



Araştırma Makalesi

TÜRKİYE SÜPER LİGİNDE YABANCI FUTBOLCU KOTASI: SOSYAL MEDYA YORUMLARI ÜZERİNE BİR İÇERİK ANALİZİ

FOREIGN FOOTBALL PLAYER QUOTA IN TURKISH SUPER LEAGUE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS

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Emre UYSAL

Karabük University, Hasan Dogan Faculty of Sports Sciences, Karabük, Türkiye
Orcid: 0009-0006-8857-0535

Fatih Mehmet PARLAR¹

Karabük University Hasan Dogan Faculty of Sports Sciences, Karabük, Türkiye
Orcid: 0000-0002-3401-4078

Nedim TEKİN

Karabük University Hasan Dogan Faculty of Sports Sciences, Karabük, Türkiye
Orcid: 0000-0002-6249-3862

¹ Corresponding Author: Fatih Mehmet PARLAR, Karabük University Hasan Dogan Faculty of Sports Science, fatihparlar@karabuk.edu.tr

Türkiye Süper Ligi'nde Yabancı Futbolcu Kotası: Sosyal Medya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İçerik Analizi

ÖZ

Bu araştırma, Türkiye Süper Ligi'ndeki yabancı futbolcu kotası uygulamalarıyla ilgili basın kuruluşlarının sosyal medya hesaplarından yayımladığı içeriklere ilişkin sosyal ağ kullanıcı yorumlarının analiz edilmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır. Nitel araştırma modeli ve doküman analizi deseniyle tasarlanan bu iç içe geçmiş tekli durum çalışmasında, TRT Spor ve Futbol Arena isimli yayımcıların Facebook, Instagram ve X hesaplarında yabancı futbolcu kotası ile ilgili yayımladığı içeriklere yapılan geçerli 220 taraftar yorumu içerik analizi tekniği ile değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırma neticesinde; taraftarların yüksek yabancı futbolcu kotasına dair "Olumlu görüşler" ve "Olumsuz görüşler" ana temalarında görüşlerinin olduğu, bunun yanında "Sürdürülebilirlik" ve "Tavsiyeler" olmak üzere ayrıca iki ana tema altında daha görüş bildirdiği tespit edilmiştir. Olumlu görüşler ana temasında katılımcıların; "Yerli oyuncu performansı", "Takım performansı", "Kulüp ekonomisi", "Milli takım performansı" ve "Takım planlaması"; olumsuz görüşler ana temasında, "Takım performansı", "Kulüp ekonomisi", "Yerli Oyuncu", "Altyapı", "Milli Takım" ve "Kota Yapısı" alt temalarında, sürdürülebilirlik ana temasında "İstikrar" alt temasında ve "Tavsiyeler" ana temasında ise "Altyapı" ve "Kota yapısı" görüşlere sahip olduğu saptanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, sosyal ağ kullanıcılarının uygulanan yabancı futbolcu kotaları konusunda farklı görüşlere sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Yabancı futbolcu kuralı konusunda futbolun aktörleri arasında uzlaşma sağlanabilmesi için tüm paydaşların görüşleri dikkate alınarak ortak bir düşünce üzerinden stratejiler geliştirilmesinin faydalı olacağı, karar vericilerin kota uygulamasının amacı, gerekçesi ve olası sonuçları konusunda kamuoyuna bilgilendirme yapmasının bilgi kirliliğinin önlenmesi açısından yararlı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Futbol, Yabancı Oyuncu Kotası, Taraftar Görüşleri, Türkiye Süper Ligi

Foreign Football Player Quota in Turkish Super League: A Content Analysis Through Social Media Comments

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to analyze social network user comments on the content published by media organizations on their social media accounts regarding the foreign football player quota practices in the Türkiye Super League. In this nested single case study designed with qualitative research model and document analysis design, 220 valid fan comments on the content published by TRT Spor and Futbol Arena on their Facebook, Instagram and X accounts regarding the foreign football player quota were evaluated by content analysis technique. As a result of the research, it was determined that fans had opinions on the high foreign football player quota under the main themes of "Positive opinions" and "Negative opinions", as well as under two other main themes, namely "Sustainability" and "Suggestions". In the main theme of positive opinions, the participants had opinions under the sub-themes of "Native player performance", "Team performance", "Club economy", "National team performance" and "Team planning"; in the main theme of negative opinions, under the sub-themes of "Team performance", "Club economy", "Native player", "Youth Development", "National team" and "Quota structure"; in the main theme of sustainability, under the sub-theme of "Stability"; and in the main theme of "Suggestion", under the sub-themes of "Youth development" and "Quota structure". The findings show that social network users have different opinions on the foreign football player quotas. It is thought that it would be useful to develop strategies based on a common idea by taking into account the opinions of all stakeholders in order to reach a consensus among the actors of football on the foreign player rule, and it would be useful for decision makers to inform the public about the purpose, justification and possible consequences of the quota application in order to prevent information pollution.

Key Words: Football, Foreign Player Quota, Fan Opinions, Türkiye Super League,

INTRODUCTION

Football, which has a large number of participants worldwide, is not only a physical activity but also a complex phenomenon that needs to be addressed with its social, cultural and economic effects. Considered as the most followed sports branch worldwide, football is nowadays described as an industry¹. As a response to its popularity, soccer has left a deep impact on different cultures and societies² and has become a source of passion for fans, a career path for athletes and a matter of national prestige for countries.

Football is followed by a large audience in Turkey³. The Super League, the most valuable product of the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), is one of the most followed sporting events in the country⁴. The popularity of football in Turkey brings both its socio-cultural and economic dimensions to the forefront⁵. The main actors of this popularity are the teams established within sports clubs and participating in competitions⁶.

The organized structure of football, which is planned from local to global level, causes intense competition among teams, and the federative structures that organize football in countries make various regulations to increase the level of competition in the league with the practices they have developed. Although only FIFA has the authority to change the rules of the game, national federations can determine the competition and competition statutes within the framework of the legal order they are bound to^{7, 8}. Among the frequently discussed and debated issues within these regulations, foreign player quota practices have occupied the sports agenda from past to present⁹.

Foreign player quotas are implemented to encourage the development of native players, raise the level of national football and increase the success of national teams by determining the number of foreign players that each football club can have in its squad¹⁰. The quota application, which is planned in different ways around the world, has been one of the important topics of discussion among the main actors of football; federations, clubs, media and fans^{11, 12}. Especially after the 1995 Bosman Decision legitimized the free movement of foreign players in European football, there have been remarkable changes in the way quotas are applied in continental countries¹³. At this point, country federations adapt the foreign player quota to their own needs and add restrictions or freedoms to the competition statutes in line with national football policies and expectations and update them periodically. For example, in the English Premier League, a player without a British passport must have played in at least 75% of his national team matches in the last two years in order to be eligible for transfer¹⁴. In France, a maximum of 4 non-EU players can be included in the team squad¹⁵. In Ukraine, while there is no limit for the team squad, there can be a maximum of 7 legionnaires in the match squad¹⁶. Turkey is the European country that is characterized by different rules regarding foreign player quotas.

Chronologically, the TFF has tended to increase the limit of foreign players in the squads of Super League teams. The first restriction in the Turkish Football League in 1951 allowed teams to have only 1 foreign player in their squads and this restriction did not change until 1966¹⁷. In 1966, with a new decision, it was announced that teams could include 2 foreign players in their squads and this rule was applied for a long time. In 1989, the quota was increased to 3 players, while in 1996, with the 3+1 rule, the number of foreign players that could be in the squad increased to 4¹¹. In the middle of

the 1998-1999 season, the rule was revised, and the number was increased to 5 players. In the 2000-2001 season, +1 was added to the number of 5 footballers and the rule of 1 footballer on the bench was applied, while teams could field a maximum of 5 foreign footballers. In 2001-2002, a different formation was used for the first time and the 5+1+2 system was adopted. According to this system, teams could sign a total of 8 foreign players, but a maximum of 5 of the 11 players on the field could be foreign and 1 foreign player could be on the bench. In this system, foreign footballers representing +2 will not be included in the competition list. In the 2005-2006 season, the TFF introduced a simple rule, allowing teams to play 6 foreign players¹⁸ In July 2007, the number of foreign players was revised to 6+1 for the 2007-2008 season. In January 2008, the TFF amended the restriction on foreign players again and decided that 6 players could be on the pitch at the same time and 2 players could be on the bench¹⁹. The 6+2 rule remained in force in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 seasons, but the TFF introduced the 6+2+2 rule in the 2010-2011 season. According to this new regulation, clubs can sign a maximum of 10 foreign players and a maximum of 8 of these players can be included in the match squad¹⁷ In the 2011-2012 season, clubs could sign as many foreign players as they wished, but the 6+2 rule continued in the 18-man squad²⁰. The same rule applied in the 2012-2013 season. The TFF presented a statute stating that the number of foreign players would be reduced gradually and would vary according to the years. According to this statute, in the 2013-2014 season, clubs could sign a maximum of 10 foreign players and 6 of them could be included in the match squad. In the 2014-2015 season, clubs could sign contracts with a maximum of 8 foreign players and 5 of them could be included in the match roster²¹. According to the rule introduced in the 2015-2016 season, it has become compulsory for team squads to consist of 28 players and at least 14 of these 28 players must be eligible to play for the Turkish National Senior Football Team. In this case, teams could sign a maximum of 14 foreign players, while a maximum of 11 foreign players could be included in the 18-man match squad. In addition, teams could start matches by selecting the entire starting 11 from foreign players²². As of the 2017-2018 season, it is allowed to increase the match roster from 18 to 21 players. If 3 players are added to the list, at least 2 of them must be eligible to play for the Turkish National Senior Football Team, and if less than 3 players are added, all of these players must be eligible to play for the Turkish National Senior Football Team²³. With this change, when clubs presented a 21-man match roster, they were able to field 11 foreign players and keep 1 foreign player on the bench. Afterwards, the quota for foreign footballers, which remained unchanged until the 2020-2021 season, was revised again; "14 foreign national footballers can be written on the competition name list, provided that there are at most 8 foreign national footballers in the squad continuing the competition on the field at the same time"^{24, 25} and this rule remained in practice until the 2024-2025 season.

Foreign player quotas have not only affected the level of competition on the pitch but have also called into question Turkish football's native player development system. When the number of foreign players in the squad and on the field increases, teams have access to more quality foreign players and competition in the league increases; however, this situation also has the potential to negatively affect the development of national football by limiting the chances of native players to find a place on the field¹¹. However, the effects of quota regulations on Turkish football in both national and international dimensions have been occupying the public opinion for a long time, and the effects of foreign player quota practices on the development of native players and

the Turkish Football National Team have been frequently discussed in the press and especially on social media networks⁹.

Social networks, which are one of the leading platforms where sports public opinion is formed today, are very functional in setting the public agenda and monitoring and measuring social opinions on the issues on the agenda with the two-way communication opportunity they provide²⁶. While football is one of the most talked about topics on social media networks, fans evaluate the game in every aspect and can set the agenda with the level of information they have on this subject and share remarkable opinions for decision makers.

Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and X, which are among the popular social networking applications, are important channels where football discussions are held and fans can express their feelings and thoughts instantly²⁷. Super League fans in Turkey also actively use these platforms and participate in the football agenda. In particular, popular sports media outlets broadcasting on social networks share content about the foreign player quotas applied in the Turkish Super League and allow fans to express their opinions on this issue^{28,29}. In social media applications, where two-way communication is possible and public opinion can be formed freely, fans create a wide network of interaction by presenting different opinions in support of increasing and/or limiting the number of foreign players and share their evaluations with pro or con views. This situation provides critical information for decision makers in Turkish football to understand and evaluate the public opinion. As a matter of fact, the TFF, which tries to determine the most reasonable rule in the quota of foreign players, constantly changes the current practices¹⁷ and is the target of positive or negative criticism in this regard. In this context, an in-depth examination of fan opinions on the content shared by media outlets on social media regarding the foreign player quota can provide a clearer understanding of how fans approach this important regulation in Turkish football, and revealing the opinions of the public on this issue can constitute an important data source for decision makers. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the question “*What are the opinions of football fans regarding the foreign football player quota practices?*” and as a result, it is aimed to analyze the opinions of social network users regarding the content published by media outlets on social media accounts regarding the foreign football player quota practices in the Turkish Super League.

Literature Review

When the literature on the research topic is examined, it is seen that studies on foreign player quotas have been the subject of studies in Turkey and abroad. Studies in Turkey address the opinions of football players and football fans on the foreign player rule^{7, 17}, the economic reflections of foreign player quotas on sports clubs¹⁸, the general and legal dimensions of foreign player limitation⁸, the effects of clubs on native-foreign player profiles³⁰ and the effects of foreign players on competition performance and parameters^{31,32,33}. In studies conducted in other countries, the socio-economic effects of foreign player quotas in leagues^{12,34,35,36}, legal aspects^{37,38,39}, team performance^{10,15,40,41}, national team and club team performance^{13,42,43}. However, there is no research in the literature on how the current implementation of the foreign football player quota in Turkey and its changes over the years are interpreted by social network users and football followers.

METHOD

This study is a nested case study designed with a qualitative research model and data were collected through document analysis technique⁴⁴. This method allows for a holistic picture based on evidence⁴⁵. In the study, by following the document scanning process recommended by Merriam (2009)⁴⁶, firstly, the documents that were suitable for the purpose of the research were obtained and after ensuring that their authenticity could be confirmed, the content analysis process was started.

Research Data

The research data were obtained from the content shared on the historical development of the foreign football player quota in the Turkish Super League. On 22.08.2024, publishers named TRTSPOR and Futbol Arena shared content on Facebook, Instagram and X accounts. Page followers commented on these contents and expressed their opinions on foreign football player quotas. Accordingly, the research group consists of 220 participants who commented on the content shared by TRTSPOR and Futbol Arena publishers on Facebook, Instagram and X regarding foreign soccer quotas. User comments on the shared content were retrieved from the relevant accounts on 15.08.2024. Information about the publishers from which the research data were collected and the research data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Information on the data evaluated in the study.

Publisher	Platform	Follower*	Total Comments	Comment Included in the Study	Participant Nickname
TRTSPOR	X ²⁹	3.2M	34	7	TS-X-1
	Facebook ⁴⁷	1.3M	258	46	TS-F-1
	Instagram ⁴⁸	1,6M	440	124	TS-I-1
Futbol Arena	X ⁴⁹	1.33M	24	5	FA-X-1
	Facebook ²⁸	1.1M	70	15	FA-F-1
	Instagram ⁵⁰	1.4M	126	32	FA-I-1

* The number of followers belongs to 01.10.2024.

Data Collection Process

In the data collection process, first of all, documents suitable for the purpose of the research (Facebook, Instagram and X posts of TRTSPOR and Futbol Arena accounts) were transferred from the web to the computer environment and the authenticity of the content was made verifiable by recording news links and screenshots. Afterwards, off-topic comments were eliminated from the comments on the content and only the opinions related to the foreign football player quota were included in the study.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed by the research team with the content analysis technique^{51,52} in MAXQDA (V19-Trial Version) program and codes, sub-themes and main themes were reached respectively. The findings were transferred to graphs and tables and presented.

Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure the validity of the data obtained with the document scanning technique; the content connection paths were recorded in a computer environment for verifiability, the documents included in the research were selected according to

objective criteria, only the content published from verified social media accounts was evaluated regarding the authenticity of the documents, and the coding process was carried out by the research team, which can be described as experts in the subject. In order to ensure the reliability of the data, scanning and cross-matching was carried out by two researchers to ensure that the participant views in the evaluated content were relevant to the research topic. Thus, data loss was prevented. Likewise, content analyses were conducted separately by two researchers for all data, and errors and incompatibilities were checked and corrected mutually⁵³. In order to measure the consistency of the findings obtained as a result of the analysis, the codes and sub-themes obtained by using the “Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement)” formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994)⁵⁴ were evaluated by an independent researcher experienced in qualitative research, and 92% consistency was found between the analysis conducted by the research team and the independent expert in terms of codes and sub-themes.

Ethical Aspect of the Research

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Karabuk University (Approval Number 2024/7)

FINDINGS

This section of the study presents the findings obtained as a result of the analysis. The research findings consist of the main themes of “Positive Opinions”, “Negative Opinions”, “Sustainability” and “Suggestions”, and information on sub-themes and frequencies are shown in Figure 1.

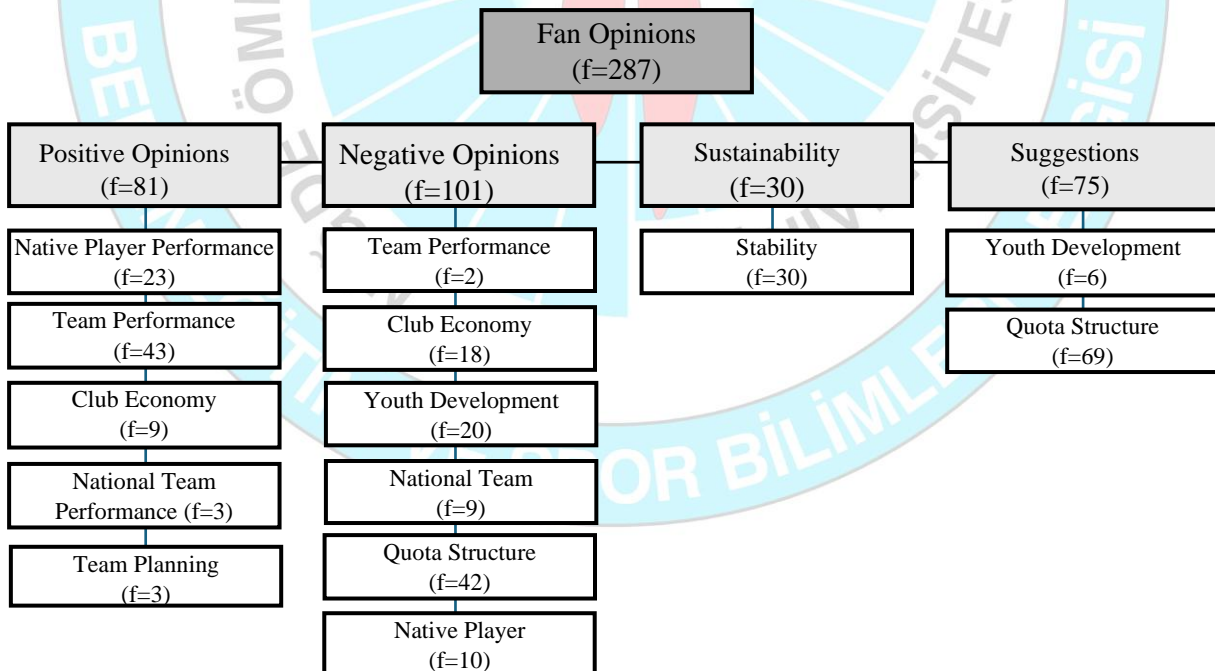


Figure 1. Information on the main and sub-themes obtained.

The information in Figure 1 shows that social network user opinions are grouped under 4 main themes. These are; “Positive opinions”, “Negative opinions” and “Sustainability” and “Suggestions” main themes. In the main theme of positive opinions, there are most

codes in the sub-themes of team performance (f=43) and native player performance (f=23). In the negative opinions, the sub-themes of club economy (f=18) and youth development (f=20) stand out. In the main theme of sustainability, it was determined that there were many opinions on the theme of stability (f=30). In the main theme of suggestions, it was emphasized that the quota structure (f=69) and youth development (f=20) should be improved. In general, fans focused on team performance and native players and made recommendations regarding the quota structure and youth development.

Table 2. Findings related to the themes and codes collected under the main theme of “Positive opinions” regarding the high quota of foreign football players.

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Positive Opinions	Native player performance	Quality native players already have a chance to play.	2
		Native players will have to improve their performance.	20
		Native players gain international experience.	1
	Team performance	Teams are more successful in Europe.	2
		Players wear the shirt according to performance criteria.	41
	Club economics	High wages paid to native players will decrease.	9
	National team performance	National team performance improves.	3
	Team planning	Teams can plan their roster more easily.	3

As a result of the analysis of the participant comments collected under the main theme of positive opinions, in the sub-theme of “Native player performance”, participant TS-I-101 said, *“The quota has not been beneficial so far. It should be free. Quality native players will find a chance to play anyway.”*, participant TS-I-85 said, *“Well done to the management, they did the right thing. Native players were not making the necessary effort due to the foreign player quota. Now they will have to compete for the jersey.”*, participant TS-I-7, *“It is a good decision that 14 foreigners can play on the field at the same time, now whoever deserves the jersey will wear it.”*, participant TS-F-2, *“It is a logical decision, native players will be ambitious so that they can wear the jersey.”*

In the sub-theme “Team Performance”, participant FA-I-3 stated: *“Whenever the number of foreign players increased, our teams became more successful. The national team has become more qualified. The good ones play, everyone wins, only managers and unqualified Turkish footballers lose. It was better for everyone. Let's hope for the best.”*, participant TS-I-68, *“The fact that the best footballer will play will increase the performance of our teams.”*, participant TS-I-45, *“It was a good decision, the best player will play. Competition will be beneficial for the teams.”*

In the sub-theme “Club economy”, respondent FA-I-3 said: *“Because of this rule, native players are paid much higher wages than they are worth. In the same way, the wages are also increasing. The club economy is negatively affected by this.”*, participant TS-I-40 said, *“As long as the foreigner quota is not liberalized, the wages paid to native players quadruple. They think that they will have to play us. Would the clubs be in this situation financially if everyone received the wages they deserved?”*

In the sub-theme of “national team performance”, participant FA-I-3 said, *“Whenever the number of foreign players increased, our national team was more successful.”*, participant TS-F-11 said, *“When there is no foreign limit, native players need to work*

hard and make a difference to get the jersey or transfer. Look at the period when there was no foreign limit, what did the national team do?"

In the sub-theme of "Team Planning", participant TS-F-1 said, *"It was the right decision. When the coach removed a native player during the match, he had to put a native player back into the game or change the positions of the players. He had to change all his plans. The coaches were the most happy about this."*, participant FA-I-2 said, *"It was very good that the number of foreigners on the field was free. Whoever wants to make a game plan with Turkish players can make a game plan with foreigners."* Participant FA-I-2 stated the following opinion.

Table 3. Findings related to the sub-themes and codes collected under the main theme of "Negative opinions" regarding the high quota of foreign football players.

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Negative Opinions	Team Performance	The high quota of foreigners has a negative impact on team performance.	2
	Club economics	High wages are paid to foreign footballers.	3
		Foreign football players negatively affect the club economy.	10
		Club resources are used irresponsibly.	3
		Clubs are financially irresponsible.	2
	Youth development	Youth development investments are decreasing.	1
		Youth development players are not supported.	19
	National team	The development of national players is negatively affected.	2
		The performance of national players is decreasing.	2
	Quota structure	The national team's player pool is shrinking.	5
		The quota structure harms teams economically.	5
	Native player	The way quotas are applied negatively affects team planning.	37
Native players cannot find a chance to play for their teams.		10	

According to Table 3, in the sub-theme of team performance, participant FA-I-18 stated: *"Is it good when we do not restrict foreign players? That is why our teams perform poorly in Europe."* Participant TS-I-34 expressed the following opinion: *"The higher the number of foreign players, the lower the team performance."*

In the sub-theme of club economy, participant TS-F-25 said, *"Foreign footballers have been coming to the country for years, signing money, bonuses, salaries, they get rich in Turkey and leave. What happens to the clubs."*, TS-I-73, *"I think this situation negatively affects club economies."*, participant TS-I-67, *"What has this system contributed to Turkish football? A lot of young people have a right to the money spent irresponsibly."*

In the sub-theme of youth development, participant TS-F-12 said, *"We need to develop formulas that invest in the youth development that raises football players in substance, not in word. This system is damaging."*, participant FA-I-15 said, *"I think it is wrong, players like Arda, Semih and Ferdi will hardly come out anymore."*, and participant FA-I-20 said, *"I think it is the wrong decision, there was already one player coming out of the youth development once a month, and now that will not come out either."*

In the national team sub-theme, participant TS-I-37 stated that *"The limit of five foreign players was good, at least quality foreign players were coming. Now you buy 14 and then you cannot send them. Native players cannot play and this reflects negatively on the national team."*, participant TS-F-12 said, *"This trend will not bring success to the teams. Native players fight for the jersey, but foreigners look at material things."*

Foreigners still play. How will the native players perform.”, participant TS-I-33, *“The national team cannot find players to play after this time.*”, participant TS-F-30, *“Soon we will not see native players playing in their teams and then we will say why the national team fails. The national team will no longer be able to find players.”*

In the sub-theme of quota structure, participants think that not including a contracted footballer in the match roster may cause economic and planning difficulties for teams. For example, participant FA-I-4 said, *“It is unreasonable to make the footballer you pay millions to sit in the tribune with a strange decision.*”, participant TS-I-70 said, *“Are millions of dollars paid to footballers to sit in the tribune? Is our country very rich and we don’t know it?”*. In terms of planning, participant TS-I-61 *“Why should the transferred footballer sit in the stands? How will the coaches build a squad if the 14 foreigners they have are better than the other players in the squad?”*, participant TS-I-78 *“What is this? A system of constant increments, how can a player sitting in the stands contribute to the team? Teams cannot make a squad.”*

In the sub-theme of native players, participants argued that the development and performance of native players may be negatively affected by the increasing quotas for foreign players. For example, participant TS-I-8 said, *“There will be almost no Turkish players on the field anymore. When these players do not play, they will not be able to develop. And we will demand success from these players.”*, while participant TS-I-109 said, *“What kind of ridiculous rule is that? 11 foreign players will be on the field and the natives will wait on the bench. This decision is a complete murder of Turkish football players.”*

Table 4. Findings on the sub-themes and codes under the main theme of “Sustainability” related to foreign football player quota practices.

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Sustainability	Stability	The target for the foreigner quota is not set.	2
		There is no stability in the foreigner quota.	20
		Constant changes in the foreigner quota harm the viewing pleasure.	1
		The quota changes depending on the person, not the system.	5
		Constant changes in the quota negatively affect team planning.	2

In the sub-theme “Stability” under the main theme of sustainability, participant TS-I-12 said, *“A management that doesn’t know what it wants.”*, participant TS-I-81 said, *“It’s like a puzzle board, there is no system, everything is improvised.”*, participant FA-I-25 said, *“The foreign limit should be abolished, its constant change has left no pleasure in watching the league.”*, participant TS-I-31 said, *“Is there a country more unstable than Turkey regarding the foreign limit? The rules change every year, even in the middle of the season. The picture is obvious, there is no success.”*, participant TS-I-69, *“The rule changes every year like a test board.”*, participant TS-I-5, *“Every incoming manager has tried something, this is not the way to go.”*, participant TS-I-97, *“Every incoming manager has brought a new rule, a common board should meet and make a decision and everyone should follow it.”*, participant TS-I-119, *“Last season you said that you would reduce the number of foreign players, the clubs make roster planning accordingly, then you increase the number of foreigners contrary to what you said, how will these clubs plan?”*

Table 5. Findings related to the sub-themes and codes under the main theme of “Suggestions” regarding the foreign football player quota practices.

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Suggestions	Youth development	Players from the youth should be on the pitch.	6
		There should be criteria for foreign player transfers.	3
	Quota structure	The number of foreign players should be less.	12
		The foreign player limit should be lifted.	21
		The quota structure should not cause waste of resources.	13
		Footballers should not be left out due to the quota structure.	20

In the sub-theme of “Youth development” that emerged in the main theme of suggestions, participant TS-F-39 said, *“There should be a rule of at least 3 young Turkish players in the first 11. There should be Turkish youth on the field.”* and participant TS-I-42 said, *“It was once very good. Our own youngsters could play. Now they are not given a chance because of foreigners. The rule should be changed.”*

In the sub-theme of the quota structure, apart from the quantitative discussions of the foreign player quota, participant FA-F-8 emphasized that the format of the foreign player rule should be based on criteria: *“Only players who play for the national team of their own country should be transferred.”* and participant TS-I-98 stated that *“The number of foreigners should be free, but there should be an age limit.”* participant TS-I-36 said, *“Turkish football cannot go forward without a maximum limit of 5 foreign players.”*, participant TS-F-24 said, *“The number of foreigners should be 3, so that quality foreign players can come.”*, participant TS-F-35 said, *“OK, there should be foreigners, but not so many, it is called a Turkish team but Turks cannot play. Turkish players should also play.”*, participant TS-F-12, *“This rule cannot be a practice that brings trophies in Europe. The number of foreigners should be less”*. In addition to the participants who stated that the quota of foreign players should be reduced, there were also some participants who stated that the foreigner quota should be completely abolished. For example, participant TS-F-6 said, *“The quota for foreign players should be completely abolished. This is how success in Europe comes.”* participant TS-I-120 said, *“The limit should be completely abolished, it is a very unnecessary rule”*. Some participants thought that the quota structure negatively affected the clubs economically and put forward suggestions. For example, participant FA-X-1 said, *“If 14 foreigners can be signed, the other 3 players should be on the bench. Sending players to the stands is a waste of resources.”* and participant TS-I-73 *“What does it mean to have 1 player on the bench? This situation negatively affects the clubs financially and there is no success”*. Participants complained about the fact that some players cannot be included in the match roster due to the quota structure; for example, participant TS-I-26 said, *“It is very illogical that these foreign players cannot be included in the roster. If you can sign 14 football players, you should play them all.”*, participant TS-I-19, *“You can't play the player you pay millions of liras for, he earns money in the stands. Is this the way the clubs think, the practice needs to change?”*, participant TS-I-17, *“If 11 out of 14 are on the field, the remaining 3 should be substitutes. 2 people in the stands is a waste of resources. Or let it be 12”*.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the opinions of social media users regarding the content published by media organizations on the implementation of foreign player quotas in

the Turkish Super League. The findings indicated that fans possess complex and diverse perspectives on the foreign player quota. Content analysis revealed four primary themes related to fan opinions: "Positive Opinions", "Negative Opinions", "Sustainability" and "Suggestions".

The analysis of fan comments revealed a substantial number of positive opinions regarding the high quota of foreign players. Within this theme, social media users argued that the presence of foreign players compels domestic players to enhance their performance, resulting in increased competition for starting eleven. They contended that this dynamic foster the development of native talent by providing opportunities for high-quality native players to earn playing time.

Examining fan comments categorized under the sub-theme "Native Player Performance" within the main theme "Positive Opinions" revealed a belief among supporters that competition for starting eleven with foreign players motivates native players to work harder to secure their place. Consequently, they argue that a higher number of foreign players fosters the development of native players. The literature review supports this perspective, with Varmus et al. (2019)⁵⁵ asserting that an increased presence of foreign players can positively influence the development of native players. While the findings of Varmus et al. (2019)⁵⁵ align with our study, research within the Turkish context Özer (2022)⁸, Fişne and Bardakçı (2019)¹⁷ suggests that a high number of foreign players may reduce opportunities for Turkish players to attain starting positions. However, no direct evidence was found to support the claim that this negatively impacts the performance of native players.

Examining fan comments categorized under the sub-theme "Team Performance" within the main theme "Positive Opinions" reveals a belief that foreign players positively influence national senior team's success in European competitions. Fans argue that the presence of foreign players elevates the overall performance standards of the team, fostering greater competition for starting positions based on merit. This perspective aligns with findings from Binder and Findlay (2012)¹³ who observed that, following the Bosman ruling, there was little evidence of a significant disruption to the competitive balance of national leagues in Europe, while top teams competing in the Champions League demonstrated a noticeable increase in strength. Similarly, Sever, Ciğerci (2023)³² highlight the potential impact of a higher number of foreign players on the quality of play within teams. Additional research, including studies by Karaca (2008)⁴³ and Varmus et al. (2019)⁵⁵, suggests a possible link between the inclusion of foreign players and team success, both domestically and in European competitions. The findings of this study indicate that positive opinions regarding the foreign player quota are consistent with existing research.

Within the sub-theme "Club economy" social media users argued that implementing a more flexible quota for foreign players in starting eleven could prevent clubs from overpaying native players, thereby promoting financial prudence. However, research conducted by Gündüz et al. (2019) revealed that expenditures on native players accounted for 33.73% of total club spending when the foreign player quota was less stringent, a figure that decreased slightly to 33.12% during periods of stricter enforcement. Yüce (2013)¹¹ in the study on public opinions regarding foreign player transfers, found that a higher number of foreign players correlates with increased financial expenditures for clubs. Çetinkaya and Yıldırım (2021)⁵⁶ in their analysis of the

profit and loss associated with foreign player transfers in Turkey, suggested that clubs occasionally utilize their financial resources irresponsibly. These findings reflect fans' concerns about inefficient financial practices by club management. Nevertheless, existing research indicates that spending on native players remains relatively stable regardless of quota changes, which contradicts the findings of our study.

Fan comments categorized under the sub-theme "National Team Performance" suggest that a more open foreign player quota, which allows for free competition, would incentivize native players to enhance their performance through competition with foreign players, ultimately benefiting the national team. However, academic research does not provide definitive evidence regarding whether a high number of foreign players positively or negatively impacts national team success. Nevertheless, former players, coaches^{57,58}, and football commentators⁵⁹ have expressed opinions that align with this fan perspective. The argument that unrestricted foreign player transfers, which lead to competition between native and foreign players, enhance the performance of native players is a crucial point of debate concerning foreign player quota regulations. Further research utilizing quantitative data is necessary to evaluate this claim and provide evidence-based conclusions.

Within the sub-theme "Team Planning" fans believed that the current foreign player quota implementation (2024-2025) allows clubs to engage in more effective squad planning. However, existing literature does not offer evidence to either support or refute this claim. It is important to acknowledge that the current system could potentially encourage clubs to prioritize short-term success through their transfer policies, potentially jeopardizing long-term team planning. The impact of foreign player quotas on team planning is intrinsically linked to club vision, strategy, and long-term objectives. Factors such as how clubs interpret the quota, the balance they strike between short-term success and long-term sustainability, and their commitment to developing native talent can significantly influence their overall approach to the quota system. Therefore, a comprehensive investigation, considering various club structures and different league levels, is necessary for a deeper understanding of this complex issue.

Examining the main theme of "Negative Opinions" it is evident that fans primarily focus their criticism on the structure of the quota system itself. They argue that the quota system's inability to accommodate all players on the matchday roster, the system's inherent instability, and the resulting negative impact on team planning and fan enjoyment are significant drawbacks. The constant changes in the quota structure and the lack of a clear, defined objective more precisely indicate that fans are dissatisfied with the current system.

Within the sub-theme "Team Performance" under "Negative Opinions", fans expressed the belief that a higher number of foreign players adversely affects team performance. This perspective can be analyzed through assumptions related to integration challenges faced by foreign players, communication barriers, and the potential disruption of team dynamics. However, these assumptions necessitate empirical validation. Numerous successful teams feature a substantial presence of foreign players, illustrating their capacity to positively influence team performance. Therefore, rather than establishing a direct correlation between the number of foreign players and team performance, it is essential to consider the impact of factors such as individual player skills, team cohesion, and the managerial expertise of the coach.

The sub-theme "Club Economy" within "Negative Opinions" revealed comments indicating that a large number of foreign players can adversely affect a club's financial stability. Existing literature supports this perspective. Gündüz et al. (2019)¹⁸, in their study on the financial implications of the foreign player rule, found that clubs often incur financial losses, particularly when acquiring foreign players. Similarly, Yüce (2013)¹¹ discovered that a high number of foreign players increases the financial expenditures of clubs. Çetinkaya and Yıldırım (2021)⁵⁶, in their analysis of the profit and loss associated with foreign player transfers in Turkey, suggested that teams may utilize their financial resources irresponsibly. These findings align with the observations made in our study.

Comments under the sub-theme "Youth Development" expressed concerns that youth players are not receiving adequate support, which is adversely affecting the development of national players. This observation aligns with research conducted by Travlos, Dimitropoulos (2017)⁶⁰, who found that as foreign player quotas increase, the influence of native players on team success diminishes, potentially leading to a devaluation of native talent. Additionally, a study by Charyev (2016)⁶¹ revealed that the implementation of a foreign player quota in Russia has prompted club management to invest more in youth development. Furthermore, Yüce et al. (2017)⁷ concluded in their research examining Turkish players' opinions on the foreign player rule that youth players are negatively impacted by the quota system. Collectively, these studies in the existing literature support the findings of our research.

Analyzing comments within the "National Team" sub-theme of "Negative Opinions" it is evident that fans, citing Baur and Lehmann (2007)⁴², argue that the free movement of players between countries can have both positive and negative effects on national teams. They advocate for reducing the number of foreign players and establishing criteria for foreign player transfers. These fans believe that a high number of foreign players can adversely impact the performance of national players, ultimately hindering the success of the national team. This perspective aligns with research conducted by Yüce et al. (2017), which found that Turkish players perceive foreign player limits as restrictive to their opportunities for playing time. Similarly, Burrows et al. (2014)⁶² emphasized the detrimental effects of a high number of foreign players on the development of English players. However Özer (2022)⁸, in the analysis of foreign player policy, concluded that increasing the number of foreign players does not negatively impact national team performance. This conclusion is consistent with observations from our study, where participants expressed concerns about the potential adverse effects of a large foreign player quota on national team performance. An analysis of the "Quota Structure" sub-theme within "Negative Opinions" revealed a significant number of critiques from participants. These criticisms primarily focus on the flawed implementation of the quota system. Fans contend that the inability to include all players on the matchday roster due to quota limitations will lead to substantial sporting and financial losses for clubs. While Gündüz et al. (2019)¹⁸ argue that restrictive foreign player regulations do not impact national team and club performance, Fişne and Bardakçı (2019)¹⁷ highlight fan concerns that such restrictions adversely affect European club performance. However, the existing literature lacks information regarding the economic implications of specific implementations, such as the inability to include at least one additional player on the matchday roster due to transfer restrictions. Furthermore, the rule stipulating that not every player on the roster

must be included in the matchday lineup raises concerns about effective squad planning, the cost-benefit analysis of transfers, and the potential to maximize the value of foreign players.

Under the "Native Player" sub-theme within "Negative Opinions" participants argued that the implementation of the foreign player quota system could adversely affect the performance of native players. Research conducted by Yüce et al. (2017)⁷ found that Turkish footballers believe the high number of foreign players restricts their playing opportunities. Similarly Fişne and Bardakçı (2019)¹⁷, in their study examining fan opinions regarding the foreign player policy, concluded that the large number of foreign players may hinder native players' chances of securing starting positions. These findings are consistent with the observations made in our study.

The primary theme of "Sustainability" intersects with the sub-theme of "Stability," where social media users emphasize the critical issue of the frequently changing foreign player quota system in Turkish football. Comments such as "There is no stability in the foreign player quota" and "Constant changes to the quota negatively affect team planning" suggest that this instability obstructs clubs from engaging in long-term planning and systematic development. The absence of a clear objective for the foreign player quota system renders it susceptible to arbitrary application, complicating the establishment of a fair competitive environment. Moreover, ongoing alterations to the quota system adversely affect fans' enjoyment of the game, diminishing their overall satisfaction. These challenges pose a significant threat to the long-term growth of Turkish football, both from a sporting and financial standpoint. Therefore, implementing foreign player policies with enhanced transparency, consistency, and a long-term vision is essential for the sustainable development of Turkish football.

The final theme identified through the analysis pertains to the suggestions directed by fans toward the TFF. Within this theme, fans collectively emphasize the need for greater opportunities for young players, particularly those from academy systems, to secure positions in professional team rosters. Furthermore, supporters highlight the significant potential of young players for the future of clubs and underscore the importance of providing them with adequate opportunities to develop and contribute.

The "Youth Development" sub-theme to emphasizes suggestions for academy players, highlighting the necessity for enhanced opportunities for their growth. Participants view increased financial investments in youth clubs as essential for fostering these young talents in improved conditions. Consequently, they underscore the importance of clubs dedicating more resources to their youth development programs.

The "Quota Structure" sub-theme focuses on the impact of the foreign player quota system on athletes. Fans argue that the current quota system (14+2) restricts native players from securing positions on matchday rosters. They contend that this regulation stifles the development of young talent and advocate for a more equitable system that allows all contracted players, regardless of nationality, to be included in the matchday roster. This approach, they believe, would provide equal opportunities for both native and foreign players, thereby enhancing the international competitiveness of Turkish football.

Overall, the study revealed that Turkish football fans hold both positive and negative views regarding an increased foreign player quota, with these opinions primarily focused on the potential impact on Turkish football as a whole. While the findings reflect concerns about the detrimental influence of a large number of foreign players on national team success, they also support the argument that such a policy could stimulate the development of native players and enhance overall team performance. A significant proportion of participants criticized the frequent changes to the quota system and offered suggestions to the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), indicating that fans are dissatisfied with the current implementation. Furthermore, the prevalence of opinions favoring a reduced number of foreign players on teams may be interpreted as a failure on the part of the TFF to effectively communicate the current quota policy to the public. These findings, largely consistent with existing research, underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the foreign player quota's impact on Turkish football. Ongoing discussions are likely regarding the most effective management of the foreign player quota, particularly in relation to youth development and national team performance. Therefore, it is advisable for the TFF to transparently explain their policies regarding the foreign player quota to the sports community, providing clear justifications for their decisions.

CONCLUSION

This research revealed that fan opinions regarding the foreign player quota system coalesced around four primary themes: "Positive Opinions", "Negative Opinions", "Sustainability" and "Suggestions". Supporters of the more free quota expressed positive views, highlighting its potential to enhance the performance of native players, improve both club and national team outcomes, bolster club finances, and facilitate team planning. Conversely, critics contended that the freer quota system adversely affects team and club finances, impedes investments in youth development, and hinders the growth of the national team. The theme of "Sustainability" focuses on the argument that the absence of a consistent standard in quota implementation leads to instability. The suggestions emphasized that football fans should have the opportunity to include players from the youth academy in the match squad, that the quota structure should be based on clear criteria to avoid resource wastage, and that all foreign players should be eligible for inclusion in the match squad. Additionally, it was noted that some fans advocated for a limitation on the quota, while others argued for its removal altogether.

Research Limitations and Recommendations

This research focused exclusively on fan opinions expressed in social media comments in response to content shared by media outlets regarding the foreign player quotas implemented in the Turkish Super League by the TFF. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the quota system be reevaluated and restructured to prioritize stability. This would enable clubs to engage in long-term transfer planning and prevent fans from constantly facing changing system. Additionally, addressing the high salaries paid to foreign players and promoting more responsible financial practices among clubs are crucial. Introducing financial limitations on foreign player transfers and enacting regulations requiring clubs to invest more in youth development are recommended. Specifically, measures supporting youth development could foster the growth of national players and lay a stronger foundation for the future of Turkish football. Furthermore, engaging the public in more effective discussions about the

foreign player quota and prioritizing public opinion will contribute to a more informed debate on the system's impact on Turkish football. It is essential to develop a sustainable framework for Turkish football when addressing the controversial foreign player quota system, which has a significant impact on both national team development and club performance. In this context, stakeholders across the sport should be informed by the TFF, and quota implementations should be supported by decisions based on scientific data. Lastly, when implementing changes to quota structures, it is crucial for the TFF to communicate the rationale behind these decisions and their potential implications to the football community through all available communication channels. This transparent approach can be beneficial in mitigating administrative criticisms.

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