

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' DECISION-  
MAKING PROCESSES: CASE OF SOMALI STUDENTS IN TÜRKİYE

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## ABSTRACT

### PUSH AND PULL FACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' DECISION- MAKING PROCESSES: CASE OF SOMALI STUDENTS IN TÜRKİYE

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Master of Arts, Migration Studies

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International Student Mobility (ISM) has increased four times over the last quarter-century. Meanwhile, showing a remarkable leap, Türkiye has experienced a twenty-time increase in international student inflow. Somali student immigration is a worth-considering case, where a wide range of factors are underway, and this thesis aims to examine why and how these students ended up in Türkiye. Drawing on the literature on migration and ISM, this study analyzes the decision-making processes of international students at the macro, micro, and meso-levels. Although the research benefits from the theories and frameworks offered by the extant research which has focused on the popular destinations at the ‘global center’, the analytical purpose is to reveal how an emerging host country has turned into a viable option rapidly in the eyes of the Somali students. The empirical analysis is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 30 students of Somali origin. The findings reveal that macro-level pre-migration factors were common to all students. While private school students were influenced by micro-level factors such as job prospects and family influence, public-school students were influenced by meso-level factors. Türkiye's policies at the macro-level and facilitating institutions at the meso-level were found to be effective for both groups. Contrary to market-driven assumptions that consider international students as rational consumers, the decision-making processes of these students who were at the periphery of the international education system were marked by limited information and various challenges that impede the alleged utility maximization in both short and long-term plans.

**Keywords:** International Student Mobility, Push-Pull Factors, Türkiye

# ÖZ

## ULUSLARARASI ÖĞRENCİLERİN KARAR VERME SÜREÇLERİNDE İTME VE ÇEKME FAKTÖRLERİ: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SOMALİLİ ÖĞRENCİLER ÖRNEĞİ

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Uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği son çeyrek yüzyılda dört kat artmıştır. Türkiye ise, aynı dönemde kayda değer bir sıçrama göstererek uluslararası öğrenci girişinde yirmi katlık bir artış yaşamıştır. Bu tez, Somalili öğrenci göçünü, çok çeşitli faktörlerin söz konusu olduğu dikkate değer bir vaka olarak ele alarak, bu öğrencilerin neden ve nasıl Türkiye'ye geldiklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Göç ve uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği literatüründen faydalanan çalışma, uluslararası öğrencilerin karar verme süreçlerini makro, mikro ve mezo düzeylerde incelemektedir. Bu araştırma, 'küresel merkezde öne çıkan destinasyonlara odaklanan mevcut araştırmaların sunduğu teori ve çerçevelerden faydalanmakla birlikte, analitik amaç, gelişmekte olan bir ev sahibi ülkenin Somalili öğrencilerin gözünde nasıl hızla uygun bir seçeneğe dönüştüğünü ortaya koymaktır. Ampirik analiz, Somali kökenli otuz öğrenciyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Bulgular, göç öncesi faktörlerin makro düzeyde tüm öğrenciler için ortak olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Özel okul öğrencileri iş beklentileri ve aile etkisi gibi mikro düzeydeki faktörlerden etkilenirken, devlet okulu öğrencileri mezo düzeydeki faktörlerden etkilenmiştir. Türkiye'nin makro düzeydeki politikalarının ve mezo düzeydeki kolaylaştırıcı kurumlarının her iki grup için de etkili olduğu görülmüştür. Uluslararası öğrencileri rasyonel tüketiciler olarak gören piyasa odaklı varsayımların aksine, uluslararası eğitim sisteminin periferisinde yer alan öğrencilerin karar verme süreçlerine hem kısa hem de uzun vadeli planlarını şekillendirdiği iddia edilen fayda maksimizasyonunu engelleyen sınırlı bilgi ve çeşitli zorluklar etki etmiştir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Uluslararası Öğrenci Hareketliliği, İtici-Çekici Faktörler, Türkiye

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD	: Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency)
BÖP	: Büyük Öğrenci Projesi (Grand Student Project)
EU	: European Union
HEI	: Higher Education Institution
HE	: Higher Education
ISM	: International Student Mobility
ICT	: Information and Communication Technology
İHH	: İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı (Humanitarian Relief Foundation)
MEB	: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (Ministry of National Education)
NoS	: Number of students
OECD	: Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development
TDV	: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation)
UK	: United Kingdom
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	: United States of America
WW2	: World War 2
YÖS	: Yabancı Öğrenci Sınavı (Foreign Student Exam)
YTB	: Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities)

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

International student mobility (ISM) is a historical phenomenon and has been encouraged by states in various periods (Choudaha, 2017). Major dynamics of the ISM have been shaped in line with the self-interests of states in different periods, to a great extent (Rizvi, 2011). For example, during the colonization period, colonizer states brought international students to the imperial center to affect and mold the mindset of the elites in the colonized territories (Lomer, 2017). Similarly, in the Cold War era, both camps encouraged international student inflow to create elites that supported them (Bislev, 2017). Although the phenomenon of international students has a historical background, it has increased rapidly in recent years. In 1990, the number of international students was 1.3 million, which increased to 2.1 million in 2000. In 2011, the number of international students reached 4.5 million. Finally, in 2022, the estimated figure reaches 6.5 million. The influx of international students has demonstrated a notable and consistent upward trend in recent decades, surpassing earlier forecasts (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach, 2004; Varghese, 2008; Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Guillerme, 2021; Caribbean, 2022).

This increase in ISM has triggered academic research in various fields (Wells, 2012). In the developing literature, researchers have focused on understanding why students prefer certain countries for education (Kondakçı, 2011). In this literature, for many years, the focus has been on students' most preferred destination countries -i.e., advanced capitalist countries that constitute the global center in many respects. A study by Gümüş et al. (2020) shows that 1548 out of 2064 articles on international students focused on four traditional host countries. These four countries are leading

destination countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia.

With the expansion in ISM, the diversity of students' countries of destination and origin is increasing markedly (Brooks & Waters, 2011). However, despite this increase in diversity, the literature has generally focused on the countries that attract the most students, which limits our understanding of migration dynamics in emerging countries and the factors that influence students choosing to study in these countries. For example, Türkiye had 15,805 international students in 2000, but today this number has inflated to 301,609. Despite this dramatic increase, research focusing on the decision-making processes of international students migrating to Türkiye to study is quite limited.

This thesis aims to examine a recent phenomenon, namely international students choosing Türkiye as a study destination instead of the traditional destination countries. In this context, the focus is on why Türkiye has become attractive to international students. It is of great importance to conduct research focusing on international students migrating to Türkiye as an important example among emerging host countries for international students. Such single case studies on emerging destinations do not only contribute to our understanding of the migration process towards that particular country, but also illuminate the decision-making processes of international students arriving in emerging host countries, in general, that are less explored in the literature.

Global student mobility is often seen through the lenses of higher education (HE) as a sector where students are considered as service-takers and customers. HE is perceived as a paid service in a global market. The terminology matches this perception and is associated with industry and consumerism (Ben-Tsur, 2009). For example, Naidoo (2003, p. 250) points out that HE is a "service that can be sold in the

global marketplace ", while Altbach (2004, p. 20) argues that "international HE is big business for countries importing foreign students". However, in reality, education is more than a consumer good. It is also a way out for the youth in communities affected by conflict and violence. For some students, education holds additional promises; moving to a safe haven from conflict and violence-affected areas is perceived as an opportunity not only for better education and different experiences but also for the search for a better and more secure future (Kirkegaard & Nat-George, 2016).

The perception of HE as a commodity often leads to the idea that all students are consumers who make rational decisions (R. Naidoo, 2003). This approach is based on the assumption that international students are treated as a homogenous group and that their decision-making processes are similar (Mercy Mpinganjira, 2012). However, studies such as Kondakçı (2011), by placing students into different categories according to their regions of origin, have shown that these student groups differ in terms of motivations and drivers for studying abroad. In particular, students from regions where, the young people suffer from various political and economic challenges, cannot be expected to go through the same decision-making processes as other groups. For example, 1 out of every 30 international students in Türkiye is of Somali origin and these students have migrated from their countries where they face conflict and environmental pressures such as drought, floods, and economic hardship. This suggests that the factors affecting these students may be different from those of students from other regions such as Europe and America. Therefore, to better understand this group of students' decision-making processes and migration experiences, it is necessary to examine the situation of students from regions where push factors-i.e., adverse conditions at home - are particularly intense.

Considering international students as decision-makers gives the impression that they are influenced by micro-level factors and their decisions are less affected by macro-level factors (Wells, 2012). However, the influence of state policies on students' decision-making has a long history (Kahanec & Králiková, 2011). ISM is influenced by national, international, and regional dynamics (Prazeres, 2013). Nevertheless, government incentives have a particularly important influence on these students' decision-making processes (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). For example, in the United States, the development of the information technology (IT) sector has attracted skilled workers from abroad (Choudaha, 2017). In this context, international student influx for IT-related degrees that would create the prospective workforce was a strategic move from a host country's viewpoint. In addition, many governments have encouraged international students by providing financial support to universities for internationalization (Beets & Willekens, 2009). Historically, for many years, the promotion of international students as a foreign policy tool has also had a significant impact (Kiran & Açikalin, 2021). For example, some colonizers sought to create an elite class sympathetic to the colonial center by encouraging international students during the colonization period. Later super powers saw international student mobility as a strategic tool during the Cold War, too. In the post-Cold War period, international students were welcome as a potential soft power linkage, and these incentives influenced the decision-making processes of international students.

Although it is accepted that state policies are determinants in the decision-making processes of international students, studies examining the impact of these factors on decision-making processes are quite limited in the literature (Kahanec & Králiková, 2011). To understand the factors influencing international students' decision-making processes, a holistic research approach that does not ignore meso- and micro-level



factors while evaluating these factors should be adopted (Chen, 2016). This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding by encompassing all factors that influence decision-making processes. Relying on the analytical lenses provided by the extant research to be covered in the literature review chapter, this thesis aims to provide an in-depth analysis of this issue by focusing specifically on the following research questions.

What are the push factors that lead Somali students to pursue HE abroad?

What are the pull factors that influence Somali students' choice of Türkiye as a study destination?

What is the role of push and pull factors at micro, meso, and macro-levels in Somali students' decision-making processes?

What stages do Somali students go through in choosing an educational institution in Türkiye?

What are the salient patterns that emerge in Somali students' plans after their educational experiences in Türkiye?

The thesis consists of the following five chapters. The first chapter is titled "International Student Mobility: Concept and Dynamics". In this chapter, international student terminology, an overview of international student mobility and Turkey's international student mobility are discussed. In the literature review chapter, the main approaches that influence international students' decision-making processes, such as the "push-pull" theory, are discussed and how this theory is applied in the field of ISM is examined in detail. The methodology chapter comprises case selection, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and methodological limitations of the study. In the findings section, the results of the study are presented in detail. Finally, the thesis concludes with the overall evaluation of the research with a comprehensive

discussion to address both the empirical contribution and limitations clearly and concisely.



## CHAPTER II

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY: CONCEPTS AND DYNAMICS

#### 2.1. Terminology

The terminology used to refer to students who study abroad varies across different countries and contexts in international HE (Wells, 2012.; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007; Teichler, 2017). This variation makes it difficult to compare and analyze student mobility and create a comprehensive database of international student information (Vögtle & Windzio, 2016). The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia use the term "international student" to describe these students, while France, Italy, Japan, and Korea label them as "foreign students" (Sağiroğlu, 2011). To illustrate the worldwide terminological variation, Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) studied the preferences and definitions of "international students" and "foreign students" in different countries. In Türkiye, although the term international student is used in legal texts, foreign student is also used in some documents (for more information, see the chapter on ISM in Türkiye in this thesis). Although some scholars use "foreign student" and "expatriate student" interchangeably, "international student" is the most commonly used term in scholarly literature and is widely accepted (Boyaci & Oz, 2019).

UNESCO offers a tentative definition of an international student as "someone who has crossed a national or territorial border for education and is now enrolled outside their country of origin" (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). UNESCO advocates for the term 'internationally mobile students' as a more precise representation of both incoming and outgoing student movements, countering the conventional reliance on citizenship

alone; this concept, incorporating factors like permanent residency and prior educational background, mitigates potential discrepancies stemming from diverse, country-specific definitions, thereby promoting clarity and facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of global mobility patterns (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007).

There are three distinct categories within ISM, each characterized by different underlying principles (Sağiroğlu, 2011). The first category encompasses students who, as a part of their degree program at their home institution, spend a predetermined period at another higher education institution (HEI), typically a semester or a year. Exchange programs like Erasmus and Mevlana, facilitating cross-border academic experiences, fall under this category. The second category pertains to students who have already completed their HE and opt to study at another HEI for a shorter duration, often without the intention of acquiring additional academic credits. These students may engage in language courses, laboratory research projects in foreign HEIs, or internships in external companies or organizations. The students falling into the first two categories are generally labeled as "temporarily mobile", "short-term mobile", or "credit mobile" (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). The third and central category focuses on individuals who traverse international borders to pursue complete degree programs at foreign HEIs. Students in this group are designated as "diploma-mobile" or "degree-mobile" (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). This thesis primarily concentrates on the last subgroup, "degree-mobile" or "diploma-mobile."

## **2.2. International Student Mobility**

The historical context of ISM within HE reveals a long-established and enduring phenomenon. Universities have traditionally served as attractive hubs for students

from diverse geographic regions, emphasizing the pivotal role of intellectual exchange in disseminating knowledge and ideas (Rizvi, 2011). Historical records substantiate instances where individuals from distant areas embarked on extensive journeys to enroll in ancient universities like India, China, and the Middle East (Gümüő et al., 2020). Throughout history, the promotion of idea exchange and intercultural learning has consistently been integral to the overarching mission of HE. However, it is essential to recognize the notable diversity in guiding principles and institutional structures overseeing this mobility over time (Hou & Du, 2022).

Policies and objectives related to international students have undergone significant transformations throughout history. During the colonial era, colonial powers implemented policies aimed at cultivating a local elite sympathetic to the economic and political agendas of the colonial rulers (Bislev, 2017). Education was strategically used to create a class aligned with colonial interests. In the Cold War era, policies shifted toward attracting international students to exert soft power and foster goodwill. Initiatives like the Fulbright Scholarships were designed to build cultural and academic ties, serving the strategic geopolitical interests of the US as the superpower of the Western bloc (Lomer, 2017).

While ISM has historical antecedents, its manifestation in the form of millions of students traversing national borders has become particularly pronounced only in the past 25 years. Choudaha (2017) delineates three waves that have significantly shaped the trajectory of ISM during this quarter-century period. The inaugural wave, spanning 1999-2008, was propelled by the escalating demand for highly skilled labor, catalyzed by the burgeoning influence of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the 1990s. This epoch witnessed the implementation of substantial scholarship programs, research grants, and facilitative measures, including streamlined work visas,

predominantly in the United States, to incentivize the influx of international students. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks and subsequent acts of terrorism, visa requirements for students became more stringent. The second wave, coinciding with the 2008 global financial crisis, witnessed a deliberate facilitation of admission processes for international students. This initiative aimed to augment foreign currency inflows and improve universities' fiscal constraints. Given the average annual tuition fees nearing \$25,000 and living costs amounting to \$12,000 in the United States (Ortiz et al., 2015), international student inflow presents a financially lucrative dynamic, particularly appealing to nations facing economic vulnerabilities and to universities with budget constraints. The third wave, characterized by three pivotal components, included the economic deceleration in China, the foremost contributor to outbound student flows. This economic downturn diminished the inclination and opportunity for Chinese students to pursue overseas education (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007; Choudaha, 2017). Simultaneously, the political landscape marked by the election of Trump and the accompanying surge in anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States, a principal host country for international students, significantly impacted global mobility patterns. The final determinant within this wave was the United Kingdom's decision to exit the European Union, commonly known as Brexit (Choudaha, 2017). This has resulted in students, particularly from the EU, turning to other alternative destinations (Falkingham et al., 2021). Factors such as increasingly restricted freedom of movement, fewer post-graduation job opportunities, and tightening visa rules have led many international students to view the UK as a less hospitable place for international students and to look elsewhere for destinations (Peters et al., 2021).

In the face of escalating anti-immigrant sentiments and stringent visa regulations in the United States and the United Kingdom—preeminent destinations for international

students—coupled with a deceleration in China's economic growth, the primary source of international student enrollment, the global influx of international students has displayed resilience rather than decrease. Several factors underpin this phenomenon. Foremost among them is the intensification of global competition, wherein restrictions and limitations in a prominent destination have prompted prospective international students to redirect their attention to alternative English-speaking nations, with Australia and New Zealand emerging remarkably in this context (Peters et al., 2021). The high demand for higher education, especially in developing countries, stems from the inability of the educational infrastructure to meet this demand. This, together with the increase in the youth population, leads to the inadequacy of local universities and students seeking education abroad. Notably, the initiation of the Bologna process and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), aimed at enhancing student mobility within Europe, has catalyzed an augmented flow of students toward countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). These nations, actively promoting student mobility, have become increasingly attractive alternatives, particularly in response to restrictive measures in the United States.

**Figure 2.1.** Number of international students between 1997-2020



Source: Guillerme (2021) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, October 2022.

Three primary repositories collect pertinent data concerning the current ISM. UNESCO, which offers comprehensive data through its publications, including "Data on Foreign Students in Tertiary-Level Education" and the UIS-published "UNESCO Statistical Yearbook and Global Education Digest, stands out as the major cross-sectional and standardized data provider." This authoritative source provides extensive information on ISM across more than 212 countries, establishing the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook as a preeminent repository for systematic data (Hou & Du, 2022; Macrander, 2017). The second notable source is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which publishes the "Education at a Glance" reports. These reports systematically present data on ISM within OECD and partner countries, contributing to a nuanced understanding of global educational trends (Vögtle & Windzio, 2016). The final noteworthy source is the "Atlas of Student Mobility," a publication by the Institute of International Education, which



comprehensively depicts student mobility patterns (Hou & Du, 2022). For introductory descriptive figures, this thesis relies on UNESCO's repository and scientific publications because of their reliability and comprehensive coverage.

A 2020 report by UNESCO reveals that the total registered number of international students in the surveyed countries stands at 6,361,963. Notably, Europe hosts the most students, a phenomenon attributed significantly to facilitative agreements among European Union countries fostering student mobility (Choudaha & De Wit, 2014). Asia emerges as the second most favored continent for international students, and a significant contributing factor to this preference lies in its status as the region is home to the largest population of HE students (Guillerme, 2021). Within the scholarly discourse, cultural and geographical proximity influence students' preferences (Vögtle & Windzio, 2016; Kondakci et al., 2016). The literature underlines those students, often guided by cultural and geographic affinities, gravitate towards regions with substantial concentrations of HE learners, reinforcing Asia's appeal in the global landscape of ISM. Furthermore, restrictive visa processes in Europe and America and high living and educational costs drive students towards new destinations, with Asia emerging as the foremost choice (Gao & De Wit, 2017).

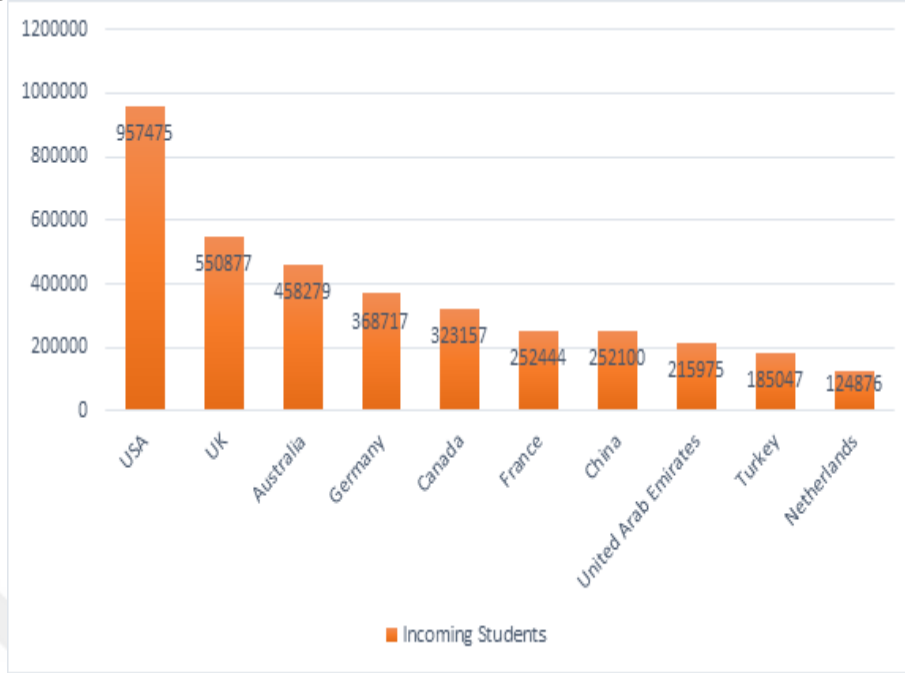
Conversely, Africa is the continent hosting the fewest students, a fact primarily attributed to inadequate HEI and associated expenditures, discouraging student preferences for this region (Maringe & Carter, 2007). Current statistics for other continents are provided in Table 2.1.

Continent	Number of International Students
Europe	2.486.491
Asia	1.590.388
North America	1.280.701
Australia	509.929
South America	271.326
Africa	223.128

**Table 2.1.** Global Patterns: Continent-wise Distribution of ISM (Guillherme, 2021)

Ranked as the foremost destination for international students, the United States has consistently held this prominent position over many years (Altbach, 2004). Noteworthy for hosting the highest volume of international students, the United States has enrolled approximately 958 thousand students, albeit experiencing a marginal decline of roughly 2% compared to 2019. Conversely, the United Kingdom, securing the second-highest enrollment, exhibited a notable increase of 13%, enrolling 550,000 students in the same timeframe. It is pertinent to highlight that the top five countries collectively accounted for more than 45% of the international student population (see Figure 2.2.). Within the top 10, having evolved into regional attractors through facilitators such as robust scholarship programs and streamlined visa processes, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates emerge conspicuously (Kondakci et al., 2018; Ahmad & Hussain, 2017).

**Figure 2.2.** Countries Hosting Most International Students in 2020



Source: Guillerme (2021) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, October 2022.

### 2.3. International Student Mobility in Türkiye

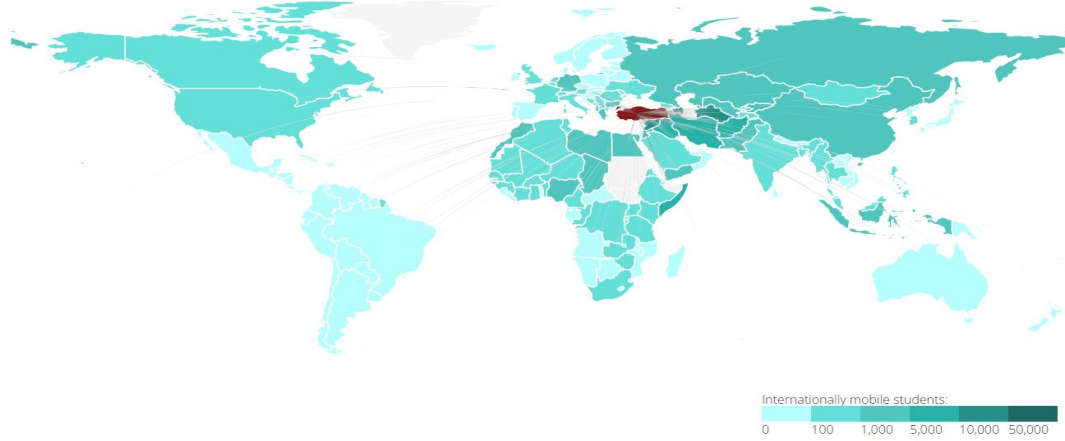
The historical trajectory of international students in Türkiye traces its roots back to the Ottoman Empire, predating the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye (Sağiroğlu, 2011). Although this thesis does not provide a complete overview of Türkiye's international student history, it aims to provide a general framework of ISM since the 1990s. In this context, it will first examine the development of international students within the legal framework and then focus on the global, regional, and national dynamics affecting ISM in Türkiye.

The term "foreign student" made its initial appearance in Turkish legal texts in 1983 (Yılmaz & Güçlü, 2021). According to the Law on Foreign Students Studying in Türkiye, these individuals are defined as students who either come to Türkiye independently or are supported by scholarships offered to foreign governments by the Turkish government through various agreements. The Regulation on Foreign Students Studying in Türkiye (Türkiye'de Öğrenim Gören Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrencilere İlişkin

Yönetmelik) further defines them as individuals not holding Turkish citizenship, studying in educational institutions of all degrees and branches, or attending Turkish language courses. Subsequently, the Law on the Organization and Duties of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities in 2010 broadened the definition to encompass those deemed suitable to study in Türkiye by public institutions and organizations, as well as students arriving in Türkiye for education within the framework of international agreements (Demirhan, 2017; Yılmaz & Güçlü, 2021; Bolat, 2017). Despite these legal definitions, the persistent use of the term "foreign student" in public discourse has negative implications, leading to a lack of necessary attention to these students and perpetuating negative connotations (Bolat, 2017). In 2011, legal amendments introduced the term "international student" to address these concerns (Ozer, 2012). However, the terminology shift has remained partial, as evidenced by the continued use of today's "Foreign Student Exam" (YÖS) for admission exams.

The number of international students in Türkiye currently stands at 301,609 and is constantly increasing due to various factors. Türkiye has become an important destination for international student migration, attracting students from across the globe (see Map 2.1. for details). The increase in international student enrollment in Türkiye is shaped by the interaction of global, regional, and national dynamics. A tripartite framework can be presented to explain this increase.

**Map 2.1.** Map of International Students Coming to Türkiye



Source: (*Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students*, 2019)

At the global level, globalization is behind the increase in demand for HE. Increasing economic integration and advances in communication technologies are facilitating young people's access to international education opportunities (Choudaha & De Wit, 2014). On the other hand, as a counter dynamic, visa restrictions and anti-immigrant sentiments in traditional destination countries are causing international students to change their preferences, in other words, they diversify the destinations but do not curtail the international mobility (Hou & Du, 2022).

Regional dynamics play a decisive role in understanding the observed increase in Türkiye's international student population (Kondakci et al., 2018). Türkiye's convenient location offers the potential to provide a safe study and living environment for students, especially in the face of political turmoil and uncertainty in neighboring regions (Yılmaz, 2021). For example, with the outbreak of the war in Syria, Türkiye has been one of the countries offering asylum to the largest number of Syrian refugees. This has led to Syrian students gaining an important place in the international student community in Türkiye.

Türkiye's attractiveness to international students is particularly related to its close geographical and cultural ties with numerous sending countries. For example, students from neighboring countries such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq constitute a significant proportion of Türkiye's international student population. The proportion of students from these countries underpins Türkiye's capacity to attract international students. The Turkic Republics, which have long held an important position among Türkiye's sources of international students, particularly Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, have played an important role in increasing Türkiye's international student numbers (see Table 2.2. for details). The increase in students from European countries, especially from geographically and culturally close regions such as the Balkans, also emphasizes the importance of Türkiye's relations with these regions (Kondakçı et al., 2018).

Name of Country	Number of Students
Syria	58.213
Azerbaijan	34.247
Iranian	22.632
Turkmenistan	18.250
Iraq	16.172
Somalia	10.043
Egypt	9597
Afghanistan	9203
Kazakhstan	8864
Yemen	8198

**Table 2.2.** Top 10 Source States for International Students in Türkiye (*Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, 2023*)

At the national level, Türkiye's use of various policy instruments to encourage an increase in international student enrollment is noteworthy (Aras & Mohammed, 2019).

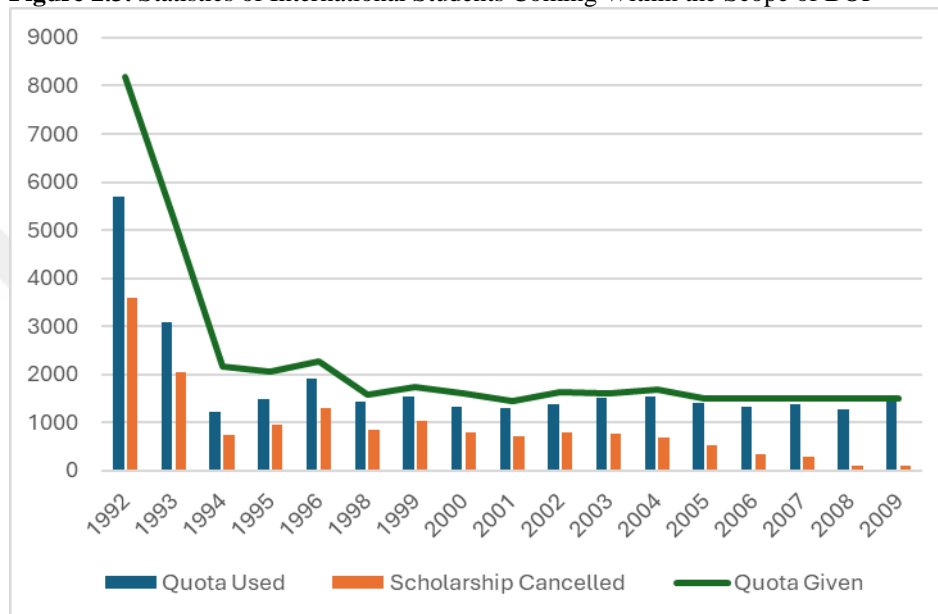
Eased admission procedures and various incentives make Türkiye an attractive study destination for international students (Nguluma et al., 2019). In addition, scholarship programs and diplomatic agreements also make Türkiye a preferred study destination (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). This trend is also supported by universities increasing their international student quotas (Yılmaz, 2021).

An important factor determining Türkiye's international student policy is its use as a foreign policy tool (Kiran & Acikalin, 2021). In the post-Cold War era, Türkiye strategically encouraged student exchange programs and cooperative educational projects with Central Asian Republics to strengthen its historical and cultural ties (Bolat, 2017). In particular, the promotion of international students from these regions has been facilitated through various scholarship programs such as state scholarships and the Grand Student Project (BÖP). These initiatives aim to encourage students to study in Türkiye and build lasting relationships with these countries (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). These initiatives included scholarships offered under the BÖP, government scholarships provided by ministries or different government agencies, and private scholarships provided by various foundations or associations (Yılmaz & Güçlü, 2021).

The introduction of the BÖP in the 1992-1993 academic year played a critical role in the significant increase in international student enrollment (Kavak & Baskan, 2001), especially from the Turkic Republics under bilateral agreements (see Figure 2.3. for annual quotas and admissions). From the 1992-93 academic year to the 1999-2000 academic year, 24,302 scholarship placements were made available for students from the Turkic republics, the Balkans, and Turkic communities in Asia. 18,690 students benefited from the program in the aforementioned period. A significant portion of the international students in this period were scholarship students.

Those studying in Türkiye on state scholarships received a range of benefits including accommodation in dormitories, transportation in certain cities, health insurance, travel assistance to and from their home countries, scholarships, books and stationery, clothing, residence permit fees, and university contributions (Bolat, 2017).

**Figure 2.3.** Statistics of International Students Coming Within the Scope of BOP

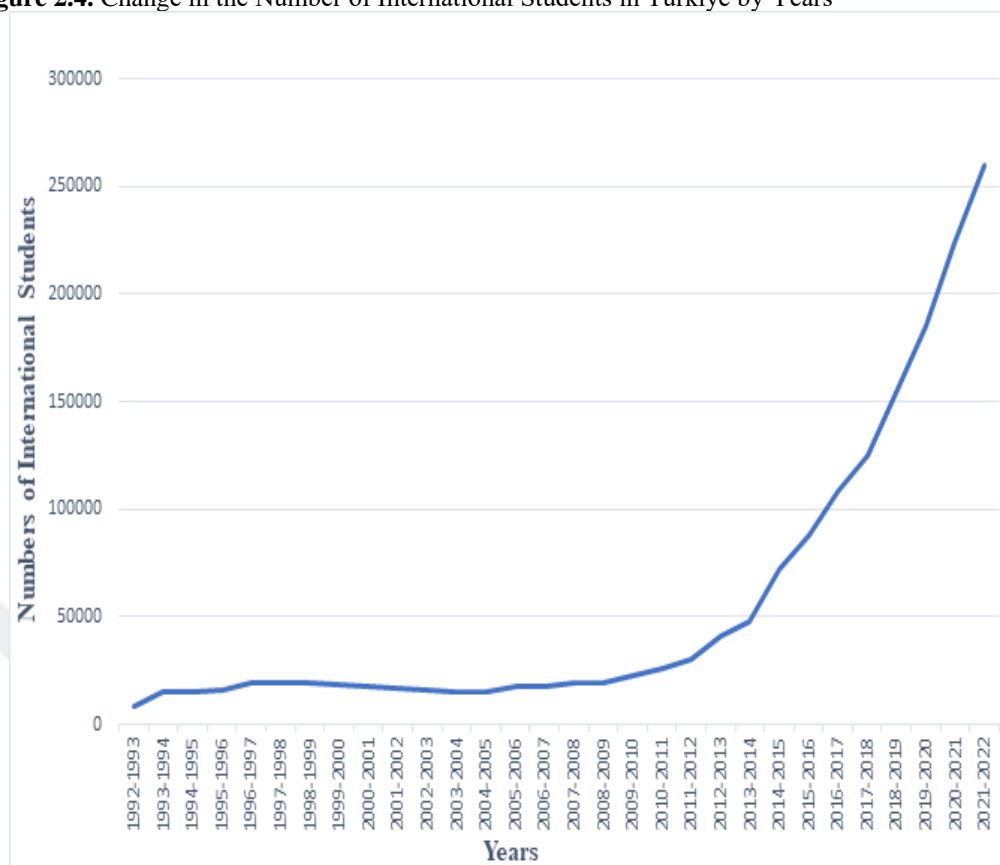


Source: (Özoğlu et al., 2012)

The influx of international students faced challenges, such as political uncertainty in 1997 and the economic crisis in 1999, and thus showed a downward trend until 2004 (Ozer, 2012). However, there was a recovery in international student enrollment from the following years until 2010 (see Figure 2.4.). In 2010, the abolition of centralized examinations for international students' admission to universities and the authorization of universities to implement their own autonomous examination and assessment processes was an important turning point (Bolat, 2017).



**Figure 2.4.** Change in the Number of International Students in Türkiye by Years



Source: Compiled by the author from Özoğlu et al. (2012) and YÖK annual statistical data.

In 2012, Türkiye's international student policies underwent fundamental changes. These changes included the restructuring of Türkiye's international student strategy and scholarship programs in line with new foreign policy initiatives (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). Before 2012, scholarships for international students were provided by various public institutions. However, in 2012, this changed, and publicly funded scholarship programs were coordinated under the Prime Ministry. For many years, scholarships under the BÖP were only for students from selected regions, as they were offered under a regional constraint (Ejder, 2019). On the other hand, the support provided under the Türkiye scholarships covered a wider geography. In addition, the scholarship quota was almost doubled in 2012 (see Figure 2.3.). Türkiye Scholarships programs have adopted new strategies aimed at attracting students

globally and making it easier for international students to apply through the online system (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). These programs and the quotas allocated to countries under these programs are planned according to foreign policy priorities and the development needs of the targeted countries, in addition to strengthening diplomatic, cultural, and economic relations (Bolat, 2017).

Türkiye has made efforts to increase ISM not only through scholarships but also through a series of incentive policies. However, despite these general efforts, some studies examining Türkiye's international student policy have raised concerns and criticisms that efforts to attract international students and internationalize HEI in Türkiye have been ineffective (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). For example, a report by the British Council (2015) criticized that it is difficult to state that Türkiye has an effective international student policy due to the lack of a clear and identifiable policy for international students in Türkiye.

As a notable example of the lack of effective policy, in 2016, the number of scholarship students accounted for almost half of the international student population, whereas in 2017 there was a radical change in this situation and the scholarship quota was reduced by almost a third. This drastic change is seen because of uncertainty about the effectiveness of Türkiye's scholarship policy. A report by the British Council (2015) found that 40 percent of scholarship students do not maintain their scholarships. Moreover, several studies have highlighted that many scholarship students return home without completing the degree program they are enrolled in.

Although Türkiye radically reduced the number of scholarship students in 2017, owing to other policies, Türkiye's international student numbers have grown substantially. During this period, Türkiye's international student enrollment has

remained stable, thanks to its balanced management of the effects of the change in scholarship policy.

In summary, global, regional, and national dynamics play an active role in the increase in the number of international students in Türkiye. However, there are not enough studies on the impact of national policies on ISM. Recent studies have emphasized Türkiye's post-Cold War international student policy as an important foreign policy tool (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). However, most of these studies have explored documents and policy shifts related to Türkiye's international student policy. For example, Nguluma et al. (2019) study examines how Türkiye used the scholarship policy as a soft power tool, while Atabaş and Köse's (2023) study explores how Türkiye used the scholarship policy as part of its African opening policy. As Nye notes, "The effectiveness of public diplomacy is measured not by dollars spent or flashy production packages, but by minds changed (as demonstrated in interviews or surveys)" (as cited in Aras & Mohammed, 2019) In this context, Aras and Mohammed's study is an exception, as they examine the impact of Türkiye's international student policy on the decision-making processes of scholarship students through interviews.

This research examines the factors affecting the increase in the number of international students in Türkiye. Academic studies focusing on the decision-making processes of international students migrating to Türkiye for education are quite limited. Two important studies stand out in the literature. One of them is the study conducted by Kondakçı (2011), which used the narrative method to understand the decision-making processes of international students. The other important study is qualitative research conducted by Özoğlu et al. (2015).

In this thesis, the case of Somalia is analyzed as an important example reflecting Türkiye's international student policy. In this study, the attractive factors as well as the push factors that influence students from Somalia to choose Türkiye for their education are discussed in detail. This assessment is conducted within a broad framework that includes not only the impact of Türkiye's international student policy but also other micro and meso-level factors that influence students' decisions. In addition, push factors affecting students' willingness to study abroad are also addressed within the scope of the research.



## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

ISM has received increasing attention in academia, with numbers crossing the million mark for the first time 25 years ago (Altbach, 2004; Nicolescu & Galalae, 2013; Gumus et al., 2020; Lo, 2019). However, there is a lack of comprehensive and systematic assessment of the literature and disciplinary categorization is an important strategy to fill this gap (Wells, 2012). This methodological approach allows for a more detailed examination of different aspects of ISM.

As academic interest in this field has grown, much research has been conducted on a variety of topics. In addition to the dominant fields identified by Wells (2012) such as education, sociology of education and migration studies, related disciplines such as cultural studies, international relations and economics have also examined the intricate details of this phenomenon. (Nicolescu & Galalae, 2013a). This thesis first aims to examine the literature surrounding the push-pull approach, a prominent theoretical framework extensively employed in migration studies, particularly within the context of international students, and then will provide additional theoretical and analytical insights originating from various disciplines (Wells, 2012).

#### **3.1. Push-Pull Theory**

The Push-Pull theory is a widely used framework that helps explain the complex dynamics of migration (Dorigo & Tobler, 1983). Thoroughly examined by scholars such as Stouffer (1940) in the preceding years, the push-pull concepts found their theoretical formulation in Lee's (1966) seminal work, "A Theory of Migration" (Özcan, 2017). This model focuses on the motivating factors that drive individuals to

leave one place and settle in another (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). The push-pull paradigm is a prototype within neo-classical migration theories, which examine migration as a phenomenon shaped by income disparities and opportunities between source and destination regions (De Haas, 2011). According to proponents of this theory, migrants experience "push" factors that propel them from their origin and "pull" factors that attract them to a new destination (Dorigo & Tobler, 1983). Push factors include poverty, unemployment, political instability, conflict, persecution, and environmental degradation, while pull factors encompass economic opportunities, improved living conditions, freedom, security, and aspirations for a better life (Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014). The theory, instead of prioritizing a particular variable or a set of key variables, recognizes that migration often results from different combinations of factors (Parkins, 2010). Although the push-pull approach is based on the assumption that migration decisions are rational choices for income optimization, it is an eclectic perspective acknowledging the influence of non-rational and unconscious determinants shaped by social, cultural, and personal factors (Haug, 2008).

Skeldon (1990) and various scholars have critiqued push-pull theory for its perceived oversimplification and determinism; however, Van Hear et al. (2018) contend that it continues to provide valuable insights by making room for the pivotal role of structural forces in the migration phenomenon. On the other hand, post-modern scholars, despite their successful deconstruction and refutation of traditional historical-structural, neo-classical theories, and push-pull models, have faced challenges in proposing alternative frameworks amenable to empirical research (Van Hear et al., 2018). Meanwhile, economists and quantitatively oriented social scientists adhere to simplistic neo-classical assumptions and popular push-pull models despite their

apparent limitations in comprehensively explaining real-world migration patterns (de Haas, 2021). The second criticism directed at the Push-Pull theory is its alleged emphasis solely on pull factors, neglecting the significance of push factors. Numerous empirical investigations have demonstrated the predominant impact of pull factors on migration decision-making (Zaiceva & Zimmermann, 2008; Van Hear et al., 2018; Wells, 2012).

Nevertheless, contemporary literature, particularly recently, has seen a surge in studies that examine both push and pull factors, with an increased focus on push factors (Maringe & Carter, 2007). It is essential to clarify that the push-pull theory does not exclusively concentrate on push or pull factors but integrates both. Moreover, it serves as a comprehensive theoretical framework that extends beyond the dichotomy of push and pull, incorporating various elements such as inhibitors, facilitators, and drivers. The third criticism directed at the Push-Pull theory pertains to its assumption that the transfer of labor from economically disadvantaged regions to affluent regions and countries, coupled with the reciprocal flow of capital from affluent countries to impoverished ones, would diminish economic disparities between the origin and destination regions and countries (de Haas, 2010). Disputing this perspective, Castles and Kosack (1973) contend that persistent inequalities arise. From centuries of exploitation of economically disadvantaged countries by affluent nations, instigate migration. Furthermore, they argue that such migration is perpetuated by the structures inherent in the labor markets of affluent countries (Van Hear et al., 2018). The theory faces another criticism for assuming that individuals consistently make rational decisions to optimize their income, particularly during its initial introduction (Haug, 2008). Despite acknowledging that rationality is always limited because of restricted access to and processing of information, it is essential to note that this constraint does

not entirely negate individual rationality (Van Hear et al., 2018). Indeed, empirical studies and historical-structural theories emphasize the significant role of economic factors, especially considering the challenges migrants encounter in enhancing their living conditions. Rejecting that individual income maximization entirely explains migration does not imply the absence of economic motives in migration decisions (Wells, 2012). Surveys consistently highlight the relevance of economic considerations, particularly for impoverished migrants, and macro-level analyses emphasize the influence of economic growth and labor demand on migration rates (De Haas, 2021).

### **3.2. Push-Pull Theory on International Students**

One of the foundational theoretical frameworks extensively employed for elucidating the migration patterns of international students is the push-pull theory (Chen, 2016; Wells, 2012). A seminal exploration within this theoretical paradigm was conducted by McMahon (1992), representing one of the pioneering endeavors to apply the aforementioned push-pull theory to reveal the multifaceted factors influencing the decision-making processes of international students. McMahon's (1992) investigation, concentrating on the migration patterns of students from 18 countries to the United States, provides a comprehensive push-and-pull model grounded in two distinct sets of determinants. The push factors encompass elements tethered to the source country, incorporating pivotal aspects such as the economic robustness of the country of origin, the extent of the country's engagement in the global economy, the availability of HE opportunities within the country of origin, and the priority accorded to education by the originating country. Conversely, the pull factors encapsulate determinants influencing students within the destination country such as the political and economic affiliations between the host country and the country of origin, the economic prowess



of the host country vis-à-vis the country of origin, and the level of financial support extended to international students.

Although McMahon's (1992) push–pull model proves valuable in elucidating global trends in international student migration, it provides limited insights into the intricacies of individual decision-making processes or the diverse factors influencing these processes (Wells, 2012). Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study is another study that analyzes international students' decision-making processes within the push-pull theory framework. The authors articulate a three-stage framework, delineating sequential phases in the decision-making process. In the first stage, the student decides whether to study at home or abroad. At this stage factors related to the country of origin come to the fore and are often referred to as push factors. The second stage then highlights the emergence of pull factors, where the differentiation of one host country as more favorable than others becomes salient in the decision-making calculation. Finally, the third stage corresponds to the student's choice of an educational institution, a complex process shaped by a myriad of pull factors that give a particular institution greater appeal than its peers. The limitation of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study is that they do not include the dynamics of course and degree choice in the decision-making process (Wadhwa, 2016).

Lee and Tan's seminal study on ISM elucidates the predominant direction of student flow, originating from less developed countries and converging towards developed nations (Özoğlu et al., 2015). The research systematically explores the multifaceted factors influencing this migration, revealing that critical determinants include an excess demand for HE in the less developed source countries, the quality of education in these origins, cost-of-living differentials, geographical distances between source

and destination countries, historical connections, and language considerations (Lee & Tan, 1984).

Kondakçı (2011), using the push-pull theory and Massey et al.'s (1993) theoretical perspective of initiating and sustaining migration to explain migration movements, offers a two-party categorization for the factors influential before and after the migration process, namely. Pre-migration decisions are usually driven by factors related to the source country, and they are analyzed under the headings of individuals and the public drivers. Post-migration factors are related to the destination country and are again divided into two main groups: public and personal.

In the literature, pull factors are usually attributed to host countries and push factors to home countries. However, Li & Bray (2007) note that 'reverse push and pull factors' are also important. This refers to reverse pull factors that lead students to stay in their home country and reverse push factors that are effective in the source country before migration. Reverse pull factors are those that lead students to study in their home country and consist of factors such as linguistic and cultural security, social and family ties, and lower cost of living. Reverse push factors refer to factors that affect the student in the source country before migration and include language problems, fear of discrimination, and high cost of living.

A major characteristic of this literature has been the concentration of studies on English-speaking host countries, particularly those traditionally recognized as destination nations for international students (Chen, 2016). Research in this domain, exemplified by studies like Padlee et al. (2010), underscores the pivotal role of English proficiency in students' decision-making processes. Classical destinations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, are prominently featured, with preferences shaped by factors such as institutional reputation, robust

employment opportunities, and the educational quality and diversity offered by cities in these nations (Chen, 2016).

A noticeable shift in research focus has emerged in recent years, turning attention to countries traditionally regarded as destinations but experiencing a surge in hosting international students (Hou & Du, 2022). For instance, historically known for sending a significant number of students (NoS) abroad, China has emerged as a notable host in the region, prompting a burgeoning body of research (Gao & De Wit, 2017; Ma & Zhao, 2018; Yang, 2022; Jiani, 2017). Similarly, though traditionally viewed as a destination already, Türkiye has seen a surge in student numbers, attracting scholarly interest. Pioneering studies by Kondakci (2011) and Özoğlu et al. (2015) delve into the decision-making processes of international students choosing Türkiye as their destination. Additionally, a growing body of research explores decision-making processes among international students opting for destinations such as the United Arab Emirates (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017).

In analyses focusing on traditional destination countries, important factors influencing international students' decision-making processes include employment opportunities, increased government spending on education, city image, the reputation of educational institutions, and quality of faculty (Cubillo et al., 2006). Conversely, in recent scholarly investigations concentrating on the decision-making processes of students opting for countries that have experienced a burgeoning influx of international students, salient factors include cultural affinity, geographic proximity, the availability of scholarships, students' inclination to engage with diverse cultures, and considerations of affordability (Kondakci, 2011).

While specific studies categorize push-pull theory as a framework scrutinizing micro-level factors (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016), its predominant

classification designates it as a theory centered on macro-level considerations (Van Hear et al., 2018). The crux of the level of analysis debate within migration studies echoes the famous structure-agent discussion in all social sciences, indeed (Wells, 2012). Structures encompass the comprehensive social, political, economic, and cultural frameworks molding individual lives (Goss & Lindquist, 1995). These structures wield influence over migration decisions by either creating conditions propelling individuals to leave their home countries (push factors) or attracting them to new destinations (pull factors). For instance, push factors include economic inequalities, political instability, and environmental degradation, whereas pull factors encompass better economic opportunities, political stability, and the promise of an elevated quality of life.

Agency, on the other hand, denotes the capacity of individuals to make choices and act in alignment with their motivations and desires (Bailey, 2001). It emphasizes the role of individual decision-making processes, personal circumstances, and social networks in shaping migration trajectories. Although structures form the backdrop of migration decisions, individuals are not passive entities; they actively interpret, manipulate, and sometimes resist these structures (Van Hear et al., 2018). The fundamental question in social sciences, especially in migration studies, revolves around why people migrate (Massey et al., 1993). Structural factors answer this question, yet they fall short of elucidating why some individuals impacted by these structural reasons opt for migration while others prefer staying home. While structural factors can explain, this perspective proves insufficient, as it relegates the agent to a passive role. For instance, it overshadows the free choice of a student migrating from China to America for education, highlighting rather structural factors like America's immigration policies.

Informed by the weaknesses and criticisms in the extant research, this study neither underestimates the agency nor disregards institutional and structural factors. Instead, decisions are considered as the outcome of the interplay between these social structures and agency. In other words, the analytical perspective is beyond the mere dichotomy of micro versus macro processes and factors and adopts a multi-level understanding.

### **3.3. Three levels of Push-Pull Factors Among Students' Decision to Study Abroad**

#### **3.3.a. Micro-level Factors Affecting Student Mobility**

The micro-level analysis focuses on the individual motivations, aspirations, and circumstances that shape international student decision-making processes (Chen, 2016). This includes personal goals, academic aspirations, financial considerations, and cultural preferences. Research at the micro-level can provide insights into why individual students choose to study abroad, the challenges they face, and the factors that contribute to their success or failure. In addition to these individual factors, the perspective of migration as a family strategy, as highlighted by dual labor economic theory, suggests that families may decide to send one or more members to study abroad to improve the family's overall financial well-being (Massey et al., 1993). This strategy may involve the student working part-time or full-time while studying, sending remittances to their family, or contributing to the family's income upon returning home.

Several studies have found that personal aspirations are essential in ISM. Kondakçı's (2011) study, the desire to get to know different cultures for personal reasons was an influential factor in the decision-making processes of students coming to Türkiye from North America. According to Holloway et al. (2012), one of the most critical reasons affecting the decision-making processes of female students from

Central Asia is that they try to gain skills to compete in the labor market. Li and Bray (2007) found that the push factor for Chinese international students to migrate is the country's lack of program diversity and inadequate language education.

Family expectation refers to family members' beliefs, values, and aspirations regarding their children's education, career, and social status (J. Lee, 2011). These expectations can vary widely depending on cultural, social, and economic contexts and individual family dynamics (Davey, 2005). Education is seen as a pathway to social and economic mobility in many cultures. Therefore, families may have high expectations for their children's academic achievement and career success (Tran, 2016). Parents may encourage their children to pursue specific fields of study or professions that will lead to financial stability and social status.

The literature has shown that family plays a pivotal role in shaping the decision-making processes of international students. Tran (2016) finds that international students migrating to Australia often develop migration and education strategies with their families. Similarly, Maringe and Carter (2007) show that family strategies guide the career planning of students who migrated to the UK from Africa. Kim (2011) also finds that family influence is crucial in international students' decision-making, especially women who migrated from Korea to the United States. The impact of family can occur in various forms, such as financial support, advice, guidance, and cultural and social expectations.

### 3.3.b. Meso-level Factors Affecting Student Mobility

At the meso-level of analysis, immigrant networks emerge as a significant factor influencing the decision-making processes of international students (Beech, 2015). These networks, formed by individuals who have previously migrated and established

communities in the host country, play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences and choices of prospective students. Immigrant networks serve as valuable sources of information, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with studying abroad (Racine et al., 2003). Students often rely on the guidance and support offered by these networks to navigate the complexities of the educational system, cultural adjustments, and other practical aspects of life in the host country. Additionally, the sense of community fostered within these networks can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students, influencing their decisions regarding destination choices and overall satisfaction with their academic journeys (Robertson, 2013).

The institutional factors that influence international students' choice of university or college are manifold and complex (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These factors encompass the host institution's standing and ranking, geographical location, faculty caliber, program offerings, availability of support services, and technological accessibility (Kondakci, 2011). Institutions excelling in these dimensions become particularly appealing to international students seeking an educational environment that ensures academic excellence and facilitates their adaptation to a new country and culture (Nicholls, 2018). Institutional image reflects an organization's ability to meet technological, scientific, and social needs (Ma & Zhao, 2018).

Employing conjoint measurement techniques, Hooley and Lynch (1981) explore the determinants influencing students' choices of a specific university, considering factors such as institutional location, academic program quality, availability of extracurricular activities, and institutional reputation. Their research emphasizes the paramount importance of academic program quality and institutional reputation in students' decision-making processes. Extending this inquiry, Price et al. (2003)

investigate the impact of facilities on students' decisions when selecting a university. By evaluating the significance of various amenities like libraries, computer labs, recreational spaces, and sports facilities, they find that students consider the quality and availability of facilities when deciding which university to attend.

### 3.3.c. Macro-level Factors Affecting Student Mobility

Especially studies on macro-level effects have attracted attention since the beginning of research in this field. At the macro-level of analysis, international students' decision-making processes are intricately shaped by overarching factors that transcend individual experiences (Goodwin, 1993). Global trends in HE, government policies, and economic conditions are pivotal determinants influencing prospective students' choices on a large scale (Barnett et al., 2016). Economic disparities between countries, political stability, and environmental considerations contribute to the broader context within which migration decisions unfold. Government regulations, such as visa policies and international education initiatives, play a crucial role in facilitating or impeding the flow of students across borders (J. J. Lee, 2008). Moreover, the reputation of destination countries as centers of academic excellence, research opportunities, and employment prospects significantly influence the decision-making calculus of international students (Barnett et al., 2016).

Since the publication of Lee and Tan's seminal article, there has been a concerted effort to delve into the profound impact of macro-level factors on the intricate decision-making processes of international students. A significant revelation stemming from this research is the stark income disparity existing between various regions, underscoring the pervasive influence of broader economic structures. Methodologically, surveys and national data have been instrumental in scrutinizing



these macro-level effects on international students' decision-making. Notable contributions from studies such as those by Bhati and Anderson (2012) and Maniu and Maniu (2014) emphasize the critical role played by employment opportunities in the target country, emerging as a salient factor shaping students' decision-making processes. Furthermore, empirical findings presented by researcher Azmat et al. (2013) shed light on the discernible trend of students selecting courses in Australia based on the perceived employment opportunities offered by the country. This robust body of research collectively emphasizes the significance of macro-level considerations in shaping the educational trajectories of international students.

Focusing on the relationship between country image and the decision-making process of international students when choosing a university, Srikanth, and Gnoth's (2002) research analyzes international students' perceptions of the countries where the universities were located and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making process. Their findings reveal that the country's image played a significant role in the decision-making process of international students. The students were more likely to choose universities in countries with a positive image, such as those perceived as safe, politically stable, and culturally rich. Gopal (2016) examines ISM in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States comparatively, with a particular focus on visa and immigration trends. The study finds that the visa policies and immigration regulations of these countries played a significant role in the decision-making process of international students. For example, countries with flexible visa policies and streamlined immigration processes, such as Canada and Australia, tended to attract more international students than those with stricter policies, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.



## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter consists of four parts. Following the first section that explains in detail why the case of Somali students was selected, the second one deals with the data collection process and covers the essentials regarding interview questions, sampling, and participant selection. The third section details the data analysis process and focuses on how the data was processed and interpreted. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the methodological limitations of the research.

#### 4.1. Case Selection

Türkiye receives a significant share of its international students from neighboring countries and Turkic Republics (Sağiroğlu, 2011). Kondakçı (2011) found that students from Turkic Republics prefer Türkiye due to factors such as cultural proximity and accessible scholarships. Following the conflict in neighboring Syria in 2011, many people sought refuge in Türkiye and this led to university-age students starting to study in Türkiye (Yılmaz & Güçlü, 2021). In addition, geographical proximity is an important attracting factor for neighboring countries. Türkiye's international student inflow has skyrocketed, especially in the last 15 years. One of the most important reasons for this increase is the transformation of the international student policy during this period (Bolat, 2017).

Changes in Türkiye's international student policy play an important role in the country's emergence as a new destination country. The case of Somalia is an important example to understand the impact of these policy changes on international students. Even in 2010, the number of international students from Somalia coming to Türkiye

was almost negligible. Today, however, one out of every 30 international students continuing their studies in Türkiye is of Somali origin. This is a concrete indication of the change in Türkiye's attractiveness to international students, with Somalia showing a marked increase in the international student population in Türkiye. The case of Somalia is an important phenomenon to shed light on the effects of Türkiye's international student policies and to assess how these policies play a role in the preferences of students from a non-contiguous country with a relatively more limited cultural affinity than the other home countries have with Türkiye. In this context, the increase in Somalia's student presence in Türkiye provides a window to understand the concrete effects of policy changes on ISM.

Although the evolution of the international student policy of Türkiye started in 1998, it gained significant momentum in 2011 and led to a noticeable increase in the international student inflow. One of the primary reasons for this increase is that Türkiye has implemented a new set of policies toward international students as a foreign policy tool and has adopted a more flexible approach in admission and visa processes (Akgün & Özkan, 2020). In addition, it is observed that Türkiye encourages students by providing scholarships to students from specific regions (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). These policy changes have led to a significant shift and growth in Türkiye's approach to ISM, thereby increasing the country's influence on the international student population.

The case of Somalia is an important example where Türkiye's international student policy and foreign relations come together. In particular, 2011 was an important turning point in the diplomatic rapprochement between Somalia and Türkiye. After this period, student migration from Somalia to Türkiye increased significantly. The 2011 famine deepened the dramatic humanitarian crisis in Somalia. This disaster,

which accounted for approximately 260,000 deaths and forced millions of people to emigrate, was a crucial tragedy that echoed in the international community (Van Hear et al., 2018). During this period, Türkiye's interest in Somalia attracted great attention both at the public and government levels (Ozkan & Orakci, 2015). Türkiye's interest in Somalia reached its peak on August 19, 2011, when former Prime Minister Erdoğan, his wife, his daughter, former Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ, former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, and other ministers visited Mogadishu. The delegation included a wide range of participants, including representatives from government, businesses, artists, and civil society organizations (Özkan, 2014). The intense interest in Somalia by the government, business community, and civil society organizations has created a social consensus on Somalia in Türkiye (Sahin, 2022). Moreover, opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's visit to Somalia in August 2011 was a rare example of consensus between the government and the opposition on a foreign policy issue (Alegöz, 2013).

Türkiye's policy response to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia has not only been limited to the humanitarian dimension but also includes three main components: humanitarian assistance, enhancing international visibility, and supporting state-building (Akpınar, 2013). In terms of humanitarian assistance, support was provided to Somalia through emergency humanitarian relief efforts organized by the Turkish Religious Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı- TDV) and the Turkish Red Crescent. Also, noteworthy are the efforts of civil society organizations such as the Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) (Özkan, 2014).

Another important component of Türkiye's policies towards Somalia is its efforts to increase the visibility of Somalia in the international arena (Özkan, 2014). Accordingly, following his visit in 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan wrote an article titled

"Somalia's Tears" in Foreign Policy Magazine, calling on the international community to take responsibility for Somalia and addressing the political roots of the famine and food crisis (Ozkan & Orakci, 2015). Moreover, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan devoted a significant part of his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 22, 2011, to Somalia (Özkan, 2014).

The state-building assistance includes many programs related to development promotion and infrastructure support (Özkan, 2014). However, in the context of this thesis, policies for human resource development stand out. Türkiye's policies to develop Somalia's human resources are carried out through two different methods: the educational support provided in Somalia and the support provided for students from Somalia to study in Türkiye. Especially in the field of education in Somalia, Türkiye's education policy in Somalia consists of three initiatives: agricultural schools established by TİKA and İHH to teach smart agricultural practices to overcome the famine problem faced by Somalia, non-commissioned officer schools established to train military personnel, and schools established by Diyanet Foundation and Maarif Foundation to increase Somalia's human resources.

The second important element of Türkiye's education policy towards Somalia is the international students brought to Türkiye. This policy component was an important area of emphasis during Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Somalia on August 19, 2011. During his visit, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan pledged scholarships for more than 1200 Somali students (Şahin, 2022). About three months after the Prime Minister's visit, in October 2011, suicide attacks by al-Shabaab on public buildings in Mogadishu killed 70 students who had applied for Turkish scholarships (Özkan, 2014). Following this bloody incident, Türkiye sent air ambulances to treat the injured students (Ozkan & Orakci, 2015).

In the aftermath of these attacks, Türkiye has admitted Somali students to Türkiye through various institutions to receive education in Türkiye. Among these institutions, the YTB plays a particularly important role. In 2012, in addition to YTB, the Diyanet Foundation and the Ministry of National Education (MEB) were prominent institutions supporting Somali students with scholarships in Türkiye. In 2012, more than 400 Somali students were admitted to institutions in Türkiye, to continue their education in cooperation with AFAD and the Turkish Religious Foundation (Özkan, 2014). Furthermore, following Erdogan's 2011 visit to Somalia, the MEB directorate General for Lifelong Learning announced that 450 Somali students would receive secondary and tertiary education and 280 students would receive vocational courses and these students started their education in Ankara on 25 June 2012 (Özkan, 2014). Since 2011, Türkiye has encouraged many students to study in Türkiye through scholarships. By 2014, a total of 915 students came from Somalia and 411 of them were awarded scholarships by YTB (see Table 4.1.)

Year	Male	Female	Total
2022-2023	6540	3503	10043
2021-2022	7685	3389	11074
2020-2021	5788	2353	8141
2019-2020	4374	1730	6104
2018-2019	2679	1085	3764
2017-2018	1690	620	2310
2016-2017	1329	406	1735
2015-2016	1079	304	1383
2014-2015	731	184	915
2013-2014	506	132	638

**Table 4.1.** Distribution of Somali Students Over Years (*Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, 2023*)

Türkiye has been encouraging student migration from Somalia for a long time, especially through scholarships (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). Moreover, another important policy in encouraging students is the easy admission process and visa policy (Bolat, 2017). This policy supports the arrival of self-funded students, in addition to those who receive scholarships. In the early years, the number of scholarship students was a significant proportion of the total NoS, while in recent years the number of scholarship students represents a more modest proportion of the total NoS (see Table 4.2.). According to MoNE annual statistics, since 2019, the distribution of students receiving scholarships under the Türkiye scholarships program has been based on region, rather than nationality. For example, Table 4.2. shows the number of Somali students among the students from Sub-Saharan Africa included in the Türkiye scholarship program in previous years. After 2019, it is not clear how many students from Somalia were awarded scholarships under the Türkiye scholarships program, but the table below provides an estimate.



Türkiye's easy admission processes have encouraged Somali students, resulting in one in every thirty international students coming to Türkiye being of Somali origin. One of the most prominent examples of Türkiye's welcoming admission policy towards students from Somalia is the statement made by Ihsan Cerrah, the Somalia Representative of the Turkish Maarif Foundation. Cerrah stated that 98 percent of Maarif students are accepted by universities in Türkiye. This is a remarkable indicator of Türkiye's interest in Somali students and its policies towards them. Türkiye's policies to encourage international student migration from Somalia have led to an exponential increase in student migration since 2011, and these students are studying at universities in almost all regions of Türkiye (See Table 4.3. for the top 10 universities in the number of Somali students).

Year	Somali students/ sub-Saharan total
2022-2023	unknown / 2.696
2021-2022	unknown / 3.101
2020-2021	unknown / 3.169
2019-2020	unknown / 3.425
2018-2019	418 / 3.451
2017-2018	324 / 3.018
2016-2017	381 / 3.413
2015-2016	691 / 4.797
2014-2015	411 / 2.481
2013-2014	346 / 1.720
2012-2013	30 / 724

**Table 4.2.** Number of Türkiye Scholarship Students from Sub-Saharan Region and Somalia (M.E.B Annual Statistics)

Universities	Numbers of Somali Students
Kutahya Dumlupinar University	830
Karabuk University	493
Saglik Bilimleri University	437
Kırsehir Ahi Evran University	404
Istanbul Gelisim University	323
Tokat GaziOsmanpasa University	314
Ankara Yildirim Beyazit	242
Dicle University	217
Sivas Cumhuriyet University	209

**Table 4.3.** Top Ten Universities in number of Somali Students (*Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi*, 2023)

## **4.2. Data Collection**

The data collection section consists of three parts. The first one explains the data collection method in detail. The second part delves into the structure and content of the semi-structured questionnaire used in the interviews. The section will end with a discussion on the process and methods of participant selection.

### 4.2.a. Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design was adopted, and data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are a powerful tool for understanding people's social worlds and a core component of qualitative research methods (Legard et al., 2003). This methodology allows participants to articulate and interpret their experiences in detail. In-depth interviews, often described as a form of conversation, are similar to everyday conversations but are professional and involve approaches and techniques with a specific purpose (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Semi-structured interviewing is a method that aims to elicit stories and explanations from the participant's life experiences to understand specific situations. (Brinkmann, 2014). This interview format aims to encourage participants to explain and interpret their experiences (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018). Semi-structured interviews, while following a set order, offer flexibility in the way topics are addressed by the participants (Morawska, 2018). In this way, they allow participants to provide open responses in their own words, allowing for richer and more in-depth insights than simple "yes" or "no" answers (Longhurst, 2003).

The decision-making process of international students is a complex process with different dynamics such as education decisions and migration decisions. In-depth interviewing is a convenient data collection tool to better understand this process which ends with a decision to study in Türkiye. The literature examining international students' decision-making processes is often focused on traditional destination countries, therefore structured interviews or quantitative approaches that would be informed by the extant research would revisit issues already addressed in this literature. Question formulations correspond to theoretically informed hypotheses in a rigid way, the close-ended format assumes that almost all possible answers, opinions, and concerns of the participants are acknowledged in the questionnaire beforehand. The semi-structured interview technique, on the other hand, stands out as a strong alternative to uncover the impact of less prominent and unearthed themes in the literature on students' quite diverse decision-making processes. As this thesis delves into a case of ISM towards an emerging host country, the semi-structured interview method is the most convenient data collection tool amenable to a genuine contribution to understanding the motivations of students who end up in Türkiye- i.e., periphery, not one of the classical host countries which extant research predominantly is about.

During the preliminary interviews, especially female participants stated that they would feel more comfortable in online interviews, which led the researcher to prefer the online interview method. Furthermore, the fact that Somali students study at universities in 43 different cities across Türkiye suggests that the online interview method may be a suitable tool for participants from different cities to participate in the study. The geographical distribution of these students suggests that the online interview method is a more effective option than face-to-face interviews, which will be very costly and time-consuming (Bauman, 2015).

#### 4.2.b. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was informed by two complementary analytical frameworks. The first construct involves the stages of international students' decision-making process. This process consists of different interrelated stages rather than a single simple stage. For example, Kondakçı (2011) offers a two-stage process model that corresponds to pre-migration and post-migration factors. In this thesis, Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) approach is adopted. The reason for choosing this model is that it is more compatible with the focus of the study and addresses a comprehensive decision-making process. This approach divides the decision-making process of students into three stages: first, the factors that influence the decision to study in a different country (push factors); second, the stage where they decide on the country to migrate to (pull factors); and third, the stage involving the choice of city and institution. This model provides a detailed framework for understanding the focus of the study and the different stages of the decision-making process. However, Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study did not include program selection, which was seen as a

shortcoming, and in this study, an additional question on the factors influencing degree selection was added.

The second framework that forms the basis of the questionnaire is the level of factors influencing decision-making processes. Although there are macro-, micro-, and meso-level factors influencing international students' decision-making processes, these factors have usually been studied at a single level. However, more recent studies have started to address these factors separately. For example, Kondakci (2011) examined these factors at different levels as public and private drivers. In Chen's (2016) and Li et al. (2021) study, the factors affecting students' decision-making processes were divided into macro, micro, and meso-levels and examined at these three levels. The questionnaire and hence the analysis of this research is shaped according to these three levels. Our research also includes meso-level factors to understand the influence of Turkish civil society organizations and counseling agencies on the decision-making processes of Somali students in particular. The questionnaire is presented in Table 4.4.

Factors Influencing the Decision to Study Abroad	Factors Influencing Source Country Selection	Factors Influencing the Choice of Institution and City and Future Plans
Question 1: What factors do you think influenced your decision to study abroad?	Question 4: Have you applied to universities in your home country or countries other than Türkiye? Can you share your experiences?	Question 7: Can you briefly explain why you chose to apply to the universities you applied to?
Question 2: How did you learn about the different study abroad options available to you?	If applied: Question 5: What were the reasons for choosing Türkiye among these countries?	Question 8: What did you know about the university you studied at? How did you gather information about this university?
Question 3: Have any of your family members, relatives, or acquaintances studied abroad?	Question 5: Why did you only apply to Türkiye?	Question 9: What are your plans? Do you plan to live in Türkiye, and what factors influenced this decision?
If yes:  •3.1 Were these individuals influential in your decision to study abroad?		

**Table 4.4.** Questionnaire Form

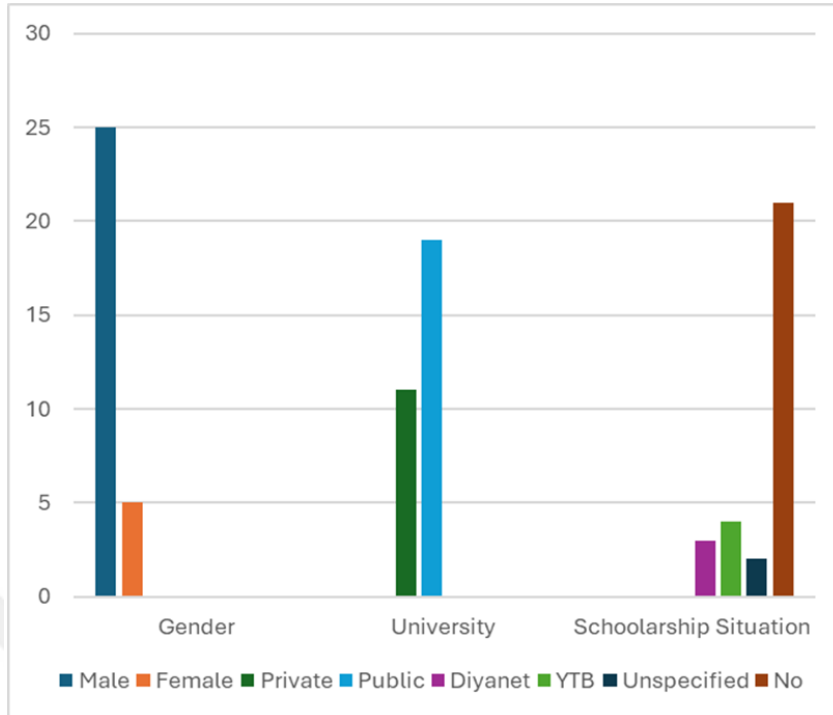
\* Note: Probe questions are asked to investigate the influence of factors at different levels.

#### 4.2.c. Sampling and Selection of Participants

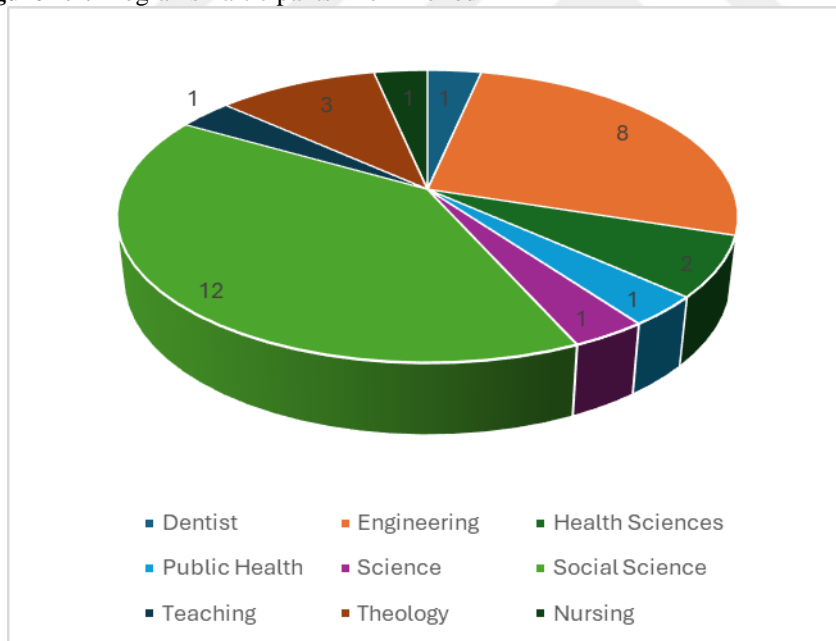
In this study, a purposive approach was preferred in sample selection. This is an approach that aims to ensure that the selected sample group has similar characteristics to the general population (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 158). Purposive sampling focuses on

specific characteristics of a population that will provide the most common answers to the research questions (Yalaz & Zapata-Barrero, 2018, p. 193). In this context, the method known as heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling is used by researchers to represent various perspectives, profiles, and situations (Yalaz & Zapata-Barrero, 2018, p. 162). This provides the researcher with a rich data set that includes different views and experiences. Somali international students in Türkiye have come to the country through scholarships, private companies, or through their means. These experiences are not only limited to scholarships and housing but can also influence their university choices. Therefore, to understand the experiences of these student groups, purposive sampling was used in interviews with students representing these groups. In this study, participants were selected from different groups. These groups include students with or without scholarships, students studying in public or private schools, students who are YTB or Diyanet scholars, students who come through private companies or institutions, and students who come through social networks (see Figure 4.1. and Figure 4.2.).

**Figure 4.1. Participant Profiles**



**Figure 4.2. Programs Participants Are Enrolled In**



During the preliminary interviews, it was determined that especially scholarship students were not comfortable during the interviews. To solve this problem, the snowball method was also used. The snowball method is a method developed to make the interviewees more comfortable and trust the researcher (Barglowski, 2018). The



basic principle of this method is that the researcher reaches the interviewee through another interviewer. In this way, a relationship of trust is established with the interviewee and the interview process becomes more efficient (Valentine, 2013).

#### **4.3. Data Analysis**

The data analysis process of the research began with the recording and transcription of the interviews. At this stage, the researcher carefully recorded the data obtained during the interviews and then converted it into a written form. Some of the data were recorded in Turkish and some in English and translated into Turkish to be used in the analysis process. This language choice was made because the researcher knew Turkish better and could conduct a more in-depth analysis of this language.

Before the research, it was planned to create a codebook as a result of examining previous studies with a deductive approach. This codebook aimed to form the basic framework within which the data would be analyzed. Given the researcher's limited research experience, this approach aimed to ensure a more effective and systematic data analysis process. However, the nature of the research question and the fact that the literature has traditionally focused on specific target countries led the researcher to Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigm.

Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigm is a frequently used method of analysis in qualitative research (Leavy, 2014, p. 662). This approach involves a three-stage process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, themes are identified during data collection, and initial codes are created (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Axial coding allows the data to be analyzed by establishing relationships between themes and exploring concepts in more detail (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). In the selective coding stage, the main themes are identified, and the data are reviewed for the last time (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). This process

provides researchers with a systematic and structured approach, which facilitates in-depth understanding and interpretation of the data.

In this thesis, MAXQDA software was chosen because of its methodological reliability and analytical capabilities in the process of analyzing complex data sets. This program provides researchers with comprehensive data exploration and in-depth data interpretation in their data-driven research (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020).

MAXQDA is chosen as part of the approach required for a detailed analysis and understanding of qualitative research data. This software offers a set of tools and features that facilitate the processes of organizing, coding, classifying and analyzing large amounts of qualitative data. The use of MAXQDA in the research process allowed for effective management of interview transcripts, identification of important themes and relationships, and deepening the data analysis process (Kuckartz & Kuckartz, 2001). The use of MAXQDA can increase the internal validity of the research because systematic analysis of the data leads to a more coherent answer to the research questions and hypotheses (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020) . This increases the reliability and validity of the research results, allowing the research process to be based on a more solid foundation.

#### **4.4. Limitations**

The researcher tried various strategies to reach as many and diverse participants as possible. First, a petition was written to the institutions providing scholarships to the students, requesting permission and mass announcement for the interview, but no response was received. In this case, the researcher took the initiative to contact the students. We tried to reach groups of students in schools where Somali students are frequently present. During the research process, finding participants proved to be a challenge and students were reluctant to communicate. This paved the way for a new

strategy and in the later stages, only students from WhatsApp groups with Somali students were reached. Among these student groups, there were distinct sub-groups such as Diyanet scholars, YTB scholars, and students studying in private schools, and communication between these groups was quite strong. The potential bias related to the overrepresentation of students in the WhatsApp-based communities is open to discussion. However, these solidarity networks have no divisive agenda, and they are inclusive. Therefore, no systematic effect is expected. When reaching students from these groups, it was observed that access to student groups was easier. From these groups, 4-5 times more students than the expected number of students requested an appointment for an interview and expressed their willingness to participate in the research. Covering all the volunteers for the research was by definition an impossible task. Therefore, interviews were conducted based on a selection of interviewees to represent specific groups as indicated in the quota sampling.

During the research process, an important dilemma emerged regarding the selected students. In a context where the research asks about past lives and experiences, selecting interviewees with more recent experiences and fresher memories may be considered a preferable approach. However, the length of stay of the students who were asked about their plans may have an impact on this choice. It is an important finding in the literature that students' length of stay affects their plans and the integration process. In addition to this, the fact that the new students could express themselves neither in English nor Turkish language made the interview process quite difficult. The researcher interviewed students who had been in Türkiye for at least one year and had sufficient English or Turkish language skills for the interview. However, the researcher did not have the opportunity to interview newly arrived students who

did not have English or Turkish language proficiency in Somali, which should be noted as a limitation of the study.

The representation of women in the research was lower than the representation of men. The main reason for this was that it was difficult to access female students. The research was planned in such a way that preliminary interviews were conducted online and female participants were included, but it was quite difficult to reach women. Furthermore, purposive sampling was used in the research, as it aimed to represent the experiences of many groups. Because of the importance of representation of all groups, some groups were accepted even without female interviewees, leading to low female representation. For example, Diyanet scholarship holders were extremely difficult to contact and the target was to interview five people from this group; however, due to the small number of interviewees in this group, a gender quota could not be set.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

This research examines in detail three important stages of the migration process related to choose and future planning. These three stages include the various decision-making processes that Somali students face before the decision to migrate, during the selection of the destination country, and during the selection of the institution, city, and department. Within the scope of the research, these critical decision-making stages of students' migration process were examined in detail and made comprehensible. The first stage includes the factors that affect the preference to study abroad before the migration decision and is called "push" factors in the literature. In this stage, the push factors that determine students' migration decisions are analyzed and explained in detail at micro, macro, and meso-levels. In the second stage, the factors affecting Somali students' choice of destination are analyzed in detail from the same three-level perspective. This is followed by a section analyzing the factors affecting students' choice of city, and educational institution. Finally, there is a section on Somali students' post-graduation plans.

#### **5.1. Factors Influencing Before Migration (Push Factors)**

Carrol and Johnson (1990) suggest that the first step in educational decision-making, and thus the "beginning" of mobility, can be the recognition of the driving force (Wells, 2012). This driving force is particularly related to factors in the country of origin. To explore the factors that influenced Somali participants' decision to study in another country before migration, Question 1 asked, "What were the factors that influenced your decision to study abroad?". To explore these factors, participants were

given probes that corresponded to macro, micro, and meso-level factors. Then, to investigate the factors influencing students' study abroad decisions, Question 2, "How did you find out about the different study abroad options available to you?" was asked. This question was also supported by follow-up probes. Finally, to understand the experience of the immediate environment affecting students' decision-making processes, Question 3 was asked, "Has anyone in your family, relatives, or acquaintances studied abroad?" and the impact of these people on the decision-making process was investigated.

These three questions examine the factors influencing their decision to study in another country, considered the first stage of the decision-making process. An inquiry into the factors influencing Somali students' decision-making processes before migration involves important elements at the macro, meso, and micro-levels. At the macro-level, the inadequacy of educational institutions and educational opportunities comes to the fore. Inadequate educational infrastructure and security concerns shape Somali students' pursuit of international education and influence their migration decisions. At the meso-level, the influence of families and the advice of the immediate environment are considered. The influence of families on migration decisions is based on students' family dynamics, family members' educational backgrounds, and future expectations. The suggestions and recommendations of the immediate environment also play an important role in students' decision-making process. At the micro-level, expectations of access to the labor market and the desire to get to know different cultures are among the determining factors. Perceptions that receiving international education will open up job opportunities and provide students with the opportunity to interact with different cultures shape migration decisions.

### 5.1.a. Push Factor at Macro-level

In the interview sessions, participants were asked to explain their reasons for leaving their home countries. In this process, it was observed that the majority of respondents mentioned inadequate HE services in the country of origin as a prominent driving factor. In particular, almost all respondents (27 out of 30) emphasized that the lack of HE services had a significant impact on their decision to study abroad. Respondents highlighted the difficulties of obtaining HE in Somalia and that funding, as well as admission, is a serious barrier. In addition, insecurity regarding the distribution of scholarships to students also emerged as an important issue. This suggests that the quality of the HE system and the availability of financial support had a major impact on respondents' decisions to leave their country.

A student enrolled in the engineering faculty stated that:

“I am pursuing studies in mining engineering here. While Africa and Somalia boast abundant mineral resources, the same cannot be asserted for education. I aspire to return to my home country and actively contribute to advancing education in this field”.

Since the first studies on international student migration, educational deficiencies in the source countries have become evident as the driving force behind students' search for educational opportunities in other countries (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985). This situation, as stated in McMahon's (1992) study, shows that international students tend to study in different countries due to inadequate educational conditions in their home countries. Similarly, Maringe and Carter's (2007) study emphasizes that inadequate HE services in the home countries of students migrating to the UK, especially from Africa, is an important driving factor. (V. Naidoo, 2007) also finds that the lack of educational institutions in students' home countries was a push factor.

Finally, Van Bouwel and Veugelers, (2012) also show that international students migrate to study in other countries due to the lack of education in their home countries. These studies demonstrate that the quality of education in source countries plays a decisive role in international students' migration decisions. In this context, the quality of education in source countries plays a decisive role in international students' migration decisions.

During the interviews, participants emphasized that security concerns stood out in their decision-making processes. Security issues in the country such as political uncertainties, internal conflicts, and terrorist threats increase feelings of insecurity towards the education system in Somalia. This suggests that students consider security concerns in their home countries when seeking international education opportunities. In particular, factors such as terrorist attacks and political instability lead students to leave Somalia in favor of safer educational environments. In this context, international education is not only about educational migration but also about a broader life experience, including key issues such as security and a better quality of life for students.

The pervasive effect of geopolitical instability, social unrest, or other forms of insecurity can significantly shape students' choices when considering studying abroad. Joseph and Joseph (2000) highlight the influence of a safer environment as an essential factor in why Indonesian international students choose to study overseas. Similarly, Mazzarol (2002), who examines the decision-making processes of international students from China, India, Taiwan, and Indonesia who migrated to Australia suggests that a safe environment is a crucial factor affecting international students' decision-making processes. Shanka et al. (2006) echo similar results. A safe environment is



both a push factor and a pull factor in the decision-making processes of international students migrating to Australia.

#### 5.1.b. Push Factor at Meso-level

In the interviews, it was observed that students' social networks stand out as an important meso-level "push" factor in the migration process. Especially among students who did not come through an agency or institution, the influence of these social networks was found to be quite evident. Almost all of the participants stated that they had an acquaintance who had studied abroad; in particular, graduates of Turkish schools in Somalia were found to have more intense social networks in Türkiye. The existence of these social networks stands out as a "pull" factor in the destination selection process and plays a role as a facilitator for students seeking international education in the pre-migration decision-making phase. In this context, students are encouraged to migrate by the presence of these social networks and are driven towards international education opportunities instead of their home countries.

In the decision-making processes of international students, the recommendations of friends and acquaintances play a critical role (Pimpa & Suwannapirom, 2008). These recommendations not only influence the decision-making process of individuals but also show that they are part of social networks (Beech, 2015). Social networks facilitate the migration process and support individuals' adaptation and settlement (Sinanan & Gomes, 2020). With the knowledge, experience, and support gained through these networks, students can cope with the challenges they may face in a new country. Therefore, the recommendations of friends and acquaintances are considered an important factor affecting international students' migration decisions. (Mazzarol & Hosie, 1996) study shows that students migrating to Australia for educational purposes

are significantly influenced by the experiences and recommendations of students who have migrated before. This influence plays a significant role not only in the choice of country but also in the choice of educational institution.

#### 5.1.c. Push Factor at Micro-level

Interviews show that the micro-level driving factors shaping international education choices are centered on three main elements. First, the influence of family members plays an important role. Especially among private university students, family members who have previously studied abroad have been observed to play an encouraging role in international education. This encouragement is based on the expectation that international education can facilitate access to the labor market, and provide opportunities to learn about different cultures. Secondly, a strong belief in the role of international education in the labor market was observed. Students believe that international education can provide better opportunities that can contribute to their careers in the decision-making process before migration. In this context, they expect that international education will contribute positively to their career development. Thirdly, students' desire to get to know different cultures should be taken into consideration. During the interviews, students stated that their interest in different cultures influenced their decision-making process before migration.

Family influence on international students' educational decisions plays a significant role not only in the international education decision-making process but also in general educational decision-making (Wells, 2012). The family significantly influences this process through their support and guidance on students' educational goals, preferences, and decision-making process (J. Lee, 2011). Students often make educational decisions based on their families' expectations, financial situation, and educational

preferences. Families have a wide range of influences, including cultural, economic, and social factors, and these factors play an important role in students' educational journey. In this context, family influence is a multifaceted and decisive factor in the educational decision-making process of international students (Soong et al., 2018).

Pimpa's (2005) study investigates the influence of families on Thai students' international education decisions. According to the results of this study, the influence of having family members with previous international education experience on students' choice to study abroad is quite significant. Similarly, (Wadhwa, 2016) study on the decision-making processes of Indian international students reveals that family and close friends play a critical role in the choice of host country. Motivations often include the desire to be close to family members, to fulfill familial expectations, or to actively contribute to the overall well-being of their family (Gatfield & Chen, 2006).

In the literature, it is noteworthy that international students' career aspirations are shaped by employment opportunities. In particular, it is observed that there is a widespread perception that it is easier to access the labor market if one has an international education. For example, Nilsson (2015) study finds that the international education pursuits and preferences of international students choosing Switzerland are shaped by their motivation to access the labor market. Similarly, Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016) study shows that non-European students are more influenced by this motivation than European students. However, there is limited evidence in the literature on the subsequent employment outcomes of student mobility (Di Pietro, 2015). Another factor influencing international students' decision-making processes is the desire to learn about different cultures. Many international students are motivated by the desire to get to know and understand different cultures more closely by studying abroad (Kondakci, 2011). This is often driven by the desire to enhance their personal

and academic development(Peng & Patterson, 2022). Living and studying in a foreign country offers students the opportunity to become acquainted with a different way of life, language, customs, and values (Chirkov et al., 2007).

Push factors have different levels of influence depending on whether students attend private or public schools with or without scholarships. The influence of macro-level push factors, such as the lack of educational institutions in Somalia and security concerns, is common across all groups. However, the presence of social networks, which is a meso-level factor, is an important push factor among scholarship and public-school students, while micro-level factors such as family influence and job prospects stand out as important push factors among private school students.

Financing overseas education and private schooling is directly related to the availability of a certain amount of capital, and this is a critical factor (Brooks & Waters, 2010). Families of students with this financial capital tend to see international education to maintain and improve their current situation (Tran, 2016). Moreover, families of students from a certain social class with this financial capital are more likely to have a more comprehensive knowledge of international education (Wiers-Jensen, 2008). This suggests that the influence of their families is particularly evident in the decision-making processes of private school students.

On the other hand, it has been observed that the social networks of students who do not have the resources to finance their private school education are influential in determining their migration decisions. In particular, students who have been educated in Turkish schools in Somalia have an extensive social network through the institutional habitus, and these social networks play an important role as a driving factor in their pursuit of international education. In conclusion, this research has shown that push factors differ between private and public-school students at the meso-level

and micro-level. This suggests that the factors influencing the migration decisions of private and public-school students may differ, and therefore more comprehensive and detailed comparative studies are needed. In particular, the fact that students from different social classes have different financial and social capitals plays an important role in shaping their migration decisions.

## **5.2. Factors Affecting Students' Choice of Destination Country (Pull Factors)**

During the interviews, to investigate the factors affecting students' choice of university destination, the first question asked was "Have you applied to universities in your home country or countries other than Türkiye? Can you tell us about your experiences?". This question was considered as a basic step to understand students' preferred university destinations and the reasons behind these preferences. Next, students were asked why they preferred Türkiye, and an in-depth analysis was conducted on the motivations behind this preference. Final issue in this section in the interviews was the university application process which is an important step in assessing students' challenges, satisfaction, and experiences during this process. This approach helped us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping students' university choices.

While analyzing the factors affecting students' choice of destination, the decision-making processes are also examined at micro, macro, and meso-levels. In this context, at macro-level, students' perception of Türkiye, their views on the overall quality of education in the country, and the impact of Türkiye's scholarship policy stand out. Among the factors that influence students' choice of university, confidence in Türkiye's educational standards and the impact of financial support policies are quite evident. At the meso-level, it is observed that Türkiye's educational institutions in

Somalia in particular influence students' choices. At this point, these institutions appear to be an important factor in Somali students' decision-making processes.

In addition, counseling firms are seen to influence the preferences of private school students. These institutions can shape students' preferences by providing guidance and information on university choice. At the micro-level, students' preferences are influenced by the fact that Türkiye is a Muslim country. In particular, the feeling of religious and cultural similarity emerges as an important factor in students' decision to choose Türkiye. In this way, students' individual and personal values play a decisive role in the process of shaping their preferences.

#### 5.2.a. Pull Factors at Macro-level

During the interviews, participants stated that the image of Türkiye plays an important role in the preference for Türkiye as an educational destination. In particular, Türkiye's increased visibility in the Somali media since 2011 and the country's increased aid to Somalia have led to a growing interest in Türkiye among Somali students. Türkiye's presence and influence in Somali society have also become more evident with the increased activities of Turkish NGOs and other institutions in Somalia. These factors have created and reinforced a positive perception for students to consider Türkiye as a choice for education. In addition, the prominence and success of Somalis who graduated from Turkish institutions in Somalia has also positively affected the perception of Türkiye. The experiences and achievements of these students have shown how valuable the education system and opportunities in Türkiye can be for Somali youth. The success stories of Somali students studying in Türkiye have increased the desire among other students to choose Türkiye and reinforced trust in Türkiye. All these factors have shaped students' perceptions and had a positive

impact on the choice of Türkiye as an educational destination. These influences play an important role in students' consideration of studying in Türkiye and determine their preferences.

The impact of institutional and country image on decision-making processes is of importance in international education choices (Maksudunov et al., 2019). The overall image of a country and the reputation of its educational institutions play a key role in determining students' preferences (Ivy, 2001). It is known that students consider factors such as the quality of education, scholarship opportunities, support for international students, and career opportunities when they make decision about the destination (Ma, 2022). These factors are key elements that make up the image of a country and can influence students' decision to choose a country. For example, a study by (Nafari et al., 2017) shows that Iranian students are influenced by the image of the country. Wu's 2014 study revealed that international students consider the image of the country they intend to study in their home country to be important.

Türkiye's policies in Somalia since 2011 and the positive impact of these policies have influenced the students seeking an international education. This example shows that a country's policies and image can have a significant impact on international students' choice of education destination. One of the most important factors strengthening Türkiye's corporate reputation is the Turkish schools in Somalia and businesses such as Mogadishu Airport. These institutions concretized Türkiye's presence in Somalia and built a solid corporate reputation. Turkish schools have created a positive perception among Somali students thanks to their quality of education and the familiarity with the Turkish education system. The Turkish management of Mogadishu Airport has become a symbol of Türkiye's cooperation and infrastructure development efforts in Somalia. These investments and initiatives have

strengthened Türkiye's presence in Somalia and had a significant impact on Somali students.

A sociology student explained the impact of these institutions as follows;

“I applied to the Maarif School when I was in high school. Then I applied for YTB scholarships as I applied to the university. I was neither admitted to the school nor granted the scholarship, but I tried to learn Turkish on my own and when I did, I applied to a few schools in Türkiye with the help of my friends. Because, for a while in Somalia, everywhere I looked, I saw Türkiye. The aid was always coming from Türkiye and I realized that the good schools were Turkish schools. Even when I came to Türkiye, my plane took off from an airport run by Türkiye”.

Students' perception of Turkish institutions operating in Somalia increased their trust in Turkish educational institutions. In addition, the fact that Abdulkadir Muhammed Nur was educated in Türkiye and became minister of justice and then minister of defense in Somalia increased students' trust in Turkish education.

A theology student emphasized this as follows:

"Before, people who studied in Egypt usually became ministers, and then people who studied in Kenya were in the cabinet. Now, people who studied in Türkiye are in the cabinet."

Scholarships are one of the critical macro-level factors that play an important role in international students' choice processes. In interviews, the availability and scope of scholarships stand out as a determining factor in selecting Türkiye as a study destination. Scholarships are expected to include cash stipends, accommodation support, and other living expenses in addition to covering tuition fees. Such scholarships are considered among the most prominent factors in students' reasons for



choosing Türkiye, which was frequently emphasized by scholarship students in the interviews.

An engineering student emphasized how and to what extent the scholarship coverage matters as follows:

“My family did not have the money to send me abroad, but my teachers wanted me to apply for scholarships abroad. I was a successful student. I applied to Türkiye, Malaysia, Germany, and Poland. Furthermore, I was accepted by a university in Malaysia, but the scholarship only covered tuition fees, so I didn't go, and when I was awarded the YTB scholarship from Türkiye, I came immediately. Later, Germany also accepted me, but when I came here, I gave up on other options. Especially in the first years, Türkiye covered everything, but now it is a bit difficult. You know that we do not have a work permit”.

Scholarships are one of the most important factors that play a decisive role in international students' choice of destination. For many years, governments have used scholarship incentives to attract students and increase ISM. For example, the United States Fulbright scholarship and other scholarships to meet needs in the IT sector are important examples of such incentives (Choudaha, 2017). However, the use of scholarships to encourage students is not limited to the United States. Australia's Colombo Plan, which supports students from neighboring Asian countries (Abimbola et al., 2016). To increase student mobility, Europe has introduced programs such as Jean Monnet to encourage long-term students and the Erasmus Program to support short-term students (Terzioğlu, 2023). The existence of these scholarships is a highly influential factor in the decision-making process of international students. Mazzarol and Soutar's (1992) study strongly suggests that scholarships play an important role in the decision-making process of international students.

Scholarships for international students have been characterized as tools for supporting developing countries or more generally as a philanthropic endeavor or charity for a long time (Rizvi, 2011). However, the use of scholarships for international students as a soft power tool is a more recent phenomenon and the use of scholarships as a soft power tool by countries such as the United States, European states and Australia has been widely discussed in the literature (Kiran & Açıkalın, 2021). In recent years, there has been research on Türkiye's use of these scholarships not only to increase the number of international students but also as a soft power tool in a broader context (Kiran & Açıkalın, 2021). Türkiye has established scholarship programs to support diplomatic rapprochement with the Turkic republics (Bolat, 2017). These scholarship programs have not only increased the NoS from Turkic republics but also strengthened positive perceptions of Türkiye (Maksudunov et al., 2019). In recent years, Türkiye has used scholarships as a soft power tool to attract students from Africa and strengthen diplomatic relations with these countries. The scholarships provided to these students have had an impact on the decision-making processes of international students, and this effect is evident in the studies of Kondakci (2011) and Özoğlu et al. (2015) in the literature.

#### 5.2.b. Pull Factors at Meso-level

Pull factors that have a meso-level effect on students' choice of educational destination are the institutions from which they obtain guidance and information about Türkiye, the interviews show. These institutions can generally be categorized as follows: state institutions and private institutions. The interviews revealed that students' university choices are influenced by their sources of information about Türkiye. Students use various sources to learn about Türkiye and its educational

environment, including institutions representing Türkiye and private consulting companies. In particular, Maarif Foundation's institutions operating in Somalia play an important role by providing detailed information about Türkiye and its education system. Similarly, organizations affiliated with the Turkish Religious Foundation also stand out as effective sources of information. Students participating in the YTB Türkiye Scholarships program provides detailed insights into the admission procedures and Türkiye. In addition, private consultancy companies also offer consultancy services to students in educational institutions in Türkiye, visa, and admission processes. These institutions and companies help students learn about Türkiye and shape their choices.

Information sources stand out in the literature as an important factor in the target country selection process (Feng & Horta, 2021). These information sources consist of various alternatives such as social media platforms, acquaintances, official institutions, and private consulting companies (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). Studies indicate that these information sources are effective in students' choice of destination country (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In a study conducted by Nghia (2015), it was emphasized that information about the destination country plays an important role among the factors determining students' choice of destination country when making HE decisions. In this study, it was observed that the sources from which students obtained information guided their decisions while determining their target countries.

#### 5.2.c. Pull Factor at Micro-level

During the interviews, it was observed that the impact of micro-level cultural factors on students' decision-making processes was evident. In particular, the fact that Türkiye is a Muslim country stands out as an important factor shaping students'

preferences. This led students to consider not only religious beliefs but also cultural differences such as food habits in Türkiye. Moreover, the fact that Türkiye is a Muslim country influences students' preferences in a positive way by ensuring that they did not worry about being excluded or discriminated against. Therefore, students' micro-level cultural aspirations and preferences played a decisive role in choosing Türkiye as a study destination.

Cultural considerations profoundly influence international students' decision-making processes, shaping their preferences and experiences throughout their academic endeavors (Shields, 2013). Cultural familiarity is paramount, prompting students to select destinations that resonate with similar values, traditions, and linguistic attributes (Bessey, 2012). The comfort derived from shared cultural elements significantly eases the process of adaptation. Language, as a pivotal cultural component, plays a critical role in destination selection, with students favoring locales aligned with their linguistic aspirations (Kondakci, 2011). Additionally, religious affiliation is a significant factor, as students often seek countries that share religious values, providing access to corresponding facilities and communities (Shields, 2013). Cultural preferences, notably the Islamic identity of Türkiye, stand out as influential pull factors. Participants emphasized the considerable impact of cultural proximity on their decision-making processes, influencing various aspects ranging from dietary preferences to daily life practices.

This research has shown that macro- and meso-level factors are particularly influential in the selection process of destination countries for Somali migrant students. At the macro-level, the ease of Türkiye's visa and admission processes and the incentives offered stands out as a determining factor in students' tendency to choose Türkiye. In particular, incentives such as scholarships play an important role in

students' decision to choose Türkiye. At the meso-level, Türkiye's institutions in Somalia and the availability of counseling agencies both in Somalia and Türkiye were identified as influential factors in the process of choosing Türkiye as a destination country. These institutions and agencies are effective in the decision to choose Türkiye through the information and guidance services they provide for students.

### **5.3. Choosing an Educational Institution and City**

To understand the dynamics of students at the final stage of the decision-making process, namely the choice of city and institution, the participants were asked "Why did you choose the universities you applied to?". This question was followed by questions about the sources from which students obtained information about these universities and their level of knowledge. It is seen that Somali students receive information from three different sources in choosing a city and an institution, and that these sources of information influence the selection process. Interviews reveal that the students take these sources of information considerably and finalize their preferences accordingly. These sources include Türkiye's government institutions in Somalia, public and private agencies, and social networks.

Türkiye's institutions and scholarship providers in Somalia have a significant impact on students' institution selection process. Especially, scholarship students' institution preferences, sometimes even the degrees that they are going to pursue, are shaped by the recommendations of the scholarship provider. For example, a student who wanted to study in the field of international relations received a scholarship from Diyanet and was advised to enroll in the theology department and choose accordingly. YTB scholarship recipients were also informed that the system recommends a few schools and that these schools should be preferred.

Maarif schools, which do not provide scholarships but support students in applying to Türkiye, play a considerable role in shaping students' institution and program preferences. In addition to students who have graduated from these schools, guidance services are also provided to students who want to receive information from outside. However, it was observed that students' level of knowledge remained quite limited even after the guidance provided, and they had limited information about the university and the city they enrolled in.

Agencies play an important role in students' information-gathering processes and are an important tool in influencing their choice of city and institution. These agencies can generally be categorized into two groups: Local agencies operating in Somalia and agencies in Türkiye. Somali-based agencies are generally consultancy firms established by students graduated from Turkish schools. According to the information shared by the students based on their knowledge and experience, these agencies provide consultancy services for a fee between 75 dollars and 300 dollars. However, even these agencies do not have enough information about the procedures and universities. A student, who wanted to emphasize that the information provided by the agency he received consultancy for studying in Turkey was incomplete, gave the following example:

When I was making my school choice, I stated that I only knew English and that I wanted an English program. The agency told me that the English program at a private school was 30% English and that I could learn Turkish over time, but when I started school, I realized that I could not continue without learning Turkish. Now I am at a school that completely gives English education, but I lost a year.

This shows that even at best, agencies may have incomplete information on some issues.

Students stated that the agencies operating in Türkiye generally referred them to foundation universities. For example, a student who received services from an agency in Ankara stated that he was not charged and was recommended three private schools in Ankara. Other students who received services from agencies in Türkiye also stated that they did not pay any fees. However, it is inherently impossible for consulting companies not to charge fees because these agencies are profit-oriented companies. During the interviews, students stated that they were aware that these agencies receive commissions from the institutions they register with. In addition, students stated that they were not sufficiently informed about the educational institutions by the agencies. It is observed that Somali students coming to Türkiye to study in Türkiye are also misinformed through these agencies and therefore have insufficient information in their preference processes.

Agencies act as an intermediary between students and educational institutions during the application process and in cases where students are not sufficiently informed about the procedures. With the increase in neoliberal trends in education in recent years, the positioning of students not only as individuals seeking education but also as customers purchasing services has transformed agencies into additional service providers. This has led to agencies not only providing counseling services to students, but also taking on the function of supplying students to educational institutions. In the process of marketization of education, competition among HE institutions has increased, which in turn has strengthened and diversified student attraction strategies. As a part of the competitive market dynamics, international students are attracted through the services offered by agencies. However, in this case, the students'

aspirations and goals may be put on the back burner by the profit-oriented approach of the agencies. Therefore, there is a risk of agencies becoming a tool for the exploitation of students.

Social networks play an important role in students' life choices, such as the educational institution and the city they live in. Somali students value these networks as the most reliable source of information. It was observed that those who received information from Somali students who have studied or are currently studying in Türkiye have a more comprehensive knowledge about the host institutions and cities than students who obtained information from other sources. These students tend to have more in-depth insights about procedures, cities, and educational institutions before migration. These social networks have the potential to not only facilitate the migration process, but also to better inform students' decision-making processes (Beech, 2015). In this context, social networks play an important role in shaping students' preferences and contributing to their decision-making processes.

In the last stage of international students' decision-making process, choosing the city and institution where they will study, it was observed that students make decisions with limited input, due to lack of information. At this stage, the quality and reputation of institutions play a decisive role in international students' decision-making processes (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Many studies have found that the ranking of universities, the quality of academic staff, and campus facilities affect students' decision-making processes (Beech, 2015). However, according to the findings of this study, the impact of these factors on students' choice of institutions is limited and students' knowledge about institutions is insufficient. Within the scope of the study, students were asked leading questions about how Türkiye's image influenced their choice of institutions, and it was found that Türkiye's image shaped students' choice of institutions. In other



words, country's image outweighs all concerns and considerations about the institutions' reputation.

The literature generally analyzes the decision-making process of international students as individuals making rational decisions (Mowjee, 2013). In this process, students make a rational evaluation by comparing the investment in education with the expectation of future returns and shape their decisions accordingly (Gerhards & Hans, 2013). In this framework, it is assumed that students strike a balance between investment and future expectations (Goodwin, 1993). This balance plays an important role in students' choice of educational institution. Students are assumed to consider information about whether their diploma is valuable in the labor market. For example, Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study suggests that in the process of institution selection, students tend to prefer institutions that can provide them with diplomas that will enable them to find a job. This research reveals that it is noteworthy that students continue to invest in their education despite certain concerns that their education in Türkiye will not be internationally recognized or will not allow them to find a job. Despite these concerns, students continue their education and maintain their investments.

Students cannot make fully rational decisions based on limited information about the institutions where they will receive education. Especially, scholarship students have significantly limited decision-making power in the process of choosing institutions and programs. Commonly, students are guided to the options suggested or offered by the institution they receive the scholarship from. That is, scholarship providers provide guidance to students on which institutions or programs they should choose, and this guidance is influential in their decision-making process. However, the fact that private school students continue to invest in their education despite concerns about the international validity of their diplomas demonstrates limited rationality.

These students make decisions within a more limited rationality framework when evaluating their diplomas in the hope that their investment will not be wasted or will at least enable them to find a job in Somalia.

#### **5.4. Post-Graduate Plans of Somali Students**

During the interviews, the participants were asked questions to obtain information about their post-graduate plans. In this process, it was observed that the participants exhibited two different tendencies. While the majority of the participants stated that they intended to return to Somalia, six out of 30 students expressed their desire to pursue a graduate degree after completing their studies. In particular, it is an important observation that the participants who wanted to pursue postgraduate education preferred to continue their education in a country other than Türkiye. The questionnaire included follow-up questions to unearth the factors behind the students' desire to leave Türkiye. In the answers given by the students, it was observed that this decision was based on two different sets of factors: Somalia-related and Türkiye-related drivers. These reasons expressed by the students can be categorized as "reverse push" and "reverse pull" factors.

The reverse push effect, i.e., the reasons related to Türkiye, comprises three main factors. The first factor is the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment in Türkiye. Students who have been in Türkiye for a long time emphasize that there has been a recent increase in hostility towards them, , when they compare their earlier experiences with the current conditions. On the other hand, students who have been in Türkiye for a short time compare their contacts with Turkish citizens, officials and activists in Somalia with their experiences in Türkiye. In contrast to the welcoming attitudes they experienced in Somalia, interviewees state that they are subjected to "xenophobia" not only by citizens in daily encounters but also by officials of the institutions in Türkiye.

The observations made in this regard are not used as exact references due to ethical concerns but can be characterized as "xenophobic" to say the least.

The second important reason is the student's perception that the degrees they obtained in Türkiye would not give them an advantage in accessing the job market in Türkiye. Students mentioned high unemployment rate in Türkiye and the recent difficulties of working and living economically in Türkiye.

The third important reason is the complexity of the procedures in Türkiye and their tightening in recent years. The students stated that the immigration administration and the foreign student offices of the schools were not informative at all and that they learned most of the rules from their Somali friends. This situation highlights the difficulties students experience with procedures in Türkiye.

For example, it was observed that a few students misunderstood about the permission to change city. To illustrate this misunderstanding, one student described his experience as follows:

“The agency told me that Konya was close to Ankara, the capital city, and therefore I could go to the capital city all the time. However, this was not the case in reality and I learned that it is forbidden to travel outside the city of residence”.

During the interviews, a few students mentioned that it is forbidden to move out of the city. However, this restriction only applied to all citizens during the COVID-19 period, and Syrian students are required to obtain permission before changing cities. Students' misunderstanding of this situation shows how complex the procedures are and that students may not yet have grasped this complexity.

In the reverse-pull factors, that is, Somalia-related reasons, two main factors stand out. The first is the homesickness. Participants' longing for their home country is a highly determining factor for their desire to return. During the interviews, it was

observed that some students visit their countries with their own financial resources, while others visit their countries during their studies supported by scholarships (students who receive scholarships from the Diyanet receive airfare support once a year). However, it was observed that those who do not have financial means do not visit their countries at all. In addition, some students avoided going back out of fear of not being able to obtain a visa from Türkiye again. For example, one student stated that his roommate visited his country in the third grade, but then had to drop out of school because he could not get a visa, and that he did not visit his country to avoid the same situation. The fact that students miss their country stands out as an important reason why they never visit their country during their education. For example, a student who had not visited his country for five years stated, "It may not be the way I remember it, but I want to go back". This longing is not only for Somalia but also for family, which encourages students to return. Upon probing the motivations behind this decision, participants highlighted the paramount influence of family considerations and a profound commitment to contribute to the development and well-being of Somalia. This departure from the traditional brain drain narrative reveals a cohort of international students motivated by a strong attachment to their homeland and a genuine aspiration to make substantive contributions upon their return.

The second important factor is the students' belief that the degrees they obtained in Türkiye will enable them to integrate more easily into the labor market in Somalia. Students believe that it will be easier for them to find a job back in Somalia than in Türkiye. For example, a Turkish language-teaching student stated, "I know that I need to be a citizen to be a teacher in public schools in Türkiye. I am aware that if I work in private schools and courses, it will be difficult to make a living, and it will be difficult to find a job. When I return to Somalia, I think it will be easier to teach Turkish there

than here because the interest in Turkish has increased in recent years". It is also noteworthy that private school students think that the diplomas they receive in Türkiye will not provide access to the labor market in Türkiye. Students stated that even if they received their education in English, the diploma would not be enough for them to find a job in Türkiye.

One of the most important factors affecting Turkey's international student policy is the expectation that these students will be a bridge between their home countries and Turkey. The soft power of these students between the two countries is at the center of this policy by increasing cultural exchange and strengthening international relations. (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). Therefore, the return of these students to their home countries after completing their studies is an outcome that Türkiye hopes for and encourages. For example, YTB covers the airfare for students to return home after graduation (Ejder, 2019). However, the negative experiences of these students during their studies raise doubts about whether they can truly be a "bridge". Although Türkiye's policies in Somalia had a positive impact on students' perception of Türkiye, their experiences in Türkiye had a negative impact on their perception. In particular, the increasing xenophobia in recent years, the complexity of the procedures, and the educational experience have been effective in the formation of this negative perception.

An important consequence of ISM is the tuition income these students generate for universities (Lo, 2019). For example, Mowjee (2013) noted that international students are seen as "cash cows". The negative experiences of these students may lead them not to recommend Türkiye to any students when they return. During the research process, when asked whether they would recommend Türkiye to the potential prospective students, students described these negative experiences in detail. In particular, the

dissatisfaction of private school students with their education experiences and the inability to find an addressee for the problems of students studying in public schools are noteworthy. Xenophobia and procedural complexity are common problems for both groups.

The need for further research that investigate the experiences of international students in Türkiye more comprehensively is crucial. These studies can assess the challenges students face in their educational process, their satisfaction levels, and their post-graduation plans in more detail. Furthermore, such research is needed to develop policy recommendations aimed at improving the life experiences of international students in Türkiye. Procedures need to be communicated more simply during international students' stay in Türkiye, counseling services have to be strictly controlled with routine inspections. All procedures and interactions with institutions requires improvement including those with private entities. Lack of transparency in almost all relationships and interactions is a major setback. Such measures could help improve students' experiences and help achieve Türkiye's policy objectives.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This thesis utilizes migration theories, notably the push-pull theory, and relevant literature applying it to ISM to establish a comprehensive framework for investigating the impact of micro, macro, and meso-level factors (McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2016). In this study, the decision-making processes of Somali students in Türkiye are examined, focusing on the three stages in Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) framework. The stages are pre-migration decision-making, i.e., the stage in which the student decides whether to study in his/her home country or another country; followed by the stage of choosing the destination country; and finally, the stage of institution selection. Pre-migration decision-making processes of all students are influenced by macro-level push factors such as inadequate educational infrastructure and security concerns in Somalia. However, private school students tend to be influenced by micro-level push factors such as the influence of their families on their decision-making processes and increased prospects of finding a job through international education, while students enrolled in public schools are driven by social networks. At the destination selection stage, all students were exposed to the macro-level influences of Türkiye's visa and admission processes. However, private school students were generally influenced by meso-level agency recommendations in their decision-making processes that resulted in their arrival in Türkiye, while other students were influenced by recommendations from Türkiye's institutions and scholarship programs in Somalia.

It was observed that macro-level factors were more dominant in Somali students' pre-migration decision-making processes and their choice of destination country. This finding is not surprising at all due to strong push factors, such as drought and civil war; and strong pull factors, such as Türkiye's easy admission processes and visas. International students, in general, are known to be affected by different push and pull factors than students from their countries of origin (Cantwell et al., 2009). For example, Kondakçı (2011) found that students who prefer Türkiye are affected by different factors than students from their countries of origin. The findings of this study suggest that in cases where intense push and pull factors are effective, students may be more affected by macro-level factors.

This research was planned at the proposal stage as a comparative study that would also cover Afghan students, another sizable group that is exposed to intense push factors. However, due to field challenges in reaching students from Afghanistan, the research focused only on the Somali students case. For future research, it may be useful to comparatively examine the cases of international students from different regions where intense push factors are in effect. In particular, a comparative analysis of the different push factors influencing the migration decisions of students from various geographical regions and their impact on the choice of destination country could offer a new perspective to this literature.

This research has revealed an important divergence in the decision-making patterns of two groups of students: namely those who pursue their education in public universities and the others who are enrolled in private institutions -i.e., 'foundation universities' according to the regulations in the Turkish education system. Students from different social classes are influenced by different factors at the pre-migration decision-making and destination country selection stages. There have been many



studies on the impact of social class background on students' access to international education (Findlay et al., 2012). In particular, studies using Bourdieu's forms of capital show that the combination of social, cultural, and financial capital of these students increases their opportunities for international education and allows them to maintain their current situation (Tran, 2016). While students belonging to a class that can afford private school costs are particularly influenced by micro-level factors such as family pressure and job expectations, students studying in public schools are guided by the social networks they have acquired in Turkish schools. Although both private and public school students were among the participants in this study, prospective research that focuses on private school students may help us better understand the factors influencing these groups.

The existing literature shows that international students consider various criteria, especially during the institution selection phase, and accordingly determine their preferences among institutions (Ivy, 2001). For example, factors such as prestige, academic ranking, technological infrastructure, academic staff and campus facilities are frequently emphasized. In addition to these factors, students' expectations of finding a job in the future also affect the institution selection process (Ma, 2022). The skills provided by the institution they study at or the reputation of the institution plays a decisive role in the impact of their diplomas on the workforce and thus shapes students' choice of institution (Findlay et al., 2012). It is accepted that students' investment in international education and their expectations are the result of a rational evaluation (Lo, 2019) and an important stage of this rationality is the institution selection process (Mowjee, 2013).

In this study, it was observed that students rely on very limited information in the process of institution selection and the majority of them have almost no information

about their target institutions before they arrive at the campus. This situation highlights students' concerns about the possibility that the diploma of the institution they are studying at may not be internationally recognized. On the other hand, students have low confidence that their diplomas are valid internationally or in Türkiye, but they believe that these diplomas are sufficient for Somali students to find jobs in their home countries.

All in all, students do not make a completely non-rational assessment in the decision-making process, but act with limited rationality. It is understood that students are influenced by factors such as lack of information and uncertainty and therefore base their decisions on limited calculations marked by uncertainty and imprecision. However, with limited opportunities in their home country, the goal of obtaining a higher education degree as the key determining factor outweighs the impact of the unknown for the Somali students. The fact that students choose educational institutions by aiming only for a diploma shows that they ignore other important factors. This reflects the fact that they focus only on prestige and job opportunities instead of evaluating factors such as academic quality, teaching methods and career opportunities.

Upon graduation almost all participants plan to go back to Somalia or attend graduate school in a country other than Türkiye. This trend can be broadly summarized as Türkiye-related reasons and Somalia-related reasons. Türkiye-related reasons include factors such as increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, doubts about the validity of diplomas in Türkiye, and tightening procedures in Türkiye. Somalia-related reasons include factors such as longing for Somalia and their families and high expectations of finding a job in Somalia. These factors were identified as important push and pull factors shaping students' post-graduation plans.

An important factor in shaping Türkiye's international student policy is the expectation that become a "soft power" element in relations with Türkiye in their home countries after graduation (Aras & Mohammed, 2019). Students graduating from Turkish universities can inspire other students who are considering studying in Türkiye by recommending the schools they attended in their home countries to future generations. In this way, a cycle is created that supports Türkiye's policy of attracting international students. Therefore, the tendency of international students to return to their home countries is desirable and encouraged for Türkiye.

The negative experiences of some students during the interviews led them to question whether studying in Türkiye should be recommended to others . At this point, there are also doubts about the expectation that international students constitute a "soft power". For example, Bislev's (2017) study examines whether Chinese students are potentially a "soft power", emphasizing that the experiences of these students are particularly decisive in shaping perceptions and that it is unclear how effective educational migration is as a "soft power" in case their experience abroad is not as they hoped.

This study focuses on the impact of Türkiye's policies towards Somalia on educational choices. In this framework, it is observed that Türkiye's policies influence students' decisions to choose Türkiye at the destination selection stage. However, the perceptions of students who graduated from Türkiye towards Türkiye and their roles and positions between the two countries can be examined through research focusing on the elites who graduated from Türkiye and returned to their countries. Such a study could provide an important opportunity to understand the effects of Türkiye's targeted policies in more depth.



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