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COUNTRY IMAGE EFFECT OF TURKEY ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' DESTINATION CHOICE: AN EXAMPLE OF KYRGYZSTAN*

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ABSTRACT

Economic and socio-cultural effects created by international students' mobility have reached a level that shouldn't be ignored. There is a growing global competition between countries to gain higher share of international student market. The Republic of Turkey is one of the main actors of this market. One of the factors influencing international students' country preferences is a country image. In this context, this study aims to reveal the image of Turkey as an international education destination in terms of Kyrgyz students and to evaluate the effect of country image on destination choice. For this purpose, first of all, indicators related to the global movement of students, leading countries for international students and the position of Turkey are discussed on the basis of secondary data. Then, the primary data obtained from undergraduate students (n=1000) studying at four big universities in Bishkek (capital city of Kyrgyzstan) through questionnaire method are evaluated. The research findings showed that overall Kyrgyz students' have positive perceptions toward the image of Turkey, moreover the results revealed three different market segments (low, medium and high) in terms of perceived country image. Country image dimensions such *the quality of education and life, symphaty and interest* have positive effects

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on destination choice. On the other hand, *historical and socio-cultural characteristics* and *human characteristics* negatively affect the country preferences. The findings of this study are thought to provide important clues both for Republic of Turkey and Kyrgyz Republic. Consequently, international student mobility is of great importance not only for hosting countries, but also in terms of source countries.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Introduction

Although the international student mobility is not a new phenomenon, over the past 10 years it has become progressively more common and important, due to the liberalization of labor and capital mobility in the globalized world. In rapidly changing and transforming world, students, parents, companies, governments and others who are the stakeholders of higher education have certain expectations regarding the international student mobility. Central Asian Turkic Republic are an important market segment in terms of higher education system of the Turkey. The country image is one of the most important factors influencing international students' destination choice. Therefore, it is of great importance to reveal Turkey's image as an international education destination in the case of Kyrgyzstan which is a one of the potential market segments, and evaluate international education tendency of Kyrgyz students. Consequently, this study which aims to reveal Kyrgyz students' perceptions of Turkey's image and attractiveness level, effect of country image on country preferences and profiles of the market segments, is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature.

Turkey is one of the main destination countries in terms of hosting international students and today the most notable trends in the Turkish higher education system is the massive increase in the number of international students. The number of international students enrolled in Turkey higher education was only 16.656 (YÖK, 2017: 3) in 2000-2001 academic year while it has risen to 48.183 in 2014, 72.178 in 2015, 87.903 in 2016, 108 .076 in 2017 and 125.138 in 2018. Tukeys' higher education institutions host 125.138 international students from 211 different countries during the 2017-2018 academic year

There is an abundance of literature which tries to explore and identify key factors affecting the mobility of international students and their choices of higher education institutions (Nafari et al., 2017: 4). Image is the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person holds regarding an object (Kotler & Keller, 2011: 771). Country image consists of the symbols and associations that people envision when thinking about a particular country. These associations influence judgments in relation to particular foreign countries (Ghazzarian, 2016: 703). The evidence also suggests that country image tends to be more important for destination choice than HEI branding (Chen, 2008; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Ghazzarian, 2016: 703). Based on a study of existing literature, students' choices of study destination are influenced by push and pull factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Yang, 2007). The "push" factors are factors associated within the source country and motivate the students to study internationally rather than

locally, whereas "pull" factors operate within a host country to make that country attractive to international students (Mazzarol ve Soutar, 2002; McCarthy vd., 2012: 86; Lee, 2014: 364).

Methodology

The following hypotheses were tested within the scope of the research:

H₁: Country image influences students' destination choice in international education

H₂: Clusters regarding perceived Turkey image differs according to the demographic characteristics

This study is descriptive which attempt to establish (describe) the current situation. The structured questionnaire form was designed to determine Kyrgyz students' perceptions of Turkey's image and their tendency (motivations) to pursue a higher education in the Republic of Turkey. The questionnaire instrument was developed on the basis of similiar studies (Lala et al., 2009; Park et al., 2014; Yıldırım & Akbulut, 2017; Ünal, 2017). The main population of this study involved undergraduate students studying at state universities in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. Overall 1000 students from four leading state universities (Y. Balasagun Kyrgyz National University, K. Karasayev Bishkek University of Social Sciences, I. Razzakov Kyrgyz State Technical University and I. Arabaev Kyrgyz State University) by the number of students (250 participants from each higher education institutions) participated in a survey. As sampling procedure, quota sampling method was chosen. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used in the evaluation of data.

Findings and Discussion

The analyzed sample comprises mainly female students (72%) rather than their male counterparts (28%). Out of 1000 respondents, 45.8% have 25.000 Som average family income, and 63.5% spend monthly less than 10 000 Som. Most of students (44.6%) have an acquaintance working abroad rather than an acquaintance studying abroad (29.4%). The most preferred regions among respondents are Central Europe (46.8%), Western Europe (46.0%) and North America (41.0%). On the other hand, top countries where students desire to pursue education are Germany (26.7%), USA (25.9%) and China (6.1%). Turkey ranks fourth (5.6%) after China.

The country image plays an important role in the international students' educational destination choice. Overall, Republic of Turkey's image in the eyes of Kyrgyz students is above the average and positive. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the image of Turkey (Bakan, 2013; Alyılmaz et al., 2015; Gülcan et al., 2015). There are studies suggesting a direct and positive relationship between country image and purchase intention of higher education in the literature (Cubillo et al., 2006; Bourke, 2006; Singh et al., 2014; Alyılmaz et al., 2015; Gülcan et al., 2015). This research also revealed that country image have a significant impact on Kyrgyzstan students' intentions to study in Turkey. However, unlike other studies, it was determined that not all dimensions have an impact, and that all influencing dimensions are not positive. For instance, dimensions of country image such as

political and administrative characteristics, economic and technological characteristics, investment climate characteristics don't have a significant effect. In a study conducted by Olgun Gündüz (2012) Turkey's economic growth, its regional power by effective foreign policy were identified as the main influencers on international students' choices. Similarly, a research conducted by Günaydın (2012) revealed that Turkey's economic growth, scientific and technological advances, political image were the most important determinants in students' choices of Turkey as an educational destination. *The quality of education and life, sympathy and interest towards Turkey* dimensions have a positive influence on students' willing to study in Turkey. In the literature, it is seen that there are studies supporting this result (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Beine et al., 2013). On the other hand, *historical and socio-cultural and human characteristics* dimensions of country image have a negative impact. It might be explained by the fact that the students in Kyrgyzstan give priority to the socio-culturally different countries in the selection of educational destinations. The hypothesis “H1: Country image influences students' destination choice in international education” is partially accepted.

Kyrgyz students can be classified into three clusters in terms of their perceptions toward Turkey's image like low, medium and high-level perception. In other words, three market segments regarding to perceived country image were identified. In addition, these cluster comprises students according to the demographic characteristics. Consequently, the hypothesis “H2: Clusters regarding perceived Turkey image differs according to the demographic characteristics” is accepted. There are researches on the image of Turkey which suggest that perceived image differs according to the demographic characteristics (Bakan, 2013; Gülcan et al., 2015) and studies revealing no differences (Yağcı et al., 2013). The findings of this study are thought to provide important clues for promotion efforts of Turkey's higher education system in Kyrgyzstan and other countries in Central Asia.

Keywords: Image, Country Image, Image of Turkey, International Students, Student Mobility

TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ İMAJININ ULUSLARARASI ÖĞRENCİLERİN ÜLKE TERCİHLERİ ÜZERİNE ETKİSİ: KIRGIZİSTAN ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZ

Uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliğinin yarattığı ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel etkiler gözardı edilemeyecek düzeye ulaşmış, bu pazardan pay almak isteyen ülkeler kendi aralarında yoğun bir rekabet içerisine girmişlerdir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti de bu pazarın önemli aktörlerinden birini oluşturmaktadır. Uluslararası öğrencilerin ülke tercihlerinde etkili olan faktörlerden bir tanesi ülke imajıdır. Bu çerçevede, yapılan araştırmanın temel amacı Kırgız öğrencilerin gözünde eğitim destinasyonu olarak Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin imajını ortaya koymak ve ülke imajının ülke tercihi olan etkisini değerlendirmektir. Bu doğrultuda öncelikle dünya genelinde uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliğine

ilişkin göstergeler, öne çıkan ülkeler ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ndeki durum ikinci el verilere dayalı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Daha sonra, Kırgızistan'ın başkenti Bişkek şehrinde faaliyet gösteren 4 büyük devlet üniversitesinde lisans programlarına kayıtlı öğrencilerden (n=1000) yüz yüze anket yöntemiyle toplanan birinci el veriler değerlendirilmektedir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, Kırgız öğrencilerin genel olarak T.C. imajına yönelik olumlu algıya sahip oldukları, ancak algılanan ülke imajı bakımından üç farklı (düşük, orta ve yüksek) pazar bölümünün olduğu ortaya konulmuştur. Ayrıca, ülke imajının boyutlarından eğitim ve yaşam kalitesi, sempati ve ilgi boyutlarının ülke tercihi üzerinde olumlu, diğer taraftan, tarihi ve sosyo-kültürel özellikler ve beşerî özellikler boyutlarının olumsuz etkisinin olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarının hem Türkiye Cumhuriyeti açısından hem de Kırgızistan Cumhuriyeti açısından önemli ipuçları vereceği düşünülmektedir. Nitekim, uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği sadece evsahibi ülkeler açısından değil, öğrencileri gönderen ülkeler açısından da önem arz etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İmaj, Ülke İmajı, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İmajı, Uluslararası Öğrenci, Öğrenci Hareketliliği.

1. Introduction

Although the international student mobility is not a new phenomenon, over the past 10 years it has become progressively more common and important, due to the liberalization of labor and capital mobility in the globalized world. Innovations in the field of international communication, reduced airway transportation costs, diversification of the range of educational opportunities for foreign students, globalization of labor markets and other factors encourage more students to study abroad. The international students' mobility was firstly mentioned as part of the "brain drain" debate, just as another form for skilled individuals to leave the origin countries for more "developed" ones (Coşciug, 2013: 94).

In rapidly changing and transforming world, students, parents, companies, governments and others who are the stakeholders of higher education have certain expectations regarding the international student mobility. Students' motives for study abroad are learning two or more foreign languages (Maiworm & Teichler, 1995) as well as international learning experience (Barnick, 2006). By completing all or at least part of their studies overseas, students desire to increase their employability by developing competencies such as a foreign language, global citizenship (Barnick, 2006), cultural interaction, awareness, adapting to change (Carlson et al., 1990; Maiworm & Teichler, 1995; Barnick, 2006; Forsey, Broomhall & Davis, 2012: 130). Companies expect graduates with a certain set of skills, knowledge and ability to successfully carry out work tasks. In an increasingly globalized and competitive environment employers prefer students with the international experience. Parents expect certain changes in student characters as well as an acquired ability to find a good job or set up their own businesses after graduation (Lapina, Roga & Mürsepp, 2016: 264).

The stakeholders of education system have certain expectations due to the substantial economic and socio-cultural benefits the international student mobility brings to an economy. In order to attract foreign students to the country and benefit from the international student mobility, marketing strategies that differ from competitors need to be developed. So, it is important to carry out researches related to this subject in the countries and regions which constitute the potential market segments. Turkic Republics in the Central Asia are the most important market segments in terms of Turkey's higher education system. Located in this region the Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Turkey carry out specific

cooperation in the field of education as in many areas also. There have been serious changes in education system in Kyrgyzstan since its proclamation of independence on August 31, 1991. The higher education system in Kyrgyzstan has been extending its international contacts, both in CIS and countries far – abroad. There are some 20 institutional agreements with the CIS countries and about 50 agreements with countries far-abroad (European Commission, 2012). Nowadays 11 357 young citizens of Kyrgyz Republic are studying abroad at universities in Russia, Turkey, Germany, US (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). Turkey ranks second after Russian Federation in terms of students going abroad for educational purposes from Kyrgyzstan.

The country image is one of the most important factors influencing international students' destination choice. Therefore, it is of great importance to reveal Turkey's image as an international education destination in the case of Kyrgyzstan which is a one of the potential market segments, and evaluate international education tendency of Kyrgyz students. There is a limited number of empirical studies on Kyrgyz students' international education tendency and their perceptions of Turkey's image in general (Gülcan et al., 2015; Alyılmaz et al., 2015; Gülcan et al., 2017; Maksudunov & Asanbekova, 2017). Consequently, this study which aims to reveal Kyrgyz students' perceptions of Turkey's image and attractiveness level, effect of country image on country preferences and profiles of the market segments, is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Student Mobility Worldwide and in Turkey

Today, the number of international students worldwide is around 4.6 million, an exponential expansion is predicted for the forthcoming years as a result of increased student expectations, the financial payback for institutions and the anticipated improvement of human capital (Vázquez, Mesa & López, 2014: 82-83). The numbers are predicted to reach to 8 million by 2020 (OECD, 2014: 344; OECD, 2017).

There is a growing global competition between countries for international students. Mobility is shifting from countries with predominantly young population like China, India, South Korea and Japan towards EU, North Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand where young population percentage comparatively is low (Çankaya et al., 2016: 34-35). The United States remains as a main education hub for the largest number of students, hosting about 907.251 international students in 2015 (Austin & Shen, 2016: 726). According to the 2016 data, total number of international students in Australia is 335.512; 137.527 in China; 189.573 in Canada and 243.752 in Russia (UNESCO Institute for Statistics; 30.08.2018).

In recent years, some developing countries such as Turkey and Mexico have become major regional hosts for international students. China, as the biggest sending country (exporter) of international students, has rapidly transformed itself into an international student “receiving” nation over the past decades. According to the global statistics published by UNESCO and OECD (2015), China was the ninth largest host for international students in the world in the year of 2013 (Wen, 2018: 174). The top 10 destinations for international students are US (907.251); UK (430.687); Australia (294.438); France (239.409); Germany (228.756); Russia (226.431); Canada (171.603); Japan (131.980); China (123.127) and Malaysia (111.443) (uis.unesco.org/indicator/edu-mobility-out-out, 03.09.2018).

International students mostly choose Europe and North America for educational purposes, however, in recent years Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania and Asia also have become the fastest growing regions. In this context, it is seen that international students prefer mostly English – speaking countries and regions. A rapid increase in the number of international students in Australia, Canada and especially in New Zealand indicates the importance of a language in a destination choice of students. OECD (2011) finds the language of instruction an important factor and notes that the most

attractive countries use one of the more spoken languages, such as English, French, German, Spanish or Russian. However, English is more and more viewed as lingua franca in higher education and research, and one of the reasons students study abroad is to enhance their proficiency (Altbach, 2007; Zheng, 2010). This importance is underscored by the fact that large share of mobile students (42%) head to English speaking countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US) (Kahanec & Králiková, 2011: 5; Özoğlu, Gür & Coşkun, 2012: 25; Levent & Karaevli, 2013: 104).

According to the OECD "Education at a Glance 2017" report China remains the top sending country with 847.046 students in the year of 2016 followed by India (277.387), Germany (117.924), France (90.689), Kazakhstan (89.650) and Turkey (45.307) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics; 30.08.2018). Despite of financial crisis in 2008 which slowed down the international student mobility, historically US and UK always remain the most popular destinations. As shown in Table 1, according to the UNESCO, the first five countries preferred by students are US (19%), UK (10%), Australia (6%), France (6%) and Germany (5%) (Collins, 2018: 36).

Table 1: Top 20 Countries Most Preferred by International Students (2000-2015)

2000		2005		2010		2015	
Countries	Number of Students	Countries	Number of Students	Countries	Number of Students	Countries	Number of Students
USA	475.169	USA	590.158	USA	684.807	USA	907.251
UK	222.936	UK	318.399	UK	389.958	UK	430.687
France	137.085	France	236.518	Australia	271.231	Australia	294.438
Australia	105.764	Australia	177.034	France	259.935	France	239.409
Japan	59.691	Japan	125.917	Japan	141.599	Germany	228.756
South Africa	45.377	Russia	90.450	Canada	106.284	Russia	226.431
Russia	41.210	Canada	69.126	China	71.673	Canada	171.603
Spain	40.689	S. Africa	50.129	Italy	69.905	Japan	131.980
Belgium	38.799	Italy	44.921	Austria	68.619	China	123.127
Canada	36.450	New Zealand	40.774	South Africa	66.119	Malaysia	111.443
Austria	30.382	Switzerland	36.792	South Korea	59.194	Italy	90.419
Switzerland	26.003	Egypt	30.723	Spain	56.018	Netherlands	86.189
Sweden	25.548	Netherlands	26.387	Egypt	49.011	UAE	73.445
Italy	24.929	Kyrgyzstan	23.565	Singapore	48.623	Saudi Arabia	73.077
Turkey	17.654	Ukraine	23.259	Switzerland	38.195	Turkey	72.178
Netherlands	14.012	Jordan	21.481	Ukraine	37.674	Austria	67.691
Lebanon	14.008	Belgium	21.054	New Zealand	37.878	Ukraine	57.583
Denmark	12.871	Sweden	19.966	Belgium	36.126	New Zealand	57.091
Romania	12.591	Czech Republic	18.522	Czech Republic	34.992	Belgium	56.453
Jordan	12.155	Turkey	18.166	Sweden	31.534	South Korea	54.540

Source: UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics) 03.09.2018

Providing educational opportunities to foreign students is a powerful way to communicate the host countries' cultural and political values. Therefore, Middle East, Asia and Latin America's

competition in this field is becoming increasingly more aggressive which leads to a rapid modification of international student mobility's flows (Santos, Rita & Guerreiro, 2017: 1-2).

Tablo 2: Top 20 Countries Increasing the Number of International Students (2000, 2016)

Countries	2000	2016	Increase Rate (%)
South Korea	3.373	54.540 (2015)	1.617
Brazil	1.260 (2002)	19.855 (2015)	1.576
Iran	1.450 (2003)	18.698	1.289
Saudi Arabia	7.561	79.854	1.056
Poland	6.117	54.734	895
Czech Republic	5.468	41.715 (2015)	762
Slovakia	1.570	10.876 (2015)	693
Qatar	1.617 (2001)	10.788	667
New Zealand	8.210	53.854	656
Mexico	1.943 (2001)	12.654	651
Netherlands	14.012	89.920	642
India	6.988	44.766	641
Belarus	2.684	16.548	617
Russia	41.210	243.752	591
Canada	36.450	189.573	520
Thailand	2.508 (2001)	12.274 (2014)	489
Ukraine	12.880 (2001)	54.144	420
Finland	5.570	23.197	416
Turkey	17.654	72.178 (2015)	409
Greece	8.615 (2002)	27.600 (2013)	320

Source: UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics) 03.09.2018

As seen in Table 2, the top five countries that increased the number of international students between 2000 and 2016 were South Korea, Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Poland, respectively. During this period, the number of international students in Turkey was increased by the rate of 409% and ranked 19th on this list.

One of the most notable trends in the Turkish higher education system is the massive increase in the number of international students. As shown in Graphic 1, the number of international students enrolled in Turkey higher education was only 16.656 (YÖK, 2017: 3) in 2000-2001 academic year while it has risen to 48.183 in 2014, 72.178 in 2015, 87.903 in 2016, 108.076 in 2017 and 125.138 in 2018.

Graphic 1: The Number of Students Enrolled in Turkey Higher Education

Source: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> 03.09.2018

The rankings with the number of students of top 20 countries sending the most students to Turkey for educational purposes in 2013-2014 and 2017-2018 academic year are given in Table 3. Tukeys' higher education institutions host 48.183 students from 186 different countries during the 2013-2014 academic year. 36.670 or approximately 76% of these students come from top 20 countries ranked below in Table 3. The number of students from the remaining 166 countries is only 11.513. In this period, Turkmenistan is at the head of the first 20 countries with 6.941 students followed by Azerbaijan, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria. Kyrgyzstan is ranked 8th with 1.410 students.

Table 3: The Number of Foreign Students by Country (2013-2014; 2017-2018)

Rank	Countries	Number of Students 2013-2014	Countries	Number of Students 2017-2018
1	Turkmenistan	6.941	Syria	20.701
2	Azerbaijan	6.901	Azerbaijan	17.088
3	Iran	4.343	Turkmenistan	12.247
4	Afghanistan	2.332	Iran	6.418
5	Syria	1.785	Afghanistan	5.826
6	Iraq	1.585	Iraq	5.187
7	Greece	1.500	Germany	4.012
8	Kyrgyzstan	1.410	Greece	2.546
9	Kazakhstan	1.306	Bulgaria	2.510
10	Kosovo	925	Somalia	2.310
11	Nigeria	876	China	2.084
12	Mongolia	862	Kazakhstan	2.065
13	Northern Cyprus	860	Kyrgyzstan	1.926
14	Bulgaria	843	Egypt	1.921
15	Russian Federation	825	Yemen	1.896
16	Pakistan	728	Palestine	1.825
17	China	691	Pakistan	1.822
18	Palestine	675	Libya	1.669
19	Albania	644	Jordan	1.603
20	Somalia	638	Kosovo	1.373
	Total	36.670	Total	97.029
	Other countries	11.513	Other countries	28.109
	Overall total	48.183	Overall total	125.138

Source: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> 03.09.2018

During the 2017-2018 academic year Turkey host 125.138 international students from 211 countries. The number of students from the top 20 countries is 97.029, which corresponds to 77.5% of the total number of students. When 2013-2014 and 2017-2018 academic years are compared, it is seen that 15 countries included in the top 20 of the ranking are the same for both period. Nigeria, Mongolia, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Russian Federation and Albania ranked on the 2013-2014 list have lost their positions in the 2017-2018 academic year and were replaced by Germany, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Jordan. The leading country with the 6.941 students in Turkey during the 2013-2014 academic year, Turkmenistan couldn't held its position, surpassed by Syria with 20.701 students in 2017-2018. Kyrgyzstan, which ranked 8th in 2013-2014, slip to 13th place in 2017-2018 with 1.926 students (TURKSTAT, 2018).

Table 4: The Number of Kyrgyz Citizens Enrolled in Turkey Higher Education Institutions

Years	Gender	Degree Level				Total
		Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	
2016-2017	Male	48	803	267	61	2.032
	Female	38	448	281	86	
2015-2016	Male	45	854	229	72	1.994
	Female	35	442	234	83	
2014-2015	Male	54	789	175	75	1.819
	Female	33	429	190	74	
2013-2014	Male	-	-	-	-	1.410
	Female	-	-	-	-	

Source: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> 03.09.2018

As shown in Table 4, growth in the number of Kyrgyz students enrolled in Turkey higher education has risen steadily since 2013-2014 from 1.410 to 1.819, 1.994 and 2.032 students, respectively. However, the number of Kyrgyz students dropped to 1.926 in the 2017-2018 academic year.

2.2. The Country Image in the International Students' Destination Choice

There is an abundance of literature which tries to explore and identify key factors affecting the mobility of international students and their choices of higher education institutions (Nafari et al., 2017: 4). The review of relevant literature shows that host countries mostly focus on economic, politic and cultural contributions (Altbach, 2004; She & Wotherspoon, 2013) made by the international students, while sending countries pay particular attention to return on investment in international education and economic implications of the monetary source that go out of the country together with the students (Agarwal, 2008; Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Uslu, 2017: 213).

Lee (1966) in his "A Theory of Migration" describes the reasons for emigration and immigration on the basis of push and pull factors. In this context, social, economic and politic factors within home country which force students abroad are "push", while the factors motivating international student choice of the host country are called "pull" factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McCarthy et al., 2012: 86; Lee, 2014: 364). These factors proposed by Lee are the main functions and components of the push – pull theory. The unity of push and pull factors forms an integrity. The positive factors are formulated with "+", negative factors with "-", and neutral factors with "0" sign. While positive factors are the circumstances that act to hold people within it, or attract people from other areas, negative factors tend to repel them. Neutral ones are the factors to which people are essentially indifferent (Lee, 1960 as cited in Aydın & Sezerel, 2017: 120).

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) used push-pull approach to examine the factors motivating international students to select particular study destination. The study surveyed a total of 2,485 students from Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India. The "push factors" identified by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) encompassed: overseas course of study is better than a local one, difficulty to gain entry to local programs, desire to gain a better understanding of the Western culture and an intention to migrate after completion. The "pull" factors influencing students' choice of a particular host country as a study destination included: the reputation or profile of the country, parental influence, geographic proximity and cost. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) argue that the choice and decision – making includes three components, noting that there are prejudices and background effects that filter the rationality of the choice of studying abroad. These are context, choice influencers and choosers. Moreover, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) proposed three distinct stages in the decision process of international students: (1) student decides to study internationally, (2) the choice of country and (3) the choice of institution. In the first stage "push factors" play important role in influencing student to study abroad. In the second and third stages student select country and institutions based on the "pull" factors. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) indicated that additional "pull" factors such as institution's reputation, market profile, range of course, alliances or coalitions, offshore teaching program, staff expertise, degree of innovation, use of information technology, resources, size of the alumni base, and promotion and marketing efforts make a particular institution more attractive than its competitors (Zhang et al., 2013: 141).

Traditionally, pull factors are associated with students' desire to go abroad, while push factors drive students to leave home country. Li and Bray (2007) emphasized the importance of pull factors such as linguistic and cultural insecurity, social and family ties, low cost of living for host countries to attract some students back. The motivations and expectations of international students in regards to their study abroad are influenced by a "cocktail" (Weibl, 2014: 46-47) of 'push and pull' factors (Altbach, 2004; Li & Bray, 2007) of mobility. Competition, quota limits, lack of specialized departments and negative effects of socio-politic factors in the home country drive students outward. On the other hand, well-known universities in the developed countries, scholarship opportunities, job and migration opportunities after graduation, academic reputation, diversity of courses, quality of education, campus security, costs/fees and campus location attracts the international students to pursue higher education abroad. Li and Bray (2007) suggest that push factors lead to a general increase in the number of outgoing students, whereas pull factors are effective in the distribution of this increase.

In recent years, the mobility of international students and contribution this mobility brings to an economy has increased markedly. In this regard, there is a growing competition at both national and university level. According to the data of the 2014 year, international students contributed 27 billion dollars to the US economy, with a growth rate of 12% compared to the previous year. Although today's demand for countries with deep-rooted academic history and culture, and where the language of instruction is English remains high, data show that new networks and locations have emerged in terms of international student mobility (Li & Bray, 2007; Adams & de Wit, 2010 as cited in Arkalı Olcay & Nasır, 2016: 289). There are many factors playing a part in students deciding where to study abroad (Santos, Rita & Guerreiro, 2017: 3-4) such as the image of host country (Bourke, 2000; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Cubillo, Sánchez & Cerviño, 2006), the image of higher education institutions (Bourke, 2000; Cubillo, Sánchez & Cerviño, 2006), financial factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Maringe & Carter, 2007), personal motivations (Bourke, 2000; Maringe & Carter, 2007), and collected information (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Bourke, 2000).

Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino (2006) proposed a theoretical model that integrates the different groups of factors which influence the decision making process of international students, analysing different dimensions of this process and explaining those factors which determine students' choice. Authors suggested a hypothetical model which shows the purchase intention (destination and HE choice) as an independent variable dependent on five factors. In their study analysing the effects of factors such

as personal reasons, country image, city image, institution image and the evaluation of the programme of study on the decision to purchase higher education services, Cubillo et al. (2006) found a direct and positive relationship between the country image and intention to purchase higher education services. In a similar way, Bourke (2006) examined the overseas education decisions of students, their choices of the host country and the institution. The most important criterion adopted by students to select host country include the reputation and image of a country. Students firstly choose the country for education, then the higher education institutions.

Maringe and Carter (2007) conducted a group meeting with 28 students from two universities in the south of England, where they discovered the decision-making experiences of African students in the UK and found that African students study in England with the hope of gaining a truly international experience. The push factors that propel African students out of their home country to study in UK consisted of economic conditions, political instability, lack of local capacity and inadequate higher education capacity within countries of origin. On the other hand, the pull factors that students take into consideration for deciding UK higher education included international recognition, international quality, excellent teaching and learning environments, easy application process, availability of part-time work, opportunities for post qualification progression.

In their research on Chinese students in Macau and Hong Kong, Li and Bray (2007) argue that the motives such as pursuit of qualification and professional development, economic benefits, internationalization of an individual and enhancement of social status lead to the mobility of international students. Authors also indicate that Chinese students' flows are driven by different demands. Liu and Wang (2008) estimated an econometric model of enrollment rates of foreign students in the US by using pooled cross-sectional time series data for the US over the time period 1993-2006. The research findings suggest that tuition fees, US federal support of education, and the size of the 'young' generation of source countries have a significant influence on international student mobility.

Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010) examined the selection criteria of international students at private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The research data was obtained from 565 international students. The results show that six factors have a strong influence on international students' decision-making process, namely, quality of learning environment, influencers, customer focus, cost, facilities, socialization and location. The another study conducted by Lam, Ariffin and Ahmad in 2011 investigated the push and pull factors influencing educational and found out that international students prefer Malaysia for higher education due to low cost of living and high quality of education. A total of 130 respondents ranging from undergraduate and PhD students enrolled at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) participated in the study. According to the data analysis, pull factor such as "institution image" significantly influenced the satisfaction level of the international students to choose UKM. Meanwhile, push factor of "job prospect" significantly influenced these students to recommend UKM as a study destination.

Günaydın (2012) conducted a research among 144 international students enrolled at METU and Bogazici university to reveal the most important factors influencing their choices of Turkey. Turkey's economic growth, historical and cultural heritage, scientific and technological advances, quality and capacity of higher education system, scholarship opportunities, suitable cost of living, emerging trend in international trade relations and political image are great of importance for students in their choices of Turkey as an education destination. Rudd, Djafarova and Waring (2012) explored the influences that have an effect on Chinese students' decision-making. The research consist of 51 interviews with Chinese students enrolled on the course at a Business School. According to the findings, Chinese students are influenced by the UK's academic reputation, the desire to experience Western culture, the facilities at the institution, the image and reputation of the school, and external factors related to the destination city.

In a study by Mehmet Serdar Ercan (2012) the majority of foreign students (43%) in order to make a decision, get information about education in Turkey from friends (graduate students); female students coming from villages and small towns face more problem with Turkish language. Olgun Gündüz (2012) conducted a study among 48 students from 33 countries located in Central Asia, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa by using focus group discussion and interview methodology. Turkey's Muslim population, Ottoman heritage, opportunities for language learning (Turkish, English and French), Turkey's economic growth, its regional power by effective foreign policy are the main influencers on international students' choices.

Bakan (2013) determined the image of Turkey in the eyes of Dutch students at the University of Amsterdam. The findings of the research indicate that most of the respondents like Turkish people and Turkey. Turkey has been perceived as a favorable country with its food, culture, climate, hospitality, sea and sun. Male students have more positive attitudes towards Turkish people than female students. The findings of the research by Beine, Noël and Ragot (2013) revealed accommodation cost, quality of higher education institutions and cost factors as main pull influencers on foreign students' mobility. Yağcı, Çetin and Turhan (2013) conducted a study among 106 Erasmus students who came to Turkey. The analysis of data obtained through "Academic Challenges Questionnaire" show that there are no significant differences in challenges faced by the students according to their genders, universities, faculties, education levels and countries.

The study conducted by Singh et al. (2014) indicated that place and specifically the pull factors of the country of Malaysia had a primary role in students' choice of overseas university. Especially, national reputation and perceived national characteristics of Malaysia appeared as the most important factors in international students' university choice. Moreover, the choice of a study destination is normally considered as a two-stage process, where the student chooses a country first and then, the educational institution.

Alyılmaz et al. (2015) examined attitudes of Kyrgyz students enrolled at Atatürk University towards Turkey and Turkish language. Overall Kyrgyz students have a positive opinion of Turkey. The results revealed that Turkish language is easy to learn for Kyrgyz students. Gülcan et al. (2015) examined the image of Turkey in the eyes of Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University Kyrgyz students. According to the results, students have a positive perception about Turkey and after being KTMTU students this perception has changed mostly positive.

Another study by Yıldırım and Köksal (2017) revealed the perceptions of foreign students in Turkey towards this country. Most of the respondents indicated that there have been changes in their opinions after coming to Turkey such as this is a large, beautiful country providing a high quality education. Shuai and Lang (2017) analyzed motivating factors for international students to choose Malaysia and higher education institutions. The research data obtained from 200 international students enrolled at Malaya University (which is the best public university of Malaysia in 2014). The respondents were chosen by random sampling and descriptive analysis was used. According to the research findings, the main influencers on international students' choice include tuition fees, academic reputation of the institution, competitive programme fees, lifestyle and culture, and safe environment to live.

Karasakal and Dursun (2018) reviewed the literature on pull and push motivation factors for destinations, and determined the most common factors by visitor nationality and preferred destinations. In a study by Bryła (2018), the data obtained from 2450 students through questionnaire method indicate that being a man and graduating from education studies diminish the likelihood of living abroad, whereas graduating from science, mathematics and computing, finishing one's education at the Bachelor level, having studied in German and French during one's international student mobility and being involved in a student association at the host university significantly increase the chance of currently living abroad.

As seen, students take many factors into consideration when deciding to study abroad. The decisive one is the country and its image as an educational destination. The students believe that a country with the positive image provides a high quality education to students. In this regard, there are a great number of studies on Turkey's image as an educational destination conducted among students who pursue their education in Turkey. However, the number of research addressed to reveal the attractiveness level of Turkey in terms of potential students (who haven't ever been to Turkey) is limited. In this context, countries should focus on their international perceptions in order to attract more foreign students.

There is an abundance of definitions on "image" proposed by many scientists in the literature. Image is the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person holds regarding an object (Kotler & Keller, 2011: 771). In other words, the image is the perception of the 'message' by the target group (reference group) as a result of a certain set of signs (Belyaeva and Samkova, 2016). Image is consisted of several factors and these factors affect the attitudes of individuals towards the object. However, the set of factors used to evaluate the object are different for each individual (Lemmink, Schuijf & Streukens, 2003: 3). The examination of the word "image" shows that this concept actually evolves in the discourse of economic disciplines such as marketing and management. In particular, a number of approaches (such as reputation management) have been developed in the management theory to examine the image as an economic category since the mid-20th century.

Destination image and country image are of vital importance in the context of international students' mobility. Destination image is the general perception of individuals about a place (Serçek & Serçek, 2016). Destination image and country image are quite similar concepts. Both definitions emphasize the cognitive images that individual people have of particular places (Zhang Bihu Wu et al., 2016: 4). The international image of a country includes the perceptions external target audiences have toward a country; overall impression of a country in the international arena; its reputation and respectability, international support and sympathy (Gültekin, 2005: 128). Country image consists of the symbols and associations that people envision when thinking about a particular country. These associations influence judgments in relation to particular foreign countries (Ghazzarian, 2016: 703). The image of a country is defined as the combination of many factors such as the people of that country, economic structure, beliefs, cultural values, art and sport achievements, geopolitical location and historical background. Country image, which is formed by the influence of all these factors, has the power to affect the views of individuals of the country itself, its residents and products in a positive or negative way (Ateşoğlu & Türker, 2013: 113).

Every definition emphasizes different aspects of the country's image, and in this context the country's image is defined not only by representative products but also as a general structure consisting of factors such as economic and political maturity, culture and traditions, history and geography, technology and industrialization (Bannister & Saunders, 1978; Allred et al., 2000; Şentürk, 2018). Every country has an image, however, this image is not static, it can change over time and is affected directly or indirectly (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Positive image strengthens country's economy, tourism and international relations (Bakan & Tabakçı, 2008).

Country image colors both consumers' perceptions of a country's products and services. The image of a country is influenced by the perception of its people, culture, level of economic development, quality of its products, products in which it has a comparative advantage (Shin, 2006). The positive country image as a powerful factor for the competitive advantage in the international markets brings significant benefits to an economy. Country branding stimulates export, tourism, direct foreign investments and migration in the global market (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Laroche et al., 2005; Kleppe & Mossberg, 2006). Lee, Rodriguez and Sar (2012) found that even a simple thing as country tourism logos can significantly affect a person's intention to travel there. The evidence also suggests that country

image tends to be more important for destination choice than HEI branding (Chen, 2008; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Ghazzarian, 2016: 703).

The country image which includes variables such as cultural distance, social reputation, academic reputation, cost of living and immigration procedures, has a direct and positive relationship with the student's purchase intention. Though, there is a well-defined set of evidence on students' choices and opinions on the problems of consumer choice models are presented, limited number of research has been conducted to explore the difficulties faced by small private institutions in hiring and attracting foreign students (Lee, 2014: 88).

Though political science and economics literature point to the benefits of positive country image, work continues to establish a conceptual framework for country image, how it influences individual decision making (Nadeau et al., 2008; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), how it disseminates (Yang et al., 2008) and how it influences cross-border students (Son & Pearce, 2005) (Ghazzarian, 2016, p. 701). Based on a study of existing literature, students' choices of study destination are influenced by push and pull factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Yang, 2007). The "push" factors are factors associated within the source country and motivate the students to study internationally rather than locally, whereas "pull" factors operate within a host country to make that country attractive to international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Although tangible elements, such as academic facilities and equipment, may assist potential students to assess the quality of higher education, most of the quality attributes in higher education cannot be seen, felt or touched in advance, which causes difficulties for a pre-purchase evaluation, especially for an overseas student. Country image is one of the pull factors determining students' educational destination choice. There are few studies on the country image as educational destination (Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006; Bourke, 2006). Researchers mostly examined the effects of country image on product evaluations (Laroche et al., 2003; Kim, 2006; Maher & Carter, 2011; Diamantopoulos et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012).

Country image in terms of students defined as students' cognitive beliefs about the country's industrialisation, national quality standard, and other information that is associated with its products and services. Prospective students perceive and evaluate the quality of international tertiary education by using the country of origin (host country) image because of the difficulties of pre-purchase evaluation. Moreover, students also perceive the quality of institutions through the image of their host countries. A poor country image creates negative beliefs regarding the institutions and their programmes. In other words, the image of institution whose campus is located in a country with negative image is also unfavourable. Similarly, students' positive (negative) beliefs of institutions and their programmes may enhance (diminish) country image. In other words, an institution's image may also influence country image (Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002).

Scnurr et al. (2009) examined Turkish university students' perceptions of their country and the USA, and similarly, USA university students' perceptions of their country and Turkey. American students mostly think of Turkey as part of the Middle East than as part of Europe. Both American and Turkish students are proud to be citizens of their own country. Turkish students indicate that American people are better educated than Turkish people. However, they perceive Turkish people to be more friendly and likeable than American people. Lack of knowledge about the country, fear of the unknown, concern over violence and/or terrorism, too close to problems in the Middle East are the main reasons indicated by American students why people shouldn't travel to Turkey. On the other hand, Turkish students do not recommend to go to the United States due to the U.S.A.'s limitations of foreign travel after 9/11, discrimination against Muslims, family constraints and distance.

Göver and Yavuzer (2015) explored the perceptions of the foreign students on Kayseri, Turkey and Islam. The research data was obtained from 181 students by questionnaire method. According to

the findings, majority of students have positive perceptions of Kayseri, Turkey and Islam. Rahman et al. (2017) analyzed the relationship between service quality, destination image and the choice of a destination for education tourism. The data were collected with using questionnaire with 220 respondents studying at the universities in Malaysia. The findings reveal that destination image has an impact on the choice of educational destination.

Ghazzarian and Keller (2016) examined the ideal choice of study abroad destinations for Koreans and differences in their perceived country image of China, Japan and US. In a study, the country image include two components: country character image and country competence image. Country character image consists of sense of personal connection, diplomatic importance, political system, culture, while country competency image include economy, military powers, education and technology. The research findings suggest that country image are not accurate predictors for destination choice.

Yıldırım and Akbulut (2017) examined foreign students' perceptions of Turkey before and after coming to Turkey. The research data were obtained by questionnaire method with 516 international students enrolled at Istanbul Aydin University. According to the results, there have been significant differences in students' perceptions regarding their respects to Turkey, its high quality of education, low tax rates before and after coming to Turkey. The study concluded that there were re no significant differences in students' perceptions toward Turkey's reputation according to the demographic characteristics before and after.

Gülcan et al. (2017) examined the image of Turkey in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and traveling trends for Turkey. The results reveal that the image of Turkey is positive, and this positive image is higher for respondents who have vistied Turkey before. The general image of Turkey in the eyes of Kazakh respondents is quite positive compared to Kyrgyz respondents. Moreover, there has been a relationship between respondents' perceptions regarding destination attributes, traveling trends and destination image.

As seen, students evaluate the country first when deciding to pursue overseas education. As mentioned before, students believe that countries with favourable image offers high quality of education. Therefore, the image of a host country in the international education industry directly affects students' attitudes towards academic institutions. As the country image influences the institution image, the image of the institution affects the country image. Therefore, host countries and institutions can better understand the perceptions of students about the quality of international education and increase their attractiveness, attractiveness and competitive advantages positively. In short, countries that want to attract foreign students should be able to manage their international and international image well. Consequently, host countries and institutions can increase their attractiveness level and gain a competitive edge by exploring students' perceptions towards the quality of international education. Shortly, countries and institutions to be successful in attracting students, should effectively manage their international images.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Model and Hypotheses

The research model was developed as follows on the basis of the existing literature.

Figure 1: Research Model

The research hypotheses are formulated as follow:

H₁: Country image influences students' destination choice in international education

H_{1a}: Political and administrative dimension of country image influences country choice

H_{1b}: The quality of education and life dimension of country image influences country choice

H_{1c}: Historical and socio-cultural dimension of country image influences country choice

H_{1d}: Human characteristics dimension of country image influences country choice

H_{1e}: Economic and technologic dimension of country image influences country choice

H_{1f}: Investment climate dimension of country image influences country choice

H_{1g}: Sympathy and interest dimension of country image influences country choice

H₂: Clusters regarding perceived Turkey image differs according to the demographic characteristics

3.2. Data Collection Tools

This study is descriptive which attempt to establish (describe) the current situation. The structured questionnaire form was designed to determine Kyrgyz students' perceptions of Turkey's image and their tendency (motivations) to pursue a higher education in the Republic of Turkey. The questionnaire instrument was developed on the basis of similiar studies (Lala et al., 2009; Park et al., 2014; Yıldırım & Akbulut, 2017; Ünal, 2017). The survey form includes questions related to the demographic characteristics such as gender, faculties of study, monthly spending; statements regarding to students' overseas experience, Turkey experience, presence of an acquaintance studying or working abroad, students' tendency to study in Turkey. Moreover, it comprised a total of 30 items in order to reveal students' perceptions of country image. Respondent were required to rank the different dimensions on a five – point Likert – type scale from “(1) strongle diagree” to “(5) strongly agree”. The questionnaire form was designed initially in Turkish, then translated into Kyrgyz and Russian languages.

A preliminary pilot study was conducted before the main research at Kyrgyz – Turkish Manas University to avoid translation errors and inaccurate statements.

3.3. Population and Sample of Research

The main population of this study involved undergraduate students studying at state universities in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. There are a total of 153.446 students enrolled at public universities in Kyrgyzstan (KC MİK, 2018). In studies, the sample size of 383 is considered satisfactory and representative of population strata at 95% confidence level with 0.05 margin of error (<https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>, 10.03.2018). Overall 1000 students from four leading state universities (Y. Balasagun Kyrgyz National University, K. Karasayev Bishkek University of Social Sciences, I. Razzakov Kyrgyz State Technical University and I. Arabaev Kyrgyz State University) by the number of students (250 participants from each higher education institutions) participated in a survey. As sampling procedure, quota sampling method was chosen.

3.4. Data Collection

The data collection process was carried out on 05-25 April 2018 period by visiting each target university. Interviewers administered questionnaires in a face-to-face manner at the beginning and at the end of the courses. The process was continued until the number of accurate and complete survey form reached (amounted) to 250.

3.5. Data Analysis

Obtained data was encoded and computerized appropriately. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency and percentage distributions, arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used in the evaluation of data. A factor analysis was performed in order to measure the image of Turkey (30 items). Factor analysis is data reduction techniques that can help determine a smaller number of underlying dimensions of a large set of inter – correlated variables (Ural & Kılıç, 2005). As a result of reliability analysis, Cronbach α was estimated as 0.931. Afterwards, the binominal logistic regression analysis was applied to test country image's impact on whether students tend to pursue education in Turkey. Binary logistic regression analysis is a statistical technique that allows to examine the cause-effect relationships between dependent and independent variables in cases when the dependent variable is specified as an attribute and includes two categories (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006 as cited in Oğuz ve Assefa, 2014). By forming 3 groups (high, medium and low-level perceptions) regarding to Kyrgyz students' Turkey's perceived country image, the cluster analysis was used to reveal the characteristics of each group. Cluster analysis is a multivariate analysis technique that provides groupings of objects, individuals, products, countries etc. that are similar to one another. Formed groups are homogeneous within themselves, but heterogeneous to each other (Chawla & Sondhi, 2016; Nakip, 2006). In this study, clusters regarding to Turkey's perceived country image were identified.

4. Research Findings and Analysis

Table 5 provides in detail the frequency and percentage distributions of students' demographic characteristics. The analyzed sample comprises mainly female students (72%) rather than their male counterparts (28%).

Tablo 5: Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Variables	Frequency	Valid %	Variables	Frequency	Valid %
Gender			Faculty of Study		
Female	720	72,0	Science & Engineering	354	36,0
Male	280	28,0	Humanities & Social Sciences	630	64,0
Year of study			Place of residence		
1 st	468	47,5	With family	431	44,3
2 nd	275	27,9	Dormitory	119	12,2
3 rd	191	19,4	With friends	131	13,5
4 th	51	5,2	With relatives	292	30,0
Monthly average family income*			Monthly average personal spending *		
25.000 Som and less	391	45,8	10.000 Som and less	551	63,5
25.001-35.000 Som	165	19,3	10.001-15.000 Som	119	13,7
35.001-45.000 Som	151	17,7	15.001-20.000 Som	73	8,4
45.001-55.000 Som	54	6,3	20.001-25.000 Som	66	7,6
55.001-65.000 Som	42	4,9	25.001-30.000 Som	33	3,8
65.001 Som and more	51	6,0	30.001 Som and more	26	3,0
Do you have an acquaintance working abroad?			Do you have an an acquaintance studying abroad?		
Yes	438	44,6	Yes	287	29,4
No	545	55,4	No	688	70,6
Preferred regions for overseas education			Preferred countries for overseas education		
Central Europe	427	46,8	Germany	230	26,7
Western Europe	420	46,0	USA	223	25,9
North America	374	41,0	China	53	6,1
Eastern Europe	209	22,9	Turkey	48	5,6
Southern Europe	191	20,9	South Korea	48	5,6
East Asia	161	17,7	France	46	5,3
Central Asis	155	17,0	Russia	43	5,0
Australia	146	16,0	England	41	4,8
Latin America	84	9,2	Japan	25	2,9
Middle East	44	4,8	Others	105	12,2
Africa	21	2,3			

*1 USD \$ = 69,8 Kyrgyz Soms, (<http://www.nbkr.kg/index.jsp?lang=ENG>, 19.11.2018)

According to the data of National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (NSCK) (2017), 53% of university students in Kyrgyzstan are female. Majority of students (64%) are enrolled in humanities and social sciences, while 36% are enrolled in science and engineering fields. Almost half of the sample are 1st year students (47.5%), and it is seen that the percentage distribution falls towards senior students. This can be explained by students' attendancy at universities. And besides that, final year students' in Kyrgyzstan don't attend the university due to internship requirements. Of the students, 44.3% stay with their family, 30% with relatives, 13.5% with friends and 12.2% at dormitories. It is seen that students' monthly average family income corresponds to monthly average personal. Of the respondents, 45.8% have 25.000 Som average family income, and 63.5% spend monthly less than 10 000 Som. According to the NSCK (2017), monthly average income and monthly consumption expenditure per person in Kyrgyzstan amount to 4739 Som and 2959 Som, respectively. Moreover, according to some sources (Bozieva, 2016), if informaly economy of over 50% is taken into account the findings is acceptable. Most of students (44.6%) have an acquaintance working abroad rather than an acquaintance studying abroad (29.4%). According to the data of State Migration Service under the

Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 800 000 of Kyrgyz citizens are abroad. The most preferred regions among respondents are Central Europe (46.8%), Western Europe (46.0%) and North America (41.0%). On the other hand, top countries where students desire to pursue education are Germany (26.7%), USA (25.9%) and China (6.1%). Turkey ranks fourth (5.6%) after China. Another noteworthy point is that, Russia is ranked seventh (5.0%) despite the majority of Kyrgyz students studying abroad are in Russia.

As seen in Diagram 2, the percentage (8.3%) of students who go abroad for academic purposes is quite low. Considering that Kyrgyzstan benefits from international programs supporting student and teaching staff mobility such as ERASMUS MUNDUS, TEMPUS, UNESCO, UNDP, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Soros Foundation, IREX (International Research and Exchange Board), ACCELS (American Councils for International Education), Mevlâna Exchange Programme and Erasmus +, obtained findings are not satisfactory.

Diagram 2: Students' Overseas Experiences and Tendencies

The proportion of students (28.4%) who have been abroad for non – academic purposes is slightly higher, because university students go to countries like Russia, Turkey and UAE and work in a seasonal temporary job. A significant part of students (91.3%) desire to pursue overseas education. In other words, it can be said that Kyrgyz students have a very high tendency to study abroad. Of the surveyed students only 7% have been to Turkey for academic and non-academic purposes, and 56% prefer Republic of Turkey as an educational destination. Although this indicator is not so bad, there is a need to focus on reasons why the remaining 44% don't choose Turkey.

All 30 statements aimed to reveal students' perceptions towards image of Turkey was assessed by factor analysis. In factor analysis, factors with eigen value greater than 1 were used and those with factor loadings of 0.40 and above were taken in order to increase the internal consistency between items. The results of the KMO test ($0.932 > 0.50$) and the Bartlett Sphericity Test showed that the variables are related for conducting factor analysis ($p=.000$, $\chi^2=8083.062$, Degree of freedom 435). The perceived average values of the factors, their eigenvalues, the variance explanation rates and the significance levels are presented in Table 6. The factor analysis produced 7 factor groups (*Political and Administrative Characteristics, The Quality of Education and Life Characteristics, Historical and Socio-Cultural Characteristics, Human Characteristics, Economic and Technological Characteristics, Investment Climate Characteristics, Symphaty and Interest Towards Turkey*) with eigenvalues greater than 1 and obtained factors explain 61.2% of total variance.

Table 6: The Results of Factor Analysis

Factors	Average	Eigenvalue s	VE (%)	α
F1: Political and Administrative Characteristics	3.3336	10,185	11,749	,844
F2: The Quality of Education and Life Characteristics	3.8164	1,988	9,159	,805
F3: Historical and Socio-Cultural Characteristics	4.2822	1,633	8,680	,730
F4: Human Characteristics	3.4881	1,275	8,156	,790
F5: Economic and Technological Characteristics	3.6907	1,155	8,000	,770
F6: Investment climate characteristics	3.4287	1,085	7,900	,675
F7: Sympathy and interest toward Turkey	3.6452	1,048	7,588	,788
Total % of Variance Explained	61.230			

Binomial logistic regression analysis was performed in order to test impact of Turkey's image dimensions on whether students desire to study in Turkey. The logistic regression coefficient, standard error, Wald's chi-square, p-value and odds ratio for each of the predictors are shown in Table 7. The overall model is statistically significant: ($\chi^2(7)=355,821$; $p<0,05$). The explanatory variables Nagelkerke R^2 predicted 45.7% of the response variable. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test ($p>0,05$) was not statistically significant, so the model fit the data well at a statistically acceptable level. According to the analysis, the two estimated coefficients, *human characteristics* and *sympathy and interest towards Turkey* were statistically significant at 0.01 level, while *the quality and life characteristics* and *historical and socio-cultural characteristics* dimensions at 0.05 level. Three coefficients, *the political and administrative characteristics*, *economic and technological characteristics* and *investment climate dimensions* were not statistically significant ($p>0,05$). *The quality of education and life characteristics* dimension of country image positively ($B=0,487$; $p<0,05$) influences students' desire to study in Turkey. One unit of positive growth for this dimension increase the possibility of students who want to study in Turkey by 1.63 times. Similarly, *sympathy and interest towards Turkey* dimension has a positive influence ($B=1,939$; $p<0,01$) on students' desire to pursue education in Turkey and increase the possibility of those who want to study in Turkey by 6.95 times. On the other hand, *historical and socio-cultural characteristics* ($B=-0,439$; $p<0,05$) and *human characteristics* ($B=-0,611$; $p<0,01$) dimensions negatively affects students' desire to study in Turkey. These dimensions reduces the likelihood of students who want to study in Turkey by 0.64 and 0.54 times, respectively. It can be explained by the fact that students mostly prefer socio-culturally different countries. The findings are acceptable, because Republic of Turkey is ranked fourth among the most preferred countries for overseas education and majority of students choose European countries and USA for study abroad.

Table 7: The Binominal Logistic Regression Analysis

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Political and Administrative Characteristics	-,075	,199	,141	1	,707	,928
The Quality and Life Characteristics**	,487	,192	6,414	1	,011	1,628
Historical and Socio-Cultural Characteristics**	-,439	,184	5,709	1	,017	,644
Human Characteristics*	-,611	,164	13,842	1	,000	,543
Economic and Technological Characteristics	,218	,195	1,249	1	,264	1,244
Investment Climate Characteristics	-,198	,188	1,102	1	,294	,821
Sympathy and Interest Towards Turkey*	1,939	,151	165,615	1	,000	6,951
Constant	-4,438	,797	31,016	1	,000	,012

* $p<0,01$ ** $p<0,05$

K-means method (nonhierarchical cluster analysis) was employed to determine students' grouped clusters regarding to their attitudes toward Turkey's image. The cluster analysis was carried out with the values of each dimension obtained from the factor analysis. Moreover, to test whether the classification of students according to their perceptions of Turkey's image is statistically significant ANOVA test was performed. The outputs are given in Table 8. Of 1.000 students 139 weren't included in any cluster due to missing data, remaining 861 students were grouped under three clusters. As presented in Table 8, 1st cluster comprises 229 (26.6%) students, 2nd cluster 370 (43%) and 3rd cluster 262 (34%). Also, the mean values of the three clusters differs significantly ($p < 0.05$) in terms of the students' perceptions towards the dimensions of the country image. Tukey test outputs were used to test the differences between groups, as a result all three cluster were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for all dimensions of country image. Thus, the classification of Kyrgyz students' according to their perceptions of Turkey's image were significant and appropriate for grouping under three clusters. Students' perceptions of Turkey's image was divided into the three cluster groups: low-level perception, medium-level perception and high-level perception.

Table 8: The Results of Cluster Analysis

Factors	CLUSTER			ANOVA	
	Low	Medium	High	F	p
Political and Administrative Characteristics	2,79	3,29	3,86	320,749	,000
Quality of Education and life characteristics	3,19	3,80	4,38	366,385	,000
Historical and Socio-cultural characteristics	3,82	4,29	4,68	184,816	,000
Human characteristics	2,79	3,40	4,22	437,726	,000
Economic and Technological Characteristics	3,24	3,74	4,04	162,214	,000
Investment Climate Characteristics	2,93	3,41	3,87	210,679	,000
Sympathy and Interest Towards Turkey	2,50	3,72	4,53	702,182	,000
<i>Number of subjects in a cluster</i>	229	370	262		

As seen in Figure 3, group with low-level perception of Turkey's image emphasizes *sympathy and interest towards Turkey*, groups with medium and high – level perceptions identify *political and administrative* dimensions to be the least important factor in influencing their choices to study in Turkey. On the other hand, *historical and socio-cultural dimension* is considered as the most important to all members of cluster. A noteworthy point is that, group with low – level perception in dimension of sympathy and interest towards Turkey is at distinctly different distance from others. Nevertheless, there is a parallelism in other dimensions.

Figure 3: The Classification of Kyrgyz Students According to Country Image Dimensions

Three market segments regarding to Kyrgyz students' perceptions of Turkey's image were identified. The chi-square test was applied to reveal the socio-demographic characteristics of these market segments. Obtained outcomes are shown in Table 9. The differences between the clusters were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in terms of variables such as gender, class, place of residence, presence of an acquaintance studying abroad, monthly average family income. On the other hand, there were no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) with regard to the faculty of study, presence of an acquaintance working abroad and monthly average personal spending.

Table 9: Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics by Clusters

Variables	χ^2	Cluster 1 (%)	Cluster 2 (%)	Cluster 3 (%)	General (%)
Gender					
Female	10,580**	63,3	72,4	76,3	71,2
Male		36,7	27,6	23,7	28,8
Faculty of study					
Science and Engineering	,999	66,2	62,4	62,5	63,5
Humanities and Social Science		33,8	37,6	37,5	36,5
Year of study					
1st year	14.963*	40.5	47.3	51.0	46,6
2nd year		32.2	26.1	25.3	27,5
3rd year		18.1	20.9	21.0	20,2
4th year		9.3	5.8	2.7	5,8
Place of residence					
With family	22,956**	58,0	45,3	36,9	46,2
At dormitory		8,5	12,6	13,5	11,8
With friends		12,1	12,1	14,7	12,9
With relatives		21,4	29,9	34,9	29,2
Presence of an acquaintance studying abroad					
Yes	,169	46,7	45,2	44,9	45,5
No		53,3	54,8	55,1	54,5
Presence of an acquaintance working abroad					
Yes	8,508*	35,3	24,2	30,4	29,0
No		64,7	75,8	69,6	71,0
Monthly average famly income					
25.000 Som and less	20,764**	34,7	45,1	48,2	43,4
25.001-35.000 Som		17,9	21,0	20,1	19,9
35.001-45.000 Som		18,9	18,6	18,3	18,6
45.001 Som and more		28,4	15,2	13,4	18,1
Monthly average personal spending					
10.000 Som and less	6.215	57,6	65,7	63,0	62,8
10.001-15. 000 Som		18,3	12,7	12,2	13,9
15.001-25.000 Som		16,2	15,1	18,5	16,5
25.001 Som and more		7,9	6,5	6,3	6,8

Not: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Cluster 1 (those with low-level perceptions of Turkey's images) comprises mostly males, 2nd year and 4th year students, who stays with family, have an acquaintance studying abroad, and have higher income level. Cluster 2 (those with medium-level perceptions of Turkey's images) consists mostly females, 1st year students, who stays with relatives, don't have an acquaintance studying abroad, and have lower income level. The last Cluster 3 (those with high-level perceptions of Turkey's images) includes mostly females, 1st year students, who stays with relatives, friends or at dormitory, and have lower income level.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The abroad experiences of Kyrgyz students is very poor, the percentage of respondents who have been abroad for non-academic purposes is higher. The low level of student mobility indicates the ineffectiveness of available international programs in the country, and cooperation between countries and institutions. In addition, students' Turkey experience is also far from satisfactory. On the other hand, despite the students' desire to study abroad is quite high (91%), the proportion of students willing to pursue education in Turkey is lower (56%). Surveyed students give priority to countries such as Germany, USA, China in their choices of education destination. In general, the programs supporting mobility of students are accessible, moreover, there are interested students in benefiting from this mobility. Unfortunately, there are very few beneficiaries. For example, only a very small number of students are aware of Türkiye Scholarships and Mevlâna Exchange programme. Based on the interviews and observations within the scope of the research, it is possible to say that the efforts on the promotion of existing opportunities are insufficient.

The country image plays an important role in the international students' educational destination choice. Overall, Republic of Turkey's image in the eyes of Kyrgyz students is above the average and positive. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the image of Turkey (Bakan, 2013; Alyılmaz et al., 2015; Gülcan et al., 2015). There are studies suggesting a direct and positive relationship between country image and purchase intention of higher education in the literature (Cubillo et al., 2006; Bourke, 2006; Singh et al., 2014; Alyılmaz et al., 2015; Gülcan et al., 2015). This research also revealed that country image have a significant impact on Kyrgyzstan students' intentions to study in Turkey. However, unlike other studies, it was determined that not all dimensions have an impact, and that all influencing dimensions are not positive. For instance, dimensions of country image such as *political and administrative characteristics, economic and technological characteristics, investment climate characteristics* don't have a significant effect. In a study conducted by Olgun Gündüz (2012) Turkey's economic growth, its regional power by effective foreign policy were identified as the main influencers on international students' choices. Similarly, a research conducted by Günaydın (2012) revealed that Turkey's economic growth, scientific and technological advances, political image were the most important determinants in students' choices of Turkey as an educational destination. *The quality of education and life, sympathy and interest towards Turkey* dimensions have a positive influence on students' willing to study in Turkey. In the literature, it is seen that there are studies supporting this result (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Beine et al., 2013). On the other hand, *historical and socio-cultural and human characteristics* dimensions of country image have a negative impact. It might be explained by the fact that the students in Kyrgyzstan give priority to the socio-culturally different countries in the selection of educational destinations. The hypothesis "*H1: Country image influences students' destination choice in international education*" is partially accepted.

Kyrgyz students' perceptions of Turkey image was classified into three clusters in terms of low, medium and high-level perception. In other words, three market segments regarding to perceived country image were identified. In addition, these cluster comprises students according to the demographic characteristics. Consequently, the hypothesis "*H2: Clusters regarding perceived Turkey image differs according to the demographic characteristics*" is accepted. There are researches on the image of Turkey which suggest that perceived image differs according to the demographic characteristics (Bakan, 2013; Gülcan et al., 2015) and studies revealing no differences (Yağcı et al., 2013). The market segment with low – level perception of Turkey's image consists respondents with higher income level, final year students, those who stay with their family; the market segment with medium – level perception of Turkey's image includes students with lower income level, 1st year students, those who stay with relatives or at dormitory and the last market segment with high-level of perception of Turkey's image comprise of females, who have the lower income level, 1st year students, who stays with relatives, friends or at dormitories.

The findings of this study are thought to provide important clues for promotion efforts of Turkey's higher education system. However, there are some limitations of the research. The most important limitation is the evaluation of only the country image's impact on students' choice of Turkey as educational destination. In addition, the analyzed sample include students studying at big universities in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. Future research should replicate these findings in other samples from different regions. Survey with students from other regions of Kyrgyzstan may lead to different results. Moreover, based on the research results, promotion efforts of Turkey in potential market segments need to be stimulated. At this point, studies conducted in Kyrgyzstan should prioritize the contents based on quality of education and life' s components and focus to differentiate these activities in various market segments. In addition, it is important to carry out researches related to this subject in potential market segments so that Turkey can gain sufficient share of international students marke.

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