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TÜRK FİZYOTERAPİ VE REHABİLİTASYON DERGİSİ

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İstanbul, Türkiye**E-mail:** dilbercoskunsu@gmail.com**ORCID:** 0000-0002-4511-6950**Received:** 16.01.2026 (Geliş Tarihi)**Accepted:** 05.03.2026 (Kabul Tarihi)**Publication Date:** 29.04.2026 (Yayınlanma Tarihi)**Cite this article as/Atf:**Karagözoğlu Coşkunsu D, Tosun A, Demirbükten İ, Avcı EE, Çağlar E, Aktar Reyhanoğlu D, et al. Investigation of the reasons for preference and employment expectations of international students studying in the department of physiotherapy and rehabilitation in Türkiye. Turk J Physiother Rehabil. 2026;37(1):28-39**INVESTIGATION OF THE REASONS FOR PREFERENCE AND
EMPLOYMENT EXPECTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
STUDYING IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSIOTHERAPY AND
REHABILITATION IN TÜRKİYE****ABSTRACT****Purpose:** To investigate the reasons why international students (ISs) studying in the Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation (PTR) departments in Türkiye chose to study in this field and their employment expectations, using a sample from one public and two foundation universities in İstanbul.**Methods:** A total of 564 students were invited to participate in the study. Participants were asked to complete a 12-item questionnaire prepared by the researchers, which assessed their reasons for choosing PTR education in Türkiye and their career plans after graduation.**Results:** A total of 267 students participated in the study (200 from Turkish-medium programs and 67 from English-medium programs). The most cited reason for choosing to study in Türkiye among both Turkish- and English-medium students was cultural similarity [60% (n=200); 58.2% (n=39), respectively]. Among Turkish-medium students, 50.2% planned to work in Türkiye, and 17.4% planned to return to their home countries. Additionally, 76.1% expressed interest in pursuing graduate studies in Türkiye. Among English-medium students, 28.4% intended to work in Türkiye, and 11.9% planned to return home. In this group, 61.2% stated that they were considering graduate education in Türkiye. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of the percentage of students who intended to work or pursue graduate education in Türkiye (p=0.001 and p=0.018, respectively).**Conclusion:** According to our findings, a significant proportion of ISs, particularly those studying in Turkish-medium PTR programs, intend to work in Türkiye after graduation. This should be taken into account in workforce planning efforts for physiotherapists.**Keywords:** Employment, Physical therapist, Undergraduate**TÜRKİYE'DE FİZYOTERAPİ VE REHABİLİTASYON BÖLÜMÜNDE OKUYAN
ULUSLARARASI ÖĞRENCİLERİN TERCİH NEDENLERİNİN VE İSTİHDAM
BEKLENTİLERİNİN ARAŞTIRILMASI****ÖZ****Amaç:** İstanbul'da bulunan bir devlet ve iki vakıf üniversitesi örneklemini üzerinden, Fizyoterapi ve Rehabilitasyon (FTR) bölümünde okuyan uluslararası öğrencilerin Türkiye'de FTR okumayı seçme nedenlerinin ve istihdam beklentilerinin araştırılmasıdır.**Yöntem:** Toplam 564 öğrenci çalışmaya davet edildi. Türkiye'de FTR eğitimi almayı seçme nedenleri ve mezuniyet sonrası çalışma planlarının sorgulandığı araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan 12 soruluk anketi yanıtlamaları istendi.**Bulgular:** Çalışmaya toplam 267 kişi (sırasıyla Türkçe ve İngilizce FTR okuyan 200 ve 67 kişi) katıldı. Türkçe ve İngilizce FTR okuyan öğrencilerin Türkiye'de okumayı seçme nedenleri arasında kültürel benzerlik ilk sırada [sırasıyla %60 (n=200); %58,2 (n=39)] yer aldı. Türkçe FTR okuyan öğrencilerden Türkiye'de çalışmayı düşünenlerin oranı %50,2 ve kendi ülkesine dönmeyi düşünenlerin oranı %17,4'tü. Ayrıca %76,1'i Türkiye'de lisansüstü eğitime devam etmeyi düşündüğünü bildirdi. İngilizce FTR okuyan öğrencilerden Türkiye'de çalışmayı düşünenlerin oranı %28,4 ve kendi ülkesine dönmeyi düşünenlerin oranı %11,9'du. Öğrencilerin %61,2'si Türkiye'de bir lisansüstü programa devam etmeyi düşündüğünü bildirdi. Türkçe ve İngilizce FTR okuyan öğrencilerden Türkiye'de çalışmayı düşünenlerin ve Türkiye'de yüksek lisans yapmak isteyenlerin yüzdesi arasında istatistiksel anlamlı fark vardı (sırasıyla p=0,001 ve p=0,018).**Sonuç:** Çalışmamızın verilerine göre Türkiye'de eğitimini tamamlayacak özellikle Türkçe FTR okuyan uluslararası öğrencilerin büyük çoğunluğunun ülkemizde çalışmayı düşündükleri belirlenmiş olup, fizyoterapist istihdamı için yapılacak çalışmalarda bu durumun göz önünde bulundurulması önem arz etmektedir.**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İstihdam, Lisans, Fizyoterapist

INTRODUCTION

The history of the physiotherapy profession in Türkiye began with the establishment of the School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation at Hacettepe University in 1961. Hacettepe remained the only university training physiotherapists for 25 years, followed by the opening of physiotherapy departments at İstanbul University (1986), Dokuz Eylül University (1993), Pamukkale University (1995), Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University (1996), Dumlupınar University (1997), and Başkent University (1998) (1). In the following years, to meet the increasing demand for physiotherapists, the number of institutions offering Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation (PTR) programs expanded rapidly, reaching 94 universities by 2023 (2).

According to information obtained from the Turkish Physical Therapy Association, as of 2024, the number of physiotherapy graduates in Türkiye is estimated to be approximately 75,000. According to Eurostat data, the number of practicing physiotherapists in countries with populations close to Türkiye's (85.664.944) (3), such as Germany (83 million) (4) and France (68.4 million), in 2023 was 197.000 and 100.569, respectively. These figures indicate that Türkiye has fewer physiotherapists compared to countries with similar population sizes. In 2021, Eurostat reported a total of 611.000 physiotherapists working in the European Union (EU), corresponding to an average of 136.7 physiotherapists per 100.000 people (5). This ratio varies across EU countries, from 234.4 in Germany and 215.9 in Belgium to as low as 12.7 in Romania (6). In Türkiye, with an estimated 75.000 physiotherapists, the ratio is approximately 87 per 100.000 people. Although Türkiye still lags behind EU countries in terms of the number of physiotherapists per capita, employment issues persist due to insufficient professional regulations and employment policies. The employment problem, which emerged rapidly with the increasing number of graduates after 2015, was highlighted with quantitative data by Karagözoğlu Coşkunsu et al. (7), also noted a high level of unemployment anxiety among final-year students (8). Therefore, close monitoring and regulation of the number of universities and student quotas are relevant issues for employment policy planning in PT profession.

The internationalization of higher education has been a strategic priority of the Turkish Council of Higher Education "Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu" (YÖK) in recent years (9). Strategic plans have been implemented to increase the number of international students (ISs). According to a YÖK statement dated February 9, 2025, there are currently 350.000 ISs in Türkiye (10). Although the exact number of ISs studying in PTR programs and their employment expectations remain unclear, these factors must be considered in strategic educational and employment planning. Each university in Türkiye sets its own application and admission criteria for ISs through internal

regulations approved by its university senate. These regulations are based on the general principles established by YÖK for the admission of ISs and the quotas assigned by YÖK (11). On May 6, 2019, a new regulation removed the restriction that limited IS admissions to a maximum of 50% of program quotas listed in the national university entrance exam guide (12). Furthermore, a regulation issued on January 11, 2024, allowed for the reallocation of unfilled quotas from other departments within the same faculty to high-demand programs like physiotherapy. As a result, the number of ISs admitted to PTR programs may exceed the number of national students.

When planning for physiotherapist employment in Türkiye, the expectations of ISs must also be considered. Informal conversations with ISs enrolled in the PTR Department at Fenerbahçe University revealed that many were considering staying in Türkiye to work. This observation formed the basis of the present study.

This study aims to investigate the reasons why ISs enrolled in PTR departments in Türkiye, specifically within a sample consisting of one public and two foundation universities in İstanbul, chose to pursue physiotherapy education in Türkiye and to explore their employment expectations. Additionally, the study aims to determine the number of ISs currently enrolled in PTR programs based on data from YÖK.

METHOD

Study Design

This descriptive study was conducted prospectively using online surveys. The study protocol was approved by the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Fenerbahçe University (approval number: 54.2024fbu, date: 16.04.2024). The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Students participating in the study were informed about the study via an explanatory text at the beginning of the questionnaire. Before starting to answer the questionnaire, participants were asked to read the consent form and check the consent box to indicate that they understood it. Checking the consent box was mandatory in order to start the questionnaire. Therefore, participants who did not check the consent box were unable to complete the questionnaire. Data collection took place between April 20, 2024, and August 15, 2024.

Participants

The study population consisted of ISs enrolled in the PTR departments at Fenerbahçe University, Marmara University, and İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University during the 2023-2024 academic year. At Fenerbahçe University, 198 ISs were enrolled in the Turkish-medium PTR program and 222 in the English-medium program. İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University had 131 ISs in its Turkish-medium PTR program, and Marmara University had

12 ISs in its Turkish-medium PTR program. These universities were selected due to data accessibility.

It is widely acknowledged by faculty members in the field that Iranian students constitute the largest portion of ISs studying Turkish FTR in Türkiye. On the other hand, it is not possible to verify this information from open sources. Initially, the study was designed to include a sample of one public and one foundation university. Since nearly all ISs at the foundation university included in the study are Iranian, another foundation university was included in the study in order to investigate the reasons why students of different nationalities choose to study FTR in Türkiye and their employment expectations. Using the known population sampling method, with a total population of 564 students, the required sample size was calculated as 229 with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level.

Inclusion criteria included being currently enrolled as a student in the PTR department at Fenerbahçe University, Marmara University, or İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University. Students from the English-medium PTR program at Fenerbahçe University were also included in the study.

Questionnaire

Data were collected using a questionnaire developed by the researchers in both Turkish and English. The questionnaire was administered either face-to-face or online. Before finalizing the questionnaire, a face-to-face pilot study was conducted with 20 ISs to evaluate the clarity and adequacy of the questions. The students reported that all questions were understandable and did not suggest any additional changes to the questions or answer choices. Therefore, no changes were made to the survey after the pilot study.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 20.0, IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics including frequencies (number and percentage) were used to summarize students' age, gender distribution, academic year, and countries of origin (Questions 2-6) for both Turkish- and English-medium PTR students. Similarly, frequencies (number and percentage) were used to describe students' reasons for choosing to study in Türkiye and their post-graduation plans (Questions 8-12). Responses regarding reasons for choosing Türkiye and future employment intentions were compared between Turkish- and English-medium groups using the chi-square test. Cramer's V effect size (ES) was calculated for all categorical comparisons to provide a more robust interpretation of the significant differences. ES values were interpreted as small (Cramer's $V = 0.10-0.29$), medium (Cramer's $V = 0.30-0.49$), and large (Cramer's $V \geq 0.50$).

RESULTS

The characteristics of students enrolled in the PTR Department (in both Turkish and English programs) are presented in Table 1.

Among the students enrolled in the Turkish PTR program (mean age: 23.03), the majority were Iranian nationals, constituting 66% ($n=132$) of the sample, followed by Egyptian students at 20% ($n=20$), Syrian students at 8.5% ($n=17$), and Azerbaijani students at 6% ($n=12$). The majority of students enrolled in the Turkish PTR program were female (66.5%, $n=131$). Regarding university affiliation, 49.7% ($n=99$) were enrolled at Fenerbahçe University, 47% ($n=94$) at Fenerbahçe University, and 3.5% ($n=7$) at Fenerbahçe University. Among the participants, 40.5% ($n=81$) were second-year students, while 30.5% ($n=61$) were in their first year.

Among the students in the English PTR program (mean age: 21.28), 53.7% ($n=36$) were Egyptian and 34.3% ($n=23$) were Iranian, followed by Azerbaijani students at 4.4% ($n=3$). The remaining nationalities—Syrian, Lebanese, Bangladeshi, Somali, and Nigerian—were each represented by one student (1%). Similar to the Turkish program, the majority of students in the English PTR program were female (65.6%, $n=44$), and all were studying at Fenerbahçe University. Most participants in this group were first-year students (55.2%, $n=37$).

Although there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of the reasons for choosing to study PTR in a foreign country ($p=0.001$), with a small ES (Cramer's $V = 0.24$) the primary motivation for both groups was the desire to study abroad (82.5% for Turkish and 58.2% for English). The proportion of students who chose Türkiye due to their inability to gain admission to a PTR program in their home countries was higher among students in the English PTR program (41.7%). Regarding the reasons for choosing to study PTR in Türkiye, the most cited reason for both groups was the cultural similarity between Türkiye and their home countries (60% and 58.2%, respectively). The second most common reason among Turkish PTR students was their ability to speak Turkish (49%), while for English PTR students it was the lower cost of education in Türkiye compared to other countries (50.7%) (Table 2).

The percentage of students who had definitively decided to return to their home country after graduation was 17.4% for the Turkish PTR group and 11.9% for the English PTR group, with no statistically significant difference between the groups ($p=0.156$). The proportion of students whose Bachelor's degree from Türkiye would be recognized in their home country was 40.3% among Turkish PTR students and 65.7% among English PTR students, and this difference was statistically significant ($p=0.001$) with a small ES (Cramer's $V = 0.25$). When asked whether they intended to work in Türkiye after graduation, 50.2% of Turkish PTR students and 28.4% of English PTR

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of students studying in physiotherapy and rehabilitation departments in Turkish and English programs

		Turkish program (n=200)	English program (n=67)	Total sample (n=267)
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Age		23.03 (4.37)	21.28 (3.51)	22.60 (4.24)
		n (%)	n (%)	
Nationality	Iran	132 (66)	23 (34.3)	155 (58)
	Egypt	20 (10)	36 (53.7)	56 (20.9)
	Syria	17 (8.5)	1 (1.4)	18 (6.7)
	Azerbaijan	12 (6)	3 (4.4)	15 (5.6)
	Jordan	3 (1.5)	-	3 (1.1)
	Iraq	4 (2)	-	4 (1.4)
	Lebanon	2 (1)	1 (1.4)	3 (1.1)
	Kazakhstan	2 (1)	-	2 (0.7)
	Palestine	2 (1)	-	2 (0.7)
	Russia	1 (0.5)	-	1 (0.3)
	Greece	1 (0.5)	-	1 (0.3)
	Indonesia	2 (1)	-	2 (0.7)
	Serbia	1 (0.5)	-	1 (0.3)
	North Macedonia	1 (0.5)	-	1 (0.3)
	Bangladesh	-	1 (1.4)	1 (0.3)
	Somalia	-	1 (1.4)	1 (0.3)
Nigeria	-	1 (1.4)	1 (0.3)	
Gender	Female	131 (66.5)	44 (65.6)	175 (65.5)
	Male	69 (34.5)	23 (34.4)	92 (34.4)
University	Fenerbahçe University	94 (47)	67 (100)	161 (60.2)
	Marmara University	7 (3.5)		7 (2.6)
	İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University	99 (49.5)		99 (37)
Class level	1	61 (30.5)	37 (55.2)	98 (36.7)
	2	81 (40.5)	18 (26.8)	99 (37)
	3	41 (20.5)	10 (14.9)	51 (19.1)
	4	17 (8.5)	2 (2.9)	19 (7.1)

SD: Standard Deviation.

students responded “Yes.” Additionally, 33.3% of Turkish PTR students stated that they had not yet made a decision. The distribution of responses between the groups was statistically significant ($p=0.001$) with a large ES (Cramer’s $V = 0.54$).

There was also a statistically significant difference in students’ intentions to pursue postgraduate education in Türkiye ($p=0.018$) with a small ES (Cramer’s $V = 0.14$). While 76.1% of students in the Turkish PTR program expressed an intention to pursue a master’s degree in Türkiye, the rate was 61.2% among those in the English PTR program. (Table 2)

To provide a national context for the survey findings, the structure and capacity of PTR programs in Türkiye were first examined. According to the 2024 Higher Education Institutions Exam Guide for Higher Education Programs and Quotas, there

are 152 universities offering PTR programs in the 2024-2025 academic year in the Republic of Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) (Table 3) (13). Of these, 143 universities are located in Türkiye—85 public (Table 3, no. 1-85) and 68 foundation universities (Table 3, no. 86-143)—while 9 universities are located in the TRNC (Table 3, no. 144-152). Based on the available information, 23 public universities and 1 foundation university had not yet started admitting students; thus, the total number of universities actively admitting students was determined to be 128.

An examination of the 2024-2025 academic year PTR program quotas revealed the following national, international, and total quotas: in public universities, 4.628 national, 676 international, and a total of 5.305; in foundation universities, 2.568 national, 2.572 international, and a total of 5.104. Universities in the TRNC did not have specific international quotas; their total

quota was calculated as 453 (13,14). In total, 7.650 national and 3.248 international slots were allocated for PTR programs

in the 2024-2025 academic year, amounting to 10.898 in total (Table 3).

Table 2. Survey responses of physiotherapy students in Turkish and English programs

Questions	Options	Turkish program (n=200) n (%)	English program (n=67) n (%)	P	Effect size
What was your reason for choosing to study physiotherapy in a country other than your own?	Desire to be a student in a different country	166 (82.5)	39 (58.2)	0.001*	0.24
	Unable to be admitted to a physiotherapy program in my own country	35 (17.4)	28 (41.7)		
Why did you choose to study physiotherapy and rehabilitation in Türkiye? (Multiple answers allowed)	Quality of physiotherapy education in Türkiye	57 (28)	22 (32.8)		
	Education in Türkiye is more affordable compared to other countries	67 (33)	34 (50.7)		
	Cultural similarity with my home country	120 (60)	39 (58.2)		
	I speak Turkish	99 (49)	5 (7.5)		
	Better living conditions compared to my home country	65 (32)	20 (29.8)		
	Bilateral agreements between Türkiye and my home country on undergraduate education	21 (10)	9 (13.4)		
Do you plan to return to your home country to work after graduation?	Yes	35 (17.4)	8 (11.9)	0.156*	
	No	76 (37.8)	20 (29.9)		
	Undecided	90 (44.8)	39 (58.2)		
Is the diploma you will receive from Türkiye recognized in your home country?	Yes	81 (40.3)	44 (65.7)	0.001*	0.25
	No	120 (59.7)	17 (25.4)		
Do you plan to work in Türkiye after graduation?	Yes	101 (50.2)	19 (28.4)	0.001*	0.54
	No	33 (16.4)	48 (71.6)		
	Undecided	67 (33.3)	-		
Do you plan to pursue postgraduate education in Türkiye after graduation?	Yes	153 (76.1)	41 (61.2)	0.018*	0.14
	No	48 (23.9)	26 (38.8)		

*: Statistically significant differences based on the chi-square test are indicated in bold.

Table 3. 2024-2025 PTR departments general and international student quotas

Rank	University	University type	Faculty/school	Program name	National quota	International quota
1	Afyonkarahisar University of Health Sciences	Public	FHS	PTR	104	7
2	Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
3	Akdeniz University	Public	FHS	PTR	79	2
4	Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University	Public	FHS	PTR	74	5
5	Amasya University	Public	FHS	PTR	32	
6	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	5
7	Atatürk University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
8	Aydın Adnan Menderes University	Public	FHS	PTR	69	3
9	Balıkesir University	Public	FHS	PTR	69	15
10	Bandırma Onyedli Eylül University	Public	FHS	PTR	79	4
11	Bartın University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-

Table 3. Continued

Rank	University	University type	Faculty/school	Program name	National quota	International quota
12	Batman University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
13	Bayburt University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
14	Bingöl University	Public	FPTR	PTR	37	10
15	Bitlis Eren University	Public	FHS	PTR	49	17
16	Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University	Public	FHS	PTR	101	35
17	Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University	Public	FHS	PTR	69	6
18	Bursa Uludağ University	Public	FHS	PTR	72	6
19	Çankırı Karatekin University	Public	FHS	PTR	59	5
20	Çukurova University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
21	Dicle University*	Public	Atatürk FHS	PTR	-	-
22	Dokuz Eylül University	Public	FPTR	PTR	108	10
23	Düzce University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
24	Ege University	Public	FHS	PTR	72	5
25	Erzurum Technical University	Public	FHS	PTR	37	3
26	Eskişehir Osmangazi University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
27	Fırat University	Public	FHS	PTR	83	5
28	Gazi University	Public	FHS	PTR	108	10
29	Gaziantep Islamic Science and Technology University	Public	FHS	PTR	73	20
30	Gaziantep University	Public	FHS	PTR	46	30
31	Giresun University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
32	Gümüşhane University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
33	Hacettepe University	Public	FPTR	PTR	108	10
34	Hakkari University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
35	Harran University	Public	FHS	PTR	40	-
36	Hatay Mustafa Kemal University	Public	FHS	PTR	46	1
37	Hitit University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
38	İğdır University	Public	FHS	PTR	69	10
39	İnönü University	Public	FHS	PTR	112	15
40	İstanbul Medeniyet University	Public	FHS	PTR	49	-
41	İstanbul University-Cerrahpaşa	Public	FHS	PTR	77	5
42	İzmir Bakırçay University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	5
43	İzmir Democracy University	Public	FHS	PTR-Eng	91	40
44	İzmir Katip Çelebi University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	8
45	Kafkas University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
46	Kahramanmaraş İstiklal University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
47	Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University	Public	FHS	PTR	85	-
48	Karabük University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	70
49	Karadeniz Technical University	Public	FHS	PTR	36	10
50	Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University	Public	FHS	PTR	22	-
51	Kırıkkale University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	2

Table 3. Continued

Rank	University	University type	Faculty/school	Program name	National quota	International quota
52	Kırklareli University	Public	FHS	PTR	69	5
53	Kırşehir Ahi Evran University	Public	FPTR	PTR	91	20
54	Kilis 7 Aralık University*	Public	Yusuf Şerefoğlu FHS	PTR	-	-
55	Kütahya Health Sciences University	Public	FHS	PTR	111	3
56	Manisa Celal Bayar University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	10
57	Mardin Artuklu University*	Public	FHS	PTR		
58	Marmara University	Public	FHS	PTR	108	1
59	Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	Public	FHS	PTR	111	25
60	Munzur University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
61	Muş Alparslan University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
62	Necmettin Erbakan University	Public	Nezahat Keleşoğlu FHS	PTR	91	6
63	Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University*	Public	Semra ve Vefa Küçük FHS	PTR	-	-
64	Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University*	Public	Bor FHS	PTR	-	-
65	Ondokuz Mayıs University	Public	FHS	PTR	49	15
66	Ordu University	Public	FHS	PTR	32	-
67	Osmaniye Korkut Ata University	Public	FHS	PTR	46	10
68	Pamukkale University	Public	FTRF	PTR	111	10
69	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University	Public	Güneysu SPTR	PTR	79	5
70	Health Sciences University	Public	Gülhane FPTR	PTR (Ankara)	79	2
71			Hamidiye FHS	PTR	79	2
72	Sakarya University of Applied Sciences	Public	FHS (Akyazı)	PTR	69	50
73	Selçuk University	Public	Kulu FHS	PTR	42	
74			FHS	PTR	74	10
75	Siirt University	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
76	Sivas Cumhuriyet University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	20
77	Süleyman Demirel University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	10
78	Tarsus University	Public	FHS	PTR	37	3
79	Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University	Public	FHS	PTR	79	40
80	Trakya University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	25
81	Uşak University*	Public	FHS	PTR	-	-
82	Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	Public	FHS	PTR	59	-
83	Yalova University	Public	FHS	PTR	69	5
84	Yozgat Bozok University	Public	Sarıkaya SPTR	PTR	79	-
85	Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University	Public	FHS	PTR	91	20
86	Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	35
87	Alanya University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	31	30

Table 3. Continued

Rank	University	University type	Faculty/school	Program name	National quota	International quota
88	Ankara Medipol University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	52	51
89	Antalya Bilim University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	50
90	Atılım University	Foundation	FHS	PTR-Eng	24	50
91	Avrasya University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	31	50
92	Bahçeşehir University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	25	60
93		Foundation		PTR-Eng	39	60
94	Başkent University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	61	27
95	Bezm-i Âlem Foundation University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	6
96	Biruni University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	40
97		Foundation		PTR-Eng	41	35
98	Demiroğlu Bilim University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	36	25
99	Fenerbahçe University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	36	60
100		Foundation		PTR-Eng	31	60
101	Haliç University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	56	20
102		Foundation		PTR-Eng	51	60
103	Hasan Kalyoncu University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	25
104	İstanbul Arel University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	46	60
105	İstanbul Atlas University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	36	60
106		Foundation		PTR-Eng	41	60
107	İstanbul Aydın University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	81	80
108	İstanbul Beykent University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	20
109	İstanbul Bilgi University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	50
110	İstanbul Esenyurt University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	56	60
111	İstanbul Galata University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	31	20
112	İstanbul Gedik University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	45	60
113	İstanbul Gelişim University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	36	60
114		Foundation		PTR-Eng	41	60
115	İstanbul Kent University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	60
116		Foundation		PTR-Eng	36	60
117	İstanbul Kültür University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	31	30
118	İstanbul Medipol University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	86	80
119				PTR-Eng	76	70
120			SHS	PTR	76	70
121	İstanbul Nişantaşı University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	56	60
122	İstanbul Okan University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	31	20
123				PTR-Eng	31	50
124	İstanbul Rumeli University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	60
125	İstanbul University of Health and Technology	Foundation	FHS	PTR	31	15
126	İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	46	60
127	İstanbul 29 Mayıs University*	Foundation	FHS	PTR	-	-
128	İstinye University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	36	60
129				PTR-Eng	31	60

Table 3. Continued						
Rank	University	University type	Faculty/school	Program name	National quota	International quota
130	İzmir University of Economics	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	17
131	İzmir Tınaztepe University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	56	26
132	Kapadokya University	Foundation	SHS	PTR	51	35
133	Kocaeli University of Health and Technology	Foundation	FHS	PTR	41	50
134	Kto Karatay University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	46	52
135	Lokman Hekim University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	25
136	Maltepe University*	Foundation	SHS	PTR	-	-
137	Mudanya University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	42	50
138	Nuh Naci Yazgan University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	15
139	Sanko University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	3
140	Toros University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	51	50
141	Üsküdar University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	81	80
142	Yeditepe University	Foundation	FHS	PTR-Eng	57	60
143	Yüksek İhtisas University	Foundation	FHS	PTR	46	20
144	Eastern Mediterranean University (Famagusta, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	45	-
				PTR-Eng	45	-
145	Girne American University (Kyrenia, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	40	-
146	University of Kyrenia (Kyrenia, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	30	-
147	Cyprus Science University (Kyrenia, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	33	-
148	Cyprus Health and Social Sciences University (Morphou, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	45	-
149	European University of Lefke (Lefka, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	45	-
			FHS	PTR	40	-
150	International Final University (Kyrenia, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	40	-
151	International Cyprus University (Nicosia, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	45	-
152	Near East University (Nicosia, TRNC)	Foundation	FHS	PTR	45	-
	State quota				4.629	676
	Cyprus quota				453	0
	Foundation quota				2.568	2.572
	Total quota				7.650	3.248

FHS: Faculty of Health Sciences, SHS: School of Health Sciences (for SBYO), PTR: Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, SPTR: School of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, SPTR-P: School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation, FPTR: Faculty of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation, *: No available quota information for the 2024 Higher Education Institutions Exam.

DISCUSSION

The results of our study showed that students from 17 different countries were enrolled in the PTR departments of Fenerbahçe University, Marmara University, and İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, which formed our sample. Among these students, more than 50% were Iranian students in Turkish PTR programs and Egyptian students in English PTR programs. The most frequently reported reason for choosing to study PTR in Türkiye among students studying in Turkish was “cultural similarity” and “being able to speak Turkish.” In contrast, students studying in English PTR programs cited “cultural similarity” and “lower cost of education in Türkiye compared to other foreign countries” as their main reasons. While half of the students studying in Turkish stated that they wanted to work in Türkiye after graduation, 33% were undecided. The rate of those wishing to work in Türkiye was lower among those studying in English.

According to the 2024 quota list published by the Council of YÖK, 127 universities in Türkiye opened 7.650 slots for national students and 3.248 slots for ISs in PTR programs. Among those who chose to study in Turkish PTR programs, Iranian students constituted the largest group, whereas they represented the second largest group among students who chose English PTR programs. Conversely, Egyptian students formed the largest group among English PTR students, but ranked second among Turkish PTR students. The high number of Iranian students studying at the three universities in our sample is particularly noteworthy. Tekin (15) analyzed YÖK data and reported that Türkiye receives ISs mainly from countries with linguistic, religious, and cultural ties such as Syria, Azerbaijan, Türkmenistan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The nationalities of ISs studying in PTR departments in Türkiye appear to be consistent with this profile.

In some countries, accessing PTR education is extremely difficult. For instance, in Iran, there are only 18 universities offering PTR education, with a total quota of 392 students in 2024 (16). Considering this limitation, we included the option “failure to gain admission to a PTR program in my home country” among the possible reasons for studying abroad. However, our results indicated that the most common reason for both Turkish and English PTR students was “the desire to study abroad,” while the aforementioned option ranked second.

For both language groups, the most frequently cited reason for choosing Türkiye was “cultural similarity with their country.” This is supported by the fact that nearly all participants were from Middle Eastern countries or neighbouring regions. The second most common reason among Turkish PTR students was “speaking Turkish,” suggesting that many of these students

were already proficient in Turkish before beginning their undergraduate education. Previous studies on ISs in Türkiye have similarly shown that the country primarily attracts students from linguistically, religiously, and culturally related nations (15-17). Our findings are consistent with the existing literature.

The second most common reason for choosing Türkiye among students studying in English was the lower cost of education compared to other countries. Currently, the tuition fees for ISs in PTR programs are often lower than those for Turkish citizens. This situation, which is likely influenced by YÖK’s goal of increasing the number of ISs, appears to have contributed to the rising demand for PTR education in Türkiye.

Less than 20% of Turkish PTR students stated that they definitely planned to return to their home countries to work after graduation, and the rate was even lower among English PTR students. Globally, ISs tend to migrate to countries offering better opportunities and conditions, leaving behind disadvantageous situations in their home countries (15). In this context, it can be inferred that students from politically unstable and economically less developed Middle Eastern and African countries may prefer to remain in or move to countries offering better living conditions.

When asked whether their undergraduate diploma is recognized in their home country, only 59.7% of Turkish PTR students responded “no”. However, undergraduate diplomas from Fenerbahçe University and İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University are not recognized in Iran. For recognition, graduates must either complete a master’s degree in Türkiye or have two years of work experience. Moreover, to obtain a physiotherapist license in Iran, graduates must also pass a national “board” exam. We believe that some Iranian students—who make up 66% of the Turkish PTR student group—may have answered “yes” based on the assumption of conditional recognition. On the other hand, the PTR diplomas from the universities included in our study are recognized in Egypt and Syria.

Among Turkish PTR students, half indicated that they planned to work in Türkiye after graduation, while about one-third were still undecided. This suggests that even if these students do not acquire Turkish citizenship, they intend to enter the labor market and seek employment, particularly in the private sector. Among English PTR students, fewer indicated a desire to work in Türkiye. Considering this and their lower willingness to return to their home countries, it is likely that they view Türkiye as a stepping stone toward working in other countries.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Health’s data dated March 15, 2014, there were 3.069 physiotherapists employed in the healthcare system and around 4.500 working outside the system.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, the Ministry reported 2.505 newly enrolled students and a total of 7.253 students actively pursuing PTR education (18). Karagözoğlu Coşkunsu et al. (7) estimated that the total number of physiotherapy graduates between 2012 and 2016 was 6.003, and it is now estimated that this number has reached approximately 75.000 in 2024 according to Turkish Physiotherapy Association. Therefore, the Ministry of Health's prediction—assuming constant enrolment rates—that the supply of physiotherapists would reach 29.200 by the end of 2023 seems to require reconsideration. First, enrolment numbers have increased significantly every year. Second, in the 2024-2025 academic year alone, YÖK allocated 10.898 slots for PTR programs, and due to flexible regulations on ISs, this number has likely been exceeded. For instance, although İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University initially opened 46 national and 60 international slots for PTR in 2024-2025, 127 ISs were ultimately enrolled due to the transfer of unfilled quotas from other departments. This example clearly demonstrates how IS numbers can increase due to administrative regulations.

According to the YÖK President's announcement on February 9, 2025, the number of ISs in Türkiye, currently at 350.000, is targeted to exceed 500.000, with an aim to reach a 6.25% share of the global IS population (10). Strategic planning is underway to achieve this goal. It is also well known that ISs generally tend to move to countries that offer them more opportunities and better prepare them for life, especially if they come from disadvantaged backgrounds (15). Given YÖK's objectives and the socio-political situations in the countries of origin of many ISs in Türkiye, an increase in their numbers seems inevitable.

Following the restructuring of independent healthcare professions under faculties of health sciences in 2007, the number of departments increased rapidly. However, differences in infrastructure, difficulties in meeting minimum standards in education and training, and the shortage of qualified academic staff have led to discrepancies in educational quality. These disparities in graduate qualifications may pose challenges in clinical practice in the future.

Based on the findings of our study, the growing number of ISs, along with the increasing number of universities and PTR graduates, may lead to more profound employment issues. If ISs join the workforce, differences in graduate qualifications may also eventually cause problems. The continuously rising number of universities and student quotas in Türkiye has already negatively impacted employment opportunities and working conditions for many professions, including physiotherapy. Our study reveals that a significant proportion of international PTR students also intend to enter the Turkish labor market. Despite potential barriers such as work permit policies, legal regulations and fluctuating economic conditions, our findings indicate a substantial inclination among ISs to seek

employment in Türkiye. We believe that a clear understanding of the current situation is critically important for strategic workforce planning and for setting appropriate PTR department quotas. This will be essential for ensuring the sustainable future of the physiotherapy profession in Türkiye.

Limitations

This study may have some limitations. First of all, information on the nationalities of ISs enrolled in FTR departments is not available from open sources. The <http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr> website provides information on the number of students by nationality on an annual basis and covers the total number of students in all departments of a university. Although the nationalities of the students participating in our study are consistent with the nationalities of ISs studying in Türkiye, their distribution may not reflect all foreign students in the FTR Departments. Secondly; as the questions developed in the study were prepared for the purpose of situation assessment, it was not deemed necessary to conduct validity and reliability analysis. The lack of validity and reliability analysis can be considered a limitation.

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examines the underlying motivations and post-graduation career trajectories of ISs enrolled in PTR programs in Türkiye. The findings reveal that cultural proximity, Turkish language proficiency, and economic advantages are the primary drivers behind their preference of Türkiye. Notably, a substantial proportion of these students, particularly those in Turkish-medium programs, express a strong intention to remain in the country to pursue clinical practice or postgraduate studies, rather than returning to their home countries. Given the expanding enrollment quotas, flexible international admission policies, and the rapid influx of students, this trend will inevitably impact the current equilibrium of the domestic physiotherapist labor market.

Therefore, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the profession, it is imperative that relevant authorities explicitly factor this strong inclination toward local labor market integration into future workforce planning, quota regulations, and employment policies.

Ethics: The study protocol was approved by the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Fenerbahçe University (approval number: 54.2024fbu, date: 16.04.2024).

Informed Consent: Before starting to answer the questionnaire, participants were asked to read the consent form and check the consent box to indicate that they understood it. Checking the consent box was mandatory in order to start the questionnaire.

Therefore, participants who did not check the consent box were unable to complete the questionnaire.

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Conflict of Interest: One of the authors, Şule Okur Dünder, and Mine Gülden Polat are members of the Editorial Board of the Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation. However, they were not involved in any stage of the editorial decision-making process for this manuscript. The manuscript was evaluated independently by editors from other institutions. The other authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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