

# Investigating the External Impacts on Public Affairs Education in Türkiye: Getting a Ph.D. Degree Abroad

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**Abstract:** Examining the developmental rotation of public affairs education in Türkiye cannot be adequately undertaken solely through a single policy lens within the framework of national higher education and administrative reform policies. Instead, a more nuanced approach entails delving into the discipline's specific structural and contextual evolution through external impacts. This study focuses on a special type of external impact: faculty members receiving their Ph.D. degrees abroad. The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of obtaining a Ph.D. degree abroad on public affairs education in Türkiye and to reveal the enablers and barriers of this process by focusing on the experiences of those faculty members. Through the interviews conducted with 24 faculty members who received their Ph.D. degrees abroad and came back home, the findings suggest that such an external impact has the potential to be as effective as any other higher education policy. Yet, this process faces some internal barriers, tension points, and enabling factors.

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### **Türkiye'de Kamu Yönetimi Eğitimi Üzerindeki Dışsal Etkilerin İncelenmesi: Yurt Dışında Doktora Derecesi Almak**

**Öz:** Türkiye'de kamu yönetimi eğitiminin gelişim sürecinin incelenmesi, ulusal yükseköğretim ve idari reform politikaları çerçevesinde tek bir politika merceğinden yeterince ele alınamaz. Bunun yerine, daha detaylı bir yaklaşımla, dış etkiler aracılığıyla disiplinin kendine özgü yapısal ve bağlamsal evriminin derinlemesine incelenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu çalışma, özgün bir dış etki olarak, öğretim üyelerinin doktora derecelerini yurt dışında almalarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, öğretim üyelerinin yurt dışında doktora derecesi almış olmalarının Türkiye'deki kamu yönetimi eğitimi üzerinde etkisini araştırmak ve bu sürecin olanaklarını ve engellerini deneyimlere dayanarak ortaya çıkarmaktır. Yurtdışında doktora derecesini aldıktan sonra Türkiye'ye dönen 24 öğretim üyesiyle yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda elde edilen bulgular, bu tür dış etkilerin diğer ulusal yükseköğretim politikaları kadar etkili olabilme potansiyeline sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak, bu sürecin bazı içsel engelleri, gerilim noktaları ve kolaylaştırıcı faktörleri de bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kamu yönetimi eğitimi, Yükseköğretim, Lisansüstü öğrenciler, Öğretim üyeleri, Yurt dışında eğitim

## **Introduction**

As noted by Karkin and Gurses (2022), we all live in a dynamic yet turbulent world characterized by the high magnitude and volume of recent developments such as the pandemic, climate change, immigration, political instabilities, economic crises, and advancements in science and technology among others. This turbulence largely stems from the interplay of various dimensions, where a development in one realm can impact the others, mainly through advancements in information and communication technologies. Arguably, the past decade has witnessed a notable surge in these transformations, especially compared to those before the 2000s. Consequently, a pressing need has emerged within the public affairs field to comprehend, manage, and guide this phenomenon. It can be argued that this responsibility also falls upon public affairs scholars since they primarily engage in teaching, research, and advocacy activities related to politics, administration, and public policy while playing a crucial role in educating future government officials.

There are several methods for preparing public affairs scholars to address this dynamism in the public affairs domain. Among them, raising human capital by having them obtain graduate degrees abroad holds a vital place. It is frequently considered as an effective measure to address the shortages of skilled professionals to lead modernization, research, and innovation in the home country (Gribble, 2008; Knight and de Wit, 1995; Kuzhabekova et al., 2019). Developed countries in the western hemisphere, like the UK, the US, Canada, or continental European countries, present esteemed and established graduate education in

public affairs; thus, having graduate students study there and return home for employment after graduation could address this dynamism.

Türkiye, as a developing and Western-attuned country pursues this path for some time, particularly after the 90s. As of today, many Turkish-origin students have either completed their graduate education in a foreign country and come back to be employed as a faculty member in a national university or are still pursuing their PhD degrees abroad. Investigating the impact of these internationalization practices on public affairs education (PAE) in Türkiye and identifying the critical factors in this context is significant to improving higher education quality and policy making. However, little is known about how these scholars who study public affairs abroad at the graduate level influence higher education in Türkiye when they return and what factors affect their successful transition. Considering this, this study aims to investigate the impact of obtaining a Ph.D. abroad on public affairs education in Türkiye and to reveal the enablers and barriers by analyzing faculty members' experiences who have studied abroad and transitioned upon their return. More specifically, we aim to address the following research questions:

- a) How did public affairs scholars in Türkiye who earned their Ph.D. degrees abroad affect public affairs higher education in their home country?
- b) What were their observable impacts on the public affairs program design and content?
- c) What were the enablers and barriers they experienced during this transition process?

We pick Türkiye as a case study since it remains relatively underexplored in academic mobility research (Karakaş, 2020). Moreover, Türkiye's long administrative and statehood tradition, dating back to the Old Persian, Seljukian, and Ottoman periods, along with its geopolitical status, location, and EU membership candidacy, provide a fertile context for studying the impacts of getting a Ph.D. abroad on PAE.

The study aims to analyze this issue qualitatively using an interview methodology, which includes eight structured questions. These questions were directed to 24 public affairs scholars who earned their PhDs in public affairs fields abroad either through government scholarships or other sources of funding and are currently working in the departments related to public affairs (public administration, political science, or political science and public administration) at the universities in Türkiye. By undertaking this analysis, we aim to make a dual contribution to the existing literature: First, there is an immediate need to allocate more room for the studies of PAE from developing countries. Second, there is a niche in the extant literature concerning the external impacts on PAE through the prospective faculty members studying in Ph.D. programs abroad.

We have found that an external impact on the structural dimension (e.g., institutional leadership, curriculum design, organizational reforms) and functional dimension (e.g., the competencies to be gained, the definition and determination of the educational outcomes) of public affairs education is indeed possible and has been realized to some extent in many public affairs programs in Türkiye through the faculty fellows who got their Ph.D. degrees abroad.

This study consists of five sections. Following the introduction, we discuss the context for public affairs education in Türkiye, including a literature review on the characteristics and evolution of this area and its content. Next, the methodology section details our research procedures. The findings section presents an analysis of the interview results. Finally, we discuss the findings and conclude the paper.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **The Context and the Development of PAE in Türkiye**

In order to investigate the impact of getting a Ph.D. degree abroad as an external factor influencing PAE in Türkiye, we first need to contextualize the study within the broader framework of PAE in the country, highlighting the multidimensional nature of the development in this area. Rather than relying solely on national higher education policies, the study advocates for a nuanced approach considering PAE's structural and contextual evolution in Türkiye. By examining various facets of public affairs education, including organizational, institutional, and content-related aspects, the study aims to identify the interconnected potential changes resulting from the interaction between obtaining a Ph.D. abroad as an external factor and the internal dynamics within the field.

The most critical feature of PAE in Türkiye is its robust connection to the reforms' history during the state's development. Therefore, we should broaden our angle to encompass this aspect of PAE, which intersects with two overarching policy frameworks: administrative reform and higher education. In both cases, the continuous development process is expected to bring about various changes, including those related to organization, institutions, design, content, and purpose in public affairs education, which can be categorized within the structural (e.g., PAE's organizational and quantitative advancement) and functional (e.g., standardization, internationalization, targeted competencies, etc.) dimensions (Göçoğlu et al., 2024).

The distinct features of PAE related to administrative reform are highlighted by the challenges in the development of the nation since its inception in 1923, characterized by the dedicated efforts towards the administrative restructuring inherited from the previous regimes and continuing over almost a century with steadfast progress (Göçoğlu et al., 2019). The driving force behind the reform efforts, spanning from the central to local governments, surpasses all

demands to growing service needs (resulting from demographic changes such as population growth) and the accompanying expansion of the service capabilities. Moreover, the imperatives linked to modernization, technological advancements, and adopting paradigms emerging in economics, administration, and politics also support these initiatives (Aykaç et al., 2003). Therefore, as these reform initiatives shape the path for the nation's policy progress, PAE concurrently plays a role in nurturing individuals who will influence reforms through their decisions. Thus, PAE occupies a position within the education policy landscape of the country that is also closely intertwined with the administrative reform agendas.

The other political assertion finds its basis in the historical evolution of higher education in Türkiye, which has been dynamically shaped over more than half a century, particularly in tandem with the nation's developmental phases since its beginning. This evolution predominantly manifests in organizational structuring, administrative frameworks, and quantitative growth within higher education. Consequently, Türkiye's higher education advancement, within the purview of public policy, initially evolved through endeavors aimed at organizational standardization (Baskan, 2001), developmental expansion (Ergen and Çakıoğlu, 2018; Özoğlu et al., 2016), and student selection criteria (Çağatay, 1990) prior to the pivotal shift towards intentional development post-1960, marking the comprehensive national public policies across various sectors. These early efforts primarily constituted narrow and rudimentary reforms, mainly focusing on organizational facets such as system standardization in higher education (Eşme, 2014). After the 1970s, characterized by burgeoning population growth and significant rural-to-urban migration within Türkiye (Göçoğlu and Göksu, 2024), the quantitative expansion of higher education institutions witnessed an incremental acceleration (with a total of 9 universities established between 1923 and 1972, surging to 50 between 1972-1997) (Kılıç, 1999). The momentum gained further traction post-2000, evolving into an anointed "academic inflation" (Yalçıntaş and Akkaya, 2019). While the policies followed during these periods aimed at structural and quantitative enhancement within higher education, the current priority is shifting towards developing comprehensive policies that address the quality and substance of education, its functional aspects, and internationalization at the level of individual disciplines. This indicates a move away from a national-level approach to education policy towards a more nuanced and detailed consideration of each academic field's specific needs and characteristics.

The organizational facet of developing and advancing PAE policies in Türkiye is intricately intertwined with the overarching landscape of the nation's higher education policies. Consequently, the expansion of departments and programs in Türkiye holding designations such as public administration, political science, and public policy at the post-graduate level-collectively guided herein as Public Affairs (PA)-correlates with these delineated periods. In this circuit, the institutional groundwork for PAE in the country was laid with the establishment

of pivotal entities such as the School of Political Sciences (Mülkiye - Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University), after that reconstituted as the Ankara Faculty of Political Sciences during the early republican era, alongside the birth of the Public Administration Institute of Türkiye and the Middle East (TODAİE) and the Middle East Technical University (METU) in the 1950s (Öztop, 2021). Proportionate with the burgeoning university count during the post-1980 period, PA departments and programs commenced integration within numerous newly founded universities, specifically following the establishment of the Higher Education Council (YÖK) (Ömürgönülşen, 2010). Notably, during the 2000s, the ambit of public administration in the country experienced expansion, with a simultaneous rise in the number of local administration programs offering vocational education over a two-year period (Yücebaş and Arap, 2017).

Slightly different from its US, European, and international counterparts, departments of public affairs education in Türkiye are mainly named as a conglomeration of the disciplines of political science and/or public administration. Some separate departments are just named “political science” in one university or “public administration” in 22 universities. However, the primary preference appears to be naming them as the Department of “Political Science and Public Administration” (PSPA) through YÖK ATLAS, an online website where all the necessary information provided for undergraduate education in Türkiye is prepared and served by the Higher Education Council (HEC).

Public affairs education in the country is offered in 118 different universities, of which 22 are named “Department of Public Administration” and 96 are named “Department of Political Science and Public Administration.” Currently, two PA departments are within the foundation universities, while 20 PA departments were established within the state universities. Similarly, while the foundation universities found 20 PSPA departments, 76 were founded within the state universities.

The Higher Education Council (HEC), YÖK, in Turkish, is a roof organization responsible for designing and implementing higher education, which the public and foundation universities provide. As a constitutional mandate, although universities in Türkiye and the HEC itself are designed as academically, administratively, and financially autonomous public institutions that are not subordinate to the government’s organizational hierarchy, there are widespread contrary arguments, mainly affiliated with the HEC and extant practical implementations or reflections (Bugday Ince and Gounko, 2014).

Our discussions so far predominantly elucidate the burgeoning direction of PAE within the realm of administrative and higher education reforms in the country, underscoring its nascent integration as a subsidiary policy focus. However, in this study, looking beyond just how PAE is structured and measured and considering its content is also essential. Administrative changes and

educational goals shape this content, adding another layer to our understanding of PAE's role in policy. Hence, the subsequent section warrants an exploration of the evolving content landscape of PAE in Türkiye, extending further to innovative trends such as standardization, internationalization, meta-goals, and the identification and adoption of universal values. Despite their current limited implementation, these elements are encapsulated within the functional dimension, which will play a pivotal role in shaping the future development trajectory of PAE and the policy landscape of the nation.

## **Content Landscape of PAE in Türkiye**

The development direction of PAE in Türkiye (and also in the world) is influenced by the academy's dynamics and focuses on its functional dimension. The studies investigating this dimension address issues such as the purpose of educating students, the competencies to be gained, the definition and determination of the educational outcomes, and the functional contributions of program designs (Göçoğlu et al., 2024). The main observed and important common emphases in these studies on the functional development of PAE are capturing universal values such as ethics, human rights, democracy, gender equality (Göçoğlu and Demirkol, 2023; Krupa, 2021; Loots and Walker, 2015; Schultz, 2016; Woodring and Feeney, 2023) and external impacts such as cultural interactions and socialization (Hergüner, 2021a; Hergüner, 2021b).

On the structural dimension, some studies focus on external influences such as standardization and internationalization. Primary discussions in this field examine the impact of international trade, competitive free economy, immigration, and terrorism, which are strengthened by the influence of globalization and new right-wing policies, on the internationalization of PAE (Ryan, 1990). Studies addressing the standardization of PAE include NASPAA standards in different PAE fields (Ganapati and Reddick, 2016; Kim and Toepler, 2024; Calarusse and Raffel, 2007; Guy and Stilman, 2016), methodological standards (Garson, 2002) and the search for a common meta-goal (Göçoğlu et al., 2024) are forefront to this end. Interaction with other countries has also been one of the focal points of PAE in Türkiye since the tendency towards internationalization and standardization is also emphasized. For instance, in his comprehensive study, Mişçiöđlü (1988) examines the international dimension of PAE in the country through important milestones such as the interactions (and reports) with foreign and domestic experts who have an impact on the structuring of public administration, institutions (TODAİE and Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University) and their collaborations with universities abroad (Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University -New York University). More updated and supportive, Yıldız et al. (2011) reveal that domestic academics educated abroad are the dominant indicators of internationalization and public policy education in the country.

We should also highlight some signs of the steps taken towards the internationalization of PAE in Türkiye so that institutional policies also support the external impact in this direction. At this point, a vital scholarship program that is the manifestation of a policy that aims to support the country's academic experiences abroad and reflect them positively on domestic higher education is the overseas graduate education scholarship program (YLSY) carried out by the Ministry of National Education. Table 1 below shows the accessible descriptive data on the number of students sent abroad under this program between 2018-2022.

**Table 1.** The Descriptive Data on YLSY for the Years 2018-2022

<b>Student Status</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Receiving Domestic Language Education	352	708	842	945	161
Awaiting to Go	372	424	361	235	555
Receiving Language Education Abroad	216	334	316	95	54
Master	1176	1011	1116	1222	1023
PhD	1341	1460	1654	1872	2044
Post-PhD	13	13	11	31	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>3470</b>	<b>3950</b>	<b>4300</b>	<b>4400</b>	<b>3904</b>

*Source:* Generated by the authors from the reports (YLSY, 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022)

The most notable observation in Table 1 is the increasing number of PhDs over the years, who are the most likely candidates to make a new impact on the nation's higher education. Although this rise only gives us a clue about internationalization and external influences in the general higher education policy, it at least reflects a positive potential for PAE. It is impossible to provide concrete data regarding PAE since the reports do not contain information on a program-specific basis. Nevertheless, this sign is vital in terms of the interaction of academic dynamics with national policies within the framework of multi-facet policy, which we have frequently emphasized since the beginning of our study. On the other hand, State University of New York (SUNY) programs activated by universities in the country also support external impact on an international scale. In this context, we should underline that METU and Pamukkale University are currently included and accredited in SUNY programs, including Political Science and Public Administration.

Depending on the foreign policy adopted by the country, the PAE was mainly influenced by Europe until the 1950s, when foreign relations with America were strengthened. After the 1950s, Anglo-American influences were seen more (Eryılmaz, 2013: 101). At this point, we can assert that it manifests the indirect impact of policy interactions on PAE. On the other hand, Ömürgönülşen (2010: 131) emphasizes that the PAE program put forward by YÖK in 1982-1983 was primarily based on the one in the Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University. This points to more incremental policy-making for the future in the design of public affairs programs, which will increase rapidly after this period. More recent findings on this point (Onder & Brower, 2013) show that European influence is still significant in PAE in the country, especially in the dimension of the dominance of administrative law. The findings reveal that PAE in the country is compatible with American PAE in theory, research, and teaching (primarily due to the interaction of local academics with American universities and American-origin studies) but shows significant divergences in the theoretical framework. In support, Karkin and Gurses (2022) give clues that the traditionalist aspect of PAE in the country continues as a reflection of the domination of administrative law, underlying that PAE still represents the traditional dimensions of statehood. Yıldız et al. (2016) emphasize that European influence is currently more limited in Public Policy and E-Government education among the new PAE subfields. Especially in studies originating from Türkiye on Public Policy, it is highlighted that the Turkish approach is closer to the USA in terms of its orientation toward quantitative research and application (Yıldız et al., 2011: 358). It can be inferred that the tide of PAE in Türkiye between Europe and the USA continues today. However, these studies show that academic interactions rather than foreign relations policies play a more important role here. Therefore, to understand and analyze the recent development of PAE in Türkiye, it would be an accurate option to focus more on the effects arising from the self-dynamics of the academy rather than institutional policies.

To conclude, beyond the policy context evident with the history of administrative reforms, the impact of external factors arising from the dynamics of the academy on PAE in Türkiye is a field that is still open to exploration and contains a significant gap for future academic studies.

## **Methodology**

This study examines the influence of obtaining a Ph.D. abroad as an external factor affecting public affairs education in Türkiye. To assess this impact on public affairs education, identify observable changes in program design and content, and analyze the enablers and barriers encountered in the transformation process, we designed a qualitative study using the interview method. The sample and the other methodological procedures are described below.

## Sample and the Selection Procedure

The study population consisted of 108 faculty fellows who completed their public affairs PhD degrees abroad as of December 2021, being financially supported either through government scholarships in Türkiye or through any other sources of funding, and currently working in the academic departments related to public affairs (public administration, political science, and political science and public administration) at the state or foundation universities in Türkiye, excluding the universities established in Northern Cyprus. Before performing the field research, we first conducted a pilot study in December 2021 including ten faculty members. After getting feedback from the selected fellows through the pilot stage and revising the study design, we contacted all 108 faculty fellows by sending an e-mail containing the interview questions and all the necessary information enclosed in a research note in early January 2022. After one week, we sent a final reminder e-mail. Eventually, 24 faculty fellows agreed to participate in this study and sent back their responses to the interview questions by e-mail.

Table 2 below shows the characteristics of the respondents. Among twenty-four faculty members who volunteered to participate in the study, sixteen were men, and over half were currently employed in a public university in Turkey. In terms of their titles, the sample included one instructor, twelve assistant professors, five associate professors, and six full professors. %37 of the respondents had a tenure between 1 and 5 years, about 30% had been employed in their departments for 6 to 10 years, and over 30% had a tenure of more than 10 years. Most of them got their PhD degrees in the UK (37.5%), followed by the USA (29%), and Canada (12.5%). Almost half of them currently hold an administrative position in their universities.

**Table 2. Characteristics of the Respondents**

		N	%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	8	%33.3
	Male	16	%66.6
<b>Current University</b>	Public	16	%66.6
	Foundation	8	%33.3
<b>Title</b>	Instructor	1	%4.2
	Assistant professor	12	%50
	Associate professor	5	%20.8
	Professor	6	%25

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	Full professor		
<b>Tenure</b>	1-5 years	9	%37
	6-10 years	7	%29.2
	11-15 years	2	%8.3
	More than 15 years	6	%25
<b>Ph.D. Degree Location</b>	UK	9	%37.5
	USA	7	%29.1
	Canada	3	%12.5
	Belgium	1	%4.1
	France	2	%8.3
	Australia	1	%4.1
	Scotland	1	%4.1
<b>Administrative duty</b>	Yes	11	%45.8
	No	13	%54.2

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## **Measures and Methods**

The interview included eight structured questions directed to 24 public affairs scholars who earned their PhDs in public affairs fields abroad and are currently employed as faculty fellows in Türkiye, which are listed as follows:

“1 -What do you think are the main values and policies of the public affairs higher education programs abroad (undergraduate and graduate)?”

“2- What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the public affairs higher education programs abroad?”

“3- How would you compare public affairs higher education programs in Türkiye with their foreign counterparts?”

“4- In your opinion, how does obtaining a graduate education in public affairs fields abroad and then being employed in universities upon returning to Türkiye change the education in these fields? What kind and degree of contribution can it make?”

“5- Were you able to transfer any knowledge/practices to the public affairs higher education programs, which you learned about / experienced during your Ph.D. study abroad? Which knowledge/practices were you able to transfer?”

“6- What initiatives/suggestions have you made? (e.g., teaching methods used in classes, developing new courses, new research topics, opening new departments, committee work, interaction methods with students, etc.) Did you fail to implement any of these policies/practices/novelties that you aimed after you returned? Why?”

“7- What do you think are the main enablers of such initiatives to succeed?”

“8- What do you think are the main barriers of such initiatives to succeed?”

After receiving all of the questionnaires self-completed by the participants of the study, we manually analyzed the answers for each question by tabulating the common expressions/concepts/factors that emerged in the decoding process. In addition, for some questions, we also compared the respondents' answers regarding the type of university they are employed in (public vs. foundation), their tenure level, and locations of Ph.D. programs, where relevant. The findings for each question are presented in the following subsections, followed by a summary table at the end.

## **Findings**

### **Main Policies and Values of the Public Affairs Programs Abroad**

We first asked the participants about their observations concerning the main values and policies of the public affairs programs abroad. Respondents mostly indicated that the programs promoted diversity, equality, ethics, freedom of expression, and innovation as the main values and also aimed to develop the students' research skills, oral and written communication skills, as well as independent thinking, analytical thinking, and critical thinking abilities. According to the respondents, these objectives were realized by offering various assistantship positions to the students, funding for attending conferences, and employing novel and interactive teaching styles in class.

In addition, most faculty members stated that teaching various research methodologies was a major focus in many programs abroad to advance science. Remarkably, the programs in the USA and Canada were stated as emphasizing quantitative methods. Another essential characteristic of the programs was their interdisciplinary and practice/policy orientation, to address the newly emerging public affairs issues in theory development and practice. According to the respondents, this was accomplished by providing the students with a country-specific context besides the general background knowledge.

The respondents also highlighted some policies regarding the faculty in these programs, such as an emphasis on the academic publication process and the significance of obtaining a research grant, both of which, as the participants argue, also contribute to the quality of public affairs education abroad.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Public Affairs Education Programs Abroad**

The participants considered the less bureaucratic, more flexible nature of the programs abroad as one of the most significant advantages because this allowed the programs to make adjustments according to the arising needs. The faculty members having tenure for 1-5 years expressed this idea more frequently than the other respondents. In addition, the emphasis on the research methods, practice orientation of the programs, and the variety of the courses offered enhanced the outputs of the programs while attracting better prospective students to these programs, according to the respondents. This effect was also strengthened by the quality of the faculty members, who tend to be experts in their areas and sometimes employed as professionals.

Besides, utilizing novel and more interactive teaching techniques, such as case study analysis, flipped learning, and opportunities for academic development, such as research assistantship or financial support for students, enhanced their learning process and improved their research skills. Some faculty observed that being part of a research group significantly increases the research skills and experiences of the students in these programs as well.

Regarding the weaknesses of the programs abroad, some respondents claimed that the programs did not always welcome international students and their needs. Furthermore, some pointed out too much competitiveness in the assistantship opportunities and the profit-making motive of the programs as a weakness. A similar concern was raised about the faculty members' requirements to obtain research grants, which were considered to put excessive pressure on them. Interestingly, some participants also highlighted a deficiency in offering enough guidance for Turkish field studies to be conducted abroad.

### **Views about Public Affairs Education Programs in Türkiye, Compared to Similar Programs Abroad**

This study also evaluates how Turkish faculty members who got their Ph.D. degrees abroad perceive public affairs programs in Türkiye compared to former institutions. The expectation is that an influence might occur when the faculty members compare the two programs and feel that a better policy or practice works well in a program abroad and could be adapted to the program in Türkiye.

In answering the related question, most respondents identified several differences between the two groups of programs. One of the most frequently

stated observations was a more hierarchical relationship between the students and faculty members in Türkiye. In other words, the programs tend to be faculty-focused rather than student-focused. According to the study participants, the informal, mentoring type of relationship with the students, rather than a formal superior-subordinate relationship, adopted in the public affairs programs abroad was rarely seen in Turkish cases. A similar comment was made concerning supervising the graduate studies in Türkiye. Notably, the respondents employed in public universities in Türkiye argued that providing constructive criticisms in guiding student research, seeing the graduate students as colleagues, and collaborating with them as part of a research group were the common practices in many graduate programs abroad, unlike the case in their home institutions. This difference in attitudes has motivated many respondents to try transferring this policy when they returned to their home institutions.

In addition, most of the participants in public universities argued that public affairs programs in Turkey tend to operate in highly centralized institutions with less autonomy, less financial resources, less interdisciplinary orientation, less research-focused, and more teaching-focused. They are more traditional in teaching and research methods and lack specializations within the public affairs field. In addition, the faculty members' interdisciplinary collaboration is less practiced than their foreign parts. On the other hand, the respondents in foundation universities stated that their programs and institutional characteristics resemble more to their counterparts abroad in these respects.

### **The Potential Impact of Employing a Faculty in Türkiye Who Earned a Ph.D. Degree Abroad**

According to all the sampled Turkish faculty members who got their Ph.D. degrees abroad, this experience has several potential benefits for their home institutions. Overall, the respondents believe that the possibility of transforming their organizations' culture and developing their teaching and research capacity are the most significant potential benefits that could be gained. They argue that the positive transformation in the public affairs programs back home may take place through providing newer perspectives in teaching and research processes, including developing new courses or programs by these faculty members (e.g., area studies in public affairs), using and teaching various research methods, being a role model for the students, and providing guidance and international networking opportunities for their applications to programs abroad. In addition, some participants emphasized that these faculty members could contribute to quality management for the public affairs programs in their home institutions (e.g., through their participation in the accreditation process) and were also better equipped to offer solutions to practical problems in their institutions. Representing national universities abroad was additionally indicated as an advantage.

In terms of the potential benefits for the faculty members themselves, the respondents generally perceived that getting a Ph.D. degree abroad motivated them to follow the international literature, publish in international journals, learn about new research methods and/or areas, have higher effectiveness in teaching in English or any other foreign language, and collaborate with the faculty abroad. The respondents further emphasized that all these practices also contributed to designing their courses in an effective, innovative, and modernized way, and to provide better guidance for the research activities of their students in the public affairs programs.

### **Knowledge and Practices Transferred to Universities in Türkiye by the Faculty Members After Getting a Ph.D. Degree Abroad**

Appreciating the strengths and benefits of the public affairs higher education programs abroad, as reviewed above, the respondents generally stated that they attempted and were able to transfer some knowledge/practices to their home institutions. These transfers included three groups of changes/innovations: teaching, research, and relationships with the faculty and students.

In the teaching area, the respondents stated that they were able to transfer some of their experiences gained abroad by offering new courses in public affairs-related undergraduate and graduate programs, developing new undergraduate/graduate programs, and using novel and more interactive teaching methods that promoted discussion, critical thinking, and development of research and presentation skills of the students (e.g., flipped classroom, Socratic teaching, simulations; using online platforms, seminars, teamwork, research paper assignments, etc.). Some also mentioned using novel student evaluation methods.

In the research category, some participants could contribute to their programs by developing new research areas; using and teaching various research methods, and networking with faculty abroad.

In terms of the transfer of knowledge/practices regarding the faculty-to-student or faculty-to-faculty relationships, the participants indicated that they tried to have more interaction with their students in a mentoring type of relationship rather than a formal superior-subordinate relationship and tried to hold regular meetings with them or form a research group while providing constructive criticisms in guiding their research. In addition, some faculty members indicated they organized conferences, seminars, and social events as practiced in public affairs programs abroad.

### **Policies or Practices that could not be easily Transferred to the Universities in Türkiye**

Some of the faculty members indicated that although they attempted to transfer the above-mentioned policies or practices to their home institutions, they

occasionally failed to do so. For example, establishing a research group was not possible for one of the participants due to lack of student interest, and faculty workload. Similarly, some faculty highlighted the difficulties experienced in developing a new graduate program/interdisciplinary program. In addition, writing a thesis in English in a Turkish public affairs program, using novel, more interactive teaching techniques, or designing courses in the form of modules could not be realized in some cases. The following sub-section will analyze the reasons for these policy transfer failures.

### **Barriers to Knowledge/Practice Transfer from Abroad**

According to the participants, three interrelated barriers to policy transfer that are commonly experienced are centralization, bureaucracy, and resistance to change. They emphasize that especially in public universities, political pressures, legal restrictions, and lack of autonomy of the administrators hinder any initiative that the individual faculty members would propose. Sometimes, a lack of interest in academia and students also contributes to the failures in bringing about change. The faculty also argues that in highly institutionalized universities, the situation might be worse: they may be particularly slow in implementing such transformation attempts due to the incompatibility of their national/organizational cultures and the cultures of the universities abroad, as well as the differences in their structures.

Lack of financial resources, knowledge about the university's procedures, teaching workload of the faculty, and many administrative duties may also act as other barriers to innovation based on the faculty experiences gained abroad.

Contrary to the expectations, many faculty members also mentioned that they experienced prejudice, alienation, discrimination, or insult when they returned to their home institutions. One faculty explained that these kinds of negative experiences can be felt more when the characteristics of the faculty members in a department are more homogenous rather than heterogeneous.

According to the findings, these barriers to policy transfer are felt more often by faculty members with a lower tenure level and are employed in a public university than a foundation university. No gender differences are observed.

### **Enablers of Knowledge/Practice Transfer from Abroad**

Regarding the success factors of transferring policies/practices from public affairs education programs abroad, the participants emphasized that academic freedom and autonomy are the keys in the first place. In addition, realizing the merit system fully by treating the faculty who got a Ph.D. abroad equally with the others can be an effective strategy. Many of the faculty members argued that direct support from the upper-level university administration, particularly those with a Ph.D. abroad, can be critical because those in leadership positions in a university can encourage participative decision-making, openness to change, and

innovation from top to bottom. This opinion was shared especially by the participants with a lower level of tenure (1-5 years), who argued for more autonomy and power, a reduced administrative workload, and increased opportunities to serve in upper administrative positions or commissions. Another success factor was the interpersonal skills and network quality of the faculty members returning to their home institutions.

Participants also suggested that policy transfer must be institutionalized by creating formal and systematic mechanisms for it. For example, the faculty members who got a Ph.D. degree abroad can be employed in the “research universities” in Turkey and provided with some financial incentives to research public affairs areas. A summary of the findings is provided in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Summary of the Findings**

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<b>Main policies and values of the public affairs-related higher education programs abroad</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Promoting diversity (ethnicity, gender, disability, etc.) and equality in every aspect,</li><li>- Freedom of expression; academic freedom</li><li>- Merit system</li><li>- Emphasis on ethics</li><li>- Being student-centered;</li><li>- Aiming to improve students’ research skills, oral and written communication skills, and independent thinking through offering various assistantship positions, funding for attending conferences, and employing novel styles of teaching</li><li>- Promoting analytical thinking and critical thinking ability of the students</li><li>- Emphasis on various research methodologies (particularly quantitative techniques) and scientific principles;</li><li>- Interdisciplinary orientation</li><li>- Practice-orientation</li><li>- Program content is constantly updated to address the newly emerging issues of public affairs</li></ul>
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- Individual experience in obtaining a research fund
  - Focusing on the country-specific context besides providing the general background knowledge
  - Emphasis on the academic publication process and academic productivity
- 

**Strengths of the public affairs-related higher education programs abroad**

- Welcoming diversity
  - Less bureaucratic; more flexible
  - Variety of courses offered, including those specializing in research methods
  - Well-developed technical infrastructure
  - International faculty members
  - Professionals who are experts in their areas teach some of the courses
  - Designing courses as modules
  - Teaching evidence-based policymaking techniques practice orientation;
  - Teaching through case study analysis; employing various interactive teaching techniques; encouraging class discussions
  - More opportunities for academic development, research funding for students
  - Academic freedom, autonomy
  - Merit system
  - Allowing the students to become part of a research group
  - More systematic design of the programs and courses
- 

**Weaknesses/limitations/disadvantages of the**

- Commercialization
-

**public affairs related  
higher education  
programs abroad**

- Marketization; seeing students as customers
  - Inadequate number of courses or guidance offered related to public affairs studies about Turkey
  - Inadequate orientation for foreign students
  - High competition
  - Individualism
  - Prejudice against international students in some regions
  - Tenure pressure for faculty members
- 

**Views about public  
affairs-related higher  
education programs in  
Türkiye, compared to  
programs abroad**

- Highly centralized institutions
  - More hierarchical relationship between students and faculty
  - Too structured
  - Less interdisciplinary collaboration,
  - Less autonomy,
  - Less financial resources;
  - More faculty-centered, less student-centered,
  - More theory-oriented, less practice-oriented
  - Less research, more teaching
  - Lack of specializations within the public affairs field
  - Inadequate use of novel teaching techniques
  - Less emphasis on the quantitative methods
  - More course-oriented graduate programs rather than original research
- 

**Potential impacts of  
employing a faculty who  
gets a Ph.D. degree  
abroad in the public**

- Providing newer perspectives in teaching and research processes; using and teaching various research methods
-

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**affairs programs in  
Türkiye**

- Being a role model for the students; guiding their applications to programs abroad
- Initiating organizational culture transformation
- An increasing collaboration with faculty abroad; international networking opportunities for students
- Offering new courses to the curriculums in the home country or developing new programs (e.g., area studies in public affairs),
- Representing national universities abroad,
- Contributing to quality management in their home institutions (e.g. accreditation process)
- Following the international literature
- Publishing in international journals
- Higher effectiveness in teaching in English
- Offering better solutions to practical problems

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**Knowledge and  
practices that have been  
transferred to the  
universities in Türkiye  
by the faculty members  
having a Ph.D. degree  
abroad**

- Offering new courses in the public affairs-related undergraduate and graduate programs;
  - Developing new undergraduate/graduate programs
  - Developing new research areas in their programs; - Networking with faculty abroad;
  - Higher interaction with the students; holding regular meetings;
  - Mentoring type of relationship with the students, rather than a formal superior-subordinate relationship
  - Constructive criticisms in guiding student research
  - Using novel and more interactive teaching methods (e.g., flipped classroom, Socratic teaching, simulations; using online platforms,
-

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	seminars, teamwork, research paper assignments) and evaluation methods
	- Using and teaching a variety of research methods,
	- Organizing conferences, seminars, social events
<b>Policies or practices that could not be easily transferred to the universities in Türkiye</b>	- Establishing a research group
	- Developing a new graduate program/ interdisciplinary program
	- Writing a thesis in English
	- Using novel, more interactive teaching techniques
	- Designing courses in the form of modules
<b>Barriers to knowledge/practice transfer from abroad</b>	- Lack of interest in academia and students
	- Centralization and bureaucracy; resistance to change
	- Legal constraints
	- Differences in national /organizational cultures
	- Institutionalization
	- Homogenous nature of the faculty member characteristics in a department
	- Prejudice against the faculty with a Ph.D. degree abroad; and alienation, discrimination, or insult when they return to their home institutions.
	- Inexperience
	- Financial constraints (e.g., lack of adequate research grants or international conference support)
	- Political pressures
	- Teaching workload/ Having administrative duties

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**Enablers  
knowledge/practice  
transfer from abroad**

- of**
- Academic freedom
  - Merit system; treating the faculty who got a Ph.D. degree abroad equally with the others
  - Upper-level university administration directly supporting the faculty's initiatives;
  - Upper-level university administration holding a Ph.D. degree abroad
  - Giving faculty with a low level of tenure more autonomy and power and a reduced administrative workload
  - Providing increased opportunities to serve in upper administrative positions or commissions
  - Participative decision-making policy at the university;
  - Openness to change and innovation;
  - Employment in research universities in Turkey
  - Creating formal and systematic mechanisms of policy transfer
  - Interpersonal skills and network quality of the faculty members returning to their home institutions
  - Financial incentives for research

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## **Discussion and Conclusion**

As pointed out throughout the paper, we live in a dynamic, turbulent, and interconnected world in the personal, societal, and governmental way of life. The level and volume of changes and transformations are incredibly grand. We believe the need for educated academic fellows is conditionally getting important compared to the previous terms. Since public officials are educated through public affairs departments, influences over different institutions or programs concerning public affairs education are essential. There could be various ways of improving public affairs education, including investing in human capital. Türkiye, as a developing and emerging country, has been investing in this path since the foundation of the Turkish Republic as a legacy from the late Ottoman

period. The pace and volume of sending students abroad could be varied but never entirely stopped. By pursuing such a path in higher education, Türkiye aims to interact with the developed countries in the Western hemisphere by having more qualified employees educated by the developed nations.

We have found that an external impact on the structural dimension (e.g., institutional leadership, curriculum design, organizational reforms) and functional dimension (e.g., the competencies to be gained, the definition and determination of the educational outcomes) of public affairs education is indeed possible, and has been realized to some extent in many public affairs programs in Türkiye through the faculty fellows who got their Ph.D. degrees abroad. This is pretty compatible with the findings presented in the extant literature. For example, Crossly and Watson (2009) argue that the internationalization of higher education affects all educational programs, paying particular attention to the valuable role of comparative perspectives and international content. On the other hand, the results also suggest that such an impact usually takes place in a narrow scope, in the form of personalized initiatives regarding teaching and research, rather than having a broader impact. In a similar venue but on a different path, Colombo & Garcia (2022) assert the personal ties and proximity of graduate students to transform the interaction between university and industry, a fashionable term to refer to one of the drivers in Turkish academy these days. Similarly, Boh et al. (2016) also draw attention to the transformative capacity of graduate and post-graduate students in university-industry collaboration.

The findings also revealed that these faculty members experience essential barriers in their attempts to influence public affairs education, including centralization of the national education system, institutionalization, resistance to change, political pressures, legal restrictions, lack of autonomy, lack of interest in academia and students, cultural differences, lack of financial resources, and prejudice against the faculty members, etc. According to the findings, these barriers are felt more often by faculty members who have a lower tenure level and are employed in a public university than a foundation university.

Based on the study findings, we can argue that many universities in Türkiye need to provide more opportunities for their faculty members to transfer the knowledge and experiences they gained abroad. Creating more formal and institutionalized knowledge/experience transfer mechanisms may enhance this process, especially right after returning to their home institutions. Besides, direct support from the upper-level university administration can also encourage participative decision-making and appreciation of innovative ideas. Further studies, including more faculty members and top-level administrators of the universities, may reveal what kinds of actions can be taken to promote such positive impacts regarding public affairs education through the faculty members with a Ph.D. degree abroad.

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