25	20	15	22	17	15	30	200
5	8	10	14	11	9	14	30	28	24	20	6	22	12	200
6	7	12	10	5	13	23	13	22	23	24	13	17	25	200
7	6	8	30	10	11	16	17	15	25	9	36	8	15	200
8	5	9	18	20	18	18	30	12	10	13	10	26	16	200
9	4	9	16	30	20	31	16	9	17	11	18	10	13	200
10	3	15	17	28	36	6	15	25	11	8	17	14	8	200
11	2	30	9	26	40	20	10	9	12	5	15	12	12	200
12	1	66	8	52	20	4	11	3	3	1	20	4	8	200
Total		200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	

The number of stimuli in the table is 12. The total number of observers is 200, which is the sum of the numbers in the rows and columns of the frequencies matrix showing the students' ranking values for each problem.

In the ranking frequency table, the frequencies matrix was created for each stimulus using the equation $n(S_{ji} > S_{ki}) = f_{ji} \cdot (f_{k<i} + \frac{1}{2} \cdot f_{ki})$. A proportions matrix was then created based on the column sums of the frequency matrix and presented in Table 5.

Table 6. Proportion matrix of all participants (P)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
A		0.298	0.509	0.436	0.306	0.327	0.280	0.280	0.217	0.351	0.262	0.282
B	0.701		0.767	0.705	0.517	0.549	0.478	0.474	0.368	0.559	0.443	0.464
C	0.490	0.223		0.419	0.245	0.257	0.215	0.207	0.144	0.297	0.201	0.212
D	0.563	0.294	0.580		0.308	0.326	0.272	0.266	0.189	0.364	0.255	0.269
E	0.693	0.482	0.754	0.691		0.526	0.461	0.456	0.349	0.545	0.422	0.449
F	0.672	0.452	0.742	0.673	0.473		0.427	0.422	0.313	0.516	0.395	0.411
G	0.719	0.521	0.784	0.727	0.538	0.572		0.497	0.381	0.583	0.459	0.485
H	0.719	0.525	0.733	0.733	0.543	0.577	0.502		0.381	0.587	0.459	0.488
I	0.782	0.631	0.855	0.810	0.650	0.686	0.618	0.618		0.683	0.565	0.602
J	0.648	0.440	0.702	0.635	0.454	0.483	0.416	0.412	0.316		0.387	0.407
K	0.737	0.556	0.798	0.744	0.577	0.604	0.540	0.540	0.434	0.612		0.527
L	0.717	0.535	0.787	0.730	0.550	0.588	0.514	0.511	0.397	0.592	0.472	

For each stimulus n , Where $(S_{ji} > S_{ki})$, values were calculated using the expression $f_{ji} \cdot (f_{k<i} + \frac{1}{2} \cdot f_{ki})$. The sum of the columns of the frequency matrix constructed using the equation $(N^2 = 200^2)$ were divided by the square of the number of participants and the proportions matrix in Table 6 was obtained. The sum of the symmetric elements of the proportions matrix with respect to the diagonal was calculated. Table 7 shows the z values corresponding to the values in the proportions matrix, i.e. the table of standard normal values. The mean of the values in the table was calculated and divided by 12 to obtain the scale values (S_j) .

Table 7. Unit normal deviations matrix (Z) for all students

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
A		-0.528	0.024	-0.158	-0.506	-0.447	-0.580	-0.581	-0.779	-0.380	-0.634	-0.576
B	0.528		0.729	0.541	0.044	0.123	-0.052	-0.064	-0.336	0.149	-0.141	-0.089
C	-0.024	-0.729		-0.202	-0.689	-0.649	-0.787	-0.814	-1.059	-0.533	-0.837	-0.798
D	0.158	0.541	0.202		-0.500	-0.450	-0.604	-0.622	-0.879	-0.347	-0.657	-0.615
E	0.506	-0.044	0.689	0.500		0.067	-0.096	-0.108	-0.385	0.114	-0.195	-0.127
F	0.447	-0.123	0.649	0.450	-0.067		-0.183	-0.194	-0.486	0.042	-0.264	-0.224
G	0.580	0.052	0.787	0.604	0.096	0.183		-0.005	-0.301	0.209	-0.102	-0.361
H	0.581	0.064	0.622	0.622	0.108	0.194	0.005		0.302	0.221	-0.100	-0.029
I	0.779	0.336	1.059	0.879	0.385	0.486	0.301	0.302		0.477	0.163	0.259
J	0.380	-0.149	0.530	0.347	-0.114	-0.042	-0.209	-0.221	-0.477		-0.286	-0.234
K	0.634	0.141	0.837	0.657	0.195	0.264	0.102	0.100	-0.163	0.286		0.069
L	0.576	0.089	0.798	0.615	0.127	0.224	0.036	0.029	-0.259	0.234	-0.069	
Total	5.148	-1.431	6.931	4.857	-0.920	-0.046	-2.068	-2.179	-5.432	0.476	-3.126	-2.401
Average	0.429	-0.119	0.577	0.40	-0.076	-0.003	-0.172	-0.181	-0.452	0.039	-0.260	-0.200
SJ	0.882	0.333	1.030	0.858	0.376	0.449	0.280	0.271	0.000	0.492	0.192	0.253
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	11	6	12	10	7	8	5	4	1	9	2	3

The smallest scale value among the (Sj) values in Table 7 is set as 0 and shown as a number line in Figure 1.

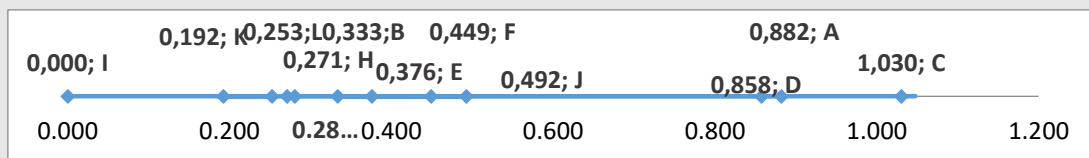


Figure 1. Number line representation of the scale values of the problems obtained from the students

According to the S_j stimulus rankings in Table 8, the problems experienced by the students studying abroad were scaled as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Scale values and rankings for the problems experienced by students studying abroad

Rank	Behaviors / Conditions	Scale Score	
1	Insufficiency of overseas scholarships	0.000	I
2	Difficulties in reaching the Ministry	0.192	K
3	Problems accessing educational attachés and consulates	0.253	L
4	Language-related challenges	0.271	H
5	Difficulty in finding accommodation	0.280	G
6	Problems adapting to the foreign education system	0.333	B
7	Difficulties in cultural adaptation	0.376	E
8	Psychological problems	0.449	F
9	Health-related issues	0.492	J
10	Family-related problems	0.858	D
11	Misalignment of the Ministry's plans with foreign academic calendars	0.882	A
12	Difficulties related to academic advisors abroad	1.030	C

The scale values related to the problems or conditions experienced by students during their studies in various countries are presented in Table 8. According to the findings, the most frequently encountered issues among students include the inadequacy of scholarships for studying abroad, difficulties in reaching the Ministry, delays in administrative processes due to limited personnel, and insufficient dissemination of information. Additional challenges involve limited access to education attachés and consular officials, language-related difficulties, problems in securing accommodation, issues stemming from differences in educational systems across countries, cultural adjustment problems, psychological challenges, health-related concerns, family-related difficulties, and incompatibility between the Ministry's planning and the academic calendars of foreign institutions. Among all these, problems related to academic advisors abroad were ranked as the least important issue by the participants.

Findings Related to the Second Research Question

The findings derived from the ranking judgment-based scaling method highlight the multidimensional nature of the challenges faced by MoNE scholarship recipients abroad. The results reveal that financial, administrative, psychological, academic, and cultural factors intersect to shape the overall educational experiences of these students. While the perspectives of the participants provide valuable insights into their lived realities, these challenges also resonate with broader patterns documented in the international scholarship literature, particularly in the Global South (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Byun et al., 2012).

Financial Constraints

The insufficiency of scholarship amounts emerged as the most critical challenge. Students emphasized the disproportion between stipends and the cost of living in major cities such as London and New York. This finding is consistent with studies on government-sponsored scholarships in both low- and middle-income countries, which reveal that underfunding undermines academic focus and exacerbates inequalities among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Erden, 2013). Participants' proposals which include indexing scholarships to local cost-of-living indicators, differentiating support for married students, and linking stipends to service obligations mirror reform strategies implemented in programs such as the Fulbright Fellowship and Chinese CSC scholarships, where flexible financial adjustments are applied to reflect family circumstances and host-country conditions.

Housing Difficulties

Accommodation problems, especially in high-cost cities, were also particularly prominent. This aligns with research indicating that housing insecurity is a significant barrier for international students, influencing both well-being and academic performance (Hastings et al., 2024). The recommendation to establish agreements with housing agencies and universities echoes practices in South Korea and Malaysia, where government agencies collaborate with local institutions to ensure affordable student housing (Korea Student Aid Foundation, 2025; Koperasi Bersatu Tenaga Malaysia / UniKL, 2023). The suggestion for Ministry-provided guarantee letters during rental negotiations reflects mechanisms used in European Union mobility programs such as the Erasmus Program.

Psychological Well-being and Compensation Anxiety

Another recurring issue was psychological distress, primarily linked to fears of compensation obligations in case of failure, alongside homesickness and family separation. Previous research shows that rigid repayment policies in scholarship schemes often heighten student anxiety, discouraging risk-taking in academic work and contributing to attrition. Proposals to ease compensation policies and strengthen psychosocial support services are consistent with recommendations from UNESCO (2020), which advocates flexible contractual frameworks to reduce undue stress on students while still ensuring accountability.

Health and Family-Related Concerns

The lack of health coverage for spouses and children was reported as a pressing concern, particularly in contexts with high medical costs such as the United States. Comparable findings have been reported in analyses of Gulf States' scholarship programs, where limited family support mechanisms generate significant inequalities. Suggestions for additional health allowances, embassy-based medical support, and family flight subsidies underscore the need to reconceptualize the scholarship not merely as an individual but as a family-oriented policy instrument.

Academic System Differences and Advisor Challenges

Students also highlighted adaptation difficulties arising from diverse educational systems, compounded by issues with academic advising such as disengagement, lack of expertise, or cultural mismatch. Similar challenges have been reported in the literature on international doctoral mobility, where supervisory relationships significantly affect completion rates (Deem & Brehony, 2000). Participants' recommendations ranging from orientation programs to flexible advisor changes align with international practices in scholarship schemes like the

Commonwealth Scholarship, which integrate pre-departure academic briefings and monitoring of supervisory quality.

Administrative and Communication Barriers

A further critical finding relates to difficulties in communication with the Ministry and educational attachés, often characterized by delays, inconsistent information, and lack of transparency. These concerns parallel studies of state-funded scholarships in the Global South, where bureaucratic inefficiencies frequently undermine program effectiveness (Byun et al., 2012). Student proposals for digital communication platforms, standardized procedures, and expanded staff capacity highlight the need for institutional reforms.

Cultural Adaptation

Finally, cultural adaptation challenges, especially in geographically distant countries with in geographically distant countries distinct sociocultural norms, were emphasized. This finding resonates with research on cross-cultural adjustment of international students, which identifies culture shock as a major determinant of academic persistence (Ward et al., 2001). The proposals for pre-departure orientation, extended language training, and alumni mentoring echo best practices from established programs such as Fulbright, Chevening, and DAAD.

Findings Related to the Third Research Question

The results obtained through the ranking judgment method provide several insights for improving the MoNE YLSY scholarship program. Based on the challenges prioritized by students and the solutions they proposed, the following implications can be drawn.

Flexibility of Financial Support. Students emphasized the need for scholarship amounts to be adjusted according to the cost of living in the host country and city. Additionally, implementing supplementary financial provisions for scholars with family responsibilities can enhance the fairness and inclusiveness of the program. **Improvement of Administrative Processes.** Communication with the Ministry and attachés, reimbursement procedures, and information flow were identified as areas of concern that adversely affect program efficiency. The establishment of digital platforms and standardized procedures is recommended to streamline bureaucratic processes. **Strengthening Academic Advising Mechanisms.** Allowing students to request advisor changes, monitoring advisor performance, and providing mentoring support are critical steps to enhance academic achievement and cross-cultural adjustment. **Expansion of Psychosocial Support Services.** To mitigate psychological challenges such as loneliness, homesickness, and fear of failure, individual counseling, peer support networks, and flexible repayment policies are recommended. **Accommodation and Healthcare Services.** Extending coverage for housing and health insurance is necessary to secure students' basic welfare and reduce disruptions in their academic progress. **Cultural Adaptation and Integration.** Pre-departure orientation programs, cross-cultural training, and continuous mentoring support are essential measures to facilitate students' adaptation to new academic and social environments. **Enhancing Institutional Capacity.** Increasing personnel within scholarship units and establishing dedicated communication desks are fundamental steps to ensure program sustainability and improve student satisfaction.

Overall, the findings suggest that MoNE scholarship holders' experiences are not isolated but rather reflect recurrent challenges across international mobility programs. The combination of financial inadequacy, bureaucratic inefficiency, and limited psychosocial and family support reveals structural issues that require a holistic policy redesign. By situating the voices of students within comparative international scholarship literature, the study highlights

both the specificity of the Turkish context and its alignment with global trends, thereby strengthening the analytical and conceptual foundations of this research.

When considered alongside the international literature, the findings highlight that many issues faced by Turkish scholarship holders abroad mirror those reported among international students globally, including financial stress, accommodation challenges, and adaptation difficulties (Andrade, 2006; Montgomery, 2017; Glass & Westmont, 2014). However, context-specific solutions such as Ministry-mediated airfare discounts and country-specific scholarship adjustments reflect localized policy interventions. The combination of scaling-based prioritization and qualitative proposals provides actionable insights for restructuring the scholarship program toward a more student-centered approach.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study identified and prioritized the challenges faced by postgraduate scholarship recipients studying abroad under the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) scholarship program through a ranking judgment-based scaling method, while also analyzing student-centered solution proposals. The findings demonstrate that these challenges are multidimensional, with financial, administrative, academic, psychological, and cultural factors intersecting to shape students' overall adaptation and academic achievement. Similar studies conducted in Türkiye have also reported that financial insufficiencies, administrative bureaucracy, and inadequate academic advising significantly affect the experiences of Turkish scholarship holders (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019; Erden, 2013).

The financial dimension emerged as the most critical area. Students frequently emphasized that fixed scholarship amounts are insufficient relative to the varying living costs of host countries and cities. This finding aligns with international research documenting similar concerns in state-sponsored scholarship programs in the Global South, where static stipends fail to reflect local economic heterogeneity (Byun & Kim, 2010; Pereda, 2017). Studies conducted in Türkiye also indicate that scholarship amounts are inadequate to cover living costs abroad, creating financial stress for students (Demirtaş and Genç, 2019). Programs such as Fulbright and China's CSC program have increasingly adjusted stipends according to city-level indices, demonstrating the need for more flexible and context-sensitive funding structures (OECD, 2019).

Administrative difficulties, including communication gaps with the Ministry and attachés, delays in reimbursements and a lack of transparency were also consistently reported. These issues parallel broader bureaucratic inefficiencies documented in international analyses of government-sponsored scholarships, which can undermine trust and program effectiveness (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019; Tremblay, 2005). Research in Türkiye similarly highlights that delays and lack of information in administrative processes hinder students' adaptation (Erden, 2013). Good practices in programs like Erasmus and Chevening, including digital service platforms and standardized response timelines, offer examples for enhancing administrative transparency and responsiveness.

Academic advising challenges, particularly related to advisors' lack of engagement or misalignment with students' fields of study, were another prominent theme. This aligns with Altbach and Knight's (2007) argument that the quality of advising plays a decisive role not only in academic success but also in cross-cultural adjustment. Studies conducted in Türkiye similarly indicate that insufficient academic advising negatively affects students' motivation and adjustment processes (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019; Erden, 2013). Allowing advisor changes, monitoring advisor performance, and integrating mentoring mechanisms reflect successful

practices in Commonwealth and DAAD scholarships and underscore the need for systematic reform in this area.

Psychological well-being also emerged as a salient concern, particularly related to fear of repayment obligations in case of failure, as well as loneliness and homesickness. These findings are consistent with UNESCO (2020), which emphasizes the adverse effects of rigid repayment conditions on students' mental health and risk-taking behaviors in research. Turkish studies similarly report that scholarship holders experience loneliness and anxiety, highlighting the importance of psychosocial support (Erden, 2013). Flexible liability policies and the provision of psychosocial support services are therefore essential for creating a more supportive learning environment.

Additionally, married scholarship recipients with children reported distinctive challenges, particularly regarding health insurance coverage and family cohesion. Although these participants represent a smaller proportion of the sample, their concerns align with global discussions on equity and inclusiveness in scholarship policies (OECD, 2019). Studies conducted in Türkiye also highlight that family-related responsibilities directly affect the experiences of scholarship holders, emphasizing the importance of addressing healthcare and childcare needs (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019). Addressing family needs through healthcare coverage, childcare provisions, and policies supporting spousal educational opportunities would align MoNE's scholarships with international standards of inclusiveness.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature on government-sponsored international scholarships by situating the Turkish case within a broader comparative framework. The findings indicate that the challenges faced by MoNE scholarship recipients are not unique but resonate with structural issues identified in other Global South contexts. When compared with studies conducted in Türkiye, financial, administrative, academic, psychological, and family-related challenges show consistent patterns (Demirtaş & Genç, 2019; Erden, 2013). This underscores the importance of designing scholarship programs that move beyond a narrow, local perspective and incorporate international lessons, student diversity, and holistic support structures.

Implications for Future Research

While this study provides a systematic prioritization of the challenges faced by MoNE scholarship recipients, several avenues remain open for further exploration. First, future studies could adopt mixed-method designs that combine ranking judgment-based scaling with longitudinal approaches to capture how students' challenges evolve over time. Such designs would allow for a deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between financial, psychological, academic, and cultural factors.

Second, researchers may expand the scope of analysis by including comparative samples from different government-sponsored scholarship programs (e.g., Fulbright). This would facilitate cross-national comparisons and contribute to the development of more generalizable models of international student support.

Third, the voices of different subgroups, such as married students, students with dependents, or those studying in less common destinations, deserve more focused investigation. Disaggregated analyses could highlight equity issues and inform the development of more inclusive policies.

Finally, future research could benefit from integrating quantitative outcome measures such as academic achievement, program completion rates, or post-study employment trajectories, alongside qualitative accounts of student experiences. This would strengthen the evidence base for both scholarship policy and international higher education research.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, a series of policy recommendations have been developed to enhance the effectiveness of the MoNE scholarship program and improve the student experience. First, scholarships should be structured in a context-sensitive manner. Scholarship amounts should be differentiated according to the living costs of the host country and city; additionally, family responsibilities and dependents should be considered, making the financial support system flexible. This approach will help students meet their basic needs and reduce the negative impact of financial stress on academic performance.

The efficiency of bureaucratic processes should be increased. Digital service platforms and standardized procedures, as implemented in the Erasmus program, should be designed to ensure timely reimbursements, transparent and reliable communication, and efficient administrative processes. In this way, students' experiences with the program will improve, while the negative effects of bureaucratic obstacles on academic and psychological adjustment can be minimized.

Academic advising mechanisms should be strengthened. Practices such as allowing students to request advisor changes, regularly monitoring advisor-student interactions, and providing mentoring support from alumni should be institutionalized. These measures are in line with successful practices in DAAD and Commonwealth scholarship programs and can support both academic success and cross-cultural adjustment processes.

The scope of psychosocial support services should be expanded. By integrating individual counseling services, peer support networks, and flexible repayment policies, students' ability to cope with loneliness, homesickness, and academic pressures can be facilitated. In line with UNESCO's recommendations for inclusive scholarship structures, psychosocial support programs play a critical role in enhancing students' academic performance and overall well-being.

Access to housing and healthcare services should be strengthened. Collaborations with universities and housing providers, combined with comprehensive health insurance coverage for scholarship recipients' dependents, will secure students' basic welfare needs and prevent disruptions in the educational process. These measures will particularly increase the inclusivity of the program for scholarship recipients with family responsibilities.

Cultural adaptation and integration processes should be supported. Pre-departure orientation programs, cross-cultural training, and continuous mentoring support will facilitate students' adaptation to new academic and social environments, strengthening academic and psychosocial adjustment, as observed in Chevening and Fulbright programs.

Finally, the institutional capacity of MoNE scholarship units should be increased. Expanding staff, establishing dedicated communication desks, and maintaining regular communication channels with scholarship recipients will enhance program effectiveness and sustainability, positively affecting the student experience and satisfaction.

As part of a holistic approach, these recommendations will enable the scholarship program to move beyond being merely a financial support mechanism, providing a student-centered, inclusive, and internationally aligned educational experience.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author conducted the study alone. There is no conflict of interest. If there is more than one author, please detail the information about this title.

Ethics

The ethics application for the study was made on 19.06.2025 and the research was carried out with the approval of Ankara Sosyal Bilimler University Ethics Commission dated 19.06.2025 and numbered 165954.

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