

***Türkiye Bursları* as the Soft Power in the Reflection of Bilateral Relations between Türkiye and Indonesia**

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Abstract

Türkiye Bursları is a scholarship program for international students, but who would have thought that the existence of this scholarship was in line with Turkey's public diplomacy mission and thus became the country's soft power? Indonesia, as a friendly country, is Turkey's main target in expanding its reputation and cultural promotion mission through *Türkiye Bursları*, as evidenced by the government's policy in 2020 which plans to increase the quota for students from Indonesia. With its historical ties, similarities in religious identity, and cultural harmony, Turkey is certainly an alternative for Indonesian students to experience the experience of studying abroad. On the other hand, Indonesia, with its large population and GDP, is certainly Turkey's target in spreading its cultural values to create many agents who can fulfill national interests comprehensively from many sectors. This research seeks to analyze the influence and opportunities of the *Türkiye Bursları* scholarship on Turkey's diplomatic relations with Indonesia in detail. The methodology used in this research is qualitative with references in the form of books, reports, and relevant journal articles according to the topic of *Türkiye Bursları*'s role as Turkey's soft power and its relationship with Indonesia.

Keywords: *Türkiye Bursları*, Indonesia, Culture, Soft Power

INTRODUCTION

Türkiye's relationship with Indonesia is very inseparable in the long history of the two nations. Even before modern *Türkiye* or Indonesia it achieved post-colonial independence, it existed in the 15th century with the Ottoman Sultanate establishing strong relations with the Aceh Sultanate, Demak Sultanate, and other sultanates in the archipelago to diplomacy with each other. Even though formally *Türkiye* and Indonesia as countries—adherents of a sovereign 'nation-state'—have had bilateral relations since 1950 (Della & Solihat, 2022).

Apart from historical ties, *Türkiye* and Indonesia certainly have their own 'chemistry' considering that both are representatives of Muslim-majority countries that implement a democratic system in the contemporary era. Both of them also joined as members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and traded with each other in various sectors, including the technology industry, defense, and many more. A sector that is no less important and is a special highlight of bilateral relations between *Türkiye* and Indonesia is culture, which includes education. *Türkiye*, with its reputation in the international arena, of course, in this case not only prioritizes military strength as its main diplomatic capital but also soft power, where in this context education is included as *Türkiye*'s ultimate weapon in carrying out diplomacy for its national interests.

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In this case, the Turkish government prioritizes scholarships through the "*Türkiye Bursları*" program better known as YTB which has been standardized since 2012. *Türkiye Bursları* is an official scholarship from the Turkish government to support international students to study at various universities in the Republic of Türkiye (Türkiye Bursları, n.d.). This program is also considered the most comprehensive scholarship in the world because, not only does it just support international students financially, but it also guarantees university and department placement, academic fees, monthly living expenses, health insurance, accommodation, flight tickets, and other supporting programs for all scholarship awardee.

Indonesia is certainly included as a target country for *Türkiye Bursları*. According to the Turkish government website, there are around 1,000 Indonesian students who have received the *Türkiye Bursları* scholarship to date (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The alumni also achieved many achievements and filled various positions in the corporate, academic, and diplomatic sectors when they returned to Indonesia. Affirming the existence of Turkish government scholarships brings benefits as a means of exchange of science, culture, and knowledge across nations—without being separated by differences.

However, on the other hand, it should be noted that the Turkish government does not necessarily use the *Türkiye Bursları* program as just a symbol. More than that, *Türkiye Bursları* is Türkiye's soft power instrument in strengthening its existence in the international arena, especially in this case Indonesia. As well as being a means of culturally promoting Türkiye's national identity towards Indonesia—which incidentally is a friendly country for Türkiye—, where scholarship recipients from various countries will then become agents in promoting Türkiye's national interests. Everything will intersect later from culture and then spread to the tourism sector and science which will be explained in detail in this article.

The author will present in the discussion session an analysis of the influence and opportunities of *Türkiye Bursları* as Türkiye's soft power to fulfill its national interests toward Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in the study which analyzes the role of *Türkiye Bursları* as an instrument of Türkiye's soft power in its diplomatic relations with Indonesia is a qualitative approach. According to Creswell, qualitative methods are an analytical tradition that specifically explores humanitarian issues or social problems (Creswell, 2018). The author formulated a holistic data collection technique for analyzing issues, especially those closely related to Türkiye and diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Indonesia. This includes presenting reports with detailed perspectives, as well as scientific research with literature references; such as books, scientific articles, journals, reports, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Türkiye Bursları* in the Middle of Türkiye-Indonesia Relations

In simple terms in the state context, soft power is the ability to achieve national interests with a public approach and engagement, not through payments or coercion (Nye Jr, 2011). Non-military diplomatic approaches to strengthen the image and reach public attention are also categorized as soft power. Each country certainly has its tools or instruments to smooth out its soft power plans, including Türkiye with

its scholarship program. *Türkiye Bursları*—in targeting education for international students—has relevance to the Turkish government's foreign policy. This can be traced to changes in Türkiye's foreign policy which became increasingly ambitious, or no longer too Western-oriented several decades ago under the Justice and Development Party or *Adelet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP). Slowly, peace orientation is becoming Türkiye's priority for its neighboring and friendly countries to gain image influence in the region (Aras & Mohammed, 2018). This is what then inspired the growth of Türkiye's soft power which is based on humanity and cultural promotion so the scholarships become the main component. In 2012, the inauguration of the "Türkiye Bursları" brand as an important government program took place—even though the scholarship program had been running consistently since 1992—at the same time that the humanitarian crisis occurred in Somalia. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who at that time was Prime Minister of Türkiye, visited Mogadishu to promise scholarships to more than 1,000 Somali students as a form of Turkish solidarity (Ibid).

The scholarships are also increasingly being encouraged in neighboring countries affected by war such as Syria by embracing the religious directorate or Diyanet to manage the allocation of special scholarships. Türkiye's efforts through *Türkiye Bursları* to make the country a center of international attraction, especially in the field of education, have been confirmed by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kudret Bülbül as Chair of YTB in an interview in 2015. Prof. Bülbül confirmed the phenomenon of increasing interest of international students to enroll in *Türkiye Bursları* from year to year. He explained the reason this happened was that Türkiye was now increasingly becoming the center of attention of the world in a lot of aspects, through its advanced economy, good democracy index, increasing human rights index, and becoming a leading country for several decades (Unal, 2015).

Even though it was rocked by political instability after an attempted military coup, a constitutional referendum, and even during the Covid-19 pandemic era—which is still ongoing—the Turkish government remains consistent in providing the *Türkiye Bursları* program for international students with a quota of 5,000 per year with around 165,500 applicants from 178 countries different around the world in 2021 (Daily Sabah, 2022). Specifically for the Indonesian quota, the Turkish government itself plans to increase the quota for Indonesian students by 300 from the previous around 243 people. Due to the large number of competing quotas and applicants, the existence of this scholarship is still in demand by international students without being hampered by the pandemic that has hit globally. Indonesia's planned quota increase is also a sign that Türkiye considers Indonesia as the main target for scholarships for its cultural diplomacy mission through education. To date, there are more than 1,000 Indonesian students who have enjoyed the benefits of the Turkish government scholarship since the program was just created. There are around 2,400 Indonesian diaspora currently living in Türkiye—a number greater than the 450-500 Turkish citizens currently living in Indonesia (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

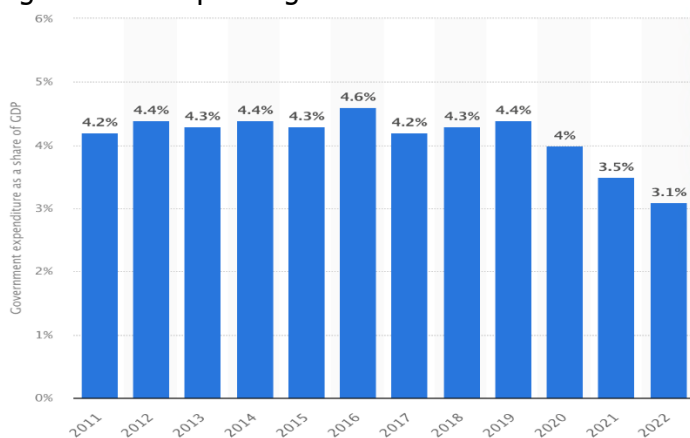
Turkish scholarship is related to the stunning image of Türkiye itself, especially when contextualized with Indonesia. Because such things can be traced for historical reasons. Türkiye in the past, when the Ottoman Empire was established, participated in coloring the history of the dynamics of kingdoms in Indonesia, even contributing to the Islamization process with evidence of the presence of the Demak Sultanate under Raden Patah with the title *Khalifatullah ing Tanah Jawa* (Caliph of God in Java

Island)—continued until the era of the Mataram Sultanate and Prince Diponegoro's resistance to Dutch colonialism, traces of the Ottomans could be seen in the composition of his soldiers. Plus, at the tip of Sumatra, the special relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Sultanate of Aceh have been going on since the 16th century when the Ottomans carried out an expedition to Sumatra to help Acehnese fight against Portuguese power ((Tarling, 2012). Historical ties are an aspect that cannot be underestimated in tracking Türkiye's stunning appeal to Indonesian citizens, the majority of whom are Muslim.

From a geographical perspective, Türkiye is a transcontinental country between the continents of Europe and Asia. This is an attraction not only for Indonesian students but also for other international students. This is because the existence of this crescent moon country is a bridge between two different civilizations, coloring the richness of culture, architecture, thought discourse, and figures in Türkiye's own national identity. Not to mention that Türkiye offers various types of tourism, both natural nuances and a very rich history, this is an added value with the presence of mobility of international students, and of course, the impact will continue on the development of tourism. It is an alternative for Indonesian students who want to continue their studies in Europe but want their culture to still be relatively close to Islam and easy to adapt to finding halal food. Also, the cost of living still tends to be cheaper compared to countries in Central Europe, Western Europe, and Northern Europe—especially when Türkiye's inflation surged during the Covid-19 pandemic. In mid-2021, 1 Turkish Lira was equivalent to around 1,657 Indonesian Rupiah—quite a lot compared to 1 Euro which was equivalent to around 17,387 Indonesian Rupiah in the same year (Exchange Rate, 2021).

In addition, what is most important is how comprehensive the *Türkiye Bursları* program is which guarantees a good life for scholarship recipients - because it is not only limited to financial support for educational costs, but also includes accommodation, flight transportation from their home country, monthly needs, insurance, and so on. Others for free without charge. The many benefits of *Türkiye Bursları* certainly still have policies according to the agreement between the scholarship recipient and YBS. Scholarships, which from the start have been closely related to Türkiye's soft power diplomacy, naturally expect certain achievements in the national interest even though they are categorized as government expenditure in terms of education.

Turkish government spending on education as a share of GDP 2011-2022.



Source: Statista (2024)

Reporting from Statista (2024), there are interesting findings regarding education expenditure on the GDP of the Republic of Türkiye. From annual data, especially in the period 2020, 2021, and 2022—Turkish government spending has decreased further than usual to 3.1% due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has spread throughout almost the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly had an impact on reducing the country's economy, hampering trade and investment, and massively transforming education digitally such as using the Zoom Meeting platform which saves budgets compared to face-to-face meetings, and what is no less important is hampering mobility. For these reasons, it seems natural that there has been a decrease in Turkish government spending on education, but on the other hand, this does not have a significant impact in the context of Türkiye Bursları—as a scholarship program for international students—because the quota provided by the government tends to be consistent. So from this phenomenon, it is clear that *Türkiye Bursları* is the government's flagship program which consistently runs without being hindered by the pandemic or internal crisis that occurred in the country with the symbol of the crescent moon. A high level of commitment for a country to maintain its public diplomacy instruments through education is what has been seen so far amid unrest and issues of national instability.

From the government's ongoing efforts to support this program, what benefits will it provide to *Türkiye Bursları* as Türkiye's soft power instrument, especially the impact on its relations with Indonesia?

The answer can be explored slowly with the policy of a one-year Turkish language course at all levels of choice in Türkiye Bursları. A 1-year Turkish language course is mandatory for scholarship recipients at both undergraduate, master's and PhD levels (Mohammed, 2017). It is known that the *Türkiye Bursları* program standardizes courses until students receive a Turkish language proficiency certificate at level C1 through TÖMER institutions or Turkish Language Teaching Centers. From this, it can be understood that around 200-300 Indonesian students in Türkiye every year can be confirmed to be active speakers of Turkish—they are at an advanced level because the language they study also adapts to the academic material there. If estimated with all the alumni who have received this scholarship, around 1,000 more Turkish active speakers are Indonesian citizens. As a characteristic of soft power which is a forum for promoting culture, *Türkiye Bursları* through its Turkish language course policy is a reflection of promotion for other countries to study Turkish culture itself. Moreover, there are more than 150,000 alumni from this scholarship spread throughout the world (YTB, 2021). Allows the consideration that they became promotional agents of Turkish culture after returning to their home country.

In organizing this program, YBS or *Türkiye Bursları* created strict regulations to ensure that scholarship awardees can use Turkish fluently in preparation for entering college. Because almost all universities in Türkiye standardize the use of Turkish as an academic and formal language, inevitably international students make courses a necessity. The absence of Turkish language preparation courses cannot be underestimated. If students do not attend courses with a duration of 20 hours per month then they will be subject to a scholarship reduction of around 25%. The situation will get worse if students do not attend up to 100 hours of course duration without permission or a clear reason then the scholarship will be completely canceled. Scholarships can also be withheld if students cannot obtain a language proficiency certificate up to C1 level during one year of study (Türkiye Burslari, 2022).

This soft power of cultural distribution will strengthen the harmonization of relations that have been formed between Türkiye and Indonesia. The momentum is also right for Türkiye to optimize international students to boost the ranking reputation of its campuses in the international arena. Considering that in the context of campus rankings—according to the *QS World University Ranking*—the presence of international students is one of the variables. In 2012 *Türkiye Bursları* became popular and most of the best universities in Türkiye were ranked 401-500 in the world, including Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University, and Sabanci University. Then in its development in 2016, the ranking of Türkiye's best campuses increased to reach the top 300 (QS Top Universities, 2016). Making universities in Türkiye prestigious educational institutions not only in the Middle East but also in Southeastern Europe. This achievement can certainly be a highlight for the Indonesian people to make Türkiye a study destination for the best educational experience abroad.

No less important, apart from affecting education, the soft power of Turkish government scholarships has the opportunity to strengthen the signal of solidarity of member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation or OIC in moving Islamic community issues—anti-Islamophobia, Palestinian liberation, and strengthening sharia economics—in their respective regions. Respectively (Pramuji, 2017). It is also hoped that the distribution of Indonesian intellectuals and practitioners from Türkiye will become a bridge for smooth strategic partnerships between the two parties in the field of trade in all aspects of related commodities, be it the machinery industry, tobacco, cotton, iron, steel, and many more.

B. Cultural Promotion Opportunities in Türkiye-Indonesia Relations

The *Türkiye Bursları* program which optimizes mastery of the Turkish language for all awardees is very effective in facilitating the transfer of knowledge to each other. The translation-based intellectual project process becomes easier to activate with the large number of Indonesian alumni who have mastered Turkish to an advanced level. Language transformation and translation can be easy for the benefit of discourse and a bridge to civilization. One can see, for example, novels by Orhan Pamuk that have been translated into Indonesian, such as the one entitled "*Namaku Merah*" in 2015—published by Serambi Publishers with a total of 750 pages (Pamuk, 2015). The history and politics book entitled "*Islam, Otoritarianisme, dan Ketertinggalan*" by Ahmet T. Kuru has also been translated and published by the Gramedia publisher since 2021. From the examples of books published, Türkiye's potential with its soft diplomacy power is enormous in the cultural field to reach segments of international society—especially Indonesia in this case—through the publication of fiction and scientific literature. The book translation process becomes a big bridge that will connect Turkish and Indonesian cultures and the world to mutually understand the symbols, history, identity, uniqueness, and wisdom of Türkiye contained in the text. The increasing interest in the *Türkiye Bursları* program as time goes by at the same time also increases the opportunities and reach of Turkish cultural diplomacy so that it not only brings positive aspects to the cultural sector but is coherent with the economy, education, science technology, etc.

An aspect that is no less important for cultural promotion opportunities is boosting tourism. Added to this is the effect of the visa exemption policy for Indonesian citizens—starting in 2022—who want to visit or travel for 30 days (Mustika, 2023). If elaborated in the context of promoting Turkish culture towards

Indonesia, this will of course intensify the mobility of citizens towards each other so that services and services as Türkiye's leading sector, especially in the field of transportation (land, sea, and air) are increasing, because tourists are now no longer obliged to Using a visa makes it more flexible. This momentum is useful for *Türkiye Bursları* awardee alumni to open travel agencies, tour guide services, and training for Indonesians who want to vacation in Türkiye by utilizing their fluency in Turkish. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesia had the largest number of tourists from Southeast Asia in Türkiye, even in 2017 there were more than 85,000 Indonesians who vacationed there (BBC Indonesia, 2018).

Moreover, during the transition period from the Covid-19 pandemic to the New Normal, Turkish tourism appears to have increased from 2020 when only around 215,000 foreign tourists in mid-2022 reached more than 6 million foreign tourists (Trading Economics, 2023). As time goes on, the need for language translation will become more complex, so that gradually Turkish will become a market for global trade, services, and product movement rates—especially in Southeastern Europe and the Middle East as geopolitical and geostrategic areas of the Republic of Türkiye. Opening partners for cultural promotion with Indonesia will benefit Türkiye in various aspects of service. Tourism certainly improves the economy of travel, transportation, insurance, and many other things. Also considering Indonesia's GDP which will reach 1.05 trillion USD in 2022, making it in the top 15 countries with the largest GDP in the world. As the economy grows, inflation is controlled, the human development index increases and the quality of education in Indonesia improves, this will certainly still have a positive impact on Türkiye in fulfilling its soft power interests in the fields of education and culture.

From the phenomenon that has been discussed, it is clear that Turkish government scholarships are not just a symbol, but also carry missions of national importance, all of which intersect with public reputation, culture, language dissemination, and quality of education, economy, tourism, knowledge transfer, translation, and other important roles.

CONCLUSION

Türkiye Bursları is a very comprehensive Turkish government scholarship program for international students, each awardee gets financial support, accommodation, free tuition fees, flight tickets, and various other benefits for academic needs. Running since 1992 and having its brand standardized in 2012, this program seems to be in line with the Turkish government's foreign policy which wants to strengthen its influence on the global and regional arena so that the existence of this scholarship is an instrument of Turkey's soft power in carrying out public diplomacy. The *Türkiye Bursları* program is open to 176 countries throughout the world, including Indonesia—which also has very close diplomatic relations and historical chemistry with Turkey. Indonesia is also an important target for Turkey in implementing its scholarship program, as evidenced by the fact that in 2020 the Turkish government plans to increase the quota for Indonesian students to 300. Since the Turkish government's scholarship was first opened, there have been more than 1,000 Indonesian students who have benefited from the program's financial support. Turkey is also an alternative reason for Indonesian students to look for studies in Europe, but still with Islamic nuances and culture so it is not surprising that the existence of the crescent moon country is popular.

Therefore, Turkey is highly committed to the *Türkiye Bursları* program which continues to run even during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, Turkey is not just showing scholarship as a mere normative symbol, but also as an effort to make its public diplomacy mission a success to fulfill its national interests. *Türkiye Bursları* is the right choice for Turkey to promote its culture, especially through language. That is why the strict conditions for *Türkiye Bursları* awardees must take a Turkish language course for one year, they also face the consequence of canceling the scholarship if they are absent for a long time from the course. This phenomenon illustrates that every awardee must have mastered Turkish fluently—given the mandatory requirement of up to C1 level—so that they then become important agents for the spread of Turkish culture in their respective countries. Mastery of the Turkish language is an important point in how the Turkish government tries to expand its network beyond national borders through awardees as agents. In the Indonesian context, of course, more than 1,000 alumni and around 200-300 new awardees each year are categorized as active speakers of Turkish so that they can become a bridge in communicating what Turkish culture is to the surrounding environment.

It should be noted that the increasing number of foreign students also brings benefits to improving the reputation of campuses and education in Turkey itself, for example how the QS World Universities Ranking includes international students as one of the variables. Identity and culture through educational representation can be communicated well through this soft power so that the impact is wider, not only on reputation but also has the opportunity to strengthen the literature, science and technology, tourism, export-import, and economic sectors in general. This is proven by the publication of books by Turkish authors such as Orhan Pamuk and Ahmet T. Kuru which have been translated into Indonesian. Likewise, the existence of travel agencies, tour guides, and Turkish language-based services for Indonesians which are increasingly developing in Indonesia itself has become a market for Turkey to attract more and more Indonesian tourists amidst the rapid development of tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic. So from these cases, it can be seen that the existence of the Turkish government scholarship, namely *Türkiye Bursları*, has influenced the Turkish government's cultural promotion efforts, especially in the context of its relations with Indonesia. As well as bringing great opportunities for the country's economic benefits considering that its partner Indonesia is a country with a large GDP.

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