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THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF UGANDAN GRADUATES FROM TÜRKİYE





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uganda is grappling with a significant unemployment rate, as numerous graduates from local universities find it challenging to secure employment after completing their studies. To stand a higher chance to a good life, many Ugandans prefer to study from abroad to stand better chances to acquire good employment opportunities and a better life.

This necessitated a study to understand the perspectives of Uganda graduates from Türkiye, to fill the knowledge gap as limited research focused on understanding the circumstances of Ugandan graduates from Türkiye.

If graduates from abroad, in this case Türkiye, are facing similar difficulties as those from local institutions, the attractiveness of studying in Türkiye may decrease. On the other hand, if Turkish education offers additional benefits, such as promoting self-employment, it has the potential to maintain or even increase its appeal. This study aimed to gather insights from key informant actors (KIIs) who are former Ugandan graduates from Turkish universities to understand the situation they live in and their perspectives about their education.

From the study findings, Ugandan graduates who studied in Türkiye have reported significant benefits from their education, including cultural exposure, community integration, and job opportunities. The Turkish education system is viewed as a valuable asset, providing a competitive advantage in Uganda's job market. Proficiency in Turkish has been particularly valuable, facilitating communication and networking opportunities. Many graduates have found employment with Turkish companies, which often prefer bilingual employees due to the nature of their operations.

The alumni also highlight the importance of connections and shared language in securing employment. They emphasize the role of the alumni association in sharing job opportunities and providing support. Additionally, the Turkish government's scholarship programs and welcoming policies for African students were praised for enabling access to high-quality education.

Several challenges were mentioned during the interviews. The main challenges faced by Ugandan students who studied in Türkiye included language barriers, cultural adjustment, limited job options outside of Turkish companies, credential recognition issues, and fierce competition in the local job market.

To address the challenges faced by Turkish graduates, several recommendations are proposed:

- Enhance support from embassies by collaborating with the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association.
- Establish a job placement program within the alumni association.
- Utilize technology for networking through an online platform or database.
- Advocate for fair employment practices and better wages.
- Provide training and skill development programs tailored to the needs of Turkish graduates.
- Collaborate with industry partners to create opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and job placements.
- These recommendations aim to strengthen alumni connections for job opportunities, enhance employability, and promote fair remuneration for Turkish graduates working with Turkish firms in Uganda.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Statement and Contextualization of Research Questions	6
1.2 Research Methodology	6
FINDINGS	7
2.1 On Return Back to Uganda	7
2.2 Merits of Turkish Education	7
2.3 The Significance of Turkish Language Proficiency in Employment for Ugandan Alumni	8
2.4 Empowerment through Self-Employment: Insights from Ugandan Graduates Inspired by Turkey	9
2.5 Connections to Job Opportunities	10
2.6 Gratitude for Turkish Education	11
2.7 Challenges and Comparison to Other Graduates	12
2.8 Recommendation 1, On institutional support	13
2.9 Recommendation 2, on remuneration for Türkiye graduates working with Turkish firms	15
2.10 Institutional Support Deficit for Employment Opportunities	16
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	17
References	19

INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad has generated significant global interest (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018; Long, 2013.) Stakeholders, including students, universities, and policy makers, are actively striving to optimize the benefits and opportunities offered by study abroad programs. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (UIS), in 2021, there were over 6.4 million international students globally, up from 2 million in 2000 (UIS, 2023)[1]. The Institute of International Education reports that there are 1,057,188 international students in the academic year 2022/23 in the U.S alone. In the academic year of 2022/2023, there were a total of 301,694 foreign students enrolled in associate, bachelor, master, or doctorate programs in higher education institutions in Türkiye[2].

Policy makers and practitioners advocate for the pursuit of studying abroad by emphasizing the advantages that graduates and society can gain (Jon and Fry, 2021). Studying abroad, for example, has the capacity to greatly improve language proficiency. This has the potential to broaden one's employment prospects (See for instance, Sisavath, 2021; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003).

In addition to the development of one's personality, language proficiency, abilities, and other intercultural competences the advantages of studying abroad in terms of employment opportunities are frequently emphasized (Di Pietro, 2019). Policy makers have traditionally assumed these benefits without questioning them. Recently, however, there has been a significant increase in the number of studies that have empirically investigated the impact of studying abroad on the labor market (see for instance Netz & Cordua, 2021; Di Pietro, JRC, 2020; Salisbury, et al, 2008).

Studying abroad is a popular global trend, it is increasingly popular in Africa as well (Chien & Chiteng, 2011). African students have pursued educational opportunities outside of Africa due to factors such as limited access to high-quality education, inadequate academic resources, and political instability (Chien & Chiteng, 2011) and Türkiye has become one of the top choices for African students including Ugandans seeking higher education. Ugandan students are increasingly selecting Türkiye as a preferred educational destination because of its expanding recognition as a hub for academic and economic worth.

[1] See the Migration Data Portal

<https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-students> retrieved on 10.08.2024

[2] See Statista by Zeynep Dierks, Jan 19, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1360610/turkey-foreign-students-in-higher-education-by-study-level-and-gender/> retrieved on 10.08.2024

However, Uganda and similar nations have taken steps to enhance their domestic higher education system while also promoting the pursuit of education abroad among its students. The presence of highly competitive educational options in one's native country can influence the appeal of studying abroad, particularly if there is no evident advantage to pursuing education in a different location.

Individuals who aspire to pursue education in foreign countries frequently do so with the intention of gaining a competitive edge over their counterparts from domestic educational institutions. However, if students encounter comparable difficulties upon their return, the appeal of studying abroad diminishes. Ugandan graduates are currently confronted with this situation.

Uganda is currently facing a significant issue of high graduate unemployment (Sempebwa, 2008). There are numerous universities in the country that generate a significant number of graduates annually. The employment market can only accommodate a limited proportion of this pool of graduates, resulting in the remainder being unemployed or working in jobs that do not fully utilize their skills and qualifications. In addition, concerns regarding the caliber of graduates have been well-documented, resulting in frustration for both prospective employers and graduates[1].

Ugandans are becoming more acquainted with Türkiye, particularly in the areas of trade and politics. With the increasing number of Ugandans completing their studies at Turkish universities, there is a growing interest among the Ugandan public to analyze the unique aspects of their situation and compare them to other graduates and the general population.

A research project, supported by Afrika Vakfi, was undertaken to investigate the experiences of Ugandan individuals who pursued their education in Türkiye, with a particular focus on those who subsequently returned to Uganda. The objective was to evaluate the advantages of education in Türkiye, examine how it aligns with the requirements of the local job market, and investigate its broader effects on graduates and their communities

[1] See for instance a report from the Young Leaders Think Tank for Policy Alternatives, "A PAPER ON THE CHALLENGES OF YOUTH (UN) EMPLOYMENT IN UGANDA" https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=445250e8-e81b-50b9-ea07-ed2878442995&groupId=252038

1.1 Statement and Contextualization of Research Questions

The limited research on the circumstances of Ugandan graduates who pursued their higher education in Türkiye represents a critical gap in understanding the experiences and outcomes of these individuals. This study aimed to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth investigation into the circumstances of these graduates, encompassing their motivations, encountered challenges, and the impact of their foreign-acquired education on their personal and professional lives.

The study's key objectives are;

- Understanding the impact of foreign acquired education in Türkiye on the career prospects and professional development of Ugandan graduates;
- Understanding the challenges that Ugandan graduates from Türkiye face
- Recommendations to improve the experiences and circumstances of Ugandan graduates from Türkiye.

1.2 Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design to thoroughly explore the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of Ugandan graduates who acquired education in Türkiye. This approach is chosen for its ability to provide in-depth insights and understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

In-depth Key Informant Interviews (KII) with 12 alumni were conducted to gain comprehensive insights into the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the participants. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to share their personal narratives and reflections, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their educational journey in Türkiye.

Additionally, the research team conducted a thorough review of scholarly literature on foreign education and reports documenting challenges faced by international students in Türkiye, with a specific focus on those referencing Ugandan students. This review provided valuable context and supplement the primary data collected through interviews.

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants for the qualitative interviews. The selection criteria ensured diversity in terms of educational backgrounds, experiences in Türkiye, and demographic characteristics. Interview participants were recruited through a WhatsApp group that unites Türkiye alumni, as well as through social activities that bring alumni together, such as the Iftar dinner hosted at the Turkish embassy in Kampala.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data acquired from the interviews using Atlas ti software. This method entails recognizing repeating themes and patterns in the data, providing for a more complete and nuanced knowledge of the participants' experiences and opinions.

FINDINGS

This section presents findings from the interviews with the Türkiye alumni. Their views range from their perceptions about Turkish education experience, their return to Uganda and post studies experience to their current circumstances.

2.1 On Return Back to Uganda

Although many interviewed graduates contemplated staying in Türkiye, circumstances and responsibilities among other factors made them decide to return back to Uganda. Some, like Interviewee (P, TR), were pressured by family to return home early due to security concerns in Türkiye^[1], (at the time when multiple terrorist attacks rocked the country) even though they had planned to stay longer. *“So my parents were like, you know what you leave Turkey. Come back home. So I came back home”* (P, TR).

Many graduates “just” chose to return back at the end of their studies as the normal expected outcome at the end of a successful study abroad. Other graduates highlighted the responsibilities and expectations waiting for them back home in Uganda. As one interviewee put it, *“The family is back at home. The other responsibilities back at home, so that you find that you have no option. But you have to travel back.”* (T, TR)

2.2 Merits of Turkish Education

Ugandan graduates from Turkish universities overwhelmingly viewed their experience positively and felt it provided significant advantages for their careers. The exposure to diverse people and cultures, as well as the professional connections made in Turkey, were seen as major benefits.

“So me, when I come back to Uganda, really, I've enjoyed. I've never got any challenge. Because I came back.” (N, TR)

[1] Türkiye was hit by a string of bombings between 2015 and 2019 that left many civilians and security personnel dead.

After returning to Uganda, the Turkish education credentials proved advantageous when applying for jobs. Graduates did not report facing challenges due to their Turkish degrees. In fact, some Ugandan schools and organizations have tried to emulate the environment and practices they experienced in Türkiye, seeing it as a model to aspire to.

Ugandan alumni often sought out opportunities to work with Turkish companies and organizations in Uganda after graduation. This was attributed to the cultural familiarity, language skills, and sense of kinship gained from studying in Türkiye. The Turkish education made them see Türkiye as a "second home" that opened doors to a network of support and employment prospects. The Turkish government's scholarship programs and welcoming policies for African students were also praised as enabling access to high-quality education.

The results suggest that a Turkish university degree is viewed as a valuable asset by Ugandan students and employers. The combination of academic training, cultural exposure, and professional connections gained in Türkiye provides graduates with a competitive advantage in Uganda's job market.

2.3 The Significance of Turkish Language Proficiency in Employment for Ugandan Alumni

For Ugandan alumni who have studied in Türkiye, proficiency in the Turkish language has proven to be a valuable asset in their employment endeavors. Alumni highlight how their knowledge of Turkish has directly contributed to their employability. They emphasize that being fluent in Turkish has opened doors to various job opportunities, particularly in sectors where Turkish companies operate. This proficiency allows them to communicate effectively with Turkish employers, colleagues, and clients, facilitating smoother business interactions.

Several alumni mention their employment with Turkish companies, emphasizing how their language skills played a crucial role in securing these positions. By being able to communicate in Turkish, they become more appealing candidates for roles within these companies, which often prefer bilingual employees due to the nature of their operations.

"I mean, when you come from it, from Turkey to Uganda, you are yearning for any opportunity, any available opportunity. In our communities, normally, we look for those Turkish friends, because we have this feeling Turkey is our second country, and those are our brothers, so we tend to run to them. That's why we give a first priority to Turkish firms, because we know their culture, we understand their language, and they can easily relate with us, especially if you communicate the same language." (L, TR)

A notable aspect of employment with Turkish companies is the versatility required in job roles. Alumni report that working with Turkish employers often entails diverse responsibilities beyond their initial job descriptions. This includes tasks such as translation, administrative duties, and technical work. While this may seem challenging, alumni acknowledge that it has broadened their skill sets and made them more adaptable in various work environments.

“Now, the relationship with my brothers from Turkey here is that even if they want you to work for them, there is no job description which is clear. There's no clear job description. If you are given a job for translation and you are moving with them, you have to be ready to do anything. Remember, you are... Your engagement terms are supposed to be on what? On translation. For example, even if you are in office, doing some official work or professional job or electrician, if you are mezun, a graduate from Turkey, and you happen to work for them, you have to be an all-round person.” (L, TR)

Proficiency in Turkish has also facilitated networking opportunities for alumni. They mention how being able to communicate in Turkish enables them to connect with Turkish expatriates and build relationships with individuals in influential positions. This network has proven beneficial in accessing job opportunities, gaining insights into industry trends, and fostering partnerships. Alumni who are fluent in Turkish have experienced enhanced career prospects, both locally and internationally. They emphasize that their language skills make them stand out in the job market and increase their competitiveness. With Türkiye's growing influence in various industries, including construction and engineering, proficiency in Turkish positions them as valuable assets for companies seeking to expand their operations or enter new markets.

Moreover, proficiency in Turkish has helped alumni break stereotypes and overcome biases. They note that being able to speak Turkish has challenged preconceived notions about their capabilities and qualifications. This has boosted their confidence and enabled them to assert their expertise in professional settings, regardless of their educational background.

2.4 Empowerment through Self-Employment: Insights from Ugandan Graduates Inspired by Turkey

A significant number of Ugandan graduates who have studied in Türkiye have been inspired to pursue self-employment rather than traditional employment. Graduates like interviewee (M, TR) have been inspired by their educational experiences in Türkiye to venture into self-employment. Encouraged by a friend to consider starting his own business, the alumnus made a conscious decision to become self-employed after completing his master's and PhD.

“But when I met one of my best friend, he is a PhD holder man. He told me, man, as we are attending this education, master and PhD, we don't attain it immediately after to go and the people to employ us. He said, it's better you yourself. Don't just get knowledge from here, just for a class knowledge. Get also knowledge of business and also being self-employed. So that thing entered in my mind. I said, me. Now I finished my master. I'm attaining my PhD. I agreed that I will not allow people to employ me, to give me a job. And that sticks in my mind. But I said, I have to finish my PhD to be a man. So I finished my PhD. And after finishing, as I've told you, that I'm a director” M, TR

He ventured into self-employment by establishing his own secondary school and has never sought traditional employment since then. Similarly, his brother, Dr. K Balonde, holds a high position as a deputy district leader but also runs his own businesses, including schools.

The alumnus and his brother, along with other graduates inspired by Türkiye, prioritize financial independence and the ability to help others through their self-employment ventures. They believe that being self-employed allows them to have a greater impact on their communities by providing financial assistance and opportunities to others.

Participation in conferences and seminars during their time in Türkiye has played a significant role in shaping their entrepreneurial mindset. These events exposed them to successful entrepreneurs who shared their experiences and insights, inspiring graduates pursue self-employment. The presentations by accomplished individuals demonstrated the possibilities of success through entrepreneurship.

Graduates from Türkiye have become ambassadors for self-employment in Uganda. Interviewee M, TR observes that many of his peers who studied in Turkey are now self-employed or actively pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. This shift reflects a growing trend among Ugandan graduates who are inspired to create their own opportunities rather than waiting for traditional employment.

2.5 Connections to Job Opportunities

The alumni also discuss the role of connections in securing job opportunities. (N, TR) for instance suggests that Turkish graduates have higher chances of employment in Turkish companies due to their background. She also highlights the importance of connections in securing employment in both Turkish and Ugandan companies, with a greater advantage for Turkish graduates in Turkish companies. Alumnus (L, TR) explains that Turkish graduates often prioritize

employment in Turkish firms due to a sense of belonging and familiarity. He emphasizes the importance of cultural connection and shared language in job preferences. He also mentions the role of the alumni association for Ugandan graduates in Türkiye in sharing job opportunities and providing support, indicating the significance of networking and associations in job connections.

Alumnus (L2, TR) shares his experience of being provided job opportunities by the SENA Foundation, which facilitated his trip to Türkiye. He highlights the importance of organizations in facilitating employment. He also underlines the significance of language skills in employment, stating that proficiency in the Turkish language facilitated communication and enhanced job opportunities.

“When we came back, Alhamdulillah, the organization, that SENA Foundation that took us to Turkey requested us to begin serving. So, they gave us jobs. Alhamdulillah, me being a teacher, I was given jobs. A job in the education department. Where I was responsible for supervising the schools and the children that we are being sponsored” (L2, TR)

In short, the alumni perceive their Turkish education as a valuable asset that has provided them with cultural exposure, community integration, and job opportunities. They also highlight the importance of connections, shared language, and cultural understanding in securing employment.

2.6 Gratitude for Turkish Education:

The Ugandan graduates expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to study in Türkiye and the support they received from the Turkish government and people. Interviewee (U, TR) stated he was "happy, and I'm grateful for the opportunity and the Turkish people and their government for supporting my master's education." Despite facing challenges upon returning to Uganda, such as the country recovering from COVID-19, the alumnus acknowledged the value of his Turkish education, saying "Overall. I would say that yeah, having a Master's degree from Turkey really contributed a lot to me attaining my first good job." The Turkish scholarship programs and welcoming policies for African students were praised for enabling access to high-quality education that significantly impacted the graduates' careers and personal growth.

2.7 Challenges and Comparison to Other Graduates

The language barrier was a major challenge for many students. Courses were taught in Turkish rather than English, making it difficult to fully understand the material and communicate effectively. As one alumnus noted, "The challenge, the first challenge was language. You know that country, our country, Turkey. By then, you couldn't get anyone speaking English." (L, TR)

While the Turkish language and experience opened up some job opportunities, especially with Turkish companies in their home countries, there were still challenges finding formal employment unrelated to Türkiye. As one alumnus explained, "*If you are given a job for translation and you are moving with them, you have to be ready to do anything. Remember, you are... Your engagement terms are supposed to be on what? On translation. For example, even if you are in office, doing some official work or professional job or electrician, if you are mezun, a graduate from Turkey, and you happen to work for them, you have to be an all-round person. You do everything.*" (L,TR).

Regarding academic credentials, the alumni reported that sometimes they face issues with having their Turkish degrees and transcripts recognized in the Ugandan job market, as they were in Turkish first and then English. As one student noted, "*The fact that the language. although transcripts and diplomas. It's it comes as Turkish, first, English second, and we are in an English best kind of society. Then it kind of distaps them at times you have to explain a few things on your transcripts.*" (U, TR)

Regarding employment, the high number of graduates in the country makes the job market very competitive, so Turkish graduates have to compete with local and other international graduates. As one student stated, "*So it is really difficult to suit in in the environment or to certain in the job market competition, including from graduates from other countries.*" (T, TR).

However, the graduates interviewed acknowledged that in Uganda, there isn't a significant difference between Turkish graduates and graduates from other major European or Western acquired education. However, they believe that Turkish graduates may have an edge when it comes to job opportunities, especially in Turkish companies operating in Uganda. Apart from Turkish firms, the graduates face similar challenges as those faced by other educated Ugandans. Graduates such as (T, TR) highlights the challenges faced by graduates in Uganda, emphasizing that competition is high, not only from other Ugandan graduates but also from graduates of other countries. She suggests that the real challenge lies in the Ugandan job market's competitiveness.

Graduate (U, TR) acknowledges that while there may be initial challenges due to the language of transcripts and diplomas, Turkish graduates are well-equipped with competitive skills and resilience. They compete favorably with graduates from other countries, demonstrating strong competence and persistence in the job market.

In short, Turkish graduates in Uganda face similar challenges to local and international graduates in the competitive job market. While there may be initial advantages in certain sectors, such as opportunities in Turkish companies, the overarching issue is the high competition and the need for graduates to demonstrate their skills and resilience in the workforce. Despite these challenges, Turkish graduates are seen as competitive and capable individuals who contribute positively to the Ugandan job market.

2.8 Recommendation 1, on Institutional Support

Turkish graduates find themselves facing a common challenge upon their return home - securing job opportunities. After years of studying abroad, these talented individuals are eager to leverage their skills and expertise in their homeland. However, the lack of a strong connection between alumni and job opportunities hinders their progress. Recognizing the importance of addressing this issue, the Turkish embassy in Uganda and the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association must work together to strengthen these connections and open doors to employment for Turkish graduates.

Alumnus (N, TR), a recent graduate, emphasizes the need for alumni to extend a helping hand to newcomers. She believes that the alumni network should be a valuable resource in providing job opportunities and support to those entering the workforce. This sentiment is echoed by (L, TR), who suggests that the embassy should empower the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association to enhance its capacity. By doing so, the association can approach firms in Uganda and offer valuable advice on how to handle the needs of Turkish graduates, including fair compensation.

Alumnus (U, TR) reminds us of the significant investment made by the Turkish government in these graduates. With this investment, he notes, Türkiye should not give up on the graduates. There should be an effort to assist opportunities to be more accessible, publication of their work, and increased exposure to different industries that can give them the boost they need. In the end, they can also significantly add value to Türkiye as an attractive and lucrative destination.

To address these concerns, several recommendations can be implemented to strengthen alumni connections for job opportunities:

- The Turkish embassy in Uganda should collaborate closely with the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association. By providing the association with the necessary support and resources, such as capacity-building initiatives, the embassy can empower the association to effectively assist Turkish graduates in finding job placements. Additionally, access to job databases and networks should be made available to facilitate connections between alumni and potential employers.
- Within the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association, a structured job placement program should be created. This program would serve as a platform to connect recent graduates with potential job opportunities. Job fairs, networking events, and mentorship programs should be organized to enhance the graduates' chances of finding suitable employment.
- In this digital age, it is essential to develop an online platform or database where Turkish alumni in Uganda can showcase their skills, experiences, and career interests. This platform would serve as a hub for both alumni and employers to connect and explore job opportunities. Through leveraging technology, the reach and accessibility of job opportunities can be expanded.
- The Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association should actively advocate for fair employment practices and better wages for Turkish graduates in Uganda. Through constructive dialogues with employers and relevant government bodies, the association can ensure that graduates are compensated appropriately for their skills and qualifications. By promoting fair employment practices, the association can create an environment that nurtures the growth and potential of Turkish graduates.
- To enhance the employability of Turkish graduates, the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association should offer training and skill development programs tailored to their needs. Workshops on CV writing, interview skills, and professional development can equip graduates with the necessary tools to navigate the job market successfully.
- To bridge the gap between academia and industry, the alumni association should forge partnerships with local businesses and industries. These partnerships can create opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and job placements for Turkish graduates. Through these collaborations, graduates can gain valuable hands-on experience, making them more competitive in the job market.

2.9 Recommendation 2, on Remuneration for Türkiye Graduates Working with Turkish Firms

The issue of remuneration for Turkish graduates employed in Uganda is a pressing concern that warrants immediate attention. These graduates often encounter challenges related to unclear job descriptions and low salaries in Turkish companies operating in Uganda. This not only affects their morale and well-being but also impacts their productivity and loyalty to their employers.

Alumnus (N, TR) a Turkish graduate, suggests that Turkish companies should at least pay their Ugandan employees the minimum wage of Turkey. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the significant wage disparity experienced when working for a Turkish company in Uganda compared to what she would earn in Turkey.

"If Turkish graduates, like us who graduated from Turkey, at least they should, I would, my suggestion, I would actually recommend the bosses at least to pay these guys, at least even if the minimum wage of Turkey." (N, TR)

Alumnus (L, TR) another graduate, highlights the lack of clear job descriptions and the issue of low remuneration as significant challenges. He notes that Turkish companies often pay their Ugandan employees, especially those who studied in Türkiye, very low wages, which he refers to as "peanuts". This, he says, has been a significant challenge for many.

To address these issues, several recommendations are proposed:

- Turkish companies should provide clear job descriptions to their employees, especially those who have graduated from Türkiye. Ambiguity in job roles can lead to frustration, decreased productivity, and a lack of motivation.
- Turkish companies should offer fair and competitive salaries to their Ugandan employees, reflecting their qualifications, skills, and contributions. It is recommended that Turkish graduates be paid at least the minimum wage of Türkiye or a salary commensurate with their qualifications and experience.
- Turkish companies should invest in the training and development of their Ugandan employees to enhance their skills and capabilities. This will not only benefit the employees but also contribute to the overall growth and success of the company.
- Turkish companies should foster a positive work environment that values and respects all employees, regardless of their nationality or educational background. This includes providing opportunities for career advancement, recognizing achievements, and ensuring a healthy work-life balance.

- Employers and employees should engage in open and constructive dialogue to address any issues or concerns related to job descriptions, salaries, or working conditions. This will help build trust and foster a collaborative working relationship.

2.10 Institutional Support Deficit for Employment Opportunities

A number of graduates interviewed such as (L2, TR), (N, TR), (M, TR), and (U, TR) reveal a concerning lack of institutional assistance for Turkish graduates seeking employment in Uganda.

The graduates expressed a lack of knowledge about any existing efforts or organizations, including the Turkish embassy, that provide support for these graduates in the Ugandan job market.

“the embassy, the office of the embassy, they could empower the association for Ugandans, the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association, so that it can have enough capacity. Because they have the database, but they don't have capacity. They don't have bargaining power. We need that bargaining power so that we can approach these firms, tax firms in Uganda. We advise them on how they could handle the Ugandans on the basic payments” (U, TR)

Although efforts through alumni associations do exist, they seem to be inadequate and inefficient. Additionally, alumnus (U, TR) also brings attention to the language barrier and the need to explain the Turkish transcripts and diplomas, which can pose challenges in the job market despite the graduates' competence.

Recommendations have been made to further address these issues:

- **Institutional Support:** Establish formal programs or initiatives, potentially through the Turkish embassy or other organizations, that specifically aim to assist Turkish graduates in finding employment opportunities in the Ugandan job market.
- **Career Guidance and Counselling:** Offer career guidance and counseling services to graduates, helping them to understand the job market and improve their job search strategies.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Provide networking opportunities where graduates can interact with potential employers and learn about various industries and job roles.
- **Collaboration with Industry:** Foster collaboration with industries to create internships and job placements for graduates, providing them with valuable experience and connections.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study of Ugandan graduates who pursued higher education in Türkiye and subsequently returned home provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impact of international education. Despite encountering challenges such as securing suitable employment and adapting to the evolving local environment, the overall sentiment among the returnees is one of gratitude and recognition of the value their Turkish education has brought to their lives. The key findings highlight that their education in Türkiye not only provided academic and professional advantages but also facilitated the development of a robust network and cross-cultural competencies. These benefits have been instrumental in enabling them to contribute significantly to their communities through the establishment of schools, charity organizations, and various business ventures. The positive societal contributions underscore the broader benefits of international education programs, extending beyond individual growth to foster community development and innovation. However, the study also illuminates areas needing improvement, particularly in the support structures available to graduates upon their return. The difficulties in finding employment aligned with their qualifications and the frustrations experienced with Turkish firms indicate a gap that could be addressed through enhanced career support and better integration mechanisms.

Recommendations:

- Enhance support from the Turkish embassy: The Turkish embassy in Uganda should collaborate closely with the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association. The embassy can empower the association to effectively assist Turkish graduates in finding job placements by providing the association with the necessary resources and support, especially in capacity building. Additionally, access to job databases and networks should be made available to facilitate connections between alumni and potential employers.
- Establish a job placement program: Within the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association, a structured job placement program should be created. This program would serve as a platform to connect recent graduates with potential job opportunities. Job fairs, networking events, and mentorship programs should be organized to enhance the graduates' chances of finding suitable employment.
- Utilize technology for networking: In this digital age, it is essential to develop an online platform or database where Turkish alumni in Uganda can showcase their skills, experiences, and career interests. This platform would serve as a hub for both alumni and employers to connect and explore job opportunities. Through leveraging technology, the reach and accessibility of job opportunities can be expanded.

- Advocate for Fair Employment Practices: The Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association should actively advocate for fair employment practices and better wages for Turkish graduates in Uganda. Through constructive dialogues with employers and relevant government bodies, the association can ensure that graduates are compensated appropriately for their skills and qualifications. By promoting fair employment practices, the association can create an environment that nurtures the growth and potential of Turkish graduates.
- Provide training and skill development: To enhance the employability of Turkish graduates, the Uganda Türkiye Alumni Association should offer training and skill development programs tailored to their needs. Workshops on CV writing, interview skills, and professional development can equip graduates with the necessary tools to navigate the job market successfully.
- Collaborate with industry: Foster collaboration with industries to create internships and job placements for graduates, providing them with valuable experience and connections. This will not only benefit the graduates but also contribute to the overall growth and success of the company.

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Appendix 1.
Interview's List

Date of interview	Interviewees	Gender	Degree(s) received in Türkiye	City of Studies
21-Jan-24	(T, TR)	F	Human Resources Management (Master's)	Konya
26-Jan-24	(L, TR)	M	Business Management (Master's)	Eskisehir
29-Jan-24	(N, TR)	F	Communications (Bachelor's)	Eskisehir
29-Jan-24	(M, TR)	M	Public Administration (PhD)	Istanbul
29-Jan-24	(N2,TR)	M	Economics (Master's)	Istanbul
29-Jan-24	(P, TR)	M	Electrical and Electronica Engineering (Bachelor's)	Eskisehir
20-April-24	U, TR	M	Food Engineering (Mater's)	Istanbul
20-April-24	M2	M	Agricultural Economics (Master's)	Ankara
20-April-24	L2, TR	M	Theology(Bachelor's)	Istanbul
20-April-24	B, TR	M	Civilization Studies	Istanbul



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