
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Identifying the Impact of Stringent Immigration Rules on International Students: The Case of Türkiye

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| ABSTRACT

Higher education is one area that has seen the most impact of globalisation, and the free exchange of scholarships is noted to be on the rise. By taking the course of other leading nations in higher education, such as the US and Canada, Türkiye, through the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), has since the early 2010s adopted a policy to increase international student enrolment in its universities. However, recent changes in the immigration laws by the Department for Immigration Management (Göç İdaresi) are noted to portend to thwart the efforts of YÖK in what could be said to be a case of conflicting roles between two state institutions. This study presents an analysis of the impacts of these stringent rules on international students by analysing survey results conducted on international students in Türkiye. The work contributes to both policy and scholarship. Its contribution to policy can be seen in its attempt to highlight the intricacies of finding a balance between national security concerns and the need to foster academic exchange and global engagement in higher education. The study also contributes to the general discipline of migration studies in addition to the field of urban and regional planning with direct contributions to areas such as global competitiveness of cities, urban growth dynamics, and cultural diversity and social integration of urban areas. This is made possible by considering the impacts of the influx of international students into cities and the challenges they face, which this study outlines. Key among the findings include the likelihood of persons who have reported having issues with Göç İdaresi not recommending Türkiye to others as a higher education destination. Thus, this demonstrates a case where immigration rules are having a counterproductive effect on the efforts put in by higher education policymakers.

| KEYWORDS

Globalisation; International Students; Immigration Laws; Academic Exchange; Türkiye

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

One of the main pieces of evidence of globalisation is the proliferation and rising numbers of international scholarship where both international students and scholars are engaged in academic works in countries other than their own countries (Tran et al., 2023; Mishra and Sahoo, 2023; Sarpong and Adelekan, 2023). Out of the reported 254 million students worldwide, 6.4 of them are studying outside their own countries as of 2023 (UNESCO, n.d.). Of this, 3 million are said to be studying outside their regions entirely (UNESCO, n.d.). Despite the rise in the number of international students globally, other researchers have maintained that it is expected to stabilize due to reasons such as improved local education and unfriendly atmospheres in host countries (Damme, 2018). Other reports, however, contend that the global number of international students is still expected to reach 20 million by 2030 (YTB, n.d.).

Evidence suggests that this increase is primarily due to the influx of students from emerging economies like India and China (Zong and Batlava, 2018). According to UNESCO (n.d.), the United States undoubtedly remains the preferred destination for the majority of international students. The importance of internationalising higher education is further demonstrated by the dominance of mostly advanced countries on the list of most preferred destination countries for international students since 2019

(see, Figure 1). Very recent figures suggest that emerging economies such as China and Türkiye have made strong gains in this regard, solidifying their places in the top 10 most preferred destinations for international students, becoming the only two emerging economies on the list as of UNESCO's 2020 report (Figure 1).

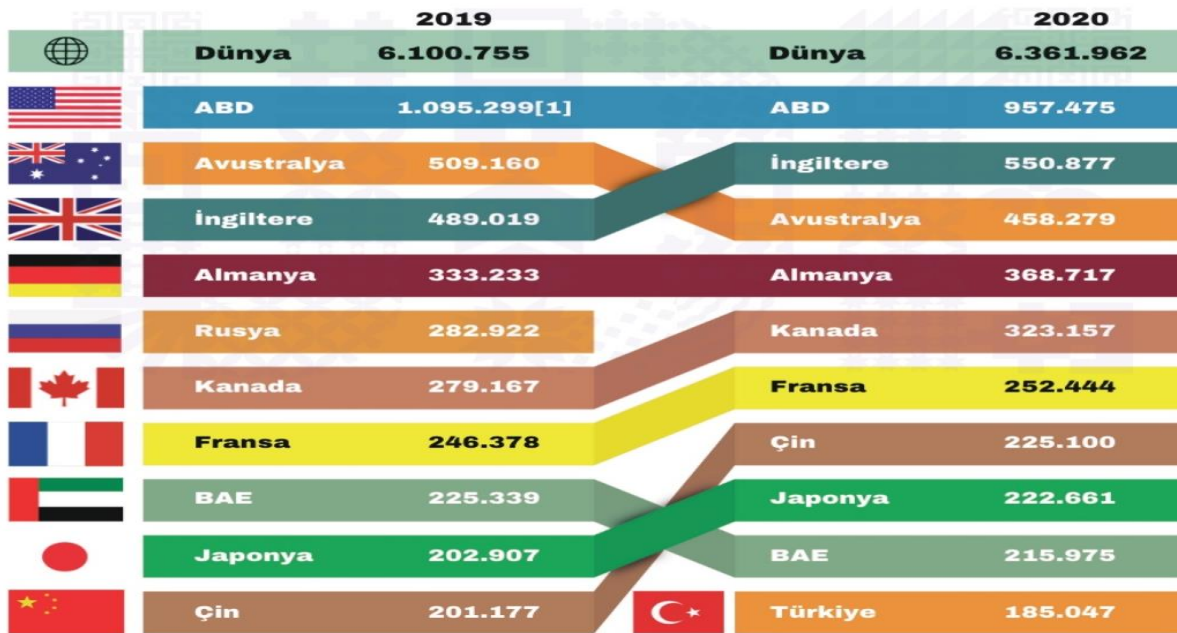


Figure 1: Top 10 Host-Countries of International Students
Source: UNESCO (cited in UDEF, n.d.)

There are many benefits to international higher education. Even though this work does not seek to rehash them, a brief mention of a few of them will be in order at this point. On the part of the host countries, international education serves as a national strategy for countries to develop foreign trade (Coelen, 2015), address human resource shortages (Wang, 2022), demonstrate soft power (Wang, 2022; Xu et al., 2015; Coelen, 2015), enhance national security, and maintain influence on the global stage (Wang, 2022). It also serves to promote global citizenship, tolerance, and understanding. It thus contributes to world peace and cultural recognition. On the part of the student, it infuses diverse perspectives and experiences from other nations' cultures, enabling the student to become more internationally minded (Shealy, 2014).

Although universities globally celebrate the diversity within their student cohorts, recent policies and immigration regulations have raised and continue to raise concerns about whether policymakers in various countries truly comprehend the significance of international enrolments. In the view of Hegarty (2014), while many acknowledge the significance of international students, there is a tendency to underestimate the extent of their impact. Undoubtedly, the number of international enrolments at a university plays a pivotal role in shaping its identity and significantly impacts its financial sustainability, given that a majority of international students typically pay tuition fees (Hegarty, 2014). Consistent with this assertion, Hegarty (2014) additionally posited that international students contribute approximately \$22 billion to the United States economy annually through expenditures covering tuition obligations, food, clothing, travel, textbooks, and other essentials. This level of capital infusion, as noted by Hegarty (2014), exceeds the \$18 billion injection typically observed in the gaming industry, the \$20 billion in the weight loss industry, and the \$20 billion contributed by both the domestic music and movie industries. In Australia, for instance, it has been estimated that international students made a collective contribution of 17.1 billion to the country's GDP between 2014 and 2015 (Weerakkody & Jerez, 2018). An analysis of this substantial capital influx indicates that around \$12 billion was disbursed as fees and service charges to educational institutions, while an additional \$5 billion was earned by intermediaries within the educational enrolment chain (Economics, 2018).

In a different fashion, Chellaraj et al. (2008) suggested that a 10% rise in the enrolment of international graduate students is associated with a 4.5% rise in patent applications. This indicates that international students serve as crucial contributors to academic innovation, bringing diverse perspectives derived from their varied lived experiences. Likewise, the presence of international students is a pivotal element that enhances and broadens domestic students' comprehension of foreign cultures. In support of this claim, Smith and Demjanenko (2011) asserted that the integration of international students introduces multicultural perspectives encompassing diverse cultural backgrounds, belief systems, and socio-political realities, thereby altering and expanding the perspectives of domestic students.

Having acknowledged the outlined economic and technological benefits of international enrolment, the Turkish government, through a number of its state institutions such as the Department for Turks and Related Communities Abroad (YTB) and the Council of Higher Education (YOK), has set in motion, efforts to internationalise higher education in the country. Even though details of this are presented in later sections of this study, suffice it to state that this has culminated in the establishment of YTB in 2012 to, among other things, provide scholarships to successful students from around the world to study in Turkish institutions of higher learning. YOK, on the other hand, has since also committed to these efforts by making the internationalisation of higher education in Türkiye its "most important" goal (URL 3, n.d.). Despite these efforts, recent observations indicate that another state institution, namely, the Department for Immigration Management (henceforth referred to in this work as Göç İdaresi or simply Göç), is making these efforts counterproductive. Among the changes to the immigration rules, which are seen as stringent, include addressing requirements, difficulty in obtaining residence permits for family members of international students, the lack of remedy except exiting and re-entry into the country in cases where students fail to re-apply for a permit within 10 days for any reason. These have been discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this work.

As will be noted later, it is apparent that there exist lots of studies on international higher education. However, the same cannot be said when examining the impact of contradictory state policies on international students. This is the gap this work intends to fill in the literature. This work is, therefore, potentially the first of its kind to use mixed methods to investigate how immigration regulations impact international students using Türkiye as a case in point. This work is, therefore, expected to be a useful addition to both the migration and international higher education literature. It is also expected to contribute to the urban and regional planning literature within the context of global competitiveness of cities, urban growth dynamics, and cultural diversity and social integration of urban areas. These are important research areas in the field of urban and regional planning to which this work is expected to contribute.

The rest of this work is structured as follows. The entire work comprises five sections. The first is the introduction, which presents a general overview of the subject along with the scholarly gap it intends to fill. The second section presents the current state of the literature on international higher education and immigration laws. This section also presents the state of Türkiye's international higher education. Section three presents the methods adopted for data generation and analyses. The fourth section presents the results and associated discussions. The fifth and final section presents the conclusion, where further discussions of the results are presented. The final section also presents some policy and scholarly recommendations along with some of the inherent limitations associated with this work and further presents a case for the validity of our findings for both policy and scholarship.

2. Literature Review

International higher education research is an area that has seen interest from scholars over the years. It is suggested that even though this area of research saw major developments in the 1990s, it was noted that this research field lacked a disciplinary 'home' (Kehm and Teichler, 2007). This makes research in international higher education open to different disciplines. Since the development of this field of research, Kehm and Teichler (2007) observed that research in this field was often limited to mobility, mutual influence of higher education systems, and internationalisation of the substance of teaching and learning. The rest included institutional strategies, knowledge transfer, cooperation and competition, and national and supranational policies (Kehm and Teichler, 2007). By way of meta-analysis, Bedenlier et al. (2018) also revealed four distinct focuses of research in international higher education between 1996 and 2016 published in one outlet of international higher education research. These developmental waves include the delineation of the field, which was noticed between 1997 and 2001; institutionalization and management of internationalisation occurring between 2002 and 2006, consequences of internationalisation: student needs and support structures noticed from 2007 to 2011, and currently, moving from the institutional to the transnational context of internationalisation also observed between 2012 and 2016 (Bedenlier et al., 2018). Since this time, other works have found a changing trend and patterns of research in this area (see Yemini and Sagie, 2016; Ogden et al., 2020). From the analysis of over 1400 articles published between 1972 and 2020, Ghani et al. (2022), in more recent work, highlighted the growing focus of research on intercultural communication for global competence skills. In the last three to four decades, increased collaborations among researchers across countries have also been observed to be taking place in this area of research, with geographic distance and linguistic commonality being the major influencing factors (Avdeev, 2019). Other works focused on investigating the number of research studies that focused on competency measurements, with very limited research in this direction found (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, et al., 2015).

Despite the growing interest in this area of research both locally and globally, very scanty research was noticed regarding the transdisciplinary approach to research in this field. For instance, internationalisation of higher education is often linked to the globalisation of higher education (see, for example, Tran et al., 2023; Mishra and Sahoo, 2023; Sarpong and Adelekan, 2023). Indeed, the internationalisation of higher education inherently connotes a cross-border movement of students and scholars. Meanwhile, research integrating migration and international higher education remains scanty. Moreso, we acknowledge the works of researchers who sought to investigate the impacts of immigration regimes on internationalisation of higher education.

For instance, the work of Bordoloi (2014) demonstrated how spouses of international students have to sacrifice their professions due to immigration rules in the US. This study is focused on investigating further how immigration rules are impacting international students by using Türkiye as a case in point. This way, the discourse on immigration and the internationalisation of higher education is taken a step further to reveal how counter-productive some immigration rules can be in national efforts towards the internationalisation of higher education. It is, therefore, relevant at this point to review some of the immigration regimes around the world.

In general, the essence of immigration laws is to check illegal migration. Recent events around the world have resulted in rising widespread displacements and, for that matter, an increase in the number of refugees. The consequent rise in the number of immigrants has necessitated countries to enact more stringent immigration laws in order to secure their borders. For instance, in the US, certain state governments have enacted immigration laws to supplement federal policies and immigration enforcement efforts. Approximately 2,100 state-level immigration-related legislations are enacted between 2005 and 2017 (Ramón and Brown 2018). One of these state laws is the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbourhoods Act (SB 1070) of Arizona, passed in 2010. The law became one of the country's toughest immigration bills; it introduced a number of restrictive immigration-control provisions (Archibold 2010). The law empowers law enforcement agencies to detain anyone reasonably suspected of being an illegal immigrant. Anyone apprehended for not carrying a legal residency document is charged with a misdemeanour. Meanwhile, knowingly hiring, harbouring, or transporting undocumented residents is a punishable offense. In the UK, recent changes have been made to the immigration rules, which have increased the minimum income threshold for skilled foreign workers who are eligible for visas (URL 1, n.d.). This is only one of many changes happening in the immigration regime in the UK. Some of the new regulations have a direct impact on international students. For instance, in January 2024, a new UK immigration regulation introduced restrictions on visa eligibility for international students dependents (see URL 2, n.d.).

The ultimate goal of many stringent immigration policies globally, it must be noted, is to check illegal residency in those countries. However, as demonstrated by several studies, law enforcement officers charged with the ultimate responsibility of ensuring undocumented immigrants are apprehended, in turn, become highly abusive of such policies (see, for example, Moya and Shedlin, 2008; Sabo and Lee, 2015; Philbin et al. 2018; Almeida et al., 2016).

The punishment for some of these crimes, argues the National Immigrant Justice Center¹ in the US, includes “incarceration and deportation, both of which tear communities and families apart and that, most previous US administration’s abuses have exposed serious injustices long embedded in U.S. immigration and criminal legal systems” which is not any different in modern times in countries like Türkiye.

While international students travel across countries specifically for studies and to learn new skills, establish their careers, and start a new phase of their lives, they also help build and broaden the economies of the countries they are residing in or studying. International students alone contributed nearly \$41 billion to the US economy, according to the Association of International Educators, a non-profit organization in Washington, DC, USA (NAFSA). In a separate development, international students, as articulated by Jacob (2020), were reported to have also

“created and supported nearly 500,000 jobs in the 2018-2019 academic year. They continue to be assets to our country even after they are no longer students. Among privately held startup companies, those with immigrant founders have created an average of more than 1,200 jobs per company, the vast majority in the U.S. If we lose immigrant students, we risk losing skilled and innovative people who can help develop our country. While we benefit from international students economically, they also add academic and cultural value to our universities and communities²”.

The importance of international students cannot be overemphasised enough. On the other hand, the need to secure borders to protect the interests of residents is of equal importance. However, the issue arises when international students who have been granted access to host countries later become victims of subsequent regulations that they could not have anticipated, as has been the case of Türkiye in recent years. The next subsection discusses the state of international higher education in the country and concludes on the observed conflicting policies emanating from Göç on the one hand and YOK on the other hand, of which the policies introduced by the former are noted to have a negative impact on international students, and for that the set goals of the latter.

¹ Stated in a published series article entitled Decriminalize Immigration. See more at (<https://immigrantjustice.org/issues/decriminalize-immigration>)

² <https://www.legalaidcc.org/blogs/new-immigration-policy-on-international-students-is-unnecessarily-strict>

2.1 International Higher Education in Türkiye

There has always been international students' presence in Türkiye going back to the turn of the 20th century (Alikhanov, 2023). During this time, talented students were sent from Turkestan to study abroad, including cities like Istanbul (Alikhanov, 2023). A different level of importance was, however, given to international students' presence in Türkiye at the turn of the 2010s when YTB was formally established in 2012. The aim was, in addition to providing equal access to higher education to successful students from around the world (by offering them scholarships to study in top Turkish higher educational institutions), to "develop mutual cooperation between Turkey and the countries of the world and to contribute to regional and global development in many fields, from academia to art, from economy to literature, from technology to architecture" (YTB, n.d.). Even though the target by 2023 was 200,000 international students (YTB, n.d.), the current number of international students is said to stand at 301,694 as at 2022/2023 academic year (YOK, n.d.), a rise from 48,183 in 2012 (UDEP, n.d.).

As to whether this is to be celebrated or not remains a matter of evaluation for the authorities. The question remains whether or not this is planned or unplanned, and for which reason, the need to shed away the excess number of international students is necessitating the stringent regulations in place. These are questions that are beyond the scope of this work and for which we encourage future studies to explore. What is, however, certain is that recent statements from the chairman of YOK suggest that even though the set target has been exceeded, the internationalisation of higher education in Türkiye is truly on course. For instance, in his latest remarks in a meeting with 25 universities at the Regional Development Focused Differentiation Mission and Specialization program hosted by Bitlis Eren University, the YOK boss, Prof. Erol Özvar, emphasized the need "to open [to the] outside world", made the following statements³ (URL 3, n.d.).

"The most important mission of the Council of Higher Education is to take all kinds of measures that will increase the national and international competitiveness, international visibility and prestige of our universities. As we expect from all our universities, we also expect our Regional Development-Focused Universities to increase their international visibility beyond the regional and national level".

*"What we understand by internationalisation is becoming a place where respected faculty members come and go, two, **becoming a hub for international students**, a centre of attraction, and three, becoming a centre to which scientists strive to come, with their scientific activities".*

Over a decade since the establishment of YTB, this period has coincided with the rise in the number of international students' enrolment in the Türkiye, rising from 48,183 in 2012 (YTB, n.d.) to 301,694 as of the 2022/2023 academic year (YOK, n.d.). The aforementioned statements of the chairman of YOK can therefore be said to be in line with the general policy stance of the country. Accordingly, this has also led to a growing interest in international higher education research across disciplines. Just like happenings in the global research dynamics in international higher education, the situation in Türkiye reflects a similar trend of variety in research themes in international higher education research. In Türkiye, research in this area is largely focused on global collaboration, economic impacts of international students on the Turkish economy, consequences of internationalisation, international mobility of scholars to Turkish higher educational institutions and the reasons for choosing Turkish higher educational institutions (Durnali and Ayyildiz, 2023; Caliklioglu, et. al., 2022; Jourde, 2023; Belenkuyu, 2022; Bahat, 2023). The challenges with respect to international students' mobility and ways of resolving them have received considerable attention from researchers in this regard (see, for example, Bahat, 2023; Kurtul et al., 2021).

The counterproductive nature of the policies of Göç İdaresi is demonstrated in its recent regulations. Over the last few years, Göç İdaresi's latest policies have become stricter and extremely challenging, especially for international students in various institutions of higher learning throughout the country. Freshly circulated instructions on new immigration measures are consistently getting international students nervous and stressed, as will be seen later in this work. It has now become an added responsibility of students to ensure that their student status is up to date on the centralised students' information system (YOKSIS); otherwise, students bear the risk of being taken to deportation camps based on wrong entry into the system. Also, the difficulties expressed by students regarding residential address registration requirements are some of the issues affecting students' lives in Türkiye.

The need to check the reported influx of immigrants has led the immigration office in recent times to implement quite stricter rules that target foreigners, including legal residents, in some cases. Students sometimes find themselves in very difficult situations due to some of these newer rules, as will be seen in the results section of this study. The next section presents the methods adopted for data generation and analyses.

³ All statements were originally made in Turkish by the YOK boss but were translated to English by the authors.

3. Methods

Within the context of scientific inquiry, methods refer to the techniques adopted to gain insights about a certain phenomenon (Farthing, 2016). In this work, we adopted a mixed approach to data generation where the data-generation tool took the form of a questionnaire and a structured interview for the purpose of generating both quantitative and qualitative responses. Participants were recruited over online messaging platforms where the link to the tool was shared with initial potential respondents, who were further encouraged to share with others within their networks. Also, the link, along with the abstract of the study indicating its main objectives, was sent to the international students' offices of various universities across Türkiye for forwarding to the international students, past or present. This, therefore, ensured that all eligible people were given an equal chance of participation. This is important to reduce the incidence of selection bias even though it is acknowledged that not all the schools cooperated in sharing the link with their students. This is an acknowledged weakness in this attempt to reduce the incidence of bias. It is, however, contended that the responses retrieved provide a fair representation of the lived experiences of international students in Türkiye. Eligible participants were all international students who have in the past or are currently studying in any of Türkiye's institutions of higher learning. The online questionnaire was left open on 28 February 2024, and the last response date was recorded on 08 May 2024. In total, 126 persons from 46 countries worldwide (as the countries of their nationality) who are currently studying or have in the past studied in different universities spread across 14 Turkish cities took part in this survey.

As stated previously, the questionnaire used comprised of questions eliciting both quantitative and qualitative responses. The questionnaire comprised three sections. In the first section, questions related to the respondents' biographical data were asked. This section was titled "Respondent's Preliminary Information". Questions such as current place of residence, year of first arrival in Türkiye, and city of the university were asked. The second section was titled "About Experiences with Immigration Department (henceforth to be referred to as Göç İdaresi or simply Göç)," which can be inferred to consist of questions related to respondents' experiences with the Immigration Department of Türkiye (Göç İdaresi). In this section, a 5-point Likert scale question consisting of 13 statements to which respondents were asked to determine their level of (dis)agreement. In an ordinal scale manner, 1 represented 'strongly disagree', 2, 'disagree', 3, 'indifferent', 4, 'agree', and 5 represented 'strongly agree'. In determining the internal consistency of the statements asked here, a reliability test was conducted, which returned a Cronbach alpha value of 0.905 (Table 1), which indicates a high level of internal consistency.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Scale Statistics	Mean	Variance	SD	N
	33.94	116.284	10.784	13
Items Statistics	Mean	SD	N	
The immigration rules are understandable and clear enough	2.83	1.246	126	
I am up-to-date with the most current immigration rules	2.98	1.159	126	
I am often well informed about changes in the immigration laws.	2.5	1.178	126	
I find the immigration rules to be reasonable enough	2.67	1.131	126	
I have peace of mind when my permit is about expiring	2.18	1.267	126	
I feel confident anytime I need to visit Göç İdaresi	2.42	1.28	126	
I have peace of mind regarding my residential status while living in Türkiye	2.84	1.305	126	
I have confidence about retaining my legal residential status throughout my stay in Türkiye	2.87	1.273	126	
I will recommend others to come and study in Türkiye	2.82	1.148	126	
My feelings towards the country has improved over the years	2.75	1.186	126	

Item-Total Statistics	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I would choose Türkiye again for my future studies	2.56	1.19	126	
Even if I get other opportunities elsewhere, I will continue to stay in Türkiye	2.15	1.153	126	
Thanks to Göç İdaresi, my stay in Türkiye has generally been stress-free.	2.37	1.244	126	
The immigration rules are understandable and clear enough	31.11	97.252	0.711	0.894
I am up-to-date with the most current immigration rules	30.95	107.854	0.294	0.911
I am often well informed about changes in the immigration laws.	31.44	105.016	0.409	0.906
I find the immigration rules to be reasonable enough	31.27	98.823	0.719	0.894
I have peace of mind when my permit is about expiring	31.75	98.747	0.632	0.897
I feel confident anytime I need to visit Göç İdaresi	31.52	97.42	0.682	0.895
I have peace of mind regarding my residential status while living in Türkiye	31.1	97.031	0.683	0.895
I have confidence about retaining my legal residential status throughout my stay in Türkiye	31.07	96.947	0.706	0.894
I will recommend others to come and study in Türkiye	31.12	99.546	0.673	0.895
My feelings towards the country has improved over the years	31.19	100.091	0.623	0.898
I would choose Türkiye again for my future studies	31.37	100.924	0.583	0.899
Even if I get other opportunities elsewhere, I will continue to stay in Türkiye	31.79	101.61	0.574	0.9
Thanks to Göç İdaresi, my stay in Türkiye has generally been stress-free.	31.56	97.016	0.723	0.893
Reliability Statistics	Cronbach's Alpha		No of Items	
	0.905		13	

Before this set of statements, respondents were initially asked if they had in the past had any issues with Göç İdaresi, to which they were asked to respond 'No' or 'Yes'. A follow-up question was elicited from respondents about the issues they had. This follow-up question constituted one of the questions that returned qualitative responses from our participants. Respondents with issues used this as an opportunity to present their cases, in some cases, in lengthy paragraphs that indicated the severity of what

they had experienced in the past. These have been presented in the results section of this work. Again, in the second section, respondents were asked if their experiences with Göç İdaresi, or those of others, have had any negative effect on their views about Türkiye to which they were again asked to respond 'No' or 'Yes'. In the third and final section of the questionnaire, questions asked were mainly "About [respondents'] Choice of Türkiye for School". Data generated here included respondents' reasons for choosing Türkiye for higher education, whether or not they had other options at the time of coming to Türkiye, whether or not their expectations were met, and whether or not they would continue to stay in Türkiye after school.

The next section presents the results, where the responses obtained for these questions are presented and analysed.

4. Results

In this section, we present the results obtained from our survey. We also present the analysis of the same. Figure 2 presents the basic descriptive data of our respondents. It can be observed from Figure 2 that the majority (67%) of our respondents were males, with the remaining 33% constituting females. Also, the overwhelming majority (84%) aged 18 to 44 years. The data is of great importance, as represented by the cyan and yellow bars. It is worthy of note that close to half (42%) of respondents have indicated ever having issues with Göç İdaresi. If our sample is assumed to be a fair representation of the population of all international students who have studied or are currently studying in Türkiye, then this must be a rather worse scenario than initially thought. Even though those who reported ever having issues with Göç İdaresi are less than half of the sample, it is worthy of note that those reporting having a negative change of heart towards Türkiye due to their personal experiences with Göç İdaresi or those of others are well above half at 56%.

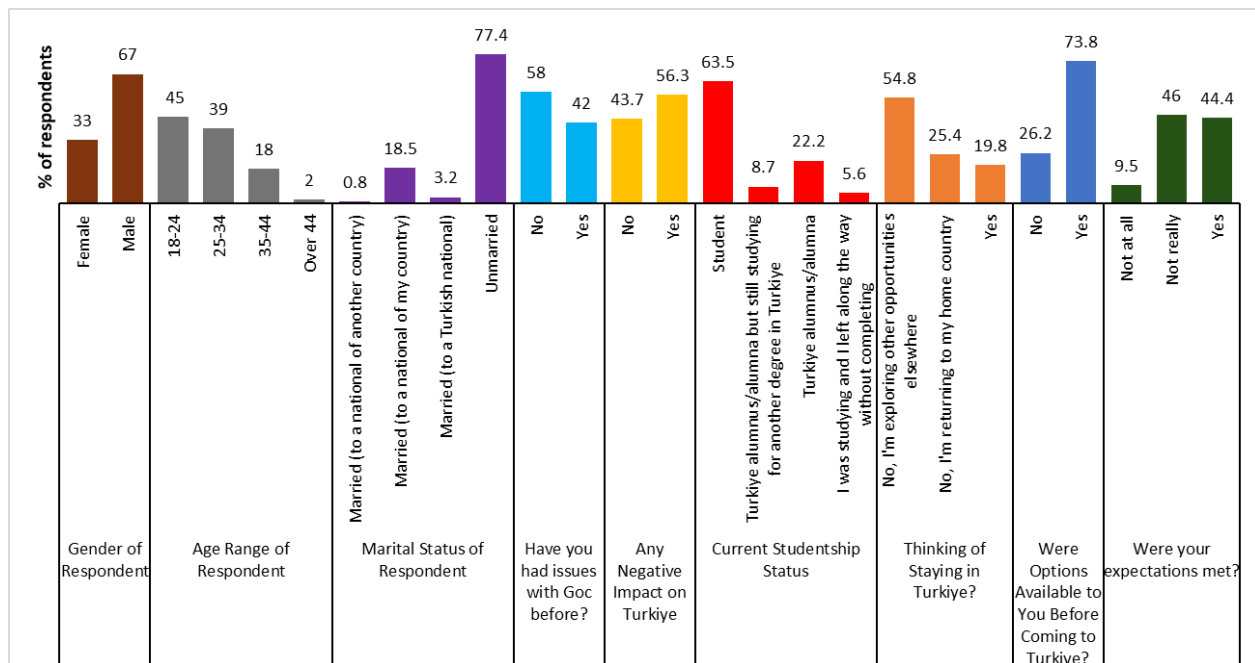


Figure 2: Respondents' Basic Descriptive Data

Further analyses were performed using these two variables to determine whether the differences in responses to subsequent critical questions among these two groups were purely coincidental or whether they indeed represented any statistical significance. A similar percentage of those having a negative change of heart about Türkiye have also indicated their intention not to continue to stay in the country by exploring opportunities abroad (54.8%). About a quarter (25.4%) have also indicated their intentions to return to their home countries after school. Of those who took part in this survey, a little over 72% are currently studying in Türkiye, with about 12% of this group having previously studied in Türkiye. We also report in this study that an overwhelming majority (73.8%) of respondents had options at the time of choosing Türkiye, with more than half (55.5%) of the total respondents reporting unmet expectations. It must be noted that reasons for the unmet expectations were mainly non-academic reasons, such as the attitudes of some locals towards foreigners in recent years, their experiences with Göç İdaresi, and the general economic downturn in the country, among others. In general, the data suggests that, on average, international students in Türkiye spend about 5 years in the country from the time of arrival to their time of departure (Table 2).

Table 2: Statistical Data on Respondents Arrival and Departure Periods

Statistics	Years Spent Before Departing	Number of Years Spent in Türkiye
N	27	119
Mean	5.33	4.87
Median	5.00	4.00
Mode	5.00	5.00
Std. Deviation	2.62	3.44
Variance	6.85	11.82
Range	10.00	19.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00
Maximum	11.00	20.00

Table 3 also presents the views of respondents on the thirteen statements posed to which they were required to ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, remain ‘indifferent’, ‘agree’, or ‘strongly agree’. Responses to this were measured on an ordinal scale, and so mean values less than 3 represented a general disagreement with the statement in question, and those greater than 3 represented a general agreement with the statement. As can be observed from Table 3, none of the statements recorded a mean value greater than 3, which is an indication that respondents generally disagreed with all the statements posed about their student life and relationship with Göç İdaresi. The rest of the figures in the columns portray the proportion of respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, indifferent, agree, and strongly agree with each of the statements. From this table, it is possible to tell the percentage of those who disagreed, agreed with, or were indifferent about the statements. However, it is not possible to tell which categories of international students are more likely to disagree, agree with, or be indifferent about these statements. So, in order to make such inferences, we performed a chi-squared test of independence, which enabled us to draw insights about the possible relations (or otherwise) between categorical or ordinal variables like these.

Table 3: Level of (dis)agreement with statements

Statements / Opinions	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Indifferent (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
The immigration rules are understandable and clear enough	16.7	27	23.8	22.2	10.3	2.83
I am up-to-date with the most current immigration rules	10.3	27	26.2	27	9.5	2.98
I am often well informed about changes in the immigration laws.	23	33.3	18.3	21.4	4	2.5
I find the immigration rules to be reasonable enough	18.3	25.4	33.3	17.5	5.6	2.67
I have peace of mind when my permit is about expiring	41.3	23	19	9.5	7.1	2.18
I feel confident anytime I need to visit Göç İdaresi	31.7	24.6	20.6	15.9	7.1	2.42
I have peace of mind regarding my residential status while living in Türkiye	19.8	20.6	28.6	17.5	13.5	2.84
I have confidence about retaining my legal residential status throughout my stay in Türkiye	16.7	25.4	25.4	19.8	12.7	2.87

I will recommend others to come and study in Türkiye	14.3	25.4	32.5	19.8	7.9	2.82
My feelings towards the country has improved over the years	19.8	19	34.9	19	7.1	2.75
I would choose Türkiye again for my future studies	23	25.4	31	13.5	7.1	2.56
Even if I get other opportunities elsewhere, I will continue to stay in Türkiye	38.9	23.8	24.6	8.7	4	2.15
Thanks to Göç İdaresi, my stay in Türkiye has generally been stress-free.	34.1	19.8	26.2	14.3	5.6	2.37

To reach the set objectives of this work, our analyses in this regard depended on the two categorical variables, "having issues (or not) with Göç İdaresi" as one variable and "having a negative change of hearth about Türkiye" as the second variable. These two variables were cross tabulated with each of the thirteen statements mentioned previously, and a chi-square test of independence was performed for each in order to arrive at any conclusion regarding the impacts of immigration rules on international students. The next subsection presents such inferential statistical analysis.

4.1 Inferential Statistical Analyses

In this study, we relied on the chi-square test of independence for the inferential statistical analyses we performed. The reason is the nature of the variables being analysed, which are on a categorical and ordinal scale of measurement. Table 4 presents the p-values for the chi-square tests performed for the variables on the columns and those on the rows. The two variables on the column ProbGoc and NiMP were each cross-tabulated with those on the rows for the chi-squared test, whose p-values are reported in the relevant cells. A significant level was set at 0.05 as the maximum threshold beyond which a failure to reject the relevant null hypothesis can be possible. Consequently, the null hypothesis for each of the pair of variables (columns and rows) is that; No significant relationship exists between the variables on the column (ProbGoc and NiMP) and those in the rows (i.e. the statements).

Table 4: Inferential Statistics from Chi-square Test

Statements	Have you had any issues with Göç İdaresi in the past before? (ProbGoc)	Experiences with Goc having negative impact on views about Türkiye? (NiMP)
I find the immigration rules to be reasonable enough	0.006	0.001
I have peace of mind when my permit is about expiring	0.001	0.0001
I feel confident anytime I need to visit Göç İdaresi	0.0001	0.002
I have peace of mind regarding my residential status while living in Türkiye	0.0001	0.0001
I have confidence about retaining my legal residential status throughout my stay in Türkiye	0.002	0.0001
I will recommend others to come and study in Türkiye	0.0230	0.0001
My feelings towards the country has improved over the years	0.016	0.0001
I would choose Türkiye again for my future studies	0.430*	0.0001
Even if I get other opportunities elsewhere, I will continue to stay in Türkiy	0.305*	0.0001
Thanks to Göç İdaresi, my stay in Türkiye has generally been stress-free	0.001	0.0001

Experiences with Goc having negative impact on views about Türkiye	0.0001	-
Thinking of staying in Türkiye?	0.832*	0.181*

The results indicate that, indeed, most of the null hypotheses are rejected. In other words, we report that (not) having issues with Göç affects international students' perception of, for example, the reasonability of the immigration laws [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 14.569, p = .006], having peace of mind when their permit is about to expire [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 17.780, p = .001] among others. Our findings indicate that having issues with Göç İdaresi can potentially lead to negative impacts on international students in their student lives in terms of living in stress for fear of losing their legal residential status, for example.

In general, we noted that the relationship between Göç and international students is having negative psychological impacts on international students. This is demonstrated by the significant relationship observed between PobGoc and "having peace of mind when the residence permit is about to expire" [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 17.780, p = .001], "having peace of mind regarding residential status while living in Türkiye" [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 29.261, p = .001] and "having confidence about retaining legal residential status throughout my stay in Türkiye" [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 16.522, p = .002]. Our analyses indicated that those who have had issues with Göç in the past are more likely to feel uneasy about their residential status in the country, which is making international students' life in Türkiye more stressful. This is also noted from the chi-square analysis of ProbGoc and "Thanks to Göç İdaresi, my stay in Türkiye has generally been stress-free" [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 28.764, p = .001] where those who have had issues with Göç in the past were found to be more likely to (strongly) disagree with this statement.

In order to determine if having issues with Göç has any tendency to affect a person's choice of school in the future and/or to recommend Türkiye to others for higher education, we performed another chi-squared test on ProbGoc and the variables "I will recommend others to come and study in Türkiye" and "I would choose Türkiye again for my future studies". There was no significant relationship established between having issues with Göç (ProbGoc) and the tendency to continue to stay or to choose Türkiye again for future studies even in the face of other options abroad [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 3.828, p = .430]. However, ProbGoc and the likelihood to recommend Türkiye to others for school were found to significantly relate [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 11.326, p = .023] with those who have had issues with Göç in the past less likely to recommend Türkiye to others for school. Also, even though ProbGoc did not significantly relate with person's tendency to choose Türkiye for their future studies, a significant relationship was found to exist between a person's negative change of heart towards Türkiye and their tendency to remain in the country for future studies [χ^2 (4, N = 126) = 21.418, p = .001] with those whose experiences (or those of others) with Göç has had a negative impact on their impression about the country found to be less likely to choose Türkiye for future studies.

These findings are of major policy implication for Türkiye. They signify how the country's efforts towards internationalisation of higher education are being rendered void by the contradictory policy directions of Göç. These findings are also of major concern to private higher educational institutions that spend lots of resources trying to attract international students to their schools (Jourde, 2023; Efe and Ozer, 2023). Also, there have been reports about how the existing places in Turkish higher educational institutions are left vacant, with up to 50% vacancies for some programs across the country (The Turkish Chamber of Civil Engineers, 2021). Even though international students may come in handy in filling up these spaces, the issues with Göç will only serve to be counterproductive in this regard if nothing is done to move away from what most international students regard -and argued for by this study- as stringent regulations. To demonstrate how negatively impactful these regulations are on international students, we present a few of the concerns raised by some of the respondents in the course of our field survey in the next section.

4.2 Analyses of Qualitative Responses

In this section, we present the analyses of qualitative responses obtained from our survey. These analyses serve to buttress the quantitative results presented. These responses describe the individual experiences that international students have had or, in some cases, continue to have with Göç İdaresi. Our analyses reveal a number of themes that are recurring in nature. Fortified by specific quotes from respondents, the key elements drawn include documentation requirements, language barriers, staff attitudes towards international students, and reported discrimination, among others, as depicted in Figure 3 and explained in more detail below.

another described the staff as "very very very rude and incompetent". Closely related to this is a reported racism and discrimination from (some of) the staff at Göç İdaresi towards international students, particularly black foreigners. One respondent stated, "*discriminatory mistreatment of foreigners (especially blacks) when we have issues or following up on residence permit applications*". Another highlighted a similar issue, "*racism and lack of attention and also language barrier*".

Another issue raised by our respondents, which also emphasizes the crux of this investigation, is the issue of regulations, which were largely identified as unclear and unstable. Respondents frequently mentioned that the rules and requirements for permits were inconsistent and changed without notice. For instance, one person noted, "*their rules are very ambiguous and can change any moment without proper dissemination*". Another respondent faced difficulties, especially in obtaining a residence permit for their family due to changing document requirements, and described it as "*unnecessary and difficult 'missing document' requirements for family residence permit*". Along with this, others also mentioned the delays and inefficiencies in the process of permit application and renewal. Many respondents experienced significant delays in the processing of their applications. One respondent described waiting for months, "*my application was evaluated for 94 days*". Another shared a similar experience, "*it took me 5 months since I came to Türkiye to get my residence permit*". Another respondent emphasized the possibility of being arrested and taken to the recently opened Repatriation Centres⁴ as they await the processing of their permits. This respondent stated, "*Deportation camps with their inhuman conditions are always one step away from us. The situation is worse when I'm waiting for my new ID to arrive, that's the most stressful time*". It appears that people waiting for the processing of their residence permit do not feel confident walking about in town due to the risk of being taken to these centres. Even though some are later released when found to be innocent, this is certainly not a pleasant experience, especially for international students who are already burdened by the workloads of their programs of study.

There is also another observed permit renewal requirement, which some respondents have reported in this investigation. This is about the requirements associated with residential addresses. Apart from the added burden of having a notarized tenancy agreement, there is also the need for international students' residential addresses to be located in the city where the university is located. This is especially strictly monitored by Göç, who, on irregular occasions, send their officers to visit foreigners at their addresses to ensure those foreigners are indeed residing in those addresses. This is particularly stressful and considered by some as a form of "*harassment*". The implication is that international students (particularly graduate students) are required to rent a place in the cities of their schools even when they really do not have to be in those cities due to completion of course works and in their thesis phase. To minimize their cost of living, some international students tend to share apartments with other colleagues in nearby cities. However, the insistence by Göç for international students to produce a notarized tenancy agreement comes with it some added burden on international students in also getting homeowners to cooperate in visiting the notary offices for this process. A student mentioned, "*Address registration issues are also problematic. I wish they would work on another way to register foreigners into the system. My landlord has not registered the house I live in, so I'm not able to register my address ...until he resolves it. Or sometimes someone else is already registered under the property and it's a hassle to resolve it*". Another stated,

"Making registration for address takes months. It's very hard to register as a student who lives in an apartment and not in the dorms and it is extremely hard for no reason. It took me over 4 months and I had to visit both the il Göç İdaresi and the Nüfus⁵ about 4 times each and they tell something different every time. It always stressing when I have to do anything related to documents, renew or change address".

The issue with registration of residential address was also highlighted by a different respondent who stated, "*Issues mainly arise while trying to procure address documents. As a student, you're prone to frequently changing your address and that presents issues*". Still on the issue of addresses, a rather lengthy comment is presented below:

One of the main issues I would like to see addressed is the Göç İdaresi's insistence on students to produce an address in the city where their university is located, and that they also require them to live there. The Immigration Office needs to understand that some of us (graduate students) are married, and our families live and work in other cities. Since we have finished our classes [course works] and are in the thesis phase, there is no reason for us to stay in the cities where our university is located. Also, we are able to access our university online resources remotely. So, how right is it to leave our families and stay in the cities where our university is located? Moreover, there are difficulties in renting a house. So let's not have

⁴ Named in Turkish as "Geri Gönderme Merkezleri". These centers were recently opened to accommodate those found without valid residence permit.

⁵ This is the Department for Population and Citizenship. It is the office in charge of addresses generally.

to move with our families just to comply with this requirement. Especially when our spouses also work in that city. Therefore, I call for this requirement to be made more flexible.

This sums up the general issues international students have to contend with while living and studying in Türkiye. These immigration rules mean that it is possible for students to lose their student statuses not because of poor academic performance but by the mere operation of immigration laws that can be made more accommodating. Even though this work does not seek to reveal the problems faced by international students in Türkiye, presenting a sneak peek of what their experiences entail is expected to provide some context and a deeper understanding of how these difficulties are impacting them, as this work seeks to investigate. Given that lots of efforts are spent by various stakeholders, including state parastatals such as YOK, YTB, some state universities, and many other private and foundation universities in bringing international students to the country. The overarching question, then, is whether it would be worthwhile to make all efforts to bring in international students if they end up leaving due to immigration rules, which could have been more accommodating. The next section presents the discussions and concludes with both policy and scholarly recommendations for future studies.

5. Discussions and Conclusion

This work sets out to identify the impact that immigration rules are having on international students studying in Türkiye. We have demonstrated this by presenting how international students' experiences with the immigration office (by virtue of their rules) have the tendency to impact their views about the country, their tendency to recommend Türkiye to others as the right destination for higher education and how these experiences are impacting on their general student lives in the country. We noted that regardless of the efforts of YOK, the experiences of international students due to the stringent rules of Göç have the ability to render all those efforts void. Also, as one of the objectives of internationalising higher education, the negative views of international students towards Türkiye because of their experiences with Göç have also been found to have the potential to distant Türkiye from building its soft power around the world. This is particularly important if nothing is done to reverse the tide and ensure that the proportion of international students having these tendencies is reduced to the barest minimum. In trying to win the hearts of people by opening up its doors to international students, it would be tragic to end up rather making enemies out of these people only because of immigration rules and procedures that could be more reasonable and accommodating.

It is acknowledged that countries need to secure their borders from illegal migrants to ensure the peace and tranquillity of their citizens. However, in doing so, it is essential to proceed with the understanding that international students are not immigrants (Bista, 2016; Hazen and Alberts, 2006). Türkiye has made great strides in its aim to attract international students from around the world, which has culminated in making it among the top 10 most preferred destinations for students (Arefin, et al., 2024; UNESCO, n.d., cited in UDEF, n.d.). As has been mentioned before, the existing population of qualified Turkish students cannot fill up all the universities around the country. There is often a reported huge vacancy rate in some programs in the universities, with some reaching close to 50% (Turkish Chamber of Civil Engineers, 2021). International students, therefore, come in handy in filling these vacancies. In this regard, we recommend possible policy reconsideration by Göç, the following.

First of all, the staff at Göç needs to be reoriented to understand the relevance of international students to the country. There is a need to make clear the goals of the country in terms of the internationalisation of higher education in Türkiye. The staff at Göç need to be made aware that international students are not migrants (Hazen and Alberts, 2006), neither are they asylum seekers or refugees (Christopher & Arefin, 2024; Bista, 2016). The requirement for addresses can be reviewed to respond to the current needs of the time. Also, during times of changing cities, rather than requiring students to reapply, a simple process informing Göç of the transfer should suffice. If it is a question of students abandoning school and doing something else after being given a student's residence permit, then it behooves the schools to inform the immigration office of those expelled from school. A country that has its focus fixed on internationalising higher education is expected to implement student-friendly immigration rules. Rules need to be set with the focus of easing the affairs of people who have come from faraway places, ignoring other options on their way, and choosing Türkiye rather than adding to the already inherent burden of having to move to a new country. In addition to the above, based on the findings presented, it is also important for staff at Göç, especially those in cities with large numbers of international students, to have some basic training in the English language to improve communication at the department. Also hiring bilingual staff could also augment this effort. There is also a need to standardize and improve clarity related to permit application and/or renewal procedures. Clearer and more consistent guidelines need to be applied; there are instances where different directives are given by different officers on the same issue. Officers at the department need to be encouraged to use discretions (if they have to) that seek to simplify processes and not discretions that seek to make things more difficult by requesting for "documents that do not exist," as rehashed by some of our respondents. The issue of purported discrimination and poor attitudes of staff at Göç can be addressed once the staff is retrained and reoriented to understand the importance of the country's internationalisation agenda and how their work impacts this agenda.

In terms of scholarly recommendations for possible further research in this area in the future, it is recommended that future studies in this area consider looking at the contribution of international students to the performance of Türkiye as a country in

international higher education academic performance. In this regard, studies may consider identifying the specific contributions of international students to the academic output of the country. Also, similar investigations may look at the contributions of international graduates from Türkiye to the expansion of Turkish companies' operations around the world. This will measure the impact of internationalisation on export volumes, which is one of the main aims that is driving Türkiye to internationalise higher education. It was also noticed that the public view of international students is negative. Thus, studies that bring out the direct contribution of international students to the intellectual growth of the common man could be undertaken in the future. This means that future studies may seek to measure the impact of interactions with international students on locals. The subject of research would then be the locals.

Like any other work, this investigation was also limited by a number of factors. First of all, we acknowledge the benefits that online surveys brought to this study by getting the views of people from across continents who could otherwise not be reachable. However, the risk of selection bias by virtue of self-selection also existed, which posed so much difficulty in trying to navigate and reduce the level of bias in this regard, which is important for the quantitative component of this work. In going around this problem, we adopted some innovative ways to allow every international student an equal chance of participation. We did this by reaching out to as many universities as possible from across the country. The results showed participation from students from 14 different cities across Türkiye, which can be said to present a fair representation of international students who have studied and/or are still studying in the country.

The other thing we did, in addition to reaching out to schools directly, was to send the link to the questionnaire to the different international students' social media groups to encourage them to take part. Given that the open-ended questions portrayed a certain level of unanimity regarding the major issues highlighted, it can be said that this study provided a fair representation of the experiences of international students with the immigration office and how these experiences are impacting or can potentially impact international students. Another notable limitation of this study can be said to be the absence of comments from Göç İdaresi. Given the fact that access to the relevant authorities at Göç could pose a challenge, we decided to limit the scope of this study to the views of international students only while at the same time encouraging future works to address this. In addition to this, we also wish to encourage authorities from Göç to address these issues either through press statements or meetings with international students on different platforms.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no financial conflict of interest in this work.

We, however, declare the following personal relationship may be considered as potential competing interests: We declare our statuses as (former) international students ourselves who have, in one way or another, encountered their fair share of the ordeal experienced by other international students in Türkiye from Göç İdaresi.

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