



Education Diplomacy in Higher Education Institutions: An Evaluation of International Student Centers as Think Tanks

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ABSTRACT

The international activities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are considered an element of soft power in inter-state relations and are included within the scope of education diplomacy in the literature. States such as the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), which are among the pioneers of education diplomacy, shape their international activities within this framework through international education as well as international research. The main adaptive stakeholders of academic and administrative activities in both fields include universities as well as various state institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and think tanks. This study examines the relationship between think tanks and education diplomacy, the role of Turkish and US HEIs in education diplomacy, and whether international student organizations of universities can be considered think tanks. Literature review and content analysis methods were preferred as methods in the study. Within the scope of the literature review, education diplomacy and think tanks, and within the scope of content analysis, existing administrative regulations and publications were examined, taking into account the structures of Turkish and US HEIs on the axis of education diplomacy. The conclusion of the study is that the international student management preferences of Turkish and US HEIs have similar outputs with think tanks by assuming a kind of central role in the contribution of countries to education diplomacy, thus gaining the ability to become a more active, institutional and sustainable stakeholder in education diplomacy and this situation provides various advantages to higher education.

Keywords: Education diplomacy, soft power, Turkish higher education, US higher education, think tanks, international student centers, international students in higher education

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a civil initiative, think tanks contribute to foreign policy by developing alternative policies for governments. Think tanks can serve as indispensable advisors to policymakers. It is possible to assert that education is one of the topics on which recommendations are given by think tanks. The *raison d'être* of think tanks is to present policy proposals in various disciplines and, according to McGann, think tanks are divided into seven distinct categories. Autonomous and independent think tanks, quasi-independent think tanks, quasi-governmental think tanks, government-affiliated think tanks, university-affiliated think tanks, and political-party affiliated think tanks and corporate for-profit think tanks (McGann, 2021: 14). Think tanks are known primarily as organizations that help bridge the gap between knowledge and policy (McGann, 2020: 5). Research and implementation centers of HEIs, known as university-affiliated think tanks, carry out studies that will create knowledge about their fields of study. This will then lead the relevant center to formulate a policy on the axis of this information. For this reason, in this study, the role of HEIs in education diplomacy, whether international student centers can be evaluated within the scope of think tanks, and the relationship between think tanks and education diplomacy are examined. Because international student centers that work as research and implementation centers will have a role to fill the gap between knowledge and politics.

In this study, firstly, the relationship between think tanks and education diplomacy will be explored. Then, the education diplomacy dimension of central structures in USA and Türkiye's HEIs will be examined, and international student activities in HEIs will be discussed in broad terms. Afterwards, international student organizations in Turkish higher education system

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will be examined. At this point, in the context of providing output with an effect similar to think tanks in education diplomacy in the context of Turkish universities, the proposal that the international student recruitment management system should provide service with a structuring that assumes a central role will be discussed and various determinations will be made.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THINK TANKS AND EDUCATION DIPLOMACY

The debate over whether or not think tanks are actors in education diplomacy has never been addressed in the literature, and this debate is necessary for light of recent developments. While the roles and activities of think tanks and educational institutions in diplomacy are distinct, there have been some convergences in recent years. Universities' research and implementation centers are the primary points of contact.

The USA is depicted as the birthplace of think tanks at the turn of the nineteenth century (Şehitoğlu, 2021: 126). In today's world, the *raison d'être* of almost all think tanks is to generate policy proposals (Weaver, 1989: 568-569). The topics of these policy proposals could be classified as foreign policy, economy, domestic policy, climate/environment, education, and military/security. Patrick Köllner, states that think tanks have eleven roles to play in international relations. According to Köllner, think tanks:

- have a salon function that brings together academics, politicians, bureaucrats, media representatives, and businesspeople as well as providing a forum for discussion.
- have the ability to directly shape public opinion about international relations or foreign policy or reshape the existing public perceptions.
- act as a research broker, in a sense, can disseminate information about international relations to a broader audience. They can accomplish this by creating public forums or publications that appeal to a broader audience and making their findings and assessments accessible to non-academics.
- can bring international and global issues to the public's attention and/or contribute to raising public awareness about these issues by hosting various forums and media interventions. Additionally, they can assist in setting national and international agendas.
- can engage in informal diplomacy activities by organizing or participating in semi-official track (track 1.5) or more autonomous track (track 2) processes. Thus, they can assist in establishing people-based pipelines, which can be particularly beneficial in situations where formal bilateral diplomatic relations do not yet exist.
- can assist governments and policymakers in obtaining more accurate information on specific issues by providing a *second opinion*.
- can directly impact foreign policy decisions or broader strategic discourses by providing policy advice. As a result, one can assert that think tanks perform a consultancy function.
- can help legitimize the relevant state's current or emerging official foreign policy positions, especially in semi-authoritarian regimes. As a result, think tanks can serve as an *intellectual cheerleader* by providing justifications from an ostensibly neutral perspective and without criticizing specific policies or policy decisions of the government of the country in question, rather than informing the government of the country in which they are based, on international public policies.
- occasionally export specific agendas to other countries. They can occasionally accomplish this by assisting similar think tanks in other countries, such as political parties, associations, and trade unions. Think tanks can also help establish think tanks in other countries, as they have adequate funding and/or staff.
- can also contribute to establishing international relations and strategic studies in other countries as their field of study. They can accomplish this through the publication of journals, the hiring of academic staff, and the provision of internal and external fellowships to researchers.
- through the operation of diplomacy academies and various training programs and internships in international relations, can assist in training the next generation of international relations practitioners and academics. They can serve as mentors for lecturers, doctoral students, and young scientists at universities and other HEIs (Köllner, 2011: 5-6 and Şehitoğlu, 2021: 62-64).

Think tanks, one of the main purposes of which is to produce information, interpret it and bring it to a usable level, have a direct relationship with education. These organizations, which have qualified human resources, are largely fed by academic circles. Here, think tanks in particular provide financial support to young researchers and interns (Ayman, 2009: 56), not only contributing to their personal development, but also enabling them to focus on strategic studies and ensure that this culture has a place in them. Indeed, two of the reasons given by Rybka-Iwanska are related to education. One of these is the fact that think tanks educate, and the other is the fact that they form a bridge between policy makers and academia (Rybka-Iwanska, 2017). Think tanks are skilled at making an impact on the minds of scientists and academics. Namely, senior managers or members working in think tanks can give lectures at universities as guest lecturers. This enables think tanks to take part in the academy ecosystem.

In this context, and in light of McGann's typologies of think tanks, it is necessary to highlight the shortcomings of university-affiliated think tanks in education diplomacy. This situation will also affect education diplomacy, and in light of this, we conclude that relevant HEIs should be practitioners of education diplomacy on both national and international levels. Given

that research and implementation centers within HEIs are classified as think tanks in the literature, it is necessary to expand McGann's definition of think tanks in education diplomacy. Thus, the Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES)¹ and the London School of Economics and Political Science Center for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE)² can be considered to be think tanks housed within internationally renowned universities. On the other hand, in the context of Turkish higher education, the İnönü University African Studies Center (İNÜAFAM)³ and the Gaziantep University European Union Research Center (GABAM)⁴ should be regarded as university-based think tanks.

It is well established that nation-states place a higher premium on education diplomacy, especially in the age of globalization. It can be said that the popularity of the education diplomacy which is good practice of public diplomacy has increased for the last 20 years. Kiran and Açıklın think that *"individuals and groups are becoming more involved in global issues and are impacting interactions between countries, sectors, and stakeholders"* (Kiran and Açıklın, 2021: 979). Essentially, education diplomacy is the interdisciplinary and transnational exchange of ideas, theories, and concepts that advance education (Batey, 2014: 77). One can point to international student mobilization as an example of this transnational collaboration. As a result, it is well known that numerous states have implemented various programs aimed at attracting international students in order to succeed in the field of education diplomacy. In this context, the Fulbright Foreign Student Program in the USA, the Chevening Scholarships in the UK, the Eiffel Excellence Scholarship Program in France, the Endeavour Postgraduate Awards in Australia, the DAAD Scholarships in Germany, and the Türkiye Scholarships in Türkiye should be highlighted as exemplary programs.

States must devote the same amount of effort to diplomacy and its components as they do to defend their sovereignty. Indeed, states have used education diplomacy to safeguard and even expand their national interests. Education, particularly in the postcolonial era, continues to be critical in advancing national influence (Peterson, 2014: 1). Education diplomacy has been classified as a soft power instrument within the discipline of international relations. As a result, it would not be inaccurate to characterize all actors involved in a country's higher education system as soft power tools.

3. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION DIPLOMACY

Education Diplomacy uses diplomacy skills to foster effective collaboration across sectors and between various actors to address educational challenges and advance transformative educational agendas (Center for Education Diplomacy, 2023). According to another definition that can also be associated with global capitalism, education diplomacy can assist in bridging the divide between industrialized and poor countries by exchanging culturally relevant and collaborative academic knowledge, skills and resources (Bhatta and Young, 2016: 24). Thus, education diplomacy is distinct from traditional diplomacy approaches. Indeed, as one of the areas of education diplomacy implementation, higher education is regarded as an *ideal soft power instrument* (Peterson, 2014: 2) capable of accomplishing much more than traditional diplomacy approaches. Services for international student processes are a critical component of education diplomacy implementation. Higher education practices, which are structural components of integrated societies of nation-states that have evolved into an integrated global society, demonstrate a critical soft power that enables them to maneuver into a modern field (Khan et al., 2020: 3). Human mobilization occurs as a natural outcome of advanced stages of integration in relevant societies. The most significant human mobilization emerges as international student activities in terms of both quantity and quality with regard to the sphere of influence. Student exchange programs, including international credit mobility and services for international student processes, are among the practices with the highest visibility for the student side of internationalization activities in HEIs. Exchange mobilities in the field of education do not only consist of public diplomacy. It should be noted that governments that subsidize and encourage these mobilities have three goals. These goals are (i) to promote the economic, technological and scientific development of the host country, (ii) developing human capital that can go especially to developing countries and contribute to the economy, (ii) to establish intercultural relations for the sake of public diplomacy (Wang, 2020: 90). International student mobility mainly comprises (i) full-time international students enrolled in a higher education institution and (ii) exchange students travelling to a higher education institution in another country for short-term study or research purposes. This activity, known as international student recruitment, is a significant element of trade in the

¹ This center at Harvard University is dedicated to the study of the Middle East through the lens of diverse politics, cultures and histories. The Middle East is the subject of extensive research, particularly in academia, government, business, journalism and law. Additional information is available at: <https://cmes.fas.harvard.edu/about>

² We are a multidisciplinary research center dedicated to understanding social disadvantage and the role of social and public policies in preventing, mitigating or exacerbating it. Social disadvantage is multidimensional and is frequently best understood in dynamic or life-course terms, as well as in terms of individual, familial, local, national and international dimensions. Additional information is available at: <https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/new/who-we-are/>

³ The study area of this center, which is part of İnönü University, is to contribute to the continent's academic enrichment through academic studies and research on Africa. Additional information is available at: <http://www.inonu.edu.tr/inuafam/menu/3366/misyon-ve-vizyon>

⁴ The primary objective of this center within Gaziantep University is to disseminate European Union (EU) and other externally funded projects. Additional information is available at: <http://gabam.gantep.edu.tr/pages.php?url=biz-kimiz-77>

service export revenues of many countries, particularly the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia. On a global scale, international student mobility is projected to exceed 7 million by 2023, representing an economy worth over \$100 billion. The factor that increases the economic value of this issue in the long term and ensures its sustainability is the ability of international student mobilizations to assume the role of an education diplomacy element.

The global mobility of international students should be considered in the context of education diplomacy, both from the receiving and sending countries' perspectives. China, India, Vietnam, Germany, France, and the USA are among the countries that send the most students abroad for higher education (UIS.Stat, 2023). China, Germany, France, and the USA are also among the most popular destinations for international students. As a result of this indicator, it is possible to deduce that the principal actors in international student mobility in education diplomacy are centered on the countries mentioned above.

Table 1.

Ranking of Countries that Send the Most Students Abroad (Source of International Students)

Rank*	Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	China	818.604	866.843	928.395	997.702	1.061.511
2	India	256.996	305.369	341.465	377.849	461.792
3	Vietnam	68.010	82.644	94.608	108.301	126.059
4	Germany	117.088	118.081	122.958	122.524	122.445
5	France	86.691	90.836	94.756	99.567	103.161
6	The USA	80.539	83.949	86.571	86.029	102.246
7	Republic of Korea	107.861	105.477	105.453	101.694	101.493
8	Nepal	40.558	49.468	64.355	82.047	93.921
9	Kazakhstan	78.253	90.213	84.859	88.118	89.292
10	Brazil	50.387	51.969	58.280	70.055	81.882
11	Ukraine	68.205	77.419	77.890	78.578	77.586
12	Italy	60.906	67.195	74.794	76.123	77.505
13	Syria	38.570	46.734	53.462	64.518	74.839
14	Nigeria	92.531	96.692	85.917	76.285	71.133
15	Saudi Arabia	86.239	90.238	84.242	77.406	66.398
	WORLD	4.779.651	5.086.012	5.375.470	5.681.622	6.063.665

Source: UNESCO UIS, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>, (Access date: 30.12.2022).

* According to 2019 data

The administrative components of HEIs are shaped by the priorities of both national and institutional education policies for international students. International student recruitment, which is distinct from domestic student admissions, necessitates the establishment of specialized administrative units to ensure student integration and compliance with global institutional regulations. The relevant operations, which differ from traditional university administrative units and are integrated into international activity through education diplomacy, continue to exist in various administrative structures.

Table 2.

Most Popular Destinations for International Students (2015-2019)

Rank order*	Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	The USA	907.251	971.417	984.898	987.314	976.853
2	Australia	294.438	335.512	381.202	444.514	509.160
3	The United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	430.833	432.001	435.734	452.079	489.019
4	Germany	228,756	244.575	258.873	311.738	333.233
5	Russian Federation	226.431	243.752	250.658	262.416	282.922
6	Canada	171.603	189.478	209.979	224.548	279.168
7	France	239.409	245.349	258.380	229.623	246.378
8	Japan	131.980	143.457	164.338	182.748	202.907
9	China	123.127	137.527	157.108	178,271	201,177
10	Türkiye	72,178	87.903	108.076	125.138	154.505
	WORLD	4.779.651	5.086.012	5.375.470	5.681.622	6.063.665

Source: UNESCO UIS, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>, (Access date: 04.01.2023).

* Rank order is based on 2019 data.

According to UNESCO data, the top three preferred countries for international student mobility in the world in the last five years (2015-2019), which had exceeded 6 million as of 2019, were the USA, the UK and Australia. Within the constraints imposed by the administrative regulations to which they are subject, it is apparent that international student recruitment and/or subsequent administrative processes are organized using office, coordinator, and center structures when the first three countries most popular with international students are considered specifically. The most distinguishing feature here is that regardless of the organizational structure chosen, the relevant units continue to exist as administratively flexible bodies

for a variety of reasons, including the diversity of the target audience, the sustainability requirements of the operation, and the quickest and most effective method of student integration. This is due to the nature of business and the functions of institutions that differ from traditional local practices. Thus, this deep structuring preference in HEIs that assume the central role institutionally, direct data to academic as well as administrative activities, and manage the unit with an academic perspective, enables institutions to act in the axis of education diplomacy with the same motivations and outputs as think tanks.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the USA, China, France, and Germany, which are the most popular destinations for international students, are also among the countries that send the most students abroad. Although numerous factors are at play in this regard, ethnic diversity in the relevant countries and the economy generated by the higher education system, a critical component of exports, are among the primary causes. Apart from these countries, it is understood that the situation is not yet comparable in the higher education systems of Russia, The UK, Japan, Australia, Canada, and Türkiye, all of which are popular with international students.

4. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GOVERNANCE: EXAMPLE OF US HIGHER EDUCATION

The international studentship in the USA is a factor of soft power and a tool of education diplomacy. This is indicated by the fact that education diplomacy is an area governed by state policy. International education in the USA became an important issue in response to the Second World War and the Cold War: the period between the 1950s and the 1980s. According to De Wit, *“although this international education was motivated mainly by political interests it has resulted in a great variety of national, private, and institutional programs for international education”* (De Wit, 2001: 71). That’s way international developments of US higher education is the dominant model in the world today. For this reason, the issue of international student recruitment in higher education is of strategic importance, and in order to prove this, it should first be understood how the foreign policy of the country is shaped and how the management of HEIs affects the relevant process. In 2008, following the election of Barack Obama as President of the USA, the government aimed to regain the momentum that had previously been lost by taking some initiatives especially in the field of public diplomacy. In this respect, a program called *Strategy for Public Diplomacy 2.0* was launched in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within the scope of the program, it was planned to undertake initiatives under the following headings;

- circulate a series of videos on YouTube about democracy and its tools to stimulate intercultural dialogue.
- to design a web page where more detailed information about study opportunities and exchange programs in the USA can be obtained and where the right information can be obtained from the right people.
- creating blog forms through which the US Minister in charge of public diplomacy can be reached directly and questions or messages can be sent to him (Erzen, 2014: 68).

Here, the fact that exchange programs, which are the field of application of education diplomacy, are among the priority areas of the US public diplomacy strategy has not only imposed an obligation on US HEIs, but has also made education diplomacy a more visible state policy. This has been associated with the fact that the USA has the most successful universities on a global scale, hosts the largest number of international students in quantitative terms and has an inclusive state policy (Şahin and Çifçi, 2022: 248).

Approximately 1 million international students 3,733 post high school institutions in the USA as of 2020. Among these institutions, 1,575 four-year and two-year institutions are public, 1,576 are private, and 582 are for-profit institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). When the structural elements of the country's HEIs are analyzed in terms of their contribution to education diplomacy, it is understood that the determining features of American capitalism are also present here. The US central government does not have a direct controlling role over the country's HEIs. However, the national public diplomacy vision of the country and the practices specialized for US capitalism, which is observed in the country's economic actions; also manifest themselves in the field of higher education. In this context, the USA, with its different institutions, plays a role in facilitating international students' preference for US universities and helping them understand the system (EducationUSA, 2023). The table below is of great importance as it shows that a holistic national structure based on the strength of systematic and inter-institutional cooperation is followed in the organization of international student processes in the USA. These institutions are direct stakeholders of internationalization in higher education and serve the education diplomacy.

Table 3.

U.S. Government Agencies Associated with International Student Recruitment

U.S. Department of State	U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)	Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)
Bureau of Consular Affairs	Study in the States
U.S. Department of Education	National Science Foundation (NSF)
Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs	Office of International Science and Engineering
Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE)	Partnerships for International Research and Education (PIRE)
U.S. Department of Commerce	
U.S. Commercial Service	

Source: EducationUSA, U.S. Department of State (Access date: 13.01.2023)

Opportunities for scholarships offered by US HEIs have a decisive role in the establishment of US HEIs as an element of education diplomacy. In this context, apart from the individual scholarships offered by institutions and the student support programs of various NGOs, the most decisive influence has been the introduction of the Fulbright Scholarship Program. The inclusion of the country's HEIs in the Fulbright Scholarship Program (The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2023), established in 1946, and led to the establishment of a strong alumni system (Fulbrighter, 2023). In this way, a space has been built where students can maintain their ties with the USA even after their transition to professional life. Thus, it also provides the US with a means to monitor the results of its investments in this area and to sustain the Americanization of its voluntary representatives around the world, which was its initial goal.

In addition to the economic benefits, the US, as the richest country in the world, as Nye points out, through internationalization in higher education, is able to pay for both better education and the international influence that comes from running an effective aid and information program abroad. This requires investing more in *soft power* rather than *hard power*, in other words expensive defense (Snow, 2009: 3). In this respect, the overlapping objectives of the US Fulbright scholarship program with education diplomacy show us why internationalization in higher education is preferred as an instrument of education diplomacy. These objectives are; i) to promote mutual understanding between the people of the USA and the peoples of other countries through educational and cultural exchange, ii) to present the educational and cultural interests, progress and achievements of the people of the USA and other nations as contributions to a peaceful and more productive life for people everywhere. In this way, it is possible to make the USA an element of peace that strengthens the ties that unite the USA with other nations, iii) to promote international co-operation for educational and cultural advancement, and in this way to help develop friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the USA and other countries of the world (ibid: 6).

The US gains in this process are developing in commercial, diplomatic and political fields. The US usually conducts student programs through public-private partnerships. These partnerships are based on political agenda, commercial agenda and one-to-one human relations. Through this initiative, the US supports students and invests in their future. This is also a facilitating factor for the international objectives of the US business world in terms of trade. The level of participation in international exchange programs in the USA is quite high. According to Aydemir, more than 100,000 foreigners have visited the USA in the last 50 years, 1,500 of whom have been ministers at cabinet level and in their own countries, and 177 of whom have served as heads of state or government (Aydemir, 2018: 250). Former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, former British Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and former Afghan President Harmid Karzai are among the world leaders who have benefited from international visitor programs (U.S. Department of State, 2005). On the other hand, "*Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania, Indira Gandhi and Oscar Arias, the Nobel Peace Prize winner and President of Costa Rica*" are other examples (Aydemir, 2018: 251).

According to the US Department of Commerce, education with international students is one of the largest exports of the US, contributing more than \$39 billion to the US economy in 2016, with 72 per cent of their funding coming from sources outside the US. This has a longer-term impact after graduation. The education received by international students in choosing US institutions is an effective element in developing economic relations through professional business contacts by providing them with strong professional skills as well as English language skills (Vaxevanidou, 2018: 57). The most visible aspect of the sustainable international relations targeted by education diplomacy is the foreign economic relations that will develop after graduation.

In summary, it is seen that US higher education is shaped on the basis of a structural diplomacy policy in the country as an extension of US capitalism. This creates a phenomenon of education diplomacy that finds a living space in foreign policy and foreign economic relations. The fact that the USA discovered internationalization in higher education relatively earlier than other countries and the actions that resulted in the identification of international students with American culture and Americanization are important determinants of the country's progress and sustainability in institutional action plans in the field.

5. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GOVERNANCE: EXAMPLE OF TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION

After the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, there was no comprehensive institutional development in student exchange programs established by international agreements between the two world wars and during the Cold War period afterwards. Nevertheless, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, steps were taken in 1992 under the name of the Great Student Project (Büyük Öğrenci Projesi - BÖP) to strengthen the relations between Türkiye and the newly independent countries by encouraging student exchange and educational investments as an extension of foreign policy strategies (Budak, 2012: 66). For Türkiye, which had provided various scholarship opportunities for international students in the past, the scholarship activities offered through the BÖP started to become more systematic (Ulutaş, 2014: 98-99). In fact, the primary aim that was desired to be achieved with the implementation of the BÖP was to establish long-term friendly relations between Türkiye and the Turkic Republics. However, as a secondary goal was to provide “Türkiye educated human resources” in order to raise qualified young generations. For this reason, BÖP is an education diplomacy initiative within the framework of its emergence and purpose of implementation. The scope of BÖP, which was initially aimed at some Central Asian countries, was expanded to 57 countries in time, including the Balkans and the cognate and related communities in Russia (Öztürk, 2014: 46). In this process, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Credit and Dormitories Institution, TİKA, and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye were identified as public institutions that took an active role in the BÖP Evaluation Board (Budak, 2012: 70). It has been observed that BÖP has been a pioneer in organizing scholarship activities for international students as an education diplomacy activity of Türkiye and in developing large scale projects.

Another program that Türkiye provides scholarship support is the Government Scholarships Program, which was launched for more than 100 countries within the framework of bilateral cultural agreements and goodwill. Students coming to Türkiye through this program benefit from scholarship support at the same rate as the BÖP (Özoğlu et al., 2012: 65). In addition, institutions such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the Ministry of National Education also provide scholarships for students abroad. Türkiye's largest program in this field is the Türkiye Scholarships program, which has been running since 2012.

The introduction of the Türkiye Scholarships system can be grounded on three bases: (i) the policies of opening up to many underdeveloped countries of the world in the field of economic, political, cultural and humanitarian aid at the state and civil society level in the new government period after 2002; (ii) the international protocols developed with these countries in the diplomatic field; (iii) the fact that Türkiye has entered the process of adapting to the internationalization strategy in higher education, which developed countries, especially G-8 countries, have implemented in their unilateral student mobility policies (Öztürk, 2014). Türkiye Scholarships provide scholarships to over 15,000 international students from 178 countries between 2012-2021 (YTB, 2023: 3). Among its graduates are Shubhash Wostey (Kamruzzaman, 2023), Cox's Bazaar Director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Bangladesh, Abdulkadir Muhammed Nur, Minister of Defense of Somalia, Dr. Saleh al-Shadli (Şenol, 2023 and Güvendik, 2021), President of the Libyan Reintegration and Development Program, Abzal Saparbekuly, President of the Kazakhstan Diaspora Authority, as well as many ambassadors, faculty members, private sector representatives and politicians. The number of Türkiye graduates spread to 184 countries of the world is over 150 thousand (Türkiye Mezunları, 2023). On the other hand, YTB, which has 34 Graduates Associations in 30 countries, has organized 118 alumni meetings in 59 countries. It is observed that the applications for Türkiye Scholarships, which are considered an alternative state scholarship to the scholarships of countries such as the USA, the UK, Germany, France and Canada, have been increasing steadily over the years.

Table 4.

Number of International Students Applying to Türkiye Scholarships by Years

Application Year	Application Numbers
2019	146.600
2020	158.168
2021	165.582
2022	170.000

Source: Türkiye Mezunları

In the face of rapidly increasing activities in Türkiye in terms of international student recruitment, especially after 2010, many institutions have started to be officially involved in the process. In addition to HEIs, the main stakeholders have been the CoHE, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Education, the Ministry of Economy for a while and then the Ministry of Trade, YTB, the Presidency of Migration Management, Yunus Emre Institute, the Association of Service Exporters (HİB), the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), Türkiye Maarif Foundation, NGOs and Education Consultancy Companies. According CoHE data, the number of international students in Türkiye has reached more than 300,000 in 2022 and will increase coming years (YÖK, 2022).

Turkish HEIs' international competitiveness is measured not only in terms of the number of international students and staff but also in terms of their national preferability.

Table 5.

Country Ranking of Students Residing in Türkiye in their Preferences for Higher Education Abroad

Country	Number	Country	Number
1 The USA	9,354	9 Austria	1,885
2 Germany	8,494	10 Bulgaria	1,317
3 The United Kingdom	3,710	11 North Macedonia	1,304
4 Ukraine	2,284	12 Hungary	1,138
5 Azerbaijan	2,257	13 Poland	910
6 France	2,007	14 Netherlands	862
7 Italy	2,001	15 Switzerland	779
8 Canada	1,914	TOTAL*	47,628

Source: UNESCO, Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>, (Access date: 30.12.2022)

* This shows the number of students going abroad from Türkiye at the higher education level as of 2019.

HEIs that make a difference in international competitiveness also affect the traffic of higher education students going abroad. Although Türkiye is not in the top 15 countries that send the highest number of higher education students abroad, it is observed that students in Türkiye prefer the USA, Germany and the UK the most. Criteria such as the welfare and security environments of the countries, more favorable education expenditures compared to other countries, ease of obtaining a student visa and finding a job after graduation are among the factors affecting the country preferences of international students in higher education.

In line with international practices, it is seen that the administrative structure in HEIs in Türkiye in terms of international student recruitment is generally organized in the form of offices, departments, coordination offices, directorates, and centers. Administrative units responsible for international student recruitment in Türkiye set annual targets as an extension of their higher education institution's internationalization strategy. Despite these goals, the quotas approved by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) are among the main areas where institutions are restricted. Depending on their human resource capacities, administrative units responsible for relevant student recruitment activities conduct application, admission, and registration procedures (in some institutions), and, in particular, international promotion activities. Academic operations such as the Foreign Student Examination (Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrenci Sınavı-YÖS), the foreign language examination, and interviews may be coordinated by the appropriate administrative units at this stage.

On the other hand, the registration and orientation procedures for accepted international students, such as transportation, visas, housing, health insurance, and residence, are also determining factors in international student recruitment processes. The paperwork associated with student affairs within the framework of CoHE regulations, inter-departmental processes such as monitoring students' payments/scholarships, and also technicalities such as continued guidance for current students, cultural activities, career, residence, and graduation processes, cause the organizational structures of the administrative units in question to expand gradually. This situation forces the international student recruitment units to have an independent organizational structure divided into many more sub-units beyond the promotion and guidance activities required for student recruitment alone.

It is seen that there are seven HEIs in Türkiye in the state universities that use the center structure, as of 2021: *İstanbul University International Student Center, Sakarya University International Student Center, Çukurova University International Student Center, Sakarya University of Applied Sciences International Student Center, Yalova University International Student Center, Kütahya Dumlupınar University International Student Office and Trakya University International Relations Office*. As for foundation universities in Türkiye, no institution has converted to the center structure yet. Even though they are not centralized like state universities, it has been observed that the administrative structures of İstanbul Bilgi University and Altınbaş University are institutionally distinct from those of other foundation universities, and they are organized as structures closest to centralization.⁵

Preference for a central structure, which is typically an academic unit formed to assume responsibility for various administrative and academic operations in the form of practice and research in institutions of higher education can be defined as *centralization*. Academic and administrative reasons are the primary reasons for the centralization or center-like structures of the units that manage international student procedures in HEIs. However, at the same time, the positive return of a structure directed and managed as a think tank is that it will benefit education diplomacy because, with centralization, the process will naturally evolve into conducting studies as a think tank.

⁵ İstanbul Bilgi University manages its international relations processes through three separate institutional structures, International Admissions, the International Student Advising Office, and the Global Talent Management Center, and Altınbaş University manages them through two separate operations, the International Office and the Alumni Relations and Internationalization Department.

Academic and administrative classification, as applied to research and implementation centers in HEIs that serve as think tanks for education diplomacy in international student practices, touches on areas that are directly related to both institutional and national education policies and regulations. The first of these is the need for centralization in terms of academic reasons and contributions to the internationalization strategy; the center would be responsible for obtaining direct data from the field and evaluating it to assist the academy in developing national policies as well as providing qualified data to the state for strategic studies such as security and migration with direct access. The second classification, which includes administrative reasons, is shaped by the need for centralization despite institutional setbacks in international student recruitment and plays a role in improving the quality of academic and strategic reasons in terms of their outcomes. Here, we encounter the need to determine the roles of universities' various academic and administrative units, the need to establish quality standards for the services provided in this context, and the need for one-stop management. Systemic issues, such as the difficulty of establishing human resources of the desired quality and efficiency in each unit, as well as the inability of units to act in unison, drive institutions to adopt centralized structures. On the other hand, centralization has been observed to play a constructive role in the joint monitoring of all relevant academic and administrative processes in updating university operations for developing needs. This brings the practicality of pulling data from a single source and managing decisions from a single place in the evaluation of improvement processes of providing services from a single center in the management of administrative fields such as implementation, evaluation, admission, registration, visa, residence, health insurance, accommodation, orientation, and social activities. In this way the student's service expectation is shaped, as are support services such as academic preparation, language preparation, career services, guidance, and scholarship. On the other hand, the guidance of consultancy firms, community organizations, and NOGs is just as influential in the recruitment of students as the students' own applications. The relationships to be developed with national and international external stakeholders through whom students are recruited contribute to the political goals of the countries along with the implementation of an institutional vision and the provision of education diplomacy services through the appropriate institutions.

6. CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

The practice of recruiting international students, one of the operational tools of HEIs in Türkiye in achieving a visible representation on an international scale, is not only a condition of internationalization but also an education diplomacy tool of foreign policy. Analyses based on the case of higher education in Türkiye show that the high internationalization motivation, which is reflected in the rapid increase in the number of students in the last decade, has found a significant response in education diplomacy. In order to evaluate Türkiye's education diplomacy initiatives on the scale of global competition, it is understood that some data need to mature. At this point, the internationalization level of the US higher education, which is by far ahead in global competitiveness, and the advantages it has gained in education diplomacy, (i) having an institutional memory and knowledge accumulation of more than seventy years and (ii) benefiting from the sustainability advantage provided by a systematic state policy, are among the priority issues to be considered. This situation points to an area where international student management within the scope of internationalization in higher education should be considered in comparing developing countries with developed countries. However, since they are competing in the same market and pursuing similar diplomatic goals, it is obvious that there are lessons to be learnt from the US structure for countries that are still young in this field, as seen in the case of Türkiye.

The fact that US HEIs achieve more sustainable results in education diplomacy than Turkish HEIs is largely due to the fact that US policies are more inclusive on a national and international scale. In addition, the USA has a management model in which there is strong communication between education diplomacy practitioners, HEIs and a synchronized working model is established. Based on this model, the elements of a sound public diplomacy strategy to be a respected leader in education on an international scale can be listed as follows:

- defining a public diplomacy strategy with goals and objectives.
- establishing a set of strategic processes.
- ensuring active participation of stakeholders.
- determination of basic education projects and promotion programs.
- establishment of partnerships at a strategic level.
- having a professional international team.
- improvement of educational environments.
- implementation of a qualified communication strategy.
- evaluating success and feedback (Vaxevanidou, 2018: 64-67).

When these elements are taken into account in higher education management, universities can offer a soft power gain to public diplomacy just like think tanks, as seen in the example of US HEIs. The Turkish experience of this practice shows that similar effects are beginning to be established, despite being at the very beginning of the process. Turkish higher education actors and education diplomacy practitioners will be able to increase their diplomatic output efficiency in the long run with more systematic and intensive analytical studies on the factors that will make international students prefer Türkiye.

Thus, with the realization of the center structure in Türkiye, the roles that Köllner attributes to think tanks in the discipline of international relations will be provided with the following points in terms of education diplomacy. In this context, a model of international student management attributed the importance of a center:

- it strengthens the network between academia and politicians, bureaucrats and education diplomacy practitioners working in the field of higher education and increases the outputs.
- the outputs such as academic publications, symposiums, panels and conferences are also used as dissemination tools in the public opinion created by the studies in the field of international students in particular and education diplomacy in general.
- the education diplomacy potential of Türkiye offers the opportunity for international propaganda as a means of social and cultural activity as well as scientific.
- it helps to set both national and international agendas on developments related to education diplomacy and HEIs through media interventions or various forums.
- when diplomatic relations have not yet been established, people-based pipelines (especially academics working in HEIs) are established by engaging in informal diplomacy activities.
- providing a second opinion to policy-makers in the field of higher education, contributing to their access to better information on specific issues.
- it can change foreign policy decisions or overall strategic discourse by providing policy advice. In this way, it performs a consultancy function in a sense. It contributes to policy formation at the national level through a number of strategic reports or strategy documents on higher education. In addition, it closely follows the trends related to international students through country studies and reports and provides projections for higher education opportunities in the future.
- increases the export of Turkish higher education abroad.
- leads the dissemination of studies on education diplomacy.
- by providing various training programs and internship opportunities, it guides the training of new generation academicians who will work in the field of education diplomacy.

When the issue is considered from an operational point of view in the administrative dimension, it cannot be said that Turkish higher education is lagging behind the USA. HEIs in Türkiye manage international student, exchange programs and other internationalization processes through different administrative organization options such as offices, coordinator offices, departments, directorates and academic international relations departments. Although it is observed that US HEIs have similar administrative processes in terms of organization, it is understood that international student processes and the accompanying economic return advantage serve the education diplomacy goals that will serve the national interests of the USA in the long term. This results in US HEIs producing the output of think tanks in national diplomacy. Therefore, centralization is not just a mere change/transformation of the organizational structure. Centralization refers to the policy of HEIs in the recruitment of international students. Being a center operationally means having an umbrella, effective and more efficient organization within the institution. In this way, all actions towards internationalization can be handled in a holistic manner. In this way, centralization provides advantages for sustainability and efficiency analysis as well as resource savings in HEIs. The multiplier effect of the total benefit will be increased by obtaining an organizational umbrella structure in which internationalization activities, especially international student and personnel affairs, international graduate follow-up and career services, Turkish and foreign language teaching, international exams, international exchange programs, international publications and events can be followed as a whole. Thus, the universities aiming to gain privileges in recruiting international students with a centralization structure that offers diplomatic, academic and administrative advantages will enable their centers to act like a think tank with the organizational preferences they follow and the services they offer through the centralization structure. Such that, with more qualified services, international students will be familiarized with the Turkish higher education system and with the formation of this perception, Türkiye's soft power in terms of education diplomacy will be exhibited.

With the globalization 4.0 process, thought organizations and research centers, which can influence decision-making processes and moreover, function as a means of pressure under appropriate conditions, have the ability to shape the foreign policy actions of the states in international relations, including their goals and principles. Indeed, think tanks, which can be counted among the parameters of soft power, also provide advantages to nation-states in terms of realizing the goals set in foreign policy. Additionally, in the context of the *Collective Self-Esteem* element expressed by Wendt (2016: 290-294), it is seen that the works of think tanks are also related to self-respect, gaining status and developing the potential for national prestige. Especially the costs brought by the concept of using force and obtaining what one wants with military power today increase the importance of soft power elements in general and education diplomacy activities in particular. In addition, when subjected to an analysis at the state and social level, education diplomacy can be used as a tool in the realization of the determined identity and the interests required by this identity.

In conclusion, it is seen that the centralization of international student processes in HEIs is not a purely academic structuring. It is understood that centralization serves the development of relations and academic outputs with existing international students, graduates, academicians, educational consultancy companies, and other relevant stakeholders in HEIs. From this point of view, it is understood that international student centers will have the effect of a soft power instrument in the field of education diplomacy with the results they obtain by working as a think tank in HEIs.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

All information in this paper has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical concerns.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

All the authors contributed to the article in equal ratio.

Statement of Interest

The authors definitely agree with each other. There is no any conflict of interest between the authors.

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