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RECONCEPTUALIZING DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT INTEGRATION AND CAMPUS CLIMATE IN TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of diversity management and inclusive practices in Turkish private universities on international students. Qualitative research method has been used in the related field research. 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with international students of five Turkish private universities accepting the highest number of international students. The goal of the field research was finding out what international students think about cultural sensitivity, inclusion, and the attractiveness of the university. Thematic analysis identified five principal themes: managing diversity, the cultural awareness of university administration, student opinions, university popularity, and educational satisfaction. Results revealed that the connectedness is particularly affected by diversity management and inclusive organizational strategies, international interactions with strategic partners, and the quality of communication across the university. This study shows that universities targeting to improve their reputation, provide their students with opportunities that make them gain more interesting experiences, and attract more international students need

to manage diversity. Universities ought to make language support better, make policies that are more welcoming, and give students more chances to socialize.

KEYWORDS: Diversity Management, Inclusiveness, International Students, University Attractiveness, Internationalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, more international students have started to get education in Turkish private (foundation) universities. With the increase in international student mobility in recent years, foundation universities in Türkiye have become attractive higher education destinations, especially for students from Middle Eastern countries and Turkic Republics, resulting in a demographic change which required effective diversity management methods in Turkish universities (Baydemir and Bolat, 2024). Turkish private (foundation) universities need international students for both academic and institutional reasons. These students help the university get more attention and respect around the world, and they also promote cultural diversity and make the learning environment more welcoming and global. International students also help universities stay financially stable because they usually pay more for school. They also make interactions in the classroom more interesting by bringing in different points of view and experiences (Taşçı and Kızılkaya, 2025). This helps people come up with new ideas and understand each other better. International students are more than just students for both local economies and local academia; they are also important resources that help the university reach its academic, internationalization, and long-term growth goals. It is a kind of foreign direct investment which is highly profitable and long term oriented (Knutsen, Wiborg and Wiers-Jenssen, 2025). OECD (2020) says that international students are a valuable source of income and human capital development because they bring in a lot of money through tuition, living expenses, and long-term talent retention. ICEF Monitor (2022) says that international students bring billions of dollars into national economies every year. They do this not only by spending money directly, but also by encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship, and global networks that help the job market and competitiveness of the host country (Zhang and Wang, 2024).

How institutions manage cultural, linguistic and social differences among students directly affects not only students' academic performance but also their adaptation to the university environment and their sense of belonging. In this context, the extend of diversity management adopted in universities has a significant role in making international students feel valued and included. In our study, we adopt the definition of diversity management which explains it as a strategic organizational approach targeting building an inclusive and resilient academic environment that appreciate, value, and integrate

differences among individuals (Manthar et al., 2025). In this study we used Diversity Management Theory as a theoretical baseline, which suggests that organizations can enhance their effectiveness by methodologically acknowledging, promoting, and leveraging cultural variations within their organizational frameworks and processes (Atkinson, Alibašić and Nyarko, 2022). The current study employs the theory as a foundational framework, illustrating how universities' inclusion-oriented policies, cross-cultural initiatives, and administrative practices affect international students' adaptation experiences and their developing sense of belonging.

In this context, this study aims to examine the effects of diversity management practices implemented in foundation universities in Turkey on the adaptation processes, academic success and sense of belonging of international students to the university. The findings to be obtained may contribute to the development of inclusive policies in higher education and the creation of learning environments that support intercultural interaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Diversity Management

The concept of diversity, in its most fundamental sense, refers to an individual possessing unique characteristics that distinguish them from others and reflecting these traits in ways that are recognizable by those around them (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). The concept of diversity management, which emerged in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, has gradually expanded to other powerful nations across the globe (Kholiavko, 2025). Diversity management is a process through which institutions include different kinds of people and appreciate their differences (Manoharan, Madera, & Singal, 2021). It is defined as the design and implementation of practices that render diversity valuable, with the aim of directing employees—who differ widely in individual, demographic, socio-cultural, informational, and skill-related attributes—toward organizational goals and objectives (Ganji et al., 2021).

Diversity management is further described as a strategic approach that seeks to integrate individuals with diverse qualities into organizations in an inclusive manner and leverage their unique attributes to contribute to organizational performance (Zhao et al., 2025). The diverse attributes extend beyond gender and race, encompassing any characteristic that distinguishes one individual or group from another (Köllen, 2019). From the perspective of Institutional Theory,

organizations require the establishment of collective ideologies and understandings, which are operationalized through norms and rules. These norms and rules, in turn, affect employee reactions. As to Social Exchange Theory, in case diversity management is embraced, employees tend to respond back with organizational citizenship behavior (Ganji *et al.*, 2021).

The literature demonstrates that diversity management is not only approached as a moral or ethical obligation but also as a strategic priority that provides organizations with a competitive advantage in highly contested business environments. Accordingly, organizations develop policies, implement practices, and pursue cultural transformations to transform diversity into a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, the successful implementation of diversity management requires organizations to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses inclusive leadership, equal opportunities for employees, and cultural sensitivity (Manoharan & Singal, 2017).

In inclusive cultural climates where diversity management policies are applied, employees are not made to feel different from one another, while simultaneously being encouraged to express their unique characteristics and potentials for the organization's development. Such an inclusive climate is critical in highlighting the importance of everyone's contribution to the institution. This perspective includes not only short-term economic benefits but also the recognition and appreciation of the unique contributions of individuals, thereby ensuring long-term organizational sustainability (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015).

In recent years, practitioners and scholars have emphasized the benefits of workforce diversity, noting that employees can approach issues from multiple perspectives, break away from standard paradigms, develop original viewpoints, foster organizational innovation, and serve as catalysts for organizational change and transformation. Thus, the concept of diversity management has gained visibility, foregrounding equal employment opportunities and employee well-being. Moreover, it has been recognized that beyond parameters such as gender, race, and high performance, organizations can achieve their goals by embracing employees' diverse attributes without prejudice (Seliverstova, 2021). Previous studies revealed that organizations embracing diversity management methods—like inclusive recruitment strategies, orientation programs, and mentoring initiatives can come across with challenges like resistance, prejudice, and in

sufficient managerial support. But they can also boost employee commitment, organizational satisfaction, and increased levels of innovativeness making long-term results of diversity management of critical importance for organizations (Manoharan & Singal, 2017; Manoharan, Madera, & Singal, 2021).

2.2. Diversity Management at Universities

As seen in the definitions above, although the concept of diversity may vary in terms of context, purpose, and objectives, its underlying aim is to ensure the inclusion of all internal and external stakeholders in institutional activities, operations, and projects regardless of their characteristics (Bataklar & Taksi Deveciyan, 2023). Universities, like other organizations, have introduced diversity policies that bring new dimensions to diversity management and have taken important steps in implementing organizational practices related to diversity. Among these policies are practices inspired by Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954). As to this theory, equal access to opportunities without discrimination motivates people and encourages organizational commitment (Resch, 2023; Golubeva *et al.*, 2025). Main objectives of diversity management practices in universities include the following (Zhao *et al.*, 2025). Establishing an inclusive learning environment, developing policies that prevent discrimination, leveraging diversity as a factor that enhances creativity. From the higher education perspective, diversity management targets, ensuring equal representation of students from diverse cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, viewing diversity not only as an ethical responsibility but also as a strategic factor in internationalization policies that promotes variations in research and institutional competitiveness, ensuring active involvement and leadership of university governing boards, promoting inclusivity and diversity beyond the institution itself to establish trust and credibility among stakeholders as part of the university's societal role (Manoharan, Madera, & Singal, 2021). For diversity management at universities, student participation is a must. In a study by Resch (2023), student partnerships were analyzed in two dimensions: faculty support and peer collaboration (Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). The findings indicated that students' perceptions of diversity management are shaped by both their personal backgrounds and experiences (subject-oriented) and their interactions with peers and faculty (context-oriented). Thus, it can be inferred that students form personal opinions about diversity policies through the interplay between subject and

context.

Riedel, Beatson, and Gottlieb (2023), in a systematic review within higher education marketing, noted that most previous studies primarily focused on diversity and cultural diversity. They revealed that incorporating diversity, including projects into curricula and emphasizing extracurricular activities can boost diversity management at universities. Although students' beliefs about diversity management practices in their institutions are not always consistent, findings indicate that they do not limit diversity to culture, race, or ethnicity alone. Instead, they believe that diversity contributes positively to the learning experience and should not be considered separately from it (Marangell et al., 2024). The results of an empirical study conducted on international students revealed that although universities explicitly declared their inclusive strategies, students expected further action. Students declared that even though diversity-related topics were addressed in their courses, some professors were inclined to engage in discrimination (Grossman et al., 2025). In another study on diversity management in higher education, students emphasized the significance of human dignity and human rights, stressing that respect for their values and beliefs was vital. They also highlighted their openness and tolerance toward cultural differences, diverse beliefs, worldviews, and cultural practices (Golubeva et al., 2025).

3. UNIVERSITY ATTRACTIVENESS

The concept of university attractiveness is defined in research conducted on higher education institutions as the ability of an institution to attract and retain students (Zhu et al., 2025). This concept is not limited to the quality of the education offered; it also encompasses a wide variety of elements such as institutional prestige, academic resources, career opportunities, and social and cultural environment (Seow et al., 2024). A review of the literature reveals that the concept of attractiveness has been addressed from several different perspectives. First, the concept was examined at the country or city level, with subheadings such as security, living costs, and cultural attractiveness of the city. Second, the institution level, with issues such as the academic standards, infrastructure, service quality, and prestige of universities in countries, was addressed. Finally, the concept of university attractiveness was examined from perspectives such as the level of programs offered at universities, curriculum structures, employment opportunities, and language of instruction. (Widiputera, 2017; Columbu et al.,

2021).

It is known that international students' university selection is determined not only by academic quality but also by the social, cultural, and economic factors of the destination country. Much existing research examining student mobility is based on the "push-pull" model. These studies employ two distinct perspectives. In the earliest and more widely accepted studies, researchers concluded that the negative economic and social conditions in the destination countries "push" students to travel abroad, while the positive characteristics of the host countries "pull" them (Altbach 1998). In another study by McMahon (1992), the "push" model was defined as the "outgoing" model, while the "pull" model was labeled the "incoming" model.

Recent academic studies have frequently addressed the concept of university attractiveness in terms of international student mobility. Studies have shown that factors such as limited opportunities in their home countries, which are driving factors for international students' choices, and scholarship opportunities and the quality of education abroad, which are attracting factors, play a role (Wu and Ishii, 2025). In Turkey, low tuition and living costs, cultural and geographic similarities, government-supported scholarship programs, and diverse program options are prominent factors when international students choose universities (Aydın, 2021). From another perspective, the availability of programs taught in English, a welcoming social environment, support services provided by universities to international students, and career options after graduation are also noteworthy factors. Moreover, life conditions in local country, comfort, security, general welfare, cultural diversity, and opportunities for socialization, increase the attractiveness of universities for international students (Seow et al., 2024).

The factors that often pique local students' curiosity about universities include high-quality academic programs, skilled instructors, and sufficient instructional resources (Cattaneo et al., 2019). The reputation and A university's reputation has a big impact on a student's selection of university; this is especially driven by future employment opportunities and expectations of social position. interest (Wilkins et al., 2013). Additionally, other elements that contribute to the appeal include accessible tuition, campus facilities, social and cultural events, and the existence of student clubs. one of the elements that contribute to a university's appeal (Moreira & Gomes, 2019). Students prioritize features like up-to-date curriculum, use of modern technologies, foreign language of instruction, and

opportunities for further career development when selecting a program in a foreign country (Widiputera, 2017). Therefore, attractiveness of a university is determined by myriad factors, including both academic criteria and personal growth opportunities (Seow et al., 2024).

3.1. Research Methodology

In this study, qualitative research method has been adopted. This method is designed to collect and analyze non-numerical data with the aim of attaining profound insights (Smith, 2024). It is mostly used in social sciences. This method encompasses open-ended inquiries used during comprehensive interviews and focus groups. Qualitative research functions as a potent instrument for gaining in-depth understanding with data encompassing participants' declarations, subsequently examined through analysis, thematic analysis, or descriptive analysis (Smith, 2024). This method enables direct engagement with participants permitting researchers to investigate participants' viewpoints in extensive depth providing a multifaceted comprehension of social issues (Thomas, 2021).

Hence, with the aim of gaining in-depth understanding regarding attractiveness of Turkish private universities and preferences of international students, in this study, we preferred qualitative study approach. This study, concentrated on gathering data based on the lived experiences and viewpoints of international students studying in Turkish private universities. This study utilized comprehensive interviews to collect data focused on how students' perception regarding their universities' inclusive strategies and adoption of diversity management techniques affect attractiveness of these universities.

4. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The current research collected information via broad interviews. The interviews in question employed open-ended queries with the objective of answering the research inquiries and getting comprehensive responses reflective of participants' opinions. The interviews were carried out with 15 international students from 5 distinct private universities in Turkey. A semi-structured interview format was used, resulting in it attainable for everyone involved to participate in an identical experience and for the interviewer to bring up further inquiries regarding every individual's experience. Interviews lasted from thirty to forty-five minutes.

4.1. Findings

This study adopted a qualitative research design on diversity management in high education institutions in Turkey. Throughout the field study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of 15 participants selected through purposive sampling. It is attempted to find traces of diversity management and students' perception regarding attractiveness of their university and satisfaction about it in participants' experiences, feelings, and approaches to the topic. The open-ended questions asked to university students from different ethnicities and departments were organized around specific topics to support the research. The questions directed to students were targeting to understand whether they feel there is an inclusive culture in their university, the university management adopted diversity management and local students were respectful to foreigners and whether this effected international students' sense of belonging or not. We asked questions such as: Do you feel that your cultural background is respected and valued at this university?, Do you believe the university has clear policies or initiatives to support students from different ethnic or national backgrounds? and Have you ever experienced or witnessed discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, or religion at this university? We directed the same question set to each participant that were all participating from different private universities in Turkey. When the nature of participants are analyzed. Results were as seen in Table 1.

4.2. Sample

This study was conducted with a sample of 15 participants from 5 different universities and of 10 different nationalities. In selecting the universities, we preferred the universities that accept the highest number of international students. Qualitative research principles favor depth, information richness, and analytical saturation over statistical representativeness, hence the sample size was chosen to maximize methodological rigor. We selected 15 foreign students from five foundation institutions with the most international students in Turkey to ensure diversity in country, department, and year of study. This method collected several experiential stories while maintaining analytical manageability. Twelve to twenty participants are typically sufficient to generate meaningful topic patterns in qualitative interview studies with a homogeneous research group (such as international students at private universities).

Saturation was monitored during data collection

and processing. The fifteenth interview repeated language problems, inclusive practices, discriminatory interactions, and community. Following the thirteenth interview, no noteworthy codes or theme elements surfaced. Two more interviews confirmed saturation and stability, however they did not generate new ideas but reinforced the conceptual structure. Besides coding redundancy, saturation was assessed for explanatory depth. Iteratively expanding sample size improved validity and reliability.

In this study, the purposive sampling method has been adopted to guarantee that participants are relevant to the study phenomena—international students studying in Turkish universities. The inclusion criteria mandated that participants should be (a) active students in Turkish private universities, (b) international students, and (c) their universities are the ones that are accepting the highest number of international students. After the 15th interview, data saturation was achieved; however, two more interviews were conducted to verify the stability of the themes.

The roles and areas of activity of the participants are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Participant Characteristics.

Participants	Age	Class	Nationality	University
P1	20	3	Syria	University 1
P2	20	3	Pakistan	University 2
P3	22	3	Algeria	University 3
P4	23	3	Tunusia	University 4
P5	22	2	Russia	University 5
P6	19	2	Russia	University 2
P7	22	4	Syria	University 2
P8	21	2	Tunusia	University 3
P9	20	2	Tunusia	University 1
P10	21	3	India	University 5
P11	22	3	Tunusia	University 4
P12	21	2	Palestine	University 3
P13	21	2	Iran	University 2
P14	21	3	Kazakhstan	University 1
P15	23	4	Turkmenistan	University 1

During the data analysis process, participant statements were categorized under themes. The main themes that emerged in this context were: Diversity Management, Cultural Sensitivity of the University Management, Students' Attitudes, Attractiveness of the University, Student Satisfaction.

Under the theme of Diversity Management; we ended up with some codes. For example, Respect towards students, includes statements such as, "our professors really know how to deal with foreign students. They do not discriminate us in class" (p11). "I can say they are respectful for the culture. Yeah, for every culture. I feel like our university is like trying to respect our culture. (p8). "So I know few

people who's covering their ethnicities but even if they open it, I don't think it will be such as a big problem, and the other students will discriminate them. We're all friendly here." (p5) and "people really respect our culture here." (p14). Another code was; Disrespect towards students, includes statements such as, "I don't think they're hurt by the jokes, but they probably feel disrespected at some point." (p6), I feel like Medipol is like trying to respect our culture. But for Turkish students, sometimes I cannot say the same thing." (p8).

Under the Theme Cultural Sensitivity of the University Management, there were codes such as International activities, which includes statements such as, "I have attended to many ones like the International Day and to some other activities of the international office. I was invited to them and they were all so great and I didn't face any problem" (p1), "we had the International Day. I did participate in it. I was actually one of the managers and organizers and I was the host for the main event." (p2), "every year I participate in International Day to represent my culture and also to find something about the other cultures." (p5), "International Day. I really enjoyed spending time there and met a lot of people. We talked, we had fun. And this kind of events are actually bringing everyone together. And it's showing the diversity, the differences in culture, in music, in food. I really enjoy this kind of events, I'd say." (p6) and "we have a lot of groups in university for international students like the sports group. Also like all international students going out together and play some different games." (p5)

On the one hand, the code, Inclusive Class work, includes statements such as, "activities in the class is even better for us. So uh, it help us to start the conversation and uh continue talk with each other and it's pretty nice." (p5), "All of my classmates and my professors are very, very respectful towards whoever is speaking and give them the full opportunity and give them the full right to." (p2). "Every professor that I've had an experience with was, uh, very accepting of anyone participating and if anything, they encouraged it because it makes the class more engaging." (p12) and "We have some classes that we do group work in it, group projects and I think it's it's very inclusive, depends on our choice of the group mates." (p7).

Another code, Inclusive procedures and rules, includes statements such as; "I saw one of the posters said that they have opened a counseling department for the students and provided for by the university it is for free. I had one friend who attended it and came back to me with nothing but positive things to say"

(p12), "I know that an ombudsman office has been opened in our university. I've been following it. I know they're working hard there and doing a lot of work against discrimination." (p15) and "In our university they're giving equal chances every student. They're treating equally to every nationality. P(10).

Moreover, the code Discrimination regarding ethnic orientation, includes statements such as; "if you would come in my class and mix us up it's gonna be better because our classroom now is divided by national groups and sometimes people like just sitting alone. (p8), "when I say people that I'm from India, they tell me that people in India, they eat food from streets, that it is dirty. This type of discrimination I face." (p10), "In our class I've noticed that foreigners, they hang out with themselves, Russian by themselves, Turkish people by themselves. They kind of separated themselves from others." (p3), "Most of the time Turk people group up with themselves and we internationals just pick ourselves." (p4) and "the professor interacts more and chats more privately, texts more and is generally closer to the Turkish students" (p12).

Moreover, under the theme Students' Attitudes; the code Positive communication between students, includes statements such as; "...But in general we have a lot of groups in university for international students like the sports group. Also like all international students going out together and play some different games. (p5), "for myself I prefer to always communicate with the new people, especially who has a background that's different than mine." (p5), "I don't find it problematic to socialize here. Everyone is very kind, very nice. Everyone is coming up to you and talking. So I don't think it's a problem here as long as you're being genuine and nice." (p6) and under the code Curiosity about different cultures, there are statements like; "it is a great opportunity to meet so many new people and culture" (p2), "I see how many people are inquiring about where I'm from and they're interested so. I feel like it's respected and people are respecting my background" (p6) and "Like I want to interact with new people. I want to see like different point of views. I have the opportunity to understand Turkish citizens especially." (p4). Further more, the code Sense of belonging, includes statements such as; "I feel that I'm I belong to this place, I belong to this society, I belong to this social structure and the structure of students, and I do genuinely love. Love it here." (p6), "I know a lot of people. A lot of people know me. Like I've created like a good circle around myself in my educational life. I I feel like I'm merged

in this uni." (p7), "I think business department students are very social, very communicative. Other than that, I have a lot of friends from other departments who are also very social, very nice to me, both Turkish and international students." (p6). Moreover, under the code Enthusiasm for socializing we had statements such as "...Even if it's not a festival, perhaps an event every two weeks to bring all students together. If the university initiates this, it would be an event, most importantly, for new students, who could connect through this event to build their own networks or just simply find friends." (p15), "I would like more events happening like once the event was cultural event which I have to wait till the end of the year" (p10) and "How would the university really create direct communities? I think maybe if there are more activities on the G floor or in B floor. People come together just like the culture day or like a protest for a good cause or such." (p12) and under the code Tr students' positive attitudes towards International students we had statements such as; "All of my classmates and my professors are very, very respectful towards whoever is speaking and give them the full opportunity and give them the full right to." (p2), "most of the time it's easier like to interact with Turkish people" (p4), "when we come to the university. we just have a friendly discussion. We don't have any problem." (p13) and "...they really respect our culture" (p14) and under the code Tr students' negative attitudes towards international students includes statements such as; "...I don't know this exactly because it was a long time ago, but I'm pretty sure a Turkish student got up and he or she said to that student, "If you cannot understand, go back to your country" or something like that. "Go back to where you came from."" (p2), "That's it. So I do think that doing our project with the with Turkish people here wouldn't be so beneficial. You do not cooperate." (p11) and "I feel like there is a like a bunch of people, a bunch of students who are racists, Turkish students" (p6). Under the code of Racism there are statements such as; "We experienced that. ...they say you don't belong here. If you are in Turkey, you have to study Turkish and start learning in Turkish and." (p4), "Like you could tell that they were a little bit racist towards the foreigner students and they did not like that the students who are international students are talking in the class or asking questions or giving an input." (p2) and "I have friends who are from South Asia. They face some discrimination. I even even if it's not active discrimination, it could be witnessing implicit racism such as seeing on the student." (p12).

Under the Theme Attractiveness of the university,

we had codes like Campus includes statements such as; "I really love our campus, I really do love like everything about it." (p3) and under the code of Quality of education, includes statements such as; "...we are satisfied with the competencies of our lecturers...(p7). The code Academic image of the uni, includes statements such as; "...For example, I had university life before in my hometown. And when I came here, I had like high expectation that it's gonna be like, you know, the dream university." (p8) Under the code of Friendly administrative staff we had statements such as; "when it comes to staff in administration, no discrimination. They do care. Actually, when you go and ask and try, they do care. (p11), "Actually it's very friendly atmosphere with them" (p13) and "...and I see the university supportive to our international students." (p1).

Under the Theme Student Satisfaction, there are codes like Social Activities includes statements such as; "For three years, I'm participating in International Culture Day." (p14), "I feel like there's no enough trips like this or any kind of events. Yeah, I think this

is what's lacking in terms of social part." (p6) and "Yes, I have attended to many ones like the International Day and to some other activities of the international office. I was invited to them, and they were all so great and I didn't face any problem" (p1). Moreover, the code Academic Support includes statements such as; "Professors, the coordinator, interacting with international students, like helping them, the way they talk with them, the type of subject they will start with them and the discussions. I can see good things there." (p4) and "To be completely honest, yes, this university is very, very supportive towards our towards the international students and I have seen that, yes." (p2). For Foreign Language Competencies of staff code there are statements such as; "Most of the times you have to find out about things on your own, asking other students how they solved this problem." (p6).

Table 2, includes the codes and sub-codes created as a result of the answers received from the questions asked to the participants.

Table 2: Code List.

Diversity management
Respect towards students
Disrespect towards students
Cultural sensitivity of the university management
international activities
Inclusive Class work
inclusive procedures and rules
Discrimination regarding ethnic orientation
Students' Attitudes
positive communication between students
curiosity about different cultures
sense of belonging
Enthusiasm for socializing
Turkish students' positive attitude towards foreigners
Turkish students' negative attitude towards foreigners
Racism
Attractiveness of the Uni
Campus
quality of education
academic image of uni.
Friendly administrative staff
Student satisfaction
Social activities
Academic support
Foreign language competencies of the staff

Most repeated codes are; sense of belonging (13), foreign language competencies of the staff (13), inclusive procedures and rules (12), discrimination regarding ethnic orientation (10), international activities (10), Inclusive Class work (8), Enthusiasm for socializing (8), Social activities (8). Moreover, as can be seen on the Table 3, the most frequently coexisting codes are; Foreign language competencies of the staff - sense of belonging (11), Foreign

language competencies of the staff - Inclusive procedures and rules (10), Foreign language competencies of the staff - Discrimination regarding ethnic orientation (10), Sense of belonging - Inclusive procedures and rules (10), Inclusive procedures and rules - international activities (9), Inclusive procedures and rules - Discrimination regarding ethnic orientation (9), Sense of belonging - Discrimination regarding ethnic orientation (9),

Foreign language competencies of the staff - international activities (8), Sense of belonging - enthusiasm for socializing (8) and Sense of belonging- international activities (8).

Table 3. Most frequent code coexistences.

CODES	Inclusive procedures and rules	Sense of belonging	Foreign language competencies of the staff	TOTAL
Diversity management	0	0	0	0
Respect towards students	4	5	4	13
Disrespect towards students	1	2	2	6
International activities	9	8	8	26
Inclusive Class work	6	7	7	21
Inclusive procedures and rules	0	10	10	20
Discrimination regarding ethnic orientation	9	9	10	29
Positive communication between students	4	6	6	17
Curiosity about different cultures	5	6	4	16
Sense of belonging	10	0	11	22
Enthusiasm for socializing	8	8	6	22
TR std's positive attitude	6	6	6	18
TR std's negative attitude	2	5	5	13
Racism	3	4	4	12
Campus	2	4	4	10
Quality of education	3	5	5	13
Academic image of uni.	5	4	5	14
Friendly administrative staff	4	4	5	14
Student satisfaction	0	1	1	2
Social activities	5	7	8	21
Academic support	6	6	6	18
Foreign language competencies of the staff	10	11	0	22
TOTAL	102	118	117	349

"International activities" was frequently (8) mentioned with the theme of "sense of belonging." This shows that students explain their sense of belonging by seeing their culture represented in the university environment or by having the opportunity to get to know new cultures. The following statements from the participants also support this: "International Day. I really enjoyed spending time there and met a lot of people. We talked; we had fun. And these kinds of events are actually bringing everyone together. And it's showing the diversity" (p6) "it's totally respected with the university. It contains cultural days. So when I join these events and see other cultures. And I really can see they respected our culture." (p13)

Having inclusive policies and procedures seemed to be considered as a good measure (9) to prevent discrimination based on ethnic orientation. The statements as follows also proves this: "The publication they post, the communication between them is mainly in Turkish. So, this would be hard for us. So, we take a step back and don't want to move forward and join these kinds of social clubs. Even though they are big, they seem to do a lot of good events, but sadly they are in Turkish." (p9) and "I saw one of the posters said that they have opened a counseling department for the students and provided for by the university it is for free. I had one friend who attended it and came back to me with nothing but positive things to say" (p12)

Having inclusive policies and procedures most frequently recurring (10) themes associated with the sense of belonging theme. It provides strong evidence and is also supported by the following statements of the participants: "But I like the atmosphere. I like the university guidelines." (P11), "I don't know much about policies, but I'm pretty sure that our university does not allow discrimination and racism" (p2) and "You know how many international students we have. We have five international clubs to choose from; it's a very small number." (p4).

Inclusive procedures and rules and foreign language competencies of the staff themes frequently existed together (10). Whether students interact with university staff who speak languages they understand is also seen as a significant factor influencing their perception of how inclusive the university is. Some of the statements of the participants regarding the subject are as follows: "in faculty you don't find someone who even speaks English. So, we can come in and every time we need to communicate there is a word missing that I don't know" (p8), "I feel like in our first year, they were like

valuing diversity, valuing foreign students, but now? I feel like they're not. Whenever I go to the faculty, for example, the secretaries, they do not speak different languages." (p11), "I would recommend considering the English more for the professors and also the students because after all we are an international student, an international university." (p9).

Sense of belonging and discrimination based on ethnic orientation themes (9) are also often mentioned together (9). As can be seen from the examples given in the participant students' statements, being exposed to negative comments about their ethnic origins or feeling to be alienated are among the themes that determine an international student's sense of belonging to the institution they study at: "in our class, I've noticed that even though myself, I don't like it. It's like foreigners, they hang out with themselves, Russian by themselves, Turkish people by themselves. They kind of separated themselves." (p3) "The professor interacts more and chats more privately, texts more and is generally closer to the Turkish students. We're excluded." (p12), "... and when we asked why, of course the Turkish citizens start yelling and like: go back to your home country, you don't belong here. If you are in Turkey, you have to study Turkish and start learning in Turkish and so..." (p4).

Since the themes of enthusiasm for socializing and the theme of international activities are similarly associated with the 'sense of belonging' (8) it seems that international students see international activities as a tool to establish ties with the institution and the social environment. Sample statements of the participants regarding this issue are as follows: "...to make the university more inclusive for international students? Um, I guess maybe more events. Uh, as I know, like compared with other universities, our union doesn't have a lot of them. (p5), "So we have to attend the maximum of what we can and interact people as much as we can. You know, for the not only for us, but for the career too. In the future. We will be like entrepreneurs. So we have like to see the different cultures and how people think exactly. So we can like know if we ever decide to start a business somewhere. We at least have the smallest knowledge about these people, who they are and how they behave with people and everything." (p4).

Participants were mostly eager to socialize through student clubs, but the fact that the clubs were generally established in the local language, ignoring the large number of foreign students, was a common theme that recurred among many participants and was found insufficient. "There is

maybe 20 or 25 clubs. There is only 5 clubs that include English speaker. This is a really bad thing. Like there is some interesting clubs. We were interested to like join in them and interact with them,..." (p4).

Positive communication between students and sense of belonging themes frequently mentioned together (6). The fact that these two themes appeared together in the interviews suggests that students' sense of belonging is determined by how well they relate to their peer groups or the other students they interact with. Their own relationships or the stories they hear are influential in this regard. Following statements on the subject also support this: "But in general we have a lot of groups in university for international students like the sports group. Also like all international students, going out together and play some different games." (p5), "I know a lot of people. A lot of people know me. Like I've created like a good circle around myself in my educational life. I I feel like I'm merged in this uni." (p7), "In some at some point we all come together. I feel like I never felt discrimination or racism towards me and none of my friends actually." (p14).

Sense of belonging and foreign language competencies of the staff appears to be the most frequently co-existing themes (11). Feeling understood by university staff, and not feeling excluded in problem solving and academic advising were highlighted as important factors in students' development of a sense of belonging, the statements supporting this situation are as follows: "But sometimes I feel like some teachers, they keep switching between Turkish and English, which I find it really difficult to understand." (p10), "there's no one in our department, at least in architecture, there's no one who can speak English." (p10), "Most of the times you have to find out about things on your own, asking other students how they solved this problem." (p6), "I feel like they don't have a good background and experience dealing with students internationally. They don't have a good experience when teaching in English" (p2), "But also, I think that a university as big as Medipol shouldn't have this kind of problem. After all, it's an International University, so this kind of problems is the university should handle and provide international students with the same opportunities (p9).

Lastly, Coexisting themes of Sense of belonging and curiosity about other different cultures (6) mentioned cases wherein the sense of belonging that participants have built towards the university, makes them more curious and willing to learn about new cultures and more eager to understand others. For

example; “But if we could like an opportunity to have more communities in English Language. I think it would be better for international students.” (p5), “Like I want to interact with new people. I want to see different point of views. I want to understand especially Turkish citizens here, because I have the opportunity to understand them.” (p4) and there are phrases that explains that participants witnessed others trying to understand their own culture makes them feel like they are in a more inclusive environment. For example: In fact, I see how many people are inquiring about where I'm from and they're interested so I feel like it's respected and people are respecting my background (p6).

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, we preferred qualitative study method to examine international students' experiences, aspirations, and attitudes in Türkiye. The results revealed that diversity management in Turkish Universities is a daily operational reality that affects students' perceptions of institutions' attraction, community, and satisfaction.

The study's distinctive contribution is the link between university attraction and diversity management strategies via the mediating role of sense of belonging. This code was the most often used one and it was often used with other themes like international activities, discrimination, and language skills. However, the findings indicate that diversity measures that are only symbolic or inconsistently implemented may undermine a sense of belonging, even in academically prominent universities.

Campus climate and inclusiveness, previously studied separately, are merged in this study. Participants, that are more engaged to university were those participants who declared that they enjoy student clubs, intercultural activities, and helpful administrative structures. We also found that multilingual accessibility, international involvement, and inclusive policies help attract foreign students. To compete globally, institutions need robust diversity programs, not just inclusion laws. Long-term internationalization requires cross-cultural interaction, anti-discrimination, and multilingualism. Academic and administrative diversity management boosts student retention and global reputation.

Language challenges and isolation were also reported by our subjects. This shows importance of promoting inclusivity and equal participation for all students. Another important point to consider is the extent to which the university's policies and procedures support internationalization. Most of the

participants declared that they were aware of their school's efforts but not found enough. For example, they think lack of international student clubs, the inconsistent application of inclusive rules, and the need for Turkish courses are still important problems to be considered. Our results revealed that internationalization methods of universities should go beyond symbolic actions and be integrated into the institution's strategic, operational and cultural framework.

This research revealed that international students prefer institutions wherein they can find competent academics and strong socialization opportunities with other students, real cultural inclusivity. For promoting satisfaction and retention of international students, universities should focus on creating comprehensive support systems, giving more importance to language education and fostering institutional cultures that actively celebrate diversity. Through these methods, universities not only attract more international students, but they also increase their competitiveness.

5.1. Discussion

The current study revealed that diversity management practices are positively related with international students' sense of belonging. This result is compatible with recent research emphasizing the centrality of campus climate and intercultural relations to the sense of belonging (Stebbleton et al., 2014; McKenzie, Farmer and Chear, 2024). A recent study regarding minorities at university found that students' perceptions of campus climate and opportunities at campus atmosphere for intercultural interaction are key factors creating students' sense of belonging (Golubeva et al., 2025). In parallel with our findings, these results showed that diversity-oriented practices shape students' sense of belonging on campus.

Diversity Management Theory clarifies these findings. Recognizing, respecting, and proactively incorporating diversity into structures and processes boosts effectiveness (Barak, 2022). Our findings suggest that inclusive procedures, culturally sensitive administrative practices, international activities, and language accessibility manage structural diversity. These systems validate diversity when integrated into institutional routines including multilingual communication, anti-discrimination laws, and intercultural activities. This boosts student belonging and institutional attachment. Students feel conditional belonging and exclusion when diversity management is symbolic or inconsistent (e.g., limited English-speaking staff or segregated student

groups). The findings experimentally extend Diversity Management Theory to higher education by showing that diversity strategies' effectiveness depends on their operational integration into academic and administrative practices, not only their formal existence.

Our results also contribute to the extant literature by examining the nuanced nature of belonging. Previous studies like Preuß, Zimmermann and Jonkmann, (2025) showed that cultural assets of universities affect the way international students experience belonging, and is shaped by students' intersecting identities and organizational climates. Similarly, research on minority ethnic students in the UK showed that a sense of belonging can be "conditional," shaped by social interactions, designating the significance of institutional diversity practices (Chiu et al., 2025). These studies are supporting our findings explaining why some international students in our study reported high belonging in the presence of inclusive practices.

Moreover, recent studies on diversity emphasize that multicultural norms, perceived existence of diversity management, and organizational support positively affect well-being and attitudes toward classmates from diverse backgrounds (Ward et al., 2025; Roshanaei, 2024). These kind of findings reinforce our deductions regarding positive effect of

supportive campus climate on belonging and attractiveness of the related university and emphasizes the need for contextual and intersectional approaches in higher education policy and practice.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Findings of our study offer several managerial implications. First, sense of belonging was a central theme in our field research, thus, it suggests that universities must go beyond basic student support and requires strategic investment like student clubs, intercultural events, mentoring programs. Secondly, the results highlight the importance of language proficiency. Managers should therefore consider expanding language support units and language courses. Third, the perceived gaps in inclusive policies and practices indicate the necessity of strengthening the institutionalization of diversity management. Universities should also create anti-discrimination protocols and should benefit from centralized international student offices with high awareness of diversity management. Lastly, using student metrics like student satisfaction analytics and methods enhancing continuous improvement can provide universities with information that is useful to monitor student experiences.

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