

Regional Internationalization in Higher Education between Turkey and The Balkans

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Abstract

Although English-speaking countries are still the main destination of international students, several regional hubs have emerged as new destinations for these students. The current incoming international student population suggests that Turkey is one of these newly emerging regional hubs. In particular, students from the Balkans choose Turkey as a destination for study abroad. The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate factors motivating students from Balkan countries to choose Turkey for study abroad and their experiences during their studies in Turkey. The study revealed that socio-cultural proximity seems to be a strong motive behind their choices of study abroad destinations. In addition, economic and academic rationales emerged as secondary and tertiary motives for specifying Turkey as a study abroad destination for students from Balkan countries. The results suggest that compared to traditional destinations for international students, Turkey's international attractiveness in higher education is based on unique rationales.

Keywords

Internationalization of higher education, regional internationalization, student mobility, Balkan countries, higher education, student satisfaction

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Introduction

In recent years, internationalization trends in higher education have been increasing in a faster way (OECD 2012, UNESCO 2014). The mobility of students and teaching staff is an important part of the internationalization in higher education. The best-known form of internationalization certainly is the increasing mobility of students studying abroad (Van Damme 2001). In the world, although the main destinations for studying abroad are mostly countries like USA, UK, and Australia, regional mobility of students in their own regions is also taking place at a greater rate (OECD 2011). Several scholars indicated that there is a growing interest about regional mobility of students and staff (Knight et al. 2011, Altbach et al. 2014). In the relevant literature, although there is a great amount of research about the factors behind the decision of study abroad (Chen et al. 2006, Li et al. 2007, Lee 2014), the underlying factors behind student mobility vary depending on the regional characteristics (Jon et al. 2014). According to UNESCO (2014) data the student inflow from neighboring countries to Turkey has increased by 50% in the last decade, which implies Turkey's potential as a regional hub in higher education. Despite the fact that internationalization has increasingly becoming a phenomenon in higher education in the literature there are seldom analyses on the factors pulling students into Turkey. Hence, there is a need for extensive knowledge to guide policy and practices in internationalizing of higher education in Turkey. This is essential to attract an international student population, which serves academic, economic and political goals of the country. Bearing in mind the unique nature of the relationships between Turkey and the Balkans, the aim of this study is to reveal factors pulling students from Balkan countries to Turkey and document their current experiences and future expectations from their study-in-Turkey.

Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization has been a one of the top issues on policy makers' agenda in higher education. In that sense, internationalization is perceived as a challenge as well as an opportunity for countries and individual higher education organizations (Luijten-Lub 2007). According to Yang (2002), internationalization, dating from ancient times and characterized as an old phenomenon, provides awareness and interaction between countries

through teaching, research, and service functions and refers to dialogue with the ultimate aim of achieving mutual understanding across cultural borders. Mobility programs, internationalization of curriculum, multicultural campuses and classrooms, courses taught in foreign languages, and cooperation in research are different forms of internationalization (Kienle et al. 2005).

As an important indicator of internationalization in tertiary education, studying abroad or student mobility has been becoming more common with an average annual growth rate of nearly 7 % between the years 2000-2011 in the worldwide (OECD 2012). As of 2011, almost 4.3 million students are enrolled in tertiary education outside of their country. In relation to student-attracting countries, 77 % of all are in OECD countries as the top three ones; the USA, the UK, and Germany (OECD 2012).

With respect to the drives or rationales behind international student flows, a variety of factors have been discussed to explain this movement. However, several scholars adopted the “push-pull” terminology from international migration theories in order to analyze international student mobility (Li et al. 2007, Lee 2013, McMahon 1992). Accordingly, the push-pull model appears quite explanatory to classify and capture the dynamics behind country choice. However, this model has been analyzed with varying factors and interpretations (Altbach 1998, Chen et al. 2006, Li et al. 2007). Given in the relevant literature, the push factors are associated with the negative conditions at home country and the pull ones are the positive sides at host country (Altbach 1998). On the other hand, Li et al. (2007) proposed that both home and host countries may have push/positive and pull/negative conditions, and more specifically these conditions are also explained with academic, economic, social, cultural, political, economic, and personal aspects with varying importance of factors on choice of destination. From a different perspective, Kondakci (2011) identified pushing and pulling dynamics by naming them as public and private matters under pre-departure and post-departure rationales. In relation to the push and pull factors from different studies, it seems that there are not constant push and pull dynamics but varying ones in different contexts or countries. Even, the relative importance of factors for different countries or regions (host or home) is showing variation (Cantwell et al. 2009, Jon et al. 2014, Kondakci

2011). For instance, in a study in Turkish context, private rationale seems more prominent for economically developed countries' students coming to Turkey while economic and academic rationales are instrumental for less developed countries' students choosing Turkey (Kondakci 2011). In addition to the ones mentioned above, "Personal and human factors are also important in determining student choices, such as individual attitudes to religion and safety, as well as the influence of recommendations from family, friends, teachers, and agent" (Wilkins et al. 2012: 418). Neither push factors nor pull factors are solely negative or positive. That is, push factors can carry negative and positive reasons originating from home country; similarly, pull factors can carry negative and positive reasons originating from host country. Thus, different from previous studies, we consolidate all student motives as push and pull factors. In order to analyze these push and pull factors, the typology developed by Knight (1999) was used as academic, economic, political and socio-cultural rationales. In addition to this, personal factors were used as an additional dimension.

Mobility between Turkey and the Balkans

Several scholars indicated that different countries have emerged as regional hubs for international students for several different reasons such as region-specific strategies to attract nearby students (Knight et al. 2011), historical and cultural familiarity (Kondakci 2011, UNESCO 2014), and low travel cost (UNESCO 2014). The concept of regional hub for education, especially for higher education, has recently begun to be very popular with the emergence of some specific education regions like Middle East and South East Asia that are trying to attract student potentials in their around or hubs (Knight et al. 2011). Until the recent years, international student mobility has looked like from the South to the North side of the world, but the flow has become varied and complex since some out-bounding countries (Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong) are also receiving a significant number of foreign students (Altbach et al. 2014). Recent data about regional flow of students in certain places also support the current trend; for instance, the Arab States have increased the percentage of incoming students from 12 % to 26 % between 1999 and 2012. Similarly, the sub-Saharan Africa has done it from 18 % to 28 %. As for Central and Eastern Europe, it is from 25 % to 37 %. The United Arab Emirates has currently exceeded the UK in

terms of attracting students from the Arab States and now has become the third most popular destination (followed by France and the United States) for the students of the region (UNESCO 2014).

Based on Turkish Higher Education Council (HEC) statistics, the number of tertiary-level international students in Turkey increased from 16,656 in the year 2000 to 20,000 in 2009; however, the most recent statistics from April 2014 reveal an almost tripled estimate of 55.000 international students (Çetinsaya 2014). To the demographic of incoming students, it is easily observed that the closer destinations and neighboring countries comprise most of the total, which supports the idea that Turkey acts as a regional hub for international students of the region particularly for students from Balkan countries. Increasing the number of international students in Turkish universities has become a top concern for Turkish governments in the last decade (Çetinsaya 2014). As a part of the strategy for attracting international students, Turkey has developed more scholarship opportunities, eased visa procedures for international students, removed the entrance exam for international students, and adapted a more flexible acceptance procedures for foreign students.

The geographical proximity, cultural familiarity and historical ties between Turkey and Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia) contributes to inflowing student mobility between these countries and Turkey. In the history, the Ottoman Empire ruled for approximately 500 years in the Balkans and left an important cultural heritage on these lands. In addition, from an economic perspective Balkan countries form an important geopolitical position for Turkey. Balkan countries constitute an important periphery region for Turkey with 10 countries, reaching nearly 42 million people. According to the UNESCO (2014) data, Turkey has been able to attract more international students than any other country in the Balkans. According to 2012 data Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania respectively attracted 29,012, 11,214, and 17,219 international students. The rest of the Balkan countries attracted less than 10,000 students to their programs. Besides, when the whole Eurasian region is considered, only the Russian Federation is able to attract more international students than Turkey to its higher education. Finally, stability

in the Balkans is an important issue for security in Turkey and Europe. All of these reasons have been motivating Turkey to contribute to the region. After the collapse of Yugoslavia, which started in 1990's, Turkey has initiated many political, economic and cultural policy and programs towards Balkans. As a state policy, Turkey is strengthening its relationships with the Balkan countries especially with Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, FYR, and Bulgaria. Education has been playing an important role in these policy and programs.

Bearing in mind the unique nature of the relationships between Turkey and the Balkans, the aim of this study is to reveal factors pulling students from Balkan countries to Turkey and document their satisfaction with study-in-Turkey experience.

Method

In this study, qualitative research tradition was used to elaborate on the meanings, challenges, and gains of the students, which can't be measured through quantitative research. The study was designed as an exploratory phenomenological study. As Marshall et al. (2006) state exploratory studies are used for investigating little-understood phenomena and for identifying or discovering important categories of meaning. From phenomenological perspective, the scientific observer deals with how the social world is made meaningful and the focus is on how members of the social world apprehend and act upon the objects of their experience as they were things separate and distinct from themselves (Holstein et al. 2005). As LeCompte et al. (1992) state phenomenological studies of schooling elicited the meanings that participants in the educational process assigned to themselves and what they were doing.

Participants

Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth-unlike quantitative researchers who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance (Miles et al. 1994). In this study, the sample comprises 11 participants who were interviewed to have a deeper understanding of how they construct reality in the process of regional internationalization of Turkey. The students were selected through criterion sampling. According to Patton (1990) the

logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance. In this study the criterion is having a Balkan nationality and studying at a higher education institution in Turkey.

The participants of the study were students who were studying at one of the four different public universities in Ankara and who came from the Balkan countries. As Balkan countries, the literature offers 10 countries, namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia.

Since the study is about Balkan students who studied in Turkey, the UNESCO statistics of incoming students were analyzed before sampling. According to UNESCO (2014) statistics, the most student sending countries to Turkey are respectively Greece (1322), Bulgaria (1236), Bosnia and Herzegovina (629), Albania (530), Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (439), Serbia (171), Montenegro (74), Romania (61), and Croatia (14). There is no official statistics on Kosovo. With this information, the students from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro were included in the analysis. Romania, Croatia and Kosovo were excluded due to their low representativeness in the incoming student population. Greece was excluded because of convenience, since all the students that were reached from Greece also had a Turkish nationality.

The demographic characteristics of the participants show that: out of 11 students studying at four public universities in Ankara namely Ankara University, Hacettepe University, Gazi University, and Middle East Technical University. Out of 11 participants, 9 of them were undergraduate and two were graduate students. Three participants were studying international relations and the others were studying in different disciplines; namely, business administration, economics, city and regional planning, political science and public administration, architecture, linguistics, Middle Eastern studies, and elementary mathematics education. The average stay period was 3.36 in years. Eight of the 11 participants were staying in dormitories and 3 of them are staying in rental apartments. The average cumulative grade point average (CGPA) was 2.98/4.00.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perceptions, challenges, and gains of these students about the rationales of the Balkan student to study in Turkey. The interviews were developed by the researchers through analyzing the relevant literature. The questions were prepared by taking the research questions into account. The rationales on four levels, namely political, cultural, economic and social, were asked during the interviews. “Questions developed to guide a qualitative study need to be more open-ended and concerned with process and meaning rather than cause and effect” (Bogdan et al. 2007: 162). Therefore the questions were prepared in compatible with the qualitative research philosophy.

The researchers got two expert qualitative researchers’ feedback about the instrument before starting to study in order to get the tool reviewed by the experts. Then, since the instrument was a new one, there was a pilot study was conducted with 3 Balkan students who were studying in Turkey. The research tool was re-developed further according to the results of the pilot study.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through content analysis. After the data collection procedure, the researchers transcribed the data verbatim. The researchers transcribed the data by themselves to be more close to the data. After several readings of the transcriptions, the researchers started to code when they felt that they are familiar with the data. Coding was noted for every interview, and then, commonalities between the coding of the different interviews were explored. Then, the themes and sub-themes from the coding were determined and initial code list was prepared. In this process, the research questions guided the researchers to find relevant codes and themes. Results of the study were supported with the quotations from the interviews to enrich the end product.

Results

The results of the study are presented under five headings. The push factors referring to the reasons of leaving home-country, the pull factors explaining the attractiveness of the host country for studying, the expectations of the students about the host country and studying there, and the last part is the experiences of the students in host country, respectively.

Push Factors

Of the eleven interviews, in relation to the push factors that refer to the reasons to come Turkey due to the participants' countries particular problems or motivators for going abroad, the most outstanding push factors are listed as;

The home-country cannot provide high quality education or internship opportunities like Turkey, and so students think that they will be better-equipped with their field of study than their counterparts. Regarding with this issue, some of the participants express this situation with such words: "I will have more chance than anyone else studied in Albania. My academic level will be higher and will have a higher chance of employment there". Another participant similarly states that: "I was looking for an education of higher quality. There is no in Albania and I found in Turkey. The reason that I wanted an education of higher quality was to have a brighter future. That higher quality of education could provide me a brighter future."

Accordingly, the chance of finding a job in home country seems more possible for the ones in Turkey because of studying abroad at good universities. In addition to these, students express that university education in homeland does not offer the same variety as Turkish universities provide, accordingly one of the students described the situation as "... there was not such a department that I desired to study". With a similar fashion, another participant indicated that: "Variety of the [choices], I mean like [sic] that for everyone you should check that faculties, departments at ODTÜ for example engineering or natural sciences [the university provides a variety of departments for students' choice]...you really can find what you wish to study. It really gives the possibility. It is in Turkey like that. Compared with Bosnia or some other Balkan state [countries], it is really a huge advantage."

As another aspect stated by the participants is that the home-country does not give a wide range of job opportunities after studying. Especially, unemployment and corruption seem to be reason for some students to lose their hope for education and future career in their country and support this idea in their statements: "In Bulgaria, students are so free and ignore education since exams are passed through bribing, and even you can get diploma with money". In terms of unemployment and less variety of job

opportunities, the participants express their feelings: “As I stated, the education and job opportunities are very limited. Therefore, if I return to Bulgaria or go another country, I believe that I can find a good job with the education here.”

Among the pushing factors, another reason is that scholarship opportunities are less likely in their home-country due to lack of such facilities, but it mostly seems that living expenses are mostly cheaper than Turkey even if they don't have much chance of economic support, but even so, a few of them stated that: “I have scholarship here, but it would be impossible in my home country.”

Other than the general factors stated above, some country-specific factors are also stated, especially the ones who are of Turkish-origin, Muslim, and minority in their home country put forward that they feel pressure at the home-country in politics, academic life, social life, religion affairs, and personal matters. For instance, they feel segregation both politically and socially, and uneasy about their practices in relation to the religion. They summarize these problems by saying so: “There can be problem between Serbian and Bosnian ones, for instance if a teacher is Serbian origin, the teacher may make discrimination by giving lower grades than your Serbian counterparts.” These segregations are not just for Turkish-origin ones, but for other minorities, too. Additionally, some of the Muslim and Turkish origin participants feel themselves closer to Turkey and Turkish traditions and so they are not happy to live in their home country: “You cannot develop yourself so much since they do not allow it, for instance at universities you are sometimes asked whether you are Muslim or not, then you are graded according to that”. One another participant expresses: “Turkish origin ones abroad are a bit under pressure, hence it is becoming easier for us to come here.”

Besides such problems for minorities, other pushing factors are also listed. For instance, the schools do not pay attention to injustice such as bribing between teachers and students, or cheating. They feel insecure because of instability among groups of people in the same country or the neighbor country, which can be concluded from their utterances like these: “There is a more confused state of politics in Albania. There is no social and economic stability. It provides many obstacles for students. The stability that I found in Turkey is very helpful for me.”

For some of the participants, the pushing factor is family support, teachers' and friends' advices because of historical ties, similar traditions, or their previous experiences about Turkey, and living abroad. For example; one of the participants stated that "I met with Turkish people while I studied in Bosnia. They encouraged me to study here."

Moreover, Turkish schools [Turkish schools in the home country], especially the quality of teachers at these schools and their encouragement also made some of them choose Turkey, as expressed by one of the students "your life changes depending on the place that you take your education, but I accepted to come Turkey. Actually, my teachers too much wanted me to go on university education in Turkey, and also I love them so much, therefore I agreed due to their persistence."

Finding a job at these schools is also another option for some students. In addition to this, the spread of Turkey throughout the region in education, industry and cultural affairs seem to influence them to choose here because it is generally believed that knowing Turkish with good education in the prominent Turkish universities may give them the chance of finding a position in their home-country in the fields Turkey does business as a bridge between home and host country. One of the students indicated that "graduating from Turkey is a good option for me since I can find job much easier. Some Turkish business sectors in my country [Montenegro] need qualified people who know Turkish, as well. I may be a bridge between two countries. Such a chance influenced me."

Pull Factors

The pulling factors stand for the rationales which Turkey offers in order to attract foreign students. The factors are classified under academic, economic, social, personal, and political issues. Some of the most significant pulling factors of Turkey are the historical ties, similar traditions or culture, religious factors, and social interaction with Turkish people. These are expressed by the participants in the following words, "All of the Balkan countries' students, we all are a part of Ottoman Empire. So close affinities with Turkey not just Albania but all Balkan countries. Maybe, Albania and Bosnia have also religious affinities. But, all countries don't matter."

Another most outstanding reason seems to be the scholarship opportunities with health insurance, food, and accommodation that are provided by Turkish government while some cannot benefit from such privileges. Moreover, this one is by far the most expressed opportunity by most of the participants: “The government offers scholarship and lots of facilities to us. Except for ODTÜ, other universities support the transportation and meal costs, the scholarship is high enough. Such a policy is attracting students.”

Of the pulling factors, the recognition of Turkey especially in economics, politics, and tourism also seems to influence students. That is, they can find better conditions here. That Turkish government has a policy to fund scholarships specifically for Balkans has a great appeal. One participant states that “By the way, I have learnt Turkish, actually I have already known French and Turkey is a country whose economy is developing abroad, and therefore I was attracted”. Another participant also states that “Turkey offers much more opportunity because Turkey has made investments in Macedonia”.

As for academic matters, the reputation of universities like ODTÜ, Boğaziçi, and Bilkent in terms of being very good, universal, and qualified universities with medium of instruction in English is mostly stated by the incoming students; their source of information about universities comes from close friends who came earlier and relatives who lived in Turkey. One of the students states, during my high school studies, I studied in a Turkish high school in Albania. This was the place that I get used to Turkish universities, especially ODTÜ. Because our professors in high school all were Turkish, as it was Turkish college. And they told me that there are so quality universities in Turkey, especially Boğaziçi and ODTÜ. Bilkent for example. And I got to know them when I enter the examination to come to Turkey and I came. What I want to say, my professors in the Turkish college of Albania provided such valuable information for me. This was another reason to push me to come to Turkey.

For academic matters, some students had good expectations about the prominent universities in terms of their quality, reputation, and language of instruction. Some students believe having a diploma from Turkish universities will be a basis for masters abroad and help them with future career plans abroad and in home country. One of the students states that

“ODTÜ is an international university, and here is so strict but we learn lots of things compared with my friends in the same department in Serbia”.

Geo-politics of Turkey and personal interest of students in the Middle East appear to play important roles in decision-making. One participant states that “I wonder Middle East, so I have learnt something thanks to coming here”.

Multicultural environment from various countries, especially at large-scale universities, inspires the students to experience it. The social life and relations among people are found very welcoming. The relatives of some students already live here and they have pre-defined images about Turkey. Turkey is considerably cheaper than countries like the USA, Germany, France, etc. The warm relationship between students makes them feel secure; especially welcoming attitudes and hospitality are described as the main arguments for Turkish people. One participant expresses this as “Like hospitality or, helping without any reward. Doing something for the sake of doing it. I have seen such things here, which is not common in my country [Albania]. They love foreigners very much”.

Experiences

The situations students have shared as a result of experience in the host country are evaluated as the experiences of students in Turkey. The experiences of the participating students show variety; that is, similar experiences among the students converge less than the different experiences they have. First of all, they have found the prominent Turkish universities like ODTÜ very qualified and equipped with successful staff, social and academic opportunities. On the other hand, using Turkish in English-medium universities in lecture instead of English is stated as a big difficulty, and criticized. Moreover, quota restriction for international students in the departments of some Turkish universities is a serious concern for the participants.

The expense of life is a frequently stated concern for all of the participants, but students who are self-financing have much more difficulty to meet the expenses while the others have scholarship. One student said that “If there had not been scholarship, Turkey is not at all cheap country for a student”.

In addition to these issues they criticize the difficulty of finding a job because of work permit and that the tradition of part-time job is not common in Turkey. One of them expressed that “In Turkey, without knowing Turkish you can’t work. At least for one year you can’t work anywhere. Even though you know English it won’t help you at all. Also, work permit and so on. No one wants to take in Turkey. I have friends studying in Europe and they had student services that help them to find a job. But in Turkey they don’t provide you anything like that.”

They find Turkish people warm and very welcoming. The following expression indicated that students get even more than they expected from their lives in Turkish society,

Because my experience until now was really good in Turkey. I get even more than I expected. People are so helpful. All Turkish people are saying that we love Bosnians. Even if it is not true, we have such connections. I don’t feel as a foreigner here. I feel as a native almost. People are so kind. That is really important if you are abroad and away from parents. It is really a good country to live. We really miss our parents but we really have good connections and friends here.

Some of the students were expecting a more oriental country in contrast to the experiences they have had. However, their positive experiences in Turkey during their study abroad experience convince them for spending the rest of their lives in Turkey. In this regard several participants expressed their plans of applying for Turkish citizenship in the future in order to live legally here: “I am thinking about dual citizenship and after five years, I can earn the right to live here by working and taking master’s degree at the same time”.

Some students mention student clubs on campus and associations for Balkan students or that of home country in Turkey. They have become members of these clubs or associations to interact with other students on campus or keep in touch with other students from Balkan countries or home country. One of the Bosnian students states that “I have lots of friends from different cities. Also, here, we established a union. If it were in Bosnia, it would be difficult”.

Despite these positive experiences, religion-based difficulties or ideological matters they have experienced surprise them since they do not find the

attitudes of some people democratic. In other words, students believe there is political polarization or less tolerance to different views and ideologies in the society. Students say they have less freedom of expression over social issues or else they would face deportation.

Lastly, a few students expected a difficult dormitory life at first, which later on turned into an advantage for them. One of them explains that “One student asked when the dormitory results were explained, and then he was scolded and behaved badly. He did not deserve such things. Sometimes we experience such things. This may negatively affect the international students”.

Discussion and Conclusions

Internationalization of higher education is a frequently stated dynamics of Turkish higher education. However, how internationalization is perceived and implemented is a serious concern. Internationalization of higher education is a superordinate term that involves the prevalence of international perspective in every segment of higher education such as curriculum, teaching staff, diploma accreditation, educational policy making as well as the most concrete example of student mobility (Erdoğan 2014). If Turkey is committed to a broader international perspective in higher education and European Union propositions of a higher education area, internationalization needs to be high on the agenda (Çetinsaya 2014).

The statistics of incoming and outgoing students within the mobility dimension of internationalization of higher education show a dichotomy between internationalization and regional internationalization of higher education. Not only are the USA and Europe still international attractions for student mobility but also today regional hubs have their increased presence in the landscape of internationalization of higher education. The numbers affirm Turkey as a hub for several regions around its territory; the Balkan countries being one of them. The top 20 states sending students to Turkey is an obvious indicator for regional internationalization in that regions such as Turkic Republics of the former USSR, Arab world, European states with Turkish presence, and recently Africa send the most students to Turkey. This may also have implications for attracting students from other territories such as China and Far East in the near future.

Within this context, the Balkan countries can be regarded one of the hinterlands of internationalization of higher education in Turkey. Moreover, perceptions of participants from Balkan countries and their rationales to study in Turkey may help better understand the regionalization phenomenon in Turkey. To start with, push factors for the participants can be summarized as lack of quality of higher education or scholarship opportunities, less prospect to find good jobs, country-specific ones such as segregation of minorities in higher education in their home country, and personal ones like family support and family ties with Turkey. Pull factors can be listed as historical, cultural, religious and social proximity as well as increased recognition of Turkey in economics, politics and tourism. Furthermore, worldwide reputation of universities like Ankara, Boğaziçi, Gazi, İTÜ and ODTÜ appeal students from the Balkans. As for experiences, participants mentioned high quality of education and medium of instruction in English in addition to difficulties with expense of life and finding jobs as a student. They also experienced warm welcome by the Turkish people but ideological and religious conflicts in Turkey surprised them. When it comes to expectations of the participants, the image of Turkey before they arrived in terms of quality and reputation of education, job prospects after graduation matched with their present image of Turkey as destination to study.

With respect to these rationales of participants from Balkan countries, a qualitative research contributes to understanding how human interaction and experience can be reflected in regional internationalization of higher education. The specific focus of this study is Turkey's being a regional higher education hub for Balkan students. Then, the above data from this research about the student flow from the Balkans into Turkey should be analyzed by considering their region-specific features and dynamics, which is as well supported by the relevant literature that there are varying particular reasons behind student flows in different contexts. In the Turkish context, the underlying beliefs and opinions of Balkan students in the interviews form patterns of support for Turkish regional hub in that they express a visible and dominant texture of socio-cultural, economic and academic rationales. To be specific, the students converge on the idea that cultural and social proximity of Turkey and its being a geographically closer location help Turkey stand out as a regional alternative to the European Union or even the United States at large. This pull factor of Turkey as a regional hub is

also accompanied with positive daily life experiences and fulfilled social and cultural expectations of the participants. Second, the students seem to have admired and benefitted economic stability and economic competitiveness of Turkey compared to relatively more expensive European Higher Education Area and the recent economic crises in European Union. This is justified in the pull factors of Turkey and economic life experiences of students in the interviews. Lastly, the drive to benefit from Turkish academic setting is a commonly stated feature of Turkish higher education hub in a time of increased visibility of Turkey in international university rankings and its competitive quality of education. This idea is grounded in the push and pull factors as well as the experiences and fulfilled expectations of the students.

The study also provides a versatile account of the Balkan students' choice of Turkey as a regional hub for higher education. Studying only pull-push reasons behind the flow of students into an educational hub would give a limited scope for regional internationalization of Turkish higher education. However, the study also incorporates a further evaluation of this flow by incorporating expectations and experiences of student into the study, especially, in terms of understanding how much the pre-assumed conditions and current experiences are fitting. Thus, a contribution to existing literature is evident. Besides, the study provides valuable data for authorities and policy makers in higher education area in order to have competitive plans and bigger share in internationalization in the future.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Some limitations and suggestions for future research about the present study need to be highlighted. Firstly, the study does not have a full coverage of Balkan countries due to sampling choice and practicality. However, future research may reach out to more participants from Balkan countries and conduct quantitative analysis with a more larger and fairly distributed sample from each country. Secondly, the study has not addressed undergraduate and graduate students differently while they may have different motives, demographics, experiences, and expectations. Thus, future studies may have a distinction between undergraduate and graduate students. Thirdly, sampling based on field of study may be a significant factor. Therefore, a study that analyzes the academic rationales more deeply may reveal the motive behind "field specific Turkey choice" of students and similarly, Turkey's field specific

attraction for international students. Next, the choice of unit of analysis, individuals in this case, may be broadened to group or organizational level generalize at national and international levels. To serve this purpose, data from other stake holders such as state and non-governmental organizations, and organizations run by students from the related countries established in Turkey may be enlightening. Finally, a comparative study of different regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia and Balkans may be lucrative. That is, it may be beneficial to study the specific and general reasons of student mobility from these regions. Thus, the increased awareness of flow of students into Turkish higher education hub may help support, triangulate and better understand the regionalization phenomenon of Turkish higher education.

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Türkiye ve Balkan Ülkeleri Arasında Yükseköğretimde Bölgesel Uluslararasılaşma

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Öz

İngilizce konuşan ülkeler yurtdışı eğitim için tercih edilen başlıca merkezler olmalarına rağmen, son yıllarda değişik ülkeler bölgesel çekim merkezleri olarak ortaya çıkmaktadırlar. Türkiye'ye gelen uluslararası öğrenci kitlesi Türkiye'yi de bu merkezlerden biri olarak işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Balkan ülkelerinden gelen öğrencilerin, yurtdışı eğitim için Türkiye'yi seçmelerine neden olan gerekçeleri ve Türkiye'deki öğrenim deneyimlerini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın sonuçları Balkan ülkelerinden gelen öğrencilerin Türkiye'yi temelde sosyo-kültürel yakınlık dolayısıyla seçtiklerini göstermiştir. Sosyo-kültürel yakınlık yanında ekonomik kaygılar ve akademik nitelik Türkiye'deki üniversitelerinde eğitim almak için önemli tercih nedenleri olarak belirtilmiştir. Elde edilen bu sonuçlar, Türkiye'nin yükseköğretimdeki uluslararasılaşmasının, bu konudaki öncü ülkelerin uluslararasılaşmalarından farklı ve özgün temeller üzerinde yükseldiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Yükseköğretimin uluslararasılaşması, bölgesel uluslararasılaşma, öğrenci hareketliliği, Balkan ülkeleri, yükseköğretim, öğrenci doyumu

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Региональная интернационализация в сфере высшего образования между Турцией Балканскими странами

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Аннотация

Несмотря на то, что англоязычные страны по прежнему основное направление для международных студентов, некоторые региональные центры расширяются, чтобы стать новыми вариантами для иностранных студентов. Уровень прибывающих международных студентов позволяет говорить, что Турция один из таких растущих центров для международных студентов. Особенно часто выбирают Турцию как место обучения зарубежом студенты с Балкан. Целью этого количественного исследования являлось исследовать факторы, стимулирующие студентов с Балкан выбирать Турцию для обучения, и их впечатления за время их учебы в Турции. Результаты исследования показали, что социо-культурный фактор является сильным стимулом в решении, где учиться за рубежом. Кроме этого, на втором и третьем месте экономические и академические факторы, которые побуждают студентов с Балкан учиться за рубежом – в Турции. Эти результаты позволяют предположить, что по сравнению с обычными направлениями для международных студентов интернационализация Турции в сфере высшего образования основана на сочетании уникальных показателей.

Ключевые слова

интернационализация в сфере высшего образования, региональная интернационализация, мобильность студентов, страны Балкан, высшее образование, удовлетворение студентов

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