Check for updates

Journal of Public Affairs Education
1–22
© The Author(s) 2026
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/15236803261499005
journals.sagepub.com/home/paj
Sage

Public Affairs Higher Education: A Comparative Perspective on Türkiye From Turkish Faculty With PhDs Earned Abroad

Nilay Yavuz[1] and Naci Karkin[2,3]

Abstract

Public affairs higher education has been undergoing significant changes driven by international reforms, making it more student-centered and increasingly interdisciplinary globally. Türkiye has also been influenced by these developments, particularly through faculty members who obtained their doctoral degrees abroad. Based on in-depth interviews with 24 such faculty members, this study examines how internationally trained academics perceive public affairs education abroad and how these perceptions affect their comparative assessments. The findings suggest that global academic norms are not directly adopted but are interpreted and selectively valued. By analyzing faculty perspectives through policy transfer theory and internationalization of higher education frameworks, the study contributes to the literature on the MENA region and offers insights into how international academic exposure shapes debates over local curriculum and pedagogy in public affairs.

Keywords

public affairs education, faculty mobility, policy transfer, internationalization of higher education, Türkiye

Introduction

Public affairs is a field heavily influenced by shifting governmental priorities, public sector reforms, and evolving societal expectations (McDonald et al., 2024). This turbulent environment that confronts public organizations today also requires public affairs education systems to continually update their pedagogical approaches, institutional culture, and program structures to prepare graduates with analytical, ethical, interdisciplinary, and problem-solving capacities (McDonald et al., 2024; Perry, 2019; Raadschelders et al., 2019). Therefore, global models of public administration and public policy education over the past several decades have increasingly

[1]Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye
[2]United Nations University, Guimarães, Portugal
[3]Pamukkale University, Denizli, Türkiye

Corresponding Author:
Naci Karkin, The Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance, United Nations University, Campus de Couros, Rua de Vila Flor 166, 4810-445, Guimarães, Portugal.
Email: nacikarkin@unu.edu

emphasized interdisciplinary curricula, student-centered pedagogy, public service values, and the integration of theory and practice worldwide (Jennings, 2019; NASPAA, 2024; Svara & Baizhanov, 2019; White, 2023).

As these educational practices circulate around the world through internationalization processes and academic mobility, they impact not only formal curricular practices but also the perceptions and professional identities of faculty members who participate in foreign academic training (Bedenlier, 2017; Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Dai & Hardy, 2024; Renfors, 2021; Sanderson, 2008). Policy transfer is rarely a straightforward process. As suggested by the related literature, it involves interpretation and selective adaptation according to domestic institutional conditions (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Similarly, in public affairs education, these global models of curriculum and pedagogy often interact with local administrative systems and higher education structures. Therefore, it is inevitable that the roles of faculty members and their institutional contexts occupy a central place in the conceptual and theoretical discussion of the evolution of public affairs higher education systems, particularly in how global educational models are translated into national contexts.

Türkiye is also one of the countries influenced by these global educational developments, particularly through faculty members who earned their PhD degrees abroad. While the field of public affairs education in Türkiye is characterized by specific institutional, curricular, and administrative traditions, it has also been subject to international academic standards (Karkin & Gurses, 2022; Onder & Brower, 2013). A growing number of academics who have obtained their doctoral degrees abroad and subsequently returned to domestic universities have contributed to the development of higher education (Yavuz et al., 2025). These faculty members are analytically significant for understanding public affairs education in Türkiye for two main reasons. First, when they return to their domestic universities, they might selectively transfer or resist international academic norms about public affairs education that they encountered abroad, due to the institutional realities of Turkish higher education or their own positions and perceptions of the public affairs discipline and profession. Second, it can inform the understanding of the extent to which a PhD degree in public affairs earned abroad affects the evolution of public affairs education in Türkiye, particularly in relation to curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and academic culture.

Since faculty members often encounter novel pedagogical methods and institutional cultures while studying abroad, they are in a unique position to compare foreign and domestic public affairs programs. In fact, their perceptions provide valuable insights into how global academic norms are understood, critiqued, and selectively reinterpreted within local institutional contexts, and in turn influence the development process itself.

Despite the importance of academic actors in shaping higher education reforms, there is a gap in the literature on understanding how internationally trained academics themselves evaluate their academic experiences abroad and how these perceptions affect their assessments of domestic educational practices in the public affairs field, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA; Al-Fayez et al., 2025; Haase et al., 2018). Moreover, there is an overall growing need to understand "how public administration is taught in non-Western contexts" (McDonald et al., 2024, p. 9).

In light of this gap, this study focuses on how internationally trained faculty may act as interpretive agents in translating global academic norms into public affairs higher education contexts in Türkiye. By drawing on in-depth interviews with 24 faculty members currently employed in public affairs–related departments at state and foundation universities in Türkiye who completed their PhD training abroad, it examines how ideas about curriculum design, pedagogy, and institutional culture are selectively valued and critically assessed. Rather than merely cataloging perceived differences between foreign and domestic programs, the analysis adopts Policy Transfer Theory and the Internationalization of Higher Education framework as analytical lenses to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Turkish faculty members who obtained their PhDs abroad interpret and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of public affairs higher education programs in foreign contexts?
2. How do these interpretations inform their assessments of public affairs education in Türkiye and its alignment with global academic models?

By focusing on faculty perceptions, this article contributes to the emerging scholarship on public affairs teaching in the MENA region and the debates on internationalization and policy transfer by providing empirically grounded insights into how foreign academic exposure influences local assessments of curriculum design and pedagogical practices. It is argued that Turkish faculty with PhDs earned abroad act as interpretive agents who evaluate global models of public affairs education and embed them into the Turkish higher education system. Overall, the study suggests that faculty experience, their perceived professional identity, and perceived local institutional constraints determine the characteristics of a policy transfer regarding the public affairs education system, despite global trends.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature on global trends in public affairs higher education, internationalization, and faculty mobility, as well as the Turkish context. Following that, it presents the analytical framework, drawing on policy transfer theory and the internationalization of higher education to conceptualize how returned faculty members interpret global academic norms. The methodology part describes the research design, data collection procedures, and qualitative coding strategy. The findings section reports the empirical findings, focusing on faculty perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of public affairs programs abroad and their comparative assessments of programs in Türkiye. The final section discusses the implications of the findings for public affairs education in the MENA region and concludes with directions for future research.

Global Trends in Public Affairs Education

The field of public affairs integrates two interrelated components: the accumulation of knowledge as a scientific discipline and the preparation of individuals for public service practice. Public affairs education, therefore, aims both to develop theoretical and conceptual knowledge and to cultivate graduates who can contribute to policy design, administrative decision-making, and the provision of public services. In this sense, public administration can be understood as both an "academic discipline and as a profession that rests upon a body of specialized knowledge that progressively reinvents itself to bridge the gap between theory and practice" (Manoharan et al., 2020). This dual character is central to the present study because internationally trained faculty members teaching in the public affairs field are likely to evaluate public affairs education not only as an academic field but also as a professional formation process shaped by different administrative traditions, pedagogical models, and institutional expectations.

Public organizations face complex and often transboundary challenges, including global political instability, pandemics, migration, environmental unsustainability, fiscal constraints, and technological change (Karlsson et al., 2025). This complexity also shapes debates over what public affairs education should teach and how it should prepare future public professionals (McDonald et al., 2024). As there is a pressing need to integrate theory and practice in this field, faculty members are increasingly expected to advance academic knowledge and contribute to improving policy design and public service delivery (Cheema & Perry, 2025; Onder & Brower, 2013). This necessity also makes comparative perspectives valuable, since faculty members who have experienced different higher education systems can assess how various programs respond to similar global pressures through different curricular, pedagogical, and institutional arrangements.

As a branch of the wider social sciences, public affairs draws on public policy, political science, sociology, economics, management, nonprofit studies, and other related fields (Farrell et al., 2022; Frank & Kunz, 2025; LePere-Schloop & Nesbit, 2024; Onder & Brower, 2013). Karkin and Gurses (2022) similarly emphasize the multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and reflexive character of public administration education. These disciplinary interactions suggest that public affairs education should not be considered a fixed curricular field; rather, it is continually shaped by evolving relationships among academic disciplines, public sector needs, and institutional contexts. Globalization, governance reforms, technological change, cultural shifts, and growing interest in collaboration and co-creation have generated continuing pressure to reconsider curricula and teaching approaches (Ingraham & Zuck, 1996; Leight & Abbott, 2022).

Public affairs education has been transforming from discipline-bound public administration training toward interdisciplinary, skills-oriented models that emphasize critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and applied policy analysis (NASPAA, 2024; Shotton & Timmermans, 2024; Svara & Baizhanov, 2019). This shift can be understood in relation to broader developments in public administration theory and practice. While the practice of governing dates back to early forms of statecraft, public administration as a scientific field is relatively recent, with its modern foundations usually traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Farrell et al., 2022; Tribe, 1984). More recent approaches, including governance-oriented and public value perspectives, have moved beyond traditional and managerial understandings of public administration. Bryson et al. (2014), for example, argue that contemporary public administration responds to a "networked, multisector, no-one-wholly-in-charge world" and to the limitations of earlier approaches. These developments have implications for public affairs education because they require programs to prepare students for policy problems that cross organizational, sectoral, and disciplinary boundaries.

The curricular implications of these changes are visible in recent studies on public affairs and public administration education. There has been a growing emphasis on revising curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels to address changing public sector competencies, ethical responsibilities, evidence-based policymaking, applied problem-solving, and practitioner engagement (Baracskay, 2021; Leight & Abbott, 2022; McDougle et al., 2022; Rinfret & Young, 2025; Rubaii, 2016; Şahin, 2025; Timmermans, 2020). Effective governance in the 21st century requires competencies that differ from those emphasized in earlier rule-based administrative models, including analytical capacity, responsiveness, collaborative skills, public service values, and the ability to use evidence in policymaking (Göçoğlu & Demirkol, 2024; NASPAA, 2024; Rubaii, 2016). Farrell et al. (2022) similarly argue that evidence-based decision-making should be central to public affairs education, particularly in a context marked by misinformation, populism, and increasing distrust in public institutions. These debates suggest a broader shift from rule-based administration toward problem-solving, governance, and public value-oriented education.

However, the transformation of public affairs education is not limited to technical skills or digital competencies. Recent scholarship also emphasizes the importance of democratic values, fairness, equity, prosocial motivation, public responsiveness, and commitment to the common good (Farrell et al., 2022; Guy, 2025; Hergüner, 2021; Rinfret & Young, 2025; Svara & Baizhanov, 2019). These concerns are reflected in pedagogical developments that move beyond lecture-based instruction toward discussion-based learning, experiential learning, applied projects, and stakeholder engagement. Baracskay (2021) notes that pedagogical development can help future public administrators better understand different cultures, governments, and policy environments. Similarly, McDougle et al. (2022) argue that global public affairs curricula should prepare students for public service careers while also cultivating civic responsibility and engagement. In Türkiye, Şahin's (2025) "studio of public reasoning" provides an example of how such pedagogical innovation can be localized through sustained interaction between students, faculty members,

public institutions, and external stakeholders. This example is important because it shows that curricular and pedagogical changes are not simply imported as global models; they are adapted through local institutional arrangements and professional networks.

The internationalization of higher education provides an additional framework for understanding how these curricular and pedagogical models circulate across contexts. Internationalization is not limited to student mobility or institutional partnerships; it also involves the circulation of academic norms, teaching practices, professional expectations, and ideas about curriculum design (de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2004). Studies of academic mobility further show that international experiences can shape faculty members' teaching practices, academic identities, and understandings of professional work (Bedenlier, 2017; Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Sanderson, 2008). At the curricular level, lecturers and faculty members play a central role in translating internationalization into teaching practices, assessment methods, and program-level decisions (Renfors, 2021). Yet these processes do not produce uniform outcomes, because global academic models are interpreted through domestic institutional, cultural, and regulatory contexts (Bedenlier, 2017; Karkin & Gurses, 2022; Knight, 2004).

This literature provides the foundation for the present study's focus on Turkish faculty members who obtained their PhDs abroad. Since these faculty members have experienced foreign academic systems and later returned to Turkish universities, they are well-positioned to compare how public affairs education is organized, taught, and valued across different contexts. Their perceptions can therefore illuminate how global models of public affairs curriculum, pedagogy, research training, public service orientation, and academic culture are interpreted, adapted, or questioned within the Turkish higher education system. In this respect, the comparative perspective explored in this article is not merely descriptive; it provides an analytical entry point for examining how internationalization and policy transfer operate through faculty experience, professional identity, and local institutional conditions.

Faculty Mobility in the Form of Doctoral Training

One contributing factor to the internationalization of higher education is faculty mobility (Mihut et al., 2016). In this study, faculty mobility is examined specifically through doctoral training abroad. Doctoral education abroad exposes future academics to alternative pedagogical practices, research expectations, supervision models, and institutional cultures, which may later influence how they evaluate higher education systems in their home countries (Kim, 2010; Kuzhabekova et al., 2019).

Research on international academic mobility shows that internationally trained scholars often develop comparative perspectives on academic norms, teaching practices, student-faculty relations, and professional identity (Ahrens, 2025; Bedenlier, 2017; Chen, 2017; Dai & Hardy, 2024). These perceptions may be positive or negative and may concern issues such as classroom interaction, assessment, research training, academic freedom, institutional hierarchy, or the university's public mission.

In the case of public affairs education, due to the intersection of theory and practice in the public affairs field, these may also be concerned with the characterization of the field itself: for example, what the identity of public administration should be; how it should be practiced, what kind of public values it should promote (McDonald et al., 2024). For public affairs education, these perceptions are especially important because the field connects academic training with public service competencies, governance problems, and the preparation of students for policy and administrative roles.

Upon returning to their home countries, faculty members with foreign PhDs tend to act as comparative observers with experiences of alternative academic cultures. Their unique position enables them to reflect on their foreign training environments and the institutional settings in

which they currently work. It is expected that this evaluation process would involve critical reflection on both positions, identifying not only perceived weaknesses in domestic programs but also limitations and unintended consequences of foreign systems.

To conclude, the flow of academic norms globally tends to be a subjective and interpretive process, in which individual faculty members selectively value, reinterpret, and sometimes challenge elements of the academic cultures to which they were exposed. As a result, faculty with PhDs earned abroad may have a key role in the transmission and reproduction of global academic norms within local institutional contexts (Chen, 2017), making them analytically central to understanding how public affairs higher education systems evolve in semi-peripheral settings such as Türkiye.

Analytical Framework: Policy Transfer and Internationalization

To address how globally circulating academic norms affect faculty members with PhDs earned abroad and to interpret their comparative perceptions, this study draws on policy transfer and internationalization of higher education frameworks. These frameworks are useful because the study does not examine formal policy adoption alone, but rather investigates how internationally trained faculty members interpret, evaluate, and potentially localize educational ideas, pedagogical practices, research expectations, and institutional norms encountered during their doctoral training abroad.

The scholarship on policy transfer is mainly concerned with how knowledge, ideas, policies, administrative arrangements, and institutional models move across political and institutional contexts. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, p. 5) define policy transfer as the "process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting." In this sense, policy transfer is not limited to the formal adoption of public policies; it also encompasses the transfer of ideas, institutional models, and practices that may be adapted, modified, or selectively adopted in a new setting.

Policy transfer processes may involve different degrees of coercion and voluntariness. Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) distinguish between coercive and voluntary transfer, while also emphasizing lesson-drawing as a process through which actors voluntarily learn from foreign experiences. Similarly, Bennett's (1991) discussion of policy convergence highlights how similar ideas or institutional models may travel across national contexts through learning, emulation, and autonomous decision-making. Onursal-Beşgül (2017, p. 742) is particularly relevant for this study because she draws attention to cases "where the pressure for change is not direct and transfer occurs voluntarily." This perspective is useful for understanding internationally trained faculty members, who are not necessarily formal policy transfer agents, but who may nevertheless carry ideas, expectations, and evaluative standards from one academic context to another.

In this study, policy transfer is therefore used as an analytical lens rather than as a claim that Turkish public affairs education directly imports foreign models. It helps structure the analysis around several questions: What kinds of academic ideas and practices are observed in foreign public affairs programs? Which of these are considered desirable or transferable? Which are seen as unsuitable or difficult to implement in Türkiye? And how do domestic institutional conditions shape the possibilities and limits of transfer? From this perspective, faculty members who completed their PhDs abroad can be understood as actors who encounter foreign academic models through doctoral training and later interpret these models in relation to the Turkish higher education context.

After earning their PhD degrees and returning to Türkiye, these academics are positioned to compare the pedagogical, institutional, and structural characteristics of foreign and domestic public affairs programs. Their evaluations are shaped not only by individual experiences, but also

by the academic cultures, professional expectations, and institutional arrangements they encountered abroad. Previous research on internationalization and academic mobility shows that international academic experiences can influence faculty members' teaching practices, professional identities, and understandings of academic work (Bedenlier, 2017; Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Sanderson, 2008). Recent studies on international returnees also suggest that academic identity formation is shaped by interactions among global, national, and local higher education contexts (Dai & Hardy, 2024). Thus, internationally trained faculty members may contribute to the circulation of academic norms not through direct institutional imitation, but through selective interpretation, adaptation, and negotiation within their home institutions.

Complementing this perspective, the literature on the internationalization of higher education conceptualizes internationalization not as the linear diffusion of a dominant model, but as a negotiated process that creates possibilities for new knowledge, intercultural learning, and changing academic practices (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Knight, 2004). In support, Ryan (2012) suggests that a PhD study can serve as an effective tool for exchanging cultural intellectual ideas and for emerging new epistemologies. According to her, the internationalization of doctoral education might enable discussions that explore new knowledge and perspectives that cut across cultural boundaries. During the PhD, "they not only have to learn new approaches and skills but also 'unlearn' their old ones" (Ryan, 2012, p. 58). Thus, it can be argued that global models of public affairs higher education are not transferred in a straightforward fashion. Instead, they are reinterpreted, or challenged by actors with different educational backgrounds, residing in different institutional frameworks and academic cultures.

Taken together, policy transfer and internationalization guide empirical analysis by focusing attention on how faculty members evaluate the movement of academic norms across contexts. Policy transfer helps identify what is perceived as transferable, adaptable, desirable, or infeasible in Turkish public affairs education. Internationalization helps explain how doctoral mobility and cross-cultural academic exposure shape faculty members' perceptions, professional identities, and comparative evaluations. The combination of these frameworks enables the study to examine not only whether foreign educational models influence Turkish public affairs education, but also how faculty members make sense of these models and assess their relevance within local institutional contexts.

The three analytical dimensions used in this study—pedagogical norms, institutional culture, and structural conditions—were developed as theoretically informed empirical categories derived from the intersection of public affairs education, policy transfer, and internationalization literature. The dimension of pedagogical norms is grounded in scholarship on curriculum, competencies, applied learning, public service values, and the theory-practice relationship in public affairs education (Farrell et al., 2022; Jennings, 2019; Leight & Abbott, 2022; McDonald et al., 2024; NASPAA, 2024; Rubaii, 2016). The dimension of institutional culture draws on internationalization and academic mobility literature, which shows how cross-border academic experiences shape faculty members' professional identities, academic expectations, teaching practices, and understandings of academic work (Bedenlier, 2017; Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Dai & Hardy, 2024; Sanderson, 2008). Finally, the dimension of structural conditions is informed by policy transfer and Turkish public administration education literature, which emphasizes that ideas and practices borrowed from abroad are filtered through domestic institutional, regulatory, cultural, and material contexts (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Karkin & Gurses, 2022; Knight, 2004; Onder & Brower, 2013).

These frameworks are operationalized through the three dimensions in the empirical analysis. Pedagogical norms refer to teaching methods, classroom interaction, student-centered learning, assessment practices, applied projects, critical thinking, and the perceived relationship between theory and practice. Policy transfer directs attention to whether such pedagogical practices are seen as transferable or adaptable, while internationalization explains how foreign doctoral

experiences shape faculty members' understanding of teaching and learning. Institutional culture refers to academic expectations, research culture, collegial relations, faculty autonomy, supervision practices, and professional identity. Here, policy transfer helps examine how institutional norms observed abroad are evaluated in relation to Turkish universities, while internationalization highlights how academic mobility shapes faculty members' sense of professional standards and academic belonging. Structural conditions refer to broader constraints and enabling factors such as higher education regulations, departmental organization, workload, resources, student profiles, language, hierarchy, and institutional governance. This dimension is essential because both policy transfer and internationalization emphasize that ideas do not travel into empty spaces; they are filtered through local institutional, cultural, and regulatory contexts.

To conclude, this study combines policy transfer and internationalization to highlight the critical role of faculty members with PhDs earned abroad in understanding how public affairs education may evolve in Türkiye. By treating these faculty members as interpretive agents, the study examines how they reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of foreign programs, compare them with domestic institutions, and assess the extent to which global academic norms are transferable, desirable, or infeasible. In doing so, the article sheds light on how academic actors contribute to the movement, adaptation, and localization of global public affairs education models in Türkiye and, more broadly, in the MENA region.

The Turkish Context

Public affairs education in Türkiye has been shaped by several overlapping historical and institutional influences, including the Ottoman administrative legacy, the Republican statecraft tradition, Continental European legal-administrative models, European integration processes, and later Anglo-American influences on public administration and public policy education (Güler, 2015; Heper & Berkman, 1979; Keleş, 2024; Keskin, 2006; Onder & Brower, 2013; Üstüner, 2023). These influences have created a field marked by tensions between administrative science and political science, legal-administrative traditions and managerial approaches, and domestic public-sector needs and international academic models.

Historically, public administration education in Türkiye dates back to the late Ottoman period, particularly the establishment of *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*, designed to train high-level civil servants for the Ottoman administrative apparatus (Keleş, 2024; Keskin, 2006). Earlier institutions, such as *Enderun Mektebi*, also reflected the long-standing importance of statecraft and administrative training, although they did not correspond to modern university-based public administration education. After the establishment of the Republic, and particularly after the post-war democratization period of the 1950s, public administration education developed through the interaction of domestic state-building priorities, Westernization efforts, and increasing exposure to American and European academic models (Heper & Berkman, 1979; Onder & Brower, 2013; Yavuz et al., 2025).

As a country with strong Continental European administrative influences, Türkiye shares several features with European public administration traditions, including an emphasis on statecraft, law, and administrative organization (Keskin, 2006; Onder & Brower, 2013; Üstüner, 2023). The importance of legal and organizational dimensions is visible in the literature and in the design of public administration curricula in Türkiye (Dinler, 2009; Karkin & Gurses, 2022; Onder & Brower, 2013; Varel, 2020; Yıldızcan & Bayraktar, 2019). Karkin and Gurses (2022) show that public administration education in Türkiye remains strongly framed around traditional, organizational, and legal-structural courses, even as newer fields and competencies have entered the curriculum.

A further feature of Turkish public administration education is its close relationship with political science. Many departments are organized under the title Political Science and Public

Administration, while others retain the title Public Administration. This naming pattern reflects the historical and intellectual connection between political science and administrative science in Türkiye, as well as the broader disciplinary tensions within the field (Onder & Brower, 2013; Yavuz et al., 2025). For the purposes of this study, the term public affairs-related departments includes public administration, political science, and political science and public administration departments that contribute to the training of students for public service, policy analysis, governance, and administrative roles.

Turkish public affairs and public administration education is offered primarily at the undergraduate level, while master's and doctoral programs are available in institutions that meet the requirements of the Council of Higher Education. Undergraduate public administration students in Türkiye are generally full-time students admitted through a centralized entrance system, whereas graduate students are more likely to have prior undergraduate training and, in some cases, professional experience (Yildiz et al., 2016). This distinction is important for the present study because participants' foreign experiences relate to doctoral education, while their assessments of the Turkish context may refer to undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs. The analysis, therefore, treats the findings as faculty perceptions across program levels rather than as direct equivalence between foreign doctoral programs and all domestic public affairs programs.

Recent studies show that Turkish public administration and public policy education has increasingly engaged with competencies, practical skills, public values, digital capacities, and evidence-based policymaking, while still reflecting the country's domestic institutional realities (Göçoğlu & Demirkol, 2024; Göçoğlu et al., 2025; Hergüner, 2021; Karkin & Gurses, 2022). These studies suggest that Turkish programs are not simply deficient versions of foreign models; rather, they combine domestic needs, institutional constraints, public-sector expectations, and selective exposure to international academic standards. In this sense, Turkish public affairs education is characterized by ongoing tensions between continuity and reform, local public-sector needs and international trends, and centralized institutional arrangements and demands for curricular flexibility.

This context is essential for interpreting the findings of the present study. Faculty members with PhDs earned abroad evaluate Turkish public affairs education through the lens of their foreign doctoral experiences, but their evaluations are also shaped by the historical, institutional, and structural features of Turkish higher education. The Turkish case, therefore, allows the study to examine how global academic norms are not simply transferred but are reinterpreted within a field shaped by statecraft traditions, centralized governance, disciplinary hybridity, and evolving public-sector needs.

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection

This study employs a qualitative research design based on written responses to a semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed as part of a broader research project on the experiences of Turkish faculty members who obtained their PhDs abroad in public affairs-related fields. This study investigates how internationally trained Turkish faculty members perceive and assess public affairs education in both foreign and domestic contexts. It focuses on faculty members who completed their doctoral training abroad and subsequently returned to academic positions in Türkiye, as this group plays a critical role in mediating between global academic norms and local institutional practices.

The population of the study consisted of 108 faculty members who had completed their PhD degrees in public affairs-related fields abroad as of December 2021, had been financially supported either through government scholarships in Türkiye or through other funding sources, and

were employed in academic departments related to public affairs, including public administration, political science, and political science and public administration, at state or foundation universities in Türkiye. Universities established in Northern Cyprus were excluded from the sampling frame.

Prior to the main fieldwork, a pilot study was conducted in December 2021 with 10 faculty members drawn from the target population. Feedback obtained during this stage was used to refine the interview protocol, clarify question wording, and enhance the relevance of the research design. The final protocol asked participants to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their doctoral education abroad, the characteristics of public affairs education in Türkiye, and the comparison between public affairs education in Türkiye and foreign public affairs programs. The interview protocol is provided in Supplemental Appendix A.

Following the pilot study, all eligible faculty members who were available were contacted by email in early January 2022. Each email included the interview questions and a research note explaining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and the anonymization of responses. A reminder email was sent 1 week later. Ultimately, 24 faculty members agreed to participate and returned written responses to the interview questions by email. The sample is therefore self-selected, and the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the perceptions of participating faculty rather than as statistically representative of the full population.

The use of written email responses was selected for practical and methodological reasons. First, the interviews were conducted during the final stages of the pandemic-related precautions in Türkiye, a period in which opportunities for face-to-face contact with participants remained partly limited. Second, the target population was geographically dispersed across universities in Türkiye, and many potential participants were senior academics with limited availability for synchronous interviews. Email-based qualitative interviewing can provide participants with time to reflect on complex professional experiences, formulate detailed answers, and respond at their own pace, although it also limits opportunities for follow-up probing and interaction between interviewer and participant (Hawkins, 2018; Meho, 2006). For this reason, the study treats the material as written qualitative interview responses rather than as conventional face-to-face in-depth interviews, and this limitation is acknowledged in the conclusion.

All responses were anonymized to protect participants' identities. The study received ethics approval from the University Ethics Board on 12.10.2021. Table 1 presents the demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents. Among the 24 participants, 17 were men, and more than half were employed at public universities. The sample included one instructor, 12 assistant professors, 4 associate professors, and 7 full professors. In terms of tenure, 37% had between 1 and 5 years of experience in their current departments, approximately 30% had between 6 and 10 years, and more than 30% had over 10 years of tenure. The majority obtained their PhD degrees in the United Kingdom (37.5%), followed by the United States (29%) and Canada (12.5%). Nearly half of the respondents currently hold administrative positions at their universities.

Data Analysis and Coding strategy

The study employed a multi-layered qualitative analysis strategy designed to capture both theoretically informed dimensions of policy transfer and internationalization and the empirical complexity of faculty narratives concerning public affairs education abroad and in Türkiye. The analysis was conducted manually through repeated reading, memo-writing, code comparison, and iterative refinement of categories. This approach is consistent with qualitative coding procedures that combine deductive sensitizing concepts with inductive theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics.

Respondent id	Gender	Employed university type	Academic title	Years of teaching in Türkiye	PhD country	Administrative role
1	Male	Foundation University	Assistant Professor	9	UK	Yes
2	Female	State University	Instructor	2	UK	No
3	Female	State University	Associate Professor	7	UK	Yes
4	Male	State University	Assistant Professor	5	UK	Yes
5	Male	Foundation University	Assistant Professor	3	Austria	No
6	Female	Foundation University	Assistant Professor	8	USA	No
7	Male	State University	Full Professor	18	USA	Yes
8	Male	Foundation University	Assistant Professor	4	UK	Yes
9	Female	State University	Full Professor	24	USA	No
10	Male	State University	Assistant Professor	3	France	Yes
11	Male	State University	Full Professor	26	UK	Yes
12	Male	Foundation University	Associate Professor	13	USA	No
13	Male	State University	Assistant Professor	3	UK	No
14	Male	State University	Full Professor	20	UK	Yes
15	Male	State University	Full Professor	20	USA	No
16	Female	State University	Associate Professor	20	Canada	No
17	Male	State University	Assistant Professor	10	UK	Yes
18	Male	Foundation University	Assistant Professor	1	Canada	No
19	Female	Foundation University	Full Professor	9	USA	No
20	Male	State University	Associate Professor	5	USA	No
21	Male	State University	Assistant Professor	5	UK	No
22	Male	State University	Assistant Professor	7	France	No
23	Female	State University	Assistant Professor	10	Belgium	No
24	Male	State University	Full Professor	13	Canada	No

In the first stage, a deductive coding framework was developed to align with the research questions and the literature on global trends in public affairs education, faculty mobility, policy transfer, and the internationalization of higher education. At this stage, sensitizing categories were created to guide the analysis, including curricular structure, pedagogical practices, institutional culture, perceived strengths, perceived weaknesses, comparative evaluations, and transferability. These categories reflected the study's interest in how internationally trained faculty interpret educational models, teaching practices, public service orientations, research training, and organizational arrangements across national contexts.

In the second stage, open coding was used to identify recurrent concepts, evaluative judgments, and meaning units emerging from participants' narratives. Following open coding procedures, each response was read line by line to identify segments that expressed a distinct perception, comparison, or evaluative claim (Saldaña, 2021). Codes generated at this stage captured fine-grained issues such as interdisciplinarity, seminar-based teaching, memorization-oriented assessment, academic freedom, meritocracy, hierarchical relations, commercialization pressures, supervision quality, research funding constraints, student preparedness, faculty workload, public service orientation, practitioner engagement, and professional identity formation.

In the third stage, the inductively generated codes were compared across cases and organized through axial coding into three analytically coherent coding families: pedagogical norms, institutional culture, and structural conditions (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021). This synthesis was not a purely mechanical grouping of codes. Rather, codes were compared in relation to the analytical framework to determine how participants evaluated the transferability, desirability, or infeasibility of foreign academic models in the Turkish context. For example, comments on

seminar-based teaching, assessment, applied projects, and critical thinking were grouped under pedagogical norms; comments on collegiality, hierarchy, meritocracy, academic freedom, supervision, and professional identity were grouped under institutional culture; and comments on centralization, workload, funding, staffing, language, student preparedness, and institutional autonomy were grouped under structural conditions.

The coding process, therefore, linked the empirical analysis to the two theoretical frameworks. Policy transfer informed the interpretation of whether participants regarded particular practices as transferable, adaptable, desirable, or constrained. Internationalization informed the interpretation of how doctoral mobility shaped faculty members' perceptions of academic norms, professional identity, and comparative evaluation. The three coding families were then used to organize the findings section, allowing the analysis to address the research questions systematically: first, by identifying how faculty evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of public affairs education abroad, and second, by examining how these evaluations informed their assessments of public affairs education in Türkiye.

Pedagogical norms encompassed codes related to student-centered versus instructor-centered teaching, critical thinking and discussion practices, assessment regimes, curriculum design, interdisciplinarity, seminar cultures, academic writing expectations, applied policy analysis, public service values, and classroom interaction styles. Institutional culture included references to departmental autonomy, collegiality, professional hierarchies, merit-based recruitment and promotion, academic socialization, perceptions of fairness, supervision practices, academic freedom, and norms governing faculty-student relations. Structural conditions included perceptions related to the regulatory role of central higher education authorities, faculty teaching and administrative workload, staffing levels, tenure and promotion policies, funding and research infrastructures, student profiles, language, marketization pressures, and institutional governance.

In the final analysis, these three overarching coding families were confirmed as representing faculty members' reflections and evaluations on public affairs education at home and abroad. They demonstrate how global academic norms are neither simply adopted nor rejected, but are filtered through actors' pedagogical values, institutional experiences, and structural realities. The findings are therefore presented not only as descriptive comparisons between foreign and Turkish programs, but also as evidence of how international academic exposure shapes the selective interpretation and localization of public affairs education models.

Findings

Perceived Strengths of Public Affairs Education Abroad

Faculty members identified several strengths of public affairs education abroad that relate directly to the distinctive purposes of public affairs programs: cultivating analytical capacity, connecting theory and practice, developing research skills, and preparing students for policy and administrative roles. One of the most frequently emphasized strengths was student-centered learning. Participants characterized foreign public affairs programs as "relatively distant from memorization, giving importance to intellectual depth and being open to student development" (Interview 1). One faculty member stated that such programs encourage "more analytical, critical, and scientific thinking" and educate students to produce innovative solutions to real-world problems (Interview 14). This focus on moving away from rote learning was closely linked to the development of analytical and critical thinking skills necessary for public affairs professionals. In policy transfer terms, these comments show that participants identified student-centered pedagogy and critical engagement as desirable academic norms; in internationalization terms, they show how doctoral exposure shaped faculty expectations about teaching and learning in public affairs education.

A second strength concerns institutional culture. Respondents highlighted merit-based systems, academic freedom, and collegiality as important features of foreign public affairs programs. One participant reported that "the most positive aspect is the existence of a merit-based system and the protection of academic autonomy and freedom at all costs" (Interview 4). Others emphasized the non-hierarchical academic environment and collegial relations, observing that it was possible to address senior professors by their first names and to experience a genuine "culture of collegiality" (Interview 17). These perceptions matter for public affairs education because faculty saw institutional culture as shaping the conditions under which critical inquiry and research supervision related to the public affairs discipline and public policy debates can take place.

In assessing curricular strengths, faculty members emphasized the interdisciplinary and rich content of public affairs programs abroad. Respondents frequently noted that integrating political science, international relations, public administration, public policy, economics, and related fields enabled broader comparative perspectives and improved students' capacity to understand complex governance problems. As one respondent explained, "political science and international relations programs are offered together . . . I believe it is important for these disciplines to be integrated" (Interview 2). This finding speaks directly to the public affairs education literature, which emphasizes interdisciplinarity, policy analysis, public service competencies, and the integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives as distinctive features of the field.

Finally, rigorous research training and intensive supervision were widely mentioned as strengths of foreign programs. Participants referred to demanding reading requirements, strong methodological preparation, and close adviser engagement as factors that supported students' development as researchers and public affairs scholars. One respondent noted that supervisors "read every single line of the thesis and provide suggestions and critiques," while programs often expect students to read "an average of twenty books per course per semester" (Interview 9). These strategies were perceived as strengthening the professionalization of public affairs education by emphasizing methodological rigor, analytical thinking, academic writing, and active student participation. The finding is especially relevant given the doctoral-level experiences of most respondents and clarifies that their strongest evaluations of foreign programs relate to research-oriented public affairs education.

Perceived Weaknesses of Public Affairs Education Abroad

Participants also expressed criticisms and concerns regarding public affairs programs abroad. These criticisms are important because they show that internationally trained faculty did not simply adopt foreign models as ideal templates. Rather, they selectively valued some elements while questioning others, which is consistent with the study's policy transfer framework.

Several respondents reported that PhD programs abroad could involve cultural and epistemic biases. One participant stated that course content was often influenced by a distinctly American perspective, noting that "interpretations and viewpoints are heavily blended with an American perspective" (Interview 8). Others reported experiences of discrimination or structural disadvantage based on nationality, language, or religion, emphasizing that "in some places, discrimination due to nationality or religion may limit the quality of education and opportunities" (Interview 14). These comments are treated not as generalizable claims about foreign higher education systems, but as evidence of participant positionality and of the uneven experiences through which internationalization is lived. They suggest that cross-border academic exposure may produce both admiration and critical distance.

Another common criticism was the increasing commercialization of higher education. Faculty members emphasized that market responsiveness may negatively affect institutional priorities and academic values, especially when it conflicts with the critical and public mission of social

science and public affairs education. One faculty member explicitly identified "commercialization" as the primary negative feature of foreign programs (Interview 1), while another explained that universities increasingly treat students as customers: "students are regarded as clients, and many suffer as a result" (Interview 4). From a public affairs education perspective, this concern is significant because participants associated commercialization with the weakening of public values, civic responsibility, and the field's public mission.

A related concern was excessive specialization and technical orientation. One faculty member observed that overly specialized orientations may narrow academic horizons and distance scholars from their public roles, arguing that "highly technical and overly specialized orientations may restrict academics' perspectives and alienate them from their public mission" (Interview 20). This criticism highlights a tension within public affairs education between technical skill formation and broader normative commitments such as democratic accountability, public service, and social responsibility.

Finally, excessive competition and individualism emerged as further criticisms. Participants argued that uncertainty about future employment and competitive selection for teaching or research assistantships can generate destructive dynamics among students. As one faculty member stated, "due to uncertainty about the future, competition among students can become destructive" (Interview 7). Similar concerns were raised about publication pressure and tenure-related stress, particularly for early-career academics, which were described as "extremely challenging, especially in the first years of the profession" (Interview 15). These criticisms show that participants' evaluations of foreign programs were not one-sided; they admired certain pedagogical and research practices while questioning institutional cultures that they perceived as overly market-oriented, competitive, or exclusionary.

Comparing Public Affairs Education Abroad and in Türkiye

When comparing foreign public affairs programs with those in Türkiye, participants emphasized differences in pedagogical norms, institutional culture, and structural conditions. Overall, they perceived foreign programs as more student-oriented, research-driven, interdisciplinary, and professionally organized, while they described Turkish programs as more centralized, hierarchical, and instructor-centered. However, the analysis does not treat these differences as simple deficiencies of Turkish programs. Instead, it examines how internationally trained faculty interpret the transferability and limits of foreign academic norms in the Turkish context.

One perceived barrier to transfer was centralization. One participant argued that "Türkiye is very centralized; interdisciplinary collaboration is limited. Departments have neither autonomy nor their own budgets" (Interview 1). This statement connects structural conditions to both policy transfer and public affairs education: even if interdisciplinary curricula and applied policy training are valued, participants perceived that centralized governance and limited departmental autonomy constrain their implementation. Thus, foreign models are not rejected as irrelevant; rather, their adaptation depends on institutional resources and authority structures.

Pedagogical culture also emerged as a dominant axis of comparison. Participants frequently referred to a "professor culture" to describe Turkish education as instructor-centered and discretionary. As one faculty member explained, "In Türkiye, there is a 'professor culture'—education is completely left to the discretion of the instructor" (Interview 3). This was contrasted with the United Kingdom, where "students are more self-confident and more entrepreneurial" (Interview 3), and learning was described as "more student- and assignment-oriented" (Interview 2). These differences were interpreted as shaping student confidence, agency, classroom participation, and the capacity to engage in policy-oriented discussion and analysis.

Evaluation practices and academic hierarchy were additional points of comparison. According to several participants, doctoral procedures and outcomes in Türkiye may be shaped by personal

networks and hierarchical relations, whereas foreign programs were perceived as more formalized and impartial. One respondent noted that, in the United Kingdom, supervisors are formally not part of the evaluation in dissertation defenses, thereby emphasizing objectivity (Interview 16). Participants also suggested that academic hierarchy may affect neutrality in Türkiye, for example, when junior academics remain silent during thesis defenses "out of respect or in order not to oppose senior colleagues" (Interview 16). This finding relates to institutional culture and shows how norms of merit, autonomy, and collegiality influence faculty assessments of doctoral public affairs education.

Faculty members also contrasted curriculum design practices. Turkish programs were criticized for offering many low-credit lecture courses, which one participant characterized as producing education that is "high in quantity but low in quality" (Interview 5). By contrast, foreign programs were perceived as offering more intensive courses, often organized around lectures combined with small-group seminars and delivered collaboratively by multiple instructors. In public affairs education terms, participants associated these practices with deeper engagement with policy problems, stronger analytical training, and more active learning.

Respondents also pointed to differences in research orientation and methodological training. Foreign programs were described as more theory-, methodology-, and analytical reasoning-oriented throughout coursework, while Turkish programs were depicted as placing greater emphasis on memorization. As one faculty member stated, "In Türkiye, there is no emphasis on how knowledge should be processed or interpreted" (Interview 16). This difference is central to the study's first research question because it shows how faculty define the strengths of foreign public affairs education in terms of research training, critical interpretation, and the ability to use knowledge for policy analysis.

At the same time, several participants recognized that Turkish programs may have context-specific advantages. These included greater accessibility for students, stronger alignment with domestic administrative and socio-political realities, and the relative stability of public provision compared with highly marketized foreign systems. These points complicate the assumption that foreign models should be adopted wholesale. They indicate that some aspects of Turkish public affairs education may be better suited to local public-sector needs, while some foreign practices require adaptation before they can be meaningfully localized.

The comparative process is significant because it suggests that earning a PhD abroad provides not only professional training but also a reference point for evaluating public affairs education in Türkiye. Faculty members' assessments are shaped by their foreign academic experiences, but these assessments are also filtered through their current work in Turkish universities. The findings, therefore, demonstrate the interpretive role of internationally trained faculty: they identify desirable features of foreign programs, criticize problematic aspects, and assess whether specific pedagogical, institutional, or structural elements can be transferred to the Turkish context.

This process also reflects ongoing professional identity formation. Participants' comparisons show how global academic norms of public affairs education interact with locally established structures, producing hybrid evaluations rather than simple acceptance or rejection. In this sense, faculty members with foreign PhDs act as mediators between international models and domestic educational practices. Their perceptions help explain why some global norms—such as student-centered learning, interdisciplinarity, and research rigor—are viewed as desirable, while others—such as excessive marketization, competition, or narrow specialization—are treated with caution.

Table 2 presents a structured overview of faculty comparative perceptions, organized into three coding families: pedagogical norms, institutional culture, and structural conditions. It highlights both the strengths and weaknesses identified in public affairs programs abroad and how these perceptions inform comparative assessments of similar programs in Türkiye. The table also

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Faculty Perceptions on Foreign and Turkish Public Affairs Programs by Coding Family.

Coding family	Sub-code	Foreign public affairs programs	Turkish public affairs programs	Representative quote(s)
Pedagogical Norms	Student-centered learning	Emphasis on independent learning, critical engagement, seminar participation	Mostly instructor-centered, lecture-based, students rely on teacher authority	"In Turkey, education is completely teacher-centered. In the UK, students are more self-confident, more proactive, and more willing in class." (Interview 3)
	Critical thinking	Encouraged, embedded in assignments and discussions	Less emphasized; focus on memorization and exam performance	"More analytical, critical, and scientific thinking . . . it prepares students better for the real world and professional life." (Interview 14)
	Interdisciplinarity	Programs often combine political science, public administration, international relations	Disciplines more siloed, less collaboration	"Political science and international relations programs are together . . . The diversity of courses is accordingly greater." (Interview 2)
	Seminar & discussion culture	Small groups, multiple instructors, student presentations	Mostly large lecture classes, fewer opportunities for discussion	"In undergraduate programs, the separation of 'lecture' and 'seminar' is common . . . extremely beneficial for students." (Interview 20)
	Research & evidence-based approach	Focus on practical methods, evidence-based policy, applied research	Less emphasis; theoretical focus dominates	"Practical-oriented work, especially for those wanting to work in public policy, becomes more focused on specific methods . . ." (Interview 3)
Institutional Cultures	Departmental autonomy & decision-making	Departments have autonomy, decentralized budgeting	Centralized, low autonomy, bureaucratic control	"Turkey is highly centralized . . . departments have no autonomy, no budget." (Interview 1)
	Collegiality & hierarchy	Flat hierarchies, informal interaction between professors and students	Strong hierarchies, formal titles dominate	"In a non-hierarchical academic culture, you can address senior professors by their first name . . ." (Interview 17)
	Meritocracy & academic freedom	Academic freedom and merit-based systems emphasized	Partial meritocracy; political and bureaucratic pressures	"The most positive aspect is a merit-based system and the preservation of academic freedom at all costs." (Interview 4)
	Faculty–student relations	Respect for individual differences; student initiative encouraged	Students highly dependent on professors; less initiative	"Respect for individual differences and asking everyone to take on tasks based on their strengths." (Interview 7)
Structural Conditions	Funding & research support	Strong financial and research support for students and faculty	Limited funding; heavy reliance on central allocations	"Foreign programs provide much more financial support for doctoral research. They also offer more opportunities for academic development." (Interview 11)
	Supervision & workload	Advisers dedicate significant time; manageable student-teacher ratio	Faculty overloaded with teaching, administrative tasks, supervision	"In Turkey, an average academic has to teach at least 10 hours per week, do administrative work, and publish at the same time." (Interview 5)
	Marketization & competition	Market pressures present but balanced by meritocratic structures	Competitive pressures exist, commercialization affecting students and faculty	"As a result of marketization, students are treated like customers and suffer in many ways." (Interview 4)
	Staffing & administrative burden	Sufficient staff, clear division of teaching and administration	Limited staff, heavy administrative and teaching burden on faculty	"Departments here usually have 10–15 faculty, whereas they often have much more abroad. This allows faculty to spend more time on research." (Interview 5)

shows how the findings relate to the study's theoretical frameworks by identifying the perceived transferability, adaptability, or limits of global academic norms.

Conclusion

This study examined how Turkish faculty members who earned their PhDs abroad evaluate public affairs education in foreign contexts and how these evaluations inform their comparative assessments of public affairs programs in Türkiye. Using written responses from 24 faculty members with PhD degrees earned abroad, the study analyzed faculty perceptions through three interrelated dimensions: pedagogical norms, institutional culture, and structural conditions. The findings show that participants valued student-centered learning, critical engagement, interdisciplinarity, rigorous research training, and intensive supervision as strengths of public affairs programs abroad. These features were interpreted as particularly relevant to public affairs education because they support analytical reasoning, policy-oriented problem-solving, public service preparation, and the integration of theory and practice.

The findings also show that faculty evaluations were not simply expressions of admiration for foreign systems. Participants criticized cultural and epistemic biases, commercialization, excessive competition, and narrow specialization in foreign programs. These criticisms demonstrate that internationally trained faculty are not passive carriers of global academic models. Rather, they act as interpretive agents who selectively value, question, and adapt the academic norms encountered abroad. This finding directly supports the study's use of policy transfer and internationalization frameworks: global educational ideas move across borders through academic mobility, but they are interpreted through faculty experience, professional identity, and local institutional conditions.

The comparative assessment of public affairs education in Türkiye revealed several perceived constraints, including centralized governance, limited departmental autonomy, hierarchical academic relations, instructor-centered pedagogy, and uneven research training. However, the findings also suggest that domestic programs may offer context-specific advantages, including accessibility for students, closer alignment with Turkish administrative and socio-political realities, and greater stability in public provision. These advantages are important because they show that participants did not necessarily advocate the wholesale adoption of foreign models. Instead, they evaluated foreign and domestic systems comparatively, considering both the desirability and feasibility of transferring particular pedagogical, institutional, and structural practices.

In terms of theoretical contribution, the study demonstrates how policy transfer and internationalization can be used together to analyze public affairs education. Policy transfer helps explain how faculty members assess whether foreign educational practices are transferable, adaptable, desirable, or infeasible in Türkiye, and that it is not a linear process but an interpretive one. Internationalization helps explain how doctoral mobility shapes faculty members' perceptions of academic norms, professional identities, and comparative evaluations. The three analytical dimensions related to public affairs education literature—pedagogical norms, institutional culture, and structural conditions—show where these processes appear empirically. Through these dimensions, the study contributes to emerging scholarship on public affairs education in the MENA region by showing how international academic exposure shapes debates over local curriculum and pedagogy.

In terms of policy implications, recognizing the interpretive role of faculty members with foreign PhDs may help policymakers and academic leaders design more context-sensitive higher education reforms. These faculty members may contribute to curriculum revision, interdisciplinary collaboration, research training, practitioner engagement, and pedagogical innovation. However, the findings suggest that such contributions require institutional conditions that support faculty autonomy, departmental flexibility, adequate resources, and structured opportunities

for reflection and knowledge exchange. The process of translating good practices from abroad into local contexts is therefore not automatic; it depends on both faculty agency and institutional capacity.

This study has several limitations. First, its findings are based on a relatively small, self-selected sample of faculty in public affairs-related fields, and the results may not generalize to all disciplines, program levels, or institutional types. Second, the research relied on written email responses rather than synchronous in-depth interviews, which limited opportunities for follow-up questions and deeper probing. Third, participants' foreign experiences were based on doctoral training in public affairs-related fields, while their assessments of Türkiye sometimes referred to broader public affairs education across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. This level-of-analysis issue should be considered when interpreting the findings. Finally, the study does not directly examine whether and how returned faculty members actually changed curricula, pedagogy, or institutional practices in their home institutions. Future research could include student perspectives, program-level comparisons, quantitative assessments of learning outcomes, and longitudinal studies of how academic mobility influences curriculum reform and institutional change over time.

Acknowledgments

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an assistive tool to translate the interviews, suggest potential codes and thematic groupings, and copy-edit the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors critically reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

ORCID iDs

Nilay Yavuz https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1673-6309
Naci Karkin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0321-1212

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

Ahrens, J. (2025). Of 'international exposure', place and mobility trajectories: Domestic students and international students in the education hub of Dubai. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *23*(4), 867–882. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2024.2335660

Al-Fayez, D., Hijal-Moghrabi, I., & Sabharwal, M. (2025). The current state of public administration education in the MENA region. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *31*(4), 482–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2025.2489207

Baracskay, D. (2021). Teaching diversity, cultural competency, and globalization to American public affairs students: Integrating comparative approaches to public administration and policy. *Teaching Public Administration*, *39*(3), 287–317. https://doi.org/10.1177/0144739420921918

Bedenlier, S. (2017). Internationalization within higher education and its influence on faculty: Experiences of Turkish academic staff. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *16*(2), 185–196. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240917724272

Bedenlier, S., & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2015). Internationalization of higher education and the impacts on academic faculty members. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *10*(2), 185–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499915571707

Bennett, C. J. (1991). What is policy convergence and what causes it? *British Journal of Political Science*, *21*(2), 215–233. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006116

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Bloomberg, L. (2014). Public value governance: Moving beyond traditional public administration and the new public management. *Public Administration Review*, *74*(4), 445–456. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12238

Cheema, F. S., & Perry, J. L. (2025). Reconsidering the gap between theory and practice in public administration. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, *47*(4), 315–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2025.2554723

Chen, Q. (Ed.). (2017). Theorizing academic mobility. In *Globalization and transnational academic mobility: The experiences of Chinese academic returnees* (pp. 33–42). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-886-1_3

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Dai, K., & Hardy, I. (2024). Contextualizing and hybridizing academic identity formation: An analysis of international returnees and locally trained scholars in China. *Higher Education*, *88*, 101–118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01108-7

de Wit, H., & Altbach, P. G. (2021). Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, *5*(1), 28–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898

de Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard, L., & Egron-Polak, E. (2015). *Internationalisation of higher education*. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies. https://doi.org/10.2861/444393

Dinler, D. (2009). Türkiye'de güçlü devlet geleneği tezinin eleştirisi [The critique of the strong-state tradition discourse in Türkiye]. *Praksis*, *9*, 17–54. https://www.praksis.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/009-01.pdf

Dolowitz, D., & Marsh, D. (1996). Who learns what from whom: A review of the policy transfer literature. *Political Studies*, *44*(2), 343–357. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1996.tb00334.x

Dolowitz, D. P., & Marsh, D. (2000). Learning from abroad: The role of policy transfer in contemporary policy-making. *Governance*, *13*(1), 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/0952-1895.00121

Farrell, C., Hatcher, W., & Diamond, J. (2022). Reflecting on over 100 years of public administration education. *Public Administration*, *100*(1), 116–128. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12808

Frank, H., & Kunz, K. (2025). The need to reconnect public administration education, research, and practice. *Administration & Society*, *57*(2), 310–335. https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997241283706

Göçoğlu, V., & Demirkol, A. (2024). What competencies public policy education promises: A qualitative comparative analysis of university types, education levels, and courses in Turkey. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *30*(3), 395–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2023.2230105

Göçoğlu, V., Göçoğlu, İ. D., & Demirkol, A. (2025). Unveiling the duality: Visiting the big questions of public administration education through qualitative insights from Türkiye. *Teaching Public Administration*, *43*(1), 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/01447394241239495

Güler, B. A. (2015). Yönetim Bilimi ya da kamu yönetimi: Yöntembilimsel özellikler üzerine [Administrative science or public administration: On methodological elements]. In F. Kartal (Ed.), *Türkiye'de kamu yönetimi ve kamu politikalari* (2nd ed., pp. 9–42). TODAIE Publications.

Guy, M. E. (2025). Has public administration education failed? *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *31*(3), 280–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2025.2484131

Haase, T. W., Haddad, T., & El-Badri, N. (2018). Public administration higher education in Lebanon: An investigation into the substance of advertised courses. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *24*(1), 43–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2018.1429820

Hawkins, J. E. (2018). The practical utility and suitability of email interviews in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *23*(2), 493–501. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3266

Heper, M., & Berkman, Ü. (1979). Administrative studies in Turkey: A general perspective. *International Social Science Journal*, *31*(2), 305–327.

Hergüner, B. (2021). An evaluation of undergraduate public administration programs at Turkish Universities: Reviewing the literature and proposing a model of cultural competence development. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *86*, Article 101914. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2021.101914

Ingraham, P. W., & Zuck, A. (1996). Public affairs and administration education: An overview and look ahead from the NASPAA perspective. *Journal of Public Administration Education*, *2*(2), 161–174. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40215136

Jennings, E. T. Jr. (2019). Competencies and outcomes in public affairs education. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *25*(1), 12–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2018.1558824

Karkin, N., & Gurses, F. (2022). An analysis of the public administration curricula in Turkey: Realities, expectations, and attitudes toward novel courses. *Teaching Public Administration*, *40*(3), 366–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/0144739421997514

Karlsson, T. S., Brorström, S., Kallio, K.-M., & Nyland, K. (2025). Exploring current themes, future trends, and challenges in Scandinavian public management. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, *29*(4), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.58235/sjpa.61209

Keleş, R. (2024). Yönetim, kamu yönetimi, yönetim kültürü [Administration, public administration, administrative culture]. *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, *57*(1), 1–8.

Keskin, N. E. (2006). Türkiye'de kamu yönetimi disiplininin köken sorunu [The origin issue of the public administration discipline in Türkiye]. *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, *39*(2), 1–28.

Kim, T. (2010). Transnational academic mobility, knowledge, and identity capital. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *31*(5), 577–591. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2010.516939

Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *8*(1), 5–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315303260832

Kuzhabekova, A., Sparks, J., & Temerbayeva, A. (2019). Returning from study abroad and transitioning as a scholar: Stories of foreign PhD holders from Kazakhstan. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *14*(3), 412–430. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499919868644

Leight, M. D., & Abbott, M. (2022). Globalizing public affairs education: The role of comparative public administration in the MPA classroom. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *28*(4), 373–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2022.2072637

LePere-Schloop, M., & Nesbit, R. (2024). Interdisciplinary knowledge integration in public affairs scholarship: An empirical analysis of the contributions of public administration, policy sciences, and nonprofit studies. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *30*(3), 418–449. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2024.2349477

Manoharan, A. P., Viswanath, S., & Sabharwal, M. (2020). Public administration pedagogy in India. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *26*(3), 291–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2020.1773118

McDonald, B. D., Hatcher, W., Bacot, H., Evans, M. D., McCandless, S. A., McDougle, L. M., Young, S. L., Elliott, I. C., Emas, R., Lu, E. Y., Abbott, M. E., Bearfield, D. A., Berry-James, R. M., Blessett, B., Borry, E. L., Diamond, J., Franklin, A. L., Gaynor, T. S., Gong, T., . . . Zhang, Y. (2024). The scholarship of teaching and learning in public administration: An agenda for future research. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *30*(1), 11–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2023.2294654

McDougle, L. M., Li, H., & Rossi, G. (2022). Experiential philanthropy in public affairs education: Learning for lives of giving? *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *28*(4), 440–459. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2022.2103337

Meho, L. I. (2006). E-mail interviewing in qualitative research: A methodological discussion. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *57*(10), 1284–1295. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.20416

Mihut, G., de Gayardon, A., & Rudt, Y. (2016). The long-term mobility of international faculty: A literature review. In M. Yudkevich, P. G. Altbach, & L. E. Rumbley (Eds.), *International faculty in higher education: Comparative perspectives on recruitment, integration, and impact* (pp. 25–41). Routledge.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.

NASPAA - Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation. (2024). *Accreditation standards: For master's degree programs*. https://www.naspaa.org/doc/2024-standards

Onder, M., & Brower, R. S. (2013). Public administration theory, research, and teaching: How does Turkish public administration differ? *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *19*(1), 117–139. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2013.12001723

Onursal-Beşgül, Ö. (2017). Translating norms from Europe to Turkey: Turkey in the Bologna process. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *47*(5), 742–755. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2016.1273094

Perry, J. L. (2019). The Journal of Public Affairs Education at 25: An agenda for the future. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *25*(1), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2018.1558826

Raadschelders, J., Whetsell, T., Dimand, A. M., & Kieninger, K. (2019). Journal of Public Affairs Education at 25: Topics, trends, and authors. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *25*(1), 51–72. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48547132

Renfors, S.-M. (2021). Internationalization of the curriculum in Finnish higher education: Understanding lecturers' experiences. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *25*(1), 66–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319888464

Rinfret, S. R., & Young, S. L. (2025). Introduction: Emerging themes to rethink how we approach Public Affairs Education. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *31*(3), 277–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2025.2527538

Rubaii, N. (2016). Bringing the 21st-century governance paradigm to public affairs education: Reimagining *how* we teach what we teach. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *22*(4), 467–482. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2016.12002261

Ryan, J. (2012). Internationalisation of doctoral education: Possibilities for new knowledge and understandings. *The Australian Universities' Review*, *54*(1), 55–63. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.425175380374618

Şahin, S. Z. (2025). Minding the gap between public administration curriculum and practice: The studio of public reasoning. *Teaching Public Administration*, *43*(2), 241–255. https://doi.org/10.1177/01447394241279204

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.

Sanderson, G. (2008). A foundation for the internationalization of the academic self. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *12*(3), 276–307. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307299420

Shotton, P., & Timmermans, A. (2024). The nature of competencies: Towards a multidimensional competency framework for public affairs. In A. Timmermans (Ed.), *Research handbook on public affairs* (pp. 222–239). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803920283.00027

Svara, J. H., & Baizhanov, S. (2019). Public service values in NASPAA programs: Identification, integration, and activation. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *25*(1), 73–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2018.1454761

Timmermans, A. (2020). Bringing science to practice: Designing an integrated academic education program for public affairs. *Journal of Public Affairs*, *20*(4), Article e2182. https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2182

Tribe, K. (1984). Cameralism and the science of government. *The Journal of Modern History*, *56*(2), 263–284. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1879090

Üstüner, Y. (2023). Reconstruction of Turkish public administration under the new presidential government system. In S. Bhuiyan (Ed.), *Public administration in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 20–33). Routledge.

Varel, A. (2020). Güçlü devlet geleneği tezinin eleştirisine katki: Özne-merkezcilik sorunu [The contribution to the critique of strong statehood tradition discourse: The issue of subject-centrism]. *Mülkiye Dergisi*, *44*(4), Article 609–642.

White, A. C. (2023). Internationalizing public administration education: Why and how? *Teaching Public Administration*, *41*(2), 190–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/01447394221092276

Yavuz, N., Karkin, N., & Göçoğlu, V. (2025). Investigating the external impacts on public affairs education in Türkiye: Getting a Ph.D. Degree Abroad. *Amme Idaresi Dergisi*, *58*(1), 135–162.

Yildiz, M., Babaoğlu, C., & Demircioğlu, M. A. (2016). E-government education in Turkish public administration graduate programs: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *22*(2), 287–302. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2016.12002246

Yıldızcan, C., & Bayraktar, U. (2019). The empowerment of Turkish governors within hybrid settings of public administration. *Mediterranean Politics*, *24*(3), 356–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2017.1398889

Author Biographies

Nilay Yavuz is a full professor of Public Administration in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Türkiye, where she also serves as Vice Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences. Her research interests include digital government, e-participation, public administration education, public transportation use, and the use of artificial intelligence in public policymaking. Her work has appeared in journals including *Government Information Quarterly*, *Urban Studies*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age*, *Information Polity*, and *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*.

Naci Karkin is a senior research analyst at the operating unit on policy-driven electronic governance (UNU-EGOV) of the United Nations University and was a full Professor (ret.) of Administrative Sciences at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Pamukkale University, Türkiye. His core expertise includes e-participation, social media analysis, public sector innovation, and e-governance. Dr. Karkin has conducted research, teaching, and supervision in the digital transformation of the public sector, including ICT-facilitated public service delivery, website analysis, e-participation, and public sector innovation through ICTs. His latest studies include the political use of social networking sites, a review of e-justice applications, the use of ICTs in emergency management, public value generation, relational trust in e-participation, and various administrative issues such as public sector innovation, public sector motivation, and the design of educational curricula.