ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Deep dive into Internationalization and International Student Mobility (ISM) Through the Eyes of International Office Professionals (IPs)

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Ethical Statement
The decision of the Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Ethics Committee dated 26.12.2022 and numbered 13 was an approval. The committee found the study in compliance with the principles of the Ethics Committee.

Conflict of Interest
No conflict of interest is present in the conduction or the reporting of this study.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the problems experienced by international office professionals (IPs) in the mobility dimension of internationalisation. It is believed that the study will contribute to the internationalisation of higher education in Türkiye with the experiences of practitioners. Case study design is employed. Interviews were conducted with the voluntary IPs. This research explores five key themes in the context of International Offices (IOs) within Turkish universities. The first theme examines IO management, highlighting administrative structure complexities and non-uniform personnel titles. The absence of a well-defined administrative framework often leaves IOs with ambiguous roles, contributing to uncertainty within the field. The second theme, workload, reveals the diversity of tasks handled by International Office Professionals (IPs), extending beyond their job descriptions. These tasks include official correspondence, mobility project management, and even translation services. The lack of clear job descriptions and institutional structures results in role ambiguity. The third theme delves into student-related challenges, encompassing issues from language proficiency to student irresponsibility. IOs struggle to enforce disciplinary measures and face grant-related complications. The fourth theme uncovers academic and institutional problems, including language barriers and residence permit complexities. Finally, the fifth theme examines the role of academic unit coordinators and reveals the reluctance and poor support of many of them to assist mobility processes. These findings emphasize the need for clearer administrative structures, standardized job descriptions, and enhanced support systems to optimize IO operations and internationalization efforts in Turkish universities.

Keywords: Internationalization, management of internationalization, international student mobility (ISM), international office professionals (IPs.), Erasmus

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization can be defined as the transnational movement of technology, economy, knowledge, individuals, values, and ideas across national boundaries. The impact of globalization on each country varies due to the unique historical, cultural, traditional, and prioritization factors of each nation (Knight, 2003). The phenomenon of globalization has significantly facilitated the movement of students on a global scale, primarily due to heightened access to information and opportunities, as well as an increased inclination towards travel. The acquisition of education and knowledge is not limited by the geopolitical boundaries of nation-states or the cultural confines of specific regions. Individuals engaged in academia and students alike have the opportunity to choose from a wide range of educational modalities and research-oriented institutions across the globe. The phenomenon of cross-border education, encompassing the physical and virtual mobility of students, academics, and educational programs across national boundaries, has gained significant prominence (Ge, 2022). Over the past 50 years, the process of internationalization in higher education has transitioned from a peripheral endeavor to a central component of educational reform efforts. During the final decade of the previous century, there was a notable rise in globalization and regionalization of economies and societies. This, coupled with the demands of the knowledge economy and the conclusion of the Cold War, established a conducive environment for the adoption of a more strategic approach to internationalization in the realm of higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). It has recently come to the attention of a variety of institutions, governments, and international bodies that one of their primary focuses should be on giving the international component of higher education a higher priority. This is called internationalization. According to Knight (2003, p. 2), "internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education." Globally, there is a significant allocation of time, effort, and resources toward the formulation and implementation of policies and programs aimed at fostering internationalization in higher education (Helms et al., 2016) and internationalization continues to be a hot topic in higher education. In many contexts around the world, universities reflect internationalization in their mission-vision statements and strategic plans (Ayoubi & Massoud, 2007; Kajberg, 2004; Soler et al., 2022). In recent years, along with globalization, there has been an increasing trend towards travel with higher access to information and opportunities. This has significantly facilitated internationalization and international student mobility (ISM). Education and knowledge acquisition are no longer bound beyond national borders or to the cultural boundaries of specific regions. Academics and students can choose from a variety of teaching methods and research-orientated institutions worldwide.

Internationalization and the Context of Türkiye

Internationalization—as a response to globalization, a strategy for quality or visibility, or an isomorphic response to environmental changes—is one of the most significant phenomena affecting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide. Internationalization and the global knowledge economy are linked. It also reflects fundamental—and still evolving—changes in our understanding of relevant, high-quality tertiary education across national and institutional contexts (Rumbley, 2015). Turkey cannot be removed from this context. With more than 200 universities, around 300,000 international students, and more than 3000 international faculty members (CoHE, 2023), the capacity of Turkish higher education is quite large, and research shows that it is an important hub in its region (Kondakçı, 2011).

The general structure of the education system in Türkiye is centralized. This structure is also valid for universities. As a result of this unified framework, the Council for Higher Education (CoHE) serves as the umbrella structure for all

HEIs (Eriçok, 2023) but the internationalization capacity of Turkish higher education is sustained by the efforts of many institutions. First, CoHE is an important actor in determining higher education policies and strategies. Announcement of policy texts, Study in Turkey web page for international students, CoHE Virtual Fairs, and bilateral agreements are some of the prominent ones. Second, the General Directorate of European Union and Foreign Relations (ABDIGM) and the General Directorate of Higher Education and Education Abroad (YYDEGM) within the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) establish relations with other countries and carry out effective activities in the field of education and higher education at national and international level. Especially YLSY Scholarship Program aims to develop Turkey's human resources and very successful results have been achieved. Third, the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) under the Ministry of Science, Industry, and Technology encourages all scientific studies of Turkish scientists through a wide range of methods such as scholarships, projects, awards, post-doc studies, etc. The Turkish National Agency (UA) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs works very closely with universities, especially in the implementation of the Erasmus+ exchange program, and plays an important role in the internationalization of Turkish higher education in terms of mobility. In conclusion, the internationalization of Turkish higher education thrives through the collaborative efforts of numerous institutions.

International Student Mobility (ISM)

ISM refers to students who are studying abroad. It is only one aspect of transnational higher education, but it has the greatest socioeconomic, cultural, and political implications (Gürüz, 2008). ISM is operationally defined as any form of international mobility that occurs in the context of a student's higher education pursuits. The length of absence can range from a brief trip to the duration of an entire academic program. In addition to academic tasks at a foreign Higher Education Institution (HEI), mobility can include time spent in a professional or other non-HE setting (SCMR, 2004). The number of students traveling internationally to attend school has tripled in the last 20 years, as more and more people come to newly established and planned educational centers (Glass & Cruz, 2023). Mobility is still "king" in most internationalization discussions, and growing student mobility numbers worldwide indicate that mobility will continue to be highly significant for the foreseeable future (Rumbley, 2015). Choudaha (2017) observed the phenomenon of ISM through three distinct waves, which indicate a sustained interest in acquiring global educational experiences. The three waves of ISM can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The three waves of international student mobility (Choudaha, 2017).
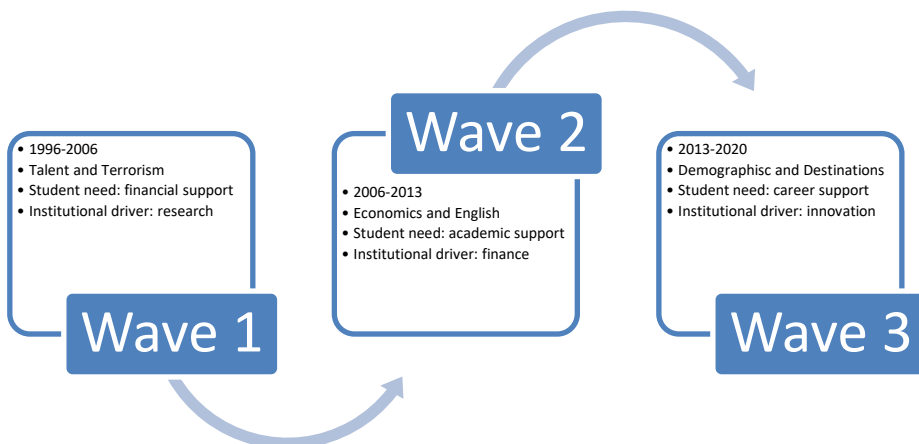
As can be seen, it is important to note that the characteristics and requirements of students have evolved over time. Simultaneously, the motivations and justifications behind the recruitment and retention of international students by educational institutions are transforming (Choudaha, 2017). The initiation of the strategic process of internationalization in Europe can be traced back to the inception of the Erasmus program. The program facilitated the development of shared understandings and motivations for internationalization in numerous countries, a phenomenon that was subsequently strengthened by the implementation of the Bologna Process (De Wit et al., 2015).

Erasmus

One of the best examples of ISM is the Erasmus exchange program. Erasmus promotes the exchange of students and faculty members and aims to establish cooperation between HEI institutions in Europe. The Erasmus exchange program supports mobility and overseas experiences in higher education. This increases the internationalization levels of universities. In addition, Erasmus enables students and faculty members from different cultural and academic backgrounds to experience higher education processes together. Erasmus also has positive results in terms of developing foreign language skills. The objectives of the Erasmus program have been discussed extensively in the literature. Rodríguez et al. (2011) state that the Erasmus Program, initiated in 1987, was among the pioneering efforts to implement the core principles of the European Higher Education Area and serves as a central component of the Bologna Process. According to Engel (2010), the Erasmus program was established as the European Union's primary education and training initiative. In 2007, on its 20th anniversary, Erasmus was recognized as a significant catalyst for European integration, leading to the identification of the "Erasmus generation" as a symbol of this process. It is abundantly clear that Erasmus marked the beginning of the process of internationalization in Europe. The Erasmus program was initiated due to the significant mismatch between the skills demanded by employers from graduates and the skills acquired by students in HEIs (Brandenburg et al., 2016). Therefore, it is unsurprising that numerous host countries in the developed world support the smooth transition of international students from education to employment upon completing their studies (Riaño et al., 2018). Rodríguez et al. (2011) underline that the Erasmus is intended to fulfill a significant socio-economic function within the European context. Another objective of Erasmus is to contribute to creating a European identity among students and graduates (Brandenburg et al., 2016).

Although internationalization is much more than student or faculty mobility, mobility is an important dimension of current internationalization models (Eriçok & Arastaman, in press; 2020; ACE, 2013; Helms et al., 2017). Since its founding, Erasmus has engaged over 9 million participants, surpassing 10 million in 2018. The program, which allows university students to study or intern abroad, has grown in popularity. Erasmus+ is a cultural phenomenon due to its popularity. Due to the program's success, the European Commission has proposed doubling the 2021-2027 plan's funding to help 12 million people move (Benedictis & Leoni, 2020). The impact of the Erasmus Program holds significant importance due to two key factors. The Erasmus Program serves as the primary avenue for students and staff at most universities to access mobility opportunities, enabling thousands of Turkish participants to engage in educational experiences in Europe. Additionally, the establishment of international offices (IOs) in numerous universities was established to effectively administer this program (Bulut-Şahin et al., 2022). The implementation of the mobility programs is overseen by National Agencies established within each country. These agencies are responsible for monitoring the execution of the Erasmus Program and allocating the budget to HEIs. In a similar vein, the establishment of the Turkish National Agency occurred in 2002, predating the involvement of Turkish universities in the Program by one year, which was initially undertaken through pilot projects. The Turkish National Agency maintains strong

connections with IOs and IPs to ensure the efficient and precise utilization of funds. Therefore, IOs play a central role in the implementation of the Erasmus Program in HEIs (Bulut-Şahin et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the subject of internationalization, ISM, the Erasmus program, and IOs in literature. In some of these studies in the international literature, mobility is seen as a "vertical" link between international experience and career success (Teichler, 2007). In others, Erasmus mobility is viewed as a "door-opener" into the labor market (Bracht et al., 2006). In others, Erasmus is seen as a factor influencing students' decision to go abroad (Parey & Waldinger, 2007). Rodríguez et al. (2011), on the other hand, focused on the socio-economic role of Erasmus within Europe and revealed several determinants. On the other hand, national-level research on IOs aims to reveal internationalization strategies in Turkish higher education (Selvitopu & Aydın, 2018). Another study aims to investigate whether the Erasmus program affects the competence development of the students who participated in the mobility (Altay, 2016). In a study conducted by Eriçok and Arastaman (in press), an internationalization map of Turkish universities was revealed. Süter (2008) approached IOs in terms of corporate governance. Çepni et al. (2018) focused on the problems experienced by students participating in the Erasmus program and their solution suggestions. Bulut-Şahin & Eriçok (2023) examined the national and institutional planning and management of internationalization in Turkish higher education through policy documents and IOs. Bulut-Şahin et al., 2023, Bulut-Şahin, 2023 and Yeniay-Hatipoğlu (2019) are among the rare studies that directly examine the role of IOs on internationalization. As Kristensen and Karlsen (2018) stated, all written strategies describing the rationale and objectives for internationalizing research, education, and administration focus on academia rather than managerial and administrative aspects. Despite the widespread implementation of the Erasmus program in all Turkish universities, there is a scarcity of literature studies conducted on the university staff who directly implement this project through IPs (Bulut-Şahin et al., 2022). The literature shows that many studies have taken IOs as a sample, but very few studies have examined the problems experienced by international office professionals (IPs). Therefore, the present study aims to reveal the problems experienced by IPs in the mobility dimension of internationalization. In this respect, it is believed that the study will contribute to the internationalization of higher education in Türkiye with the experiences of practitioners. For this purpose, the following research question is sought to be answered:

1. What are the problems experienced by international office professionals (IPs) in the mobility dimension of internationalization?

METHOD

The qualitative research methodology is commonly employed in the field of educational research, with a specific emphasis on the viewpoints of participants. This approach seeks to understand how individuals interpret their experiences and the significance they ascribe to them. It achieves this by describing events and phenomena as they occur in their natural settings (Merriam, 2009). The case study design is employed in the present study to examine the experiences of IPs deeply and comprehensively in the context of ISM (Creswell, 2016).

Participants

The present study was conducted with 17 IPs in Turkish state universities. A purposive sampling method was used to select the participants. The purposive sampling method is the selection of participants to be used in a study according to their expected richness and the suitability of the information related to the research questions of the study (Yin, 2011). Criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was adopted in the research. Criterion

sampling is the inclusion in the study of all situations that meet predetermined criteria (Patton, 2002). The selection of participants was based on specific criteria, including (a) employment at a state university, (b) possessing experience in dealing with mobility issues, and (c) expressing a willingness to engage in discussions related to internationalization. The contact information on the IO web pages of the universities was used to conduct interviews with IPs who met the mentioned criteria. An appointment was requested via phone. Some of them were interviewed at that moment, some were interviewed on the specified day and time. Some participants preferred to convey their ideas through online forms. There were also participants who stated that they could not participate in data collection due to busy schedules. Codes are provided to protect participants' privacy (IP-1, IP-2, etc.). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. The Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

No	Code	Title	Experience	Bachelor's Degree
1	IP-1	Administrative Staff	7 years	Business
2	IP -2	Research Assistant (Ph.D.)	16 years	Political science and public administration
3	IP -3	Other	5 years	N/A
4	IP -4	Administrative Staff	2 years	English Language Teaching
5	IP -5	Lecturer	6 months	English Language Teaching
6	IP -6	Administrative Staff	15 years	English Language Teaching
7	IP -7	Lecturer	1,5 years	Translation and interpreting
8	IP -8	Lecturer	14 years	International Relations
9	IP -9	Lecturer	20 years	Public Relations
10	IP -10	Lecturer	10 years	English Language Teaching
11	IP -11	Lecturer	5 years	English Language and Literature
12	IP -12	Asst. Prof. Dr.	4 years	English Language Teaching
13	IP -13	Vice coordinator	6 years	English Language Teaching
14	IP -14	Lecturer (Ph.D.)	11 years	English Language Teaching
15	IP -15	Lecturer	1,5 years	English Language Teaching
16	IP -16	Administrative Staff	12 years	Economics
17	IP -17	Lecturer (Ph.D.)	3	English Language Teaching

Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study were analyzed with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data. It minimally organizes and describes your dataset with (rich) detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because of its theoretical independence, thematic analysis can be used to address a wide range of research questions arising from quite different theoretical frameworks (Terry et al., 2017).

The literature review conducted by the researcher was used to obtain the themes of the research questions. It has been evaluated that the themes that constitute the subject of the research, internationalization, and ISM, can be created as management of IOs, workload of IPs, outgoing student mobility, incoming student mobility, and academic unit coordinators for mobility. Table 2 shows the themes, sub-themes, and codes used within the scope of the study.

Table 3. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Management of International Offices	Administrative Structure	Lack of a clear subordinate-superior relationship and the organizational structure (IP-8, IP-1, IP-2, IP-17)
		The boundaries of the office's relationship with other units and state of limbo (IP-8, IP-17, IP-12)
		Decision-making process (IP-12, IP-16)
	Staffing	Different staff positions and rights (contracted, lecturer, assistant, etc.) and injustice (IP-3, IP-2)
		Insufficient number of IPs (IP-2, IP-7, IP-9
		International office professional is not seen as a profession (IP-2)
Workload in	Regular Tasks	Official correspondence and payment, Erasmus student and teaching staff mobility, the

IOs		purchase and sale transactions, selection of students and teaching staff, writing the final report, outgoing student (IP-1, IP-2, IP-3, IP-4, IP-5)
	Undefined Tasks	Translation, travel planning, support for other projects outside the IO, buying gifts, preparing food and beverages for international meetings, making presentations, preparing posters, helping visa procedures, technical issues (IP-5, IP-6, IP-2, IP-7, IP-15, IP-11, IP-17)
Outgoing Student Mobility	Student-related Challenges	Language problems, irresponsibility of students (IP-8, IP-7, IP-2, IP-9
	External Challenges	Visa procedures, systemic problems (IP-7, IP-12, IP-7, IP-3, IP-5)
Incoming Student Mobility	Academic problems	Language problems of Turkish academic and administrative staff (IP-1, IP-2, IP-4, IP-13, IP-11, IP-14
	Institutional Problems	Residence permit procedures (IP-6, IP-8, IP-17)
Academic Unit Coordinators for Mobility	Poor Support	Not very helpful, reluctant, ignorant, little support, unconscious, inadequate (IP-1, IP-2, IP-8, IP-3, IP-4, IP-10, IP-9, IP-14)

Validity and Reliability

Trustworthiness was ensured by various steps: transcriptions of the records of the research participants were prepared and sent to them for confirmation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The purposive sampling method was used in the study to ensure transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993). Simultaneously, the researcher collected extensive and thorough data by employing open-ended questions and allocating sufficient time for each interview and discussion. The utilization of peer debriefing was employed in order to reach a consensus regarding the comprehension derived from the data, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

FINDINGS

Theme 1. Management of International Offices

The first theme of the findings of the current study is related to the management of IOs. In Türkiye, IOs, which manage the mobility dimension of internationalization, operate as coordinating offices under the rectorates. IPs were asked about their thoughts on the administrative structure of the IOs in the organization of universities. Some IPs made insightful remarks about the management of the IOs. A complex administrative structure is observed regarding the management of IOs.

> *"The administrative position of Erasmus Offices can be complicated even within the university itself. For example, every official document, every subject, and guest with international content is directed directly to our offices and we may not even be able to explain to our managers whether this issue falls within our office responsibilities or not."* IP-1

The following is one of the most precise and all-encompassing descriptions of how IOs are operated. It's been found that some disagreements stem from IOs' blurred administrative structure and the uncertainty regarding where each office's responsibility begins and ends.

> *"One of the biggest problems of the offices is the structure that arises due to the lack of clarity in their administrative position. In some cases, the office functions as an administrative unit, while in other cases it may undertake tasks as an academic unit. In other words, the office may need to be in close contact with both administrative and academic units. At this point, the lack of a clear subordinate-superior relationship causes problems in a state institution with a hierarchical structure such as a university. The boundaries of the office's relationship with other units cannot be drawn. In fact, since it is not clear where the duty of the office begins and ends, it causes conflicts between other units and the office. The office is almost in the position of a supplicant in compulsory co-operation with other academic and administrative*

units. For example, a foreign language exam is required, but there is resistance from the relevant unit(s) of the university." IP-8

"The issue is no different from Türkiye's EU process. It is in a state of limbo. The organizational structure of each university varies in terms of name, functions, and duties. In this respect, there is no regular institutional organizational structure under the central administration. Moreover, these organizational structures and tasks may change under each rector." IP-17

"The difficulties brought by the administrative structure mostly arise in decision-making processes." IP-12

"There are difficulties and delays in the decision-making process." (IP-16

Another noteworthy finding is the staffing in IOs. It is stated that IPs have different personal rights among themselves, and some inequalities are expressed.

"Since I work as a contracted staff, some friends have the attitude that if you don't like the job, you can leave the job." IP-3

"In state universities, offices are not part of the official institutional structure, so there is a lot of injustice in matters of staff title or personal rights. One of the people doing the same job can be a civil servant, while another can be a lecturer. In addition, there is no standardized process for recruiting new staff, because being an international office professional is not seen as a profession in itself. It is defined as an administrative job that anyone who speaks English can do. While some universities work with a low number of IPs, in others, staff who doesn't come to work regularly is assigned to these offices." IP-2

Based on the aforementioned statements, it can be inferred that certain universities do not regard IPs as a recognized occupation. There exists a prevailing belief that individuals possessing English language proficiency can be seen as IPs. The finding is unfortunate for IOs. The staff problems of IOs are not limited to the above. It is stated that the IPs consist of those assigned from other academic or administrative units. So much so that people whose main concern is not IOs are working in IOs, and although additional IP is requested, this is not provided.

"The senior management has no idea about how to run the business here, nor do they endeavor to take our ideas about the development of this place. There is only 1 person who is the main staff of the office. The others are assigned from other units. One research assistant who speaks English and a lecturer who does not speak any English work in the office. They were assigned to the office without any consultation. The other two are administrative and academic coordinators. This place is not even their only concern. This leads to an unpredictable distribution of work. Other staff are requested to work in the office but not given. We have no support staff for technical or financial matters. We only have 1 secretary. She doesn't speak a foreign language either. Therefore, it is very difficult to conduct business. When the senior management is asked, internationalization is one of our most important goals, but when it comes to action, nothing is done." IP-7

The number of staff is not sufficient. Until last year, I was working alone, there should be at least 3 more people. We have a budget of 400 thousand Euros from 171, we have a budget of 131, and there are 2 consortiums. Considering these, we seriously need more staff. IP-9

The above-mentioned statements reveal that the top management shows internationalization as the most important goal when it comes to talking but does not do anything when it comes to action. This finding has negative implications for the implementation of internationalization and the effective management of IOs.

Theme 2. Workload in International Offices

IOs involve processes where the workload is quite heavy. This is due to the complex nature of internationalization and mobility. Internationalization and mobility, which is an important dimension of internationalization, involve various correspondences, senior management approval, agreements, projects, admissions, advertisements, and payments. All these processes increase the workload of IOs. IPs were asked about their views on the work they are responsible for in

these offices. The findings were revealed through the jobs that were and were not included in the IPs' job descriptions. The jobs included in the job descriptions of IPs are as follows.

> *"I carry out the official correspondence and payment transactions of the Erasmus Office. As an administrative staff, I make the necessary payments for our students and projects and the purchase and sale transactions of the office in the status of realization officer. In this sense, there are requests from academic units other than the office to make the payment transactions of some of our professors or other projects carried out on behalf of the university."* IP-1

> *"The defined workload is managing Erasmus student and teaching staff mobility projects. It starts with writing the project after the money is allocated to the university, the selection of students and teaching staff, all their procedures, replacing those who withdraw, full utilization of the allocated money, writing the final report, etc."* IP-2

> *"I deal with all outgoing student mobility. The distribution of work in the office can never be equalized."* IP-3

> *"I am responsible for all kinds of documents, mail, and entry into the system related to Erasmus + Student / Staff exchange."* IP-4

> *"I am responsible for outgoing students."* IP-5

The above statements reveal the defined tasks of IPs. Furthermore, it is evident that certain requests are being directed toward IPs for matters that fall outside the primary scope of their responsibilities. These undefined tasks are as follows.

> *"There are a lot of requests for translation, international travel planning, payment processing, support for projects outside the office. However, I try to help in line with the possibilities."* IP-5

> *"Payment processing, international travel planning, support for projects outside the office, translation, it's all there!"* IP-6

> Non-defined tasks such as traveling delegations to the university, buying gifts for them, preparing food and beverages for international meetings, etc."* IP-2

> *"We have no job description. Even in the international student office, there is no one who speaks English properly, so even the phone calls from there are directed to us. We often receive requests for translating texts, planning trips abroad, and supporting projects outside the office."* IP-7

> *"Although I am an office worker responsible for international cooperation, I am sometimes asked to translate texts and make presentations in English."* IP-15

> *"The defined workload is specified in the office directive. However, I observe that the managers are not able to clearly define the scope of work due to the fact that they are not fully aware of the location or duties of the office (due to the problem mentioned in the previous question). Expectations from the office change with each change in the rector. For this reason, an institutional structure cannot be established and formal or informal workloads that vary according to the perspective of the administration emerge. Sometimes we can turn into a travel agency that organizes the travels of the administration abroad, sometimes a unit that has to deal with EU projects, and sometimes a unit that acts as a translation office. From time to time, we may be asked to do the personal work of individuals who are not in a hierarchical position in the administrative or academic structure and even the work of the managers of the official institutions in our province."* IP-8

> *"So far, I have been doing jobs that are not included in my job description, such as translation, informative poster & and brochure design, and preparation of the unit quality report."* IP-11

> *"The Erasmus program is seen by the management as the only source and way of internationalization. For this reason, different projects and initiatives are expected from the office within the scope of Erasmus in addition to the quality of exchange programs."* IP-13

> *"Unfortunately, there is no clear job description. Sometimes as a consulate visa application officer, sometimes as an insurance specialist, sometimes as a travel agency officer, sometimes as a finance officer, and sometimes as personnel responsible for many technical issues. Planning, organization,*

paperwork, budgeting, correspondence with partner institutions, etc. are routine tasks." IP-17

According to the findings, the responsibilities of IPs extend beyond the regular tasks. In addition to the defined workload, IPs may also be entrusted with tasks such as planning international travels, translation, and following up on the work of projects carried out outside the IO. Folding the intensive workload of IOs with such extra tasks may disrupt IO processes.

Theme 3. Outgoing Student Mobility

Outgoing student mobility constitutes an important dimension of IOs. Considering that the success of internationalization is evaluated through numerical indicators and these numbers are reflected in many national/international reports, the university and the country need to have a high number of outgoing students. In this context, outgoing student mobility brings with it intensive labor and workload. In addition to this labor and workload, IPs also struggle with many problems. In this part of the research, IPs were asked about the problems they experience in the process of outbound student mobility. The findings were revealed through the student-related challenges and external challenges. The student-related problems of IOs are as follows.

> *"Problems start with the organization of the foreign language exam at the student selection stage. Failure to communicate with the institution, failure of the student to complete the required documents on time, failure of the student to act within the application period, and legislation that constantly protects students but makes the work done worthless. The inability of the office to impose any sanctions on the student when necessary. Grants withheld due to students' waiver without showing force majeure. Decreased performance indicators of the office due to grant refunds. Failure to impose sanctions on the waiving student." IP-8*

> *"The language proficiency of the students before the mobility is presenting challenges. On one hand, there is a desire to accept the student; however, on the other hand, it is acknowledged that their language proficiency is not entirely satisfactory." IP-9*

> *".... the fact that students' irresponsibility cannot be punished (so that the grant is used and not returned)." IP-7*

> *"The biggest problem with outgoing students is irresponsibility. The student applies, is selected, then decides not to go, and does not inform the office. However, many students are waiting on the reserve list. We are running after them to see if they will go. No matter how much deadline you put in, it doesn't work. For example, there are even those who say that I have already applied just for the sake of it. In addition, grants are always insufficient for them." IP-2*

When the research findings are collected under the theme of student-related problems, they show that there are several student-related problems, from students' foreign language proficiency to their irresponsible behavior in the process. The research findings point to visa problems and systemic problems under the theme of external challenges.

> *"... one of the problems experienced is KA171, that is, problems in the selection of courses to be taken because non-European countries are not yet informed about the Erasmus and Bologna process." IP-11*

> *"Especially in the last few years, our students have been experiencing serious difficulties. The most common problem we encounter in the process of study mobility is the visa process. Despite the facilitating effect of the Erasmus program, we encounter easy visa rejections. Moreover, while the EU supports the paperless Erasmus program called EWP, consulates started to request documents with wet signatures and seals." IP-12*

> *"Difficulties in visa procedures, frequent changes and systemic problems in the Erasmus management systems of the UA and the European Commission, the fact that Erasmus is carried out differently in each university, the necessity to write a letter for each transaction and the standard of this is constantly changing (visa facilitation, KYK information, etc)." IP-7*

> *"The documents required in the visa process of students vary according to the consulate. One of the*

students applying with the same documents is rejected while the other is approved. In addition, the offices in some counter schools make it difficult for our students instead of making it easier." IP-3

"The process works well in routine. However, simultaneous data entry on more than one software (Erasmus portal, beneficiary module, and national agency application portal, etc.) and the consistency of the data in all software lead to unnecessary time loss." IP-5

The research results in this paragraph are grouped together under the theme of "external challenges." They show that the Erasmus program faces problems like visa challenges, systemic problems, and bureaucratic red tape. There are big problems in this area, especially with how hard it is to get a visa and how the documents consulates ask for change. External problems are also caused by things like the fact that different universities run the Erasmus program in different ways and by the fact that data have to be entered at the same time into different software. These results show that external problems can make it hard to run the program well.

Theme 4. Incoming Student Mobility

Another important task of IO is the mobility of incoming students. As with outgoing student mobility, the number of incoming student mobility is also accepted as an important indicator of internationalization in the context of mobility. In this respect, it is important to express the problems experienced in the process of incoming student mobility. For this purpose, questions were asked to IPs, and the following answers were received. The findings were revealed under the themes of academic problems and institutional problems. The academic problems of IPs are as follows.

"One of the biggest problems we face with our incoming students is the inadequacy of the foreign language levels of both our academic and administrative staff." IP-1

"The problems experienced in terms of incoming students are lecturers who do not want international students in their courses, dormitory managers who do not speak English, lecturers who speak Turkish in the course, and the slow process of obtaining residence permits." IP-2

"Course content in some departments is in Turkish." IP-4

"Courses to be given in the English language are the biggest problem." IP-13

"Since the courses are taught in Turkish in most departments, students who do not speak Turkish may have difficulties in finding suitable courses for themselves, and the solution to the problem is left to the individual efforts and sacrifices of the lecturers." IP-11

"Since the language of education at the institution is Turkish and our location is far from big cities, we are not preferred very much." IP-14

Research findings reveal incoming student mobility problems reflected in IPs in the theme of academic difficulties. The findings revealed problems such as the insufficient foreign language levels of faculty members and administrative staff, the reluctance of some faculty members to teach courses with international students, the dormitory staff not knowing English, and the faculty members speaking Turkish in classes. Some of the problems are discussed under the theme of institutional problems.

"Residence permit procedures and long duration of residence permit." IP-6

"The biggest problem is residence permit and accommodation. Dormitory fees can only be paid to state dormitories through the bank. However, foreign students cannot open a bank account without getting a foreign ID number. Dormitories do not accept payment in any other way. Private dormitories remain. They also sign an annual contract. Another problem, of course, is that the language of the courses is not English." IP-8

"Frankly speaking, we do not take too many students because they do not prefer this city very much. They prefer bigger cities. We received students from Romania, Macedonia, and Poland a few times. We had accommodation problems. International students cannot stay in state dormitories. Credit and

> *Dormitories Institution does not accept foreign students, they have to stay in private dormitories. Sometimes students like it and sometimes not."* IP-9

> *"Not planning adequate orientation activities (lack of staff), credit problems (course matching)"* IP-17

> *"There is a lack of sanctions. Since no sanctions other than grant deductions can be imposed on students, we can sometimes experience situations where we are not in control, and we experience financial loss. For example, the student may leave Türkiye without our knowledge and approval before the minimum period of stay and without refunding the grant."* IP-11

The findings show that residence permit processes and lengthy residence permit procedures in particular pose a significant challenge. Additionally, problems such as the complexity of students' accommodation and dormitory payment processes are also highlighted.

Theme 5. Academic Unit Coordinators for Mobility

Academic unit coordinators are appointed in academic units of universities to support students in the mobility processes. These coordinators are expected to be in contact with the IOs and assist students in their procedures. Considering the heavy workload of Ios and IPs, it can be said that these coordinators have a special function. In this respect, in this study, IPs were asked for their opinions about the contribution of academic unit coordinators to the mobility process. The findings were revealed under the theme of poor support for mobility. The findings regarding the poor support of academic unit coordinators are as follows.

> *"In general, I do not think they are very helpful, and some of our teachers do not even know that they are assigned. Sometimes they even hesitate to sign in order not to take responsibility."* IP-1

> *"Coordinators in academic units do not own this work very much. … Some professors are given this task by force. Some are more willing to volunteer. The reluctant ones send the student to the office even with the smallest problem."* IP-2

> *"Certainly, the vast majority are ignorant of the subject. Most of the academic unit coordinators only do this job to get additional points in Erasmus staff mobility. Since the place of the office in the administrative structure is not clear and there is no subordinate relationship, unit coordinatorship is an abused task."* IP-8

> *"Their support is very little; they are not very interested in Erasmus from their academic studies. The support of our interested professors is very good for us in this regard."* IP-3

> *"They sometimes do it unconsciously when making course assignments and matching courses for Learning Agreement documents."* IP-4

> *"Some representatives are active while others are inadequate. In some units, since this duty is compulsory, the lecturers are not interested in the subject. As such, the support they give to the office is also low."* IP-10

> *"Mobilizations have been going on with the same agreements for years. Our expectation from them is to make more agreements, but unfortunately, it does not happen."* IP-9

> *"We are forced to convince department coordinators about course equivalence. Although we have organized information meetings many times, there are still coordinators who do not know how to fill out the LA form. Some department coordinators claim that this task is forced upon them and even offer us to do the course matching."* IP-14

Participants state that the coordinators responsible for mobility in the units do not provide the expected contribution to the mobility process. It is seen that the fact that this task is given to them by force and not voluntarily reduces their contribution to the process.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to reveal the problems experienced by IPs in the mobility dimension of internationalization. The data obtained from the participants were analyzed by thematic analysis and 5 themes were revealed. The first significant theme that emerged from the data concerns the management of these IOs, which play a crucial role in overseeing the mobility aspect of internationalization efforts. This theme includes administrative structure and staffing sub-themes. In the context of the administrative structure, evidently, in Turkish universities, IOs serve primarily as coordinating offices operating under the supervision of the rectorates. IPs disclose a complex administrative ecosystem associated with the management of IOs. A complicated administrative structure is revealed as a result of the insights supplied by IPs. One of the key concerns that have been brought up by IPs relates to the administrative structure that IOs hold within the hierarchy of the university. According to the research, this placement is not always well-defined, which results in complications and uncertainties. IPs described situations in which IOs found themselves overburdened with a wide variety of international-related tasks and obligations, frequently without a distinct mandate. IPs have reported having difficulty recognizing the boundaries of their office's jurisdiction as a result of the absence of a well-defined administrative framework, which has led to uncertainty in the industry. In the context of staffing the current research highlights a lack of uniformity in personnel rights and titles among international office professionals. This results in a multitude of discrepancies regarding staff titles and personal rights. The situation is marked by a lack of standardized recruitment processes, with the role of an international office professional often reduced to a task that anyone proficient in English can undertake. Consequently, individuals assigned to IOs can vary widely in terms of their qualifications and expertise. According to Taylor (2010), new forms of professionalism and methods of administration are linked to internationalization's emergence as a management function in higher education. The majority of countries around the world, especially those in Europe, are now beginning to integrate internationalization into their national and institutional policies and practices (De Wit et al., 2015). This widespread trend of internationalization also brings the management of internationalization to the agenda. CoHE (2017) mentioned the need to upgrade the international relations offices in all universities to a more institutionalized administrative unit, the department head, as part of Turkey's internationalization strategy. This goal for the management of internationalization in universities supports the findings of the present study. However, the fact that this transformation has not yet taken place can be seen as a deficiency in terms of the management of the internationalization of higher education. Yeniay-Hatipoğlu (2019) also emphasized the role of IOs in the internationalization process, the support they receive from senior management, and their strengthening in terms of personnel, which overlaps with this study. A recent study on this topic was conducted by Bulut-Şahin et al. (2023), and their findings mirrored those of the current study. In the context of staffing, Bulut-Şahin and Eriçok (2023) brought attention to the title differences of IPs, and the findings of both pieces of research are similar. Aydınlı and Mathews (2020) highlighted the politicization of the management of internationalization and found that policies are institutionally driven in a top-down manner rather than being needs-based and initiative-driven. Accordingly, this process moves from the government to YÖK, from YÖK to the university administrators, and from those administrators to the practitioners in the international offices. On the other hand, Vossensteyn et al. (2008) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the Erasmus program's influence on enhancing the quality of higher education in Europe, specifically in the domains of teaching, research, student services, and engagement with society. The study primarily concentrated on the institutional and systemic aspects of this impact.

The second theme reached is the workload in IOs. This theme includes the sub-themes of regular tasks and undefined tasks. The study's results about the regular tasks provide insight into the significant and diverse tasks that International Offices (IOs) undertake as they manage the complexities of internationalization and mobility. It became

apparent that the workload of IPs extends to a diverse array of tasks, some of which are explicitly outlined in their job descriptions. These defined roles encompass activities such as handling official correspondence, senior management approvals, managing payment transactions, overseeing student and teaching staff mobility projects, agreements, project management, and student admissions. The conclusions of the study also released notable results for undefined tasks. This paper concluded that IPs frequently encounter a diverse range of additional duties that extend beyond the core focus of their positions. The aforementioned tasks encompass a range of activities, including but not limited to translation, planning international travel, providing assistance for projects conducted outside the office, and attending to personal tasks on behalf of individuals who are not directly affiliated with the organization. Furthermore, the study highlights a lack of clear job descriptions and institutional structures, with the roles of IPs evolving based on changing managerial perspectives and institutional needs. This lack of clarity and consistency in defining the scope of work for IPs can lead to role ambiguity and variations in workload, depending on the leadership at the time. International mobility has grown and changed. For example, joint and dual degrees, online courses, and international branch campuses are all examples of how it has changed and grown. With all of these changes in international education, HEI international offices now have more responsibilities than just student exchange (Deschamps & Lee, 2015). The statements of Beelen (2017) regarding IP workloads are similar to this research:

> "At many continental European universities, international officers have been involved in many aspects of internationalization. These range from the management of mobility to the development of internationalization policies, the management of international projects, and everything else with the word 'international' in it. International officers often remark that 'every envelope with a foreign stamp on it' ends up on their desk."

Bulut-Şahin (2023) highlighted the defined tasks of the professionals in international offices (IPs) who are experts in higher education's internationalization initiatives. Most interact with international students or work in short-term mobility offices (like those for the Erasmus program). They are engaged in multiple tasks and diversified roles and responsibilities tasks at the same time. Joint and dual degrees, online courses, and international branch campuses are just a few examples of the proliferation and diversification of international modes of delivery. These tasks may overlap with the defined tasks of the current study. However, Hunter et al., (2018) stated that with the growth of mobility, internationalization has become institutionalized, and the main work is carried out by leaders and IOs. As can be seen, due to the nature of internationalization and mobility, the workload of IOs is heavy. On the other hand, IPs' motivation may be negatively affected by having to fulfill tasks outside the job description of the office, which supports the findings of the present research.

The third result obtained as a result of the research is discussed under the titles of student-related challenges and external challenges. Problems with students range from problems with foreign languages and communication breakdowns with students to late submission of important documents, lack of interest on the part of students during application periods, and laws that protect students but may make it harder for IOs to do their jobs. Moreover, the lack of authority for International Organizations (IOs) to enforce disciplinary measures on students when deemed necessary, the withholding of grants as a consequence of student's failure to comply without legitimate justifications, and a decrease in performance indicators resulting from grant payment contribute to the complexity of the circumstances. One prominent challenge is the matter of student irresponsibility, in which students submit applications for mobility programs but subsequently decide out of participation without providing notification to the relevant office. The lack of

responsibility exhibited in this situation not only hinders the process of planning but also has a negative impact on students who are on waiting lists, thereby posing challenges in ensuring a seamless flow of outbound mobility. In her research, Bulut-Şahin (2023) drew attention to the issue of communication with younger generations, which she believed to be a problem. These findings supported the findings of the current research. Similarly, Çepni et al. (2018) stated that accommodation and communication problems are among the most important problems experienced by Erasmus outgoing students. Different from the results of the current study, Souto-Otero et al (2013) focused on economic, social, and personal barriers in the mobility process. Enders (1998) made several recommendations for improving the administrative and financial aspects of Erasmus mobility, better organization by the host country and assistance for contacts, exchanges, and longer stays abroad.

Fourth, the study found that IPs experience challenges under the themes of academic problems and institutional problems. Academic concerns encompass various issues related to foreign language proficiency among academic and administrative staff, faculty members' hesitancy to instruct international students, language barriers within dormitories, and the predominant use of Turkish as the medium of instruction in certain departments. The linguistic constraint associated with the Turkish language may present challenges for students who are not proficient in Turkish, necessitating them to exert personal endeavors in order to navigate the academic environment. These challenges, gathered under the theme of institutional problems, encompass a range of issues like protracted and often cumbersome residence permit procedures, which have been identified as a significant hurdle. The lengthy duration required for obtaining residence permits can lead to administrative complications and potential delays in students' academic journeys. Additionally, the intricacies of dormitory fees, which can only be paid through the bank, pose a notable challenge. Foreign students, lacking a foreign ID number, encounter difficulties in opening bank accounts, leaving them with limited payment options, primarily in private dormitories that may require annual contracts. One of the findings derived from this research indicates that faculty members exhibit a reluctance toward high enrolment of international students in their classrooms, which coincides with the conclusions drawn by Bulut-Şahin (2023) and Eriçok (2020). Accordingly, there is significant criticism from IPs regarding the delegation of responsibility for internationalization and international students solely to the international offices, without broader institutional engagement. According to Kondakçı (2003), a significant challenge faced by the European Higher Education Area, which seeks to promote internationalization, is the issue of language.

Finally, the role of academic unit coordinators in universities is analyzed in this study. These liaisons are essential to the smooth operation of the student mobility process and serve as a vital contact between departments and International Offices (IOs). The results, however, have shed light on a common theme: the coordinators of these academic units give inadequate assistance for mobility. One persistent problem is the widespread belief that many academic unit coordinators take on the position just to increase their own chances of receiving an Erasmus staff mobility grant. Further complicating matters is the lack of a defined hierarchy between academic unit coordinators and IOs. As a result, they typically see this responsibility negatively, which hinders their ability to aid in the migration process. In parallel with the findings of the current study, Ünal (2011) and Ünal and Özdemir (2013) found that Erasmus unit coordinators should be knowledgeable enough to answer students' questions and provide counseling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this research, a number of recommendations have been made. For the management of international

offices, clear and well-defined administrative structures are recommended. Moreover, the process of recognizing international office work as a profession and specialization should be accelerated. For the workload of IOs, it is recommended to develop comprehensive job descriptions, delineate the boundaries of their areas of responsibility, establish other administrative structures in the organizations, or assign other employees for the tasks that are not included in the job description. To improve the international student mobility experience of international offices and other stakeholders and to overcome the problems in the context of outgoing student mobility, it is recommended to improve the language proficiency of students, to establish sanctions that will ensure more responsible behavior of students who are accepted to go, and to take institutional steps to facilitate visa processes. Regarding the incoming student dimension, it is recommended to improve the foreign language proficiency of academic and administrative staff, to make classrooms, dormitories, and academic departments more hospitable, and to offer courses in international languages. In addition, addressing these issues, such as facilitating residence permit processes, simplifying dormitory payment procedures, and improving orientation activities, is essential to create a more harmonious and supportive environment for international students. These steps are considered necessary to attract more international students and help them integrate into the school. Finally, it is recommended to encourage academic unit coordinators to devote more, provide extensive mobility training, and encourage voluntary engagement to make student mobility easier. These coordinators can help institutions internationalize by connecting academic units and IOs. Moreover, at the same time, taking steps to expand their units' agreements with other universities around the world would be a step to strengthen the cooperation dimension of internationalization.

This study has some limitations. First, this study was conducted with IPs working at state universities in Turkey. This study deals with the mobility dimension of internationalization. In addition, this study deals with the problems experienced in the context of mobility.

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