Forging Diplomatic Bridges: Unveiling the Strength of Türkiye Scholarships in Shaping Indonesian Graduates’ Bond with Türkiye

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Abstract
This study explores the strategic implementation of public diplomacy by Turkey, focusing on the Turkish Scholarship Program’s impact on Indonesia’s government sector. Public diplomacy, a vital tool for shaping international public opinion and fostering mutual understanding, has gained unparalleled significance in the era of globalization. By leveraging institutions like the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), Turkey has effectively employed soft power to enhance its international standing. The Turkish Scholarship Program exemplifies this approach, offering educational opportunities to international students and thereby influencing future leaders’ perceptions of Turkey. This research addresses a crucial gap by examining the success of such scholarship programs and the perceptions of Indonesian alumni working in key bureaucratic positions. The findings underscore the program’s role in forging lasting connections and advancing Turkey’s diplomatic objectives. By evaluating the long-term effects of the Turkish Scholarship Program, this study highlights how Turkey’s commitment to educational support fosters enduring diplomatic ties, strengthens soft power, and enhances its global influence. The research offers valuable insights into the perceptions of scholarship recipients, their influence within Indonesia, and their potential as advocates for Turkey. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the significance of educational initiatives in public diplomacy, demonstrating how they contribute to the cultivation of meaningful, cross-border relationships and the promotion of national interests on the international stage.

Keywords: public diplomacy, soft power, scholarships, Indonesia, Türkiye

INTRODUCTION
Public diplomacy encompasses the strategic management of communication between nations and non-state actors, with the profound purpose of conveying targeted information and inspiration to foreign audiences through diverse channels (Melissen, 2005). Its overarching objective is to advance national interests by effectively engaging with the global public in an era dominated by interconnectedness and international integration. In the contemporary world, where effective communication and relationship-building are paramount among nations, public diplomacy has emerged as an indispensable and forceful instrument for elucidating foreign policies and shaping international public opinion. As globalization continues to shape our global landscape, public diplomacy has acquired unparalleled significance, enabling countries to actively promote their interests, amplify their impact, and exert influence in the realm of international relations. This dynamic approach entails proactive interaction with foreign audiences to project a country’s image, showcase its rich culture, uphold its values, and articulate its policies. Notably, public diplomacy has recently experienced a momentous surge, as countries strive to augment their soft power and cultivate constructive alliances with other nations, thereby fortifying their global standing (Guy, 2015; Snow & Taylor, 2009).

Public diplomacy serves as a potent expression of a nation’s soft power, focusing on the persuasion of foreign audiences rather than resorting to coercion, pressure, or threats. In the contemporary context, public diplomacy places paramount importance on fostering mutual understanding and facilitating reciprocal exchanges of information, all anchored in a nation’s influential soft power resources (Guy, 2015). Cultural diplomacy emerges as a pivotal instrument within the realm of public diplomacy, forging enduring connections through vibrant cultural interactions (Brighi & D’Arma, 2016). Furthermore, non-state diplomatic actors assume a pivotal role in public diplomacy, and the astute utilization of soft power becomes indispensable in attracting foreign publics (Luo, 2019).
Turkey has demonstrated a commendable implementation of public diplomacy, leveraging institutions like the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) to spearhead impactful public diplomacy endeavors benefiting Turks and associated communities residing overseas. A noteworthy initiative in this regard is the Turkish Scholarship Program, meticulously designed to nurture positive relations between Turkey and other nations through its unwavering support for the education of international students (Yıldırım & Albayrak, 2017). Scholarship programs, in essence, assume a pivotal role within public diplomacy, as they offer invaluable opportunities to shape the perceptions of future leaders and wield influence over their perceptions of the host country (Cho & Kim, 2017).

Achieving true success in public diplomacy through scholarship programs demands a steadfast, far-sighted approach, as the transformative effects on scholarship recipients may span well over a decade before they assume influential positions in their respective careers (Gienow-Hecht, 2017). Remarkably, the perceptions held by these scholarship recipients toward the country bestowing the award play a pivotal role in shaping the course of their future relations with that nation (Huang, 2018). Alas, despite the significance of this aspect, there exists a noticeable dearth of research encompassing the extent of triumph achieved by scholarship programs and the profound perceptions of graduate students toward the awarding country (Wang & Li, 2019).

This study delves into Turkish public diplomacy practices, examining the impact of the Turkish Scholarship Program and thoroughly assessing the role of its accomplished alumni within Indonesia's esteemed government sector. The purpose of this study is to examine Turkey's strategic use of public diplomacy through its Turkish Scholarship Program, focusing on its impact on Indonesian government officials. By evaluating the success of the scholarship program in shaping the perceptions and influence of its alumni, the study aims to understand how these educational initiatives foster long-term diplomatic ties and enhance Turkey's soft power. It addresses research gaps concerning the effectiveness of scholarship programs in public diplomacy and provides insights into how such initiatives contribute to meaningful, cross-border relationships and the promotion of national interests.

Emphatically wielding public diplomacy as a potent tool, Turkey has strategically employed this scholarship program to bolster its ties with Indonesia, nurturing relationships through the medium of cultural interactions and the unwavering tenets of soft power diplomacy. By pioneering this research endeavor, the study bridges the crucial research gap surrounding the successful outcomes of scholarship programs in the realm of public diplomacy, while simultaneously bestowing invaluable insights into the profound perceptions valued by esteemed scholarship recipients toward the awarding country. Such astute efforts to support the education of international students are a foundation for forging lasting connections that cross borders and cultivate a legacy of enduring diplomatic ties between Turkey and other nations.

METHOD

This research utilized qualitative methods, specifically a case study approach, to gather data. Qualitative research is a methodology that enables the thorough examination of individuals’ experiences using a specialised array of research techniques, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies (Hennink et al, 2020).

The process involved developing questions and procedures, collecting data in the participants' environment, analyzing the data through inductive reasoning, and identifying general themes. The study focused on six individuals who were Indonesian Turkish
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Turkey’s Public Diplomacy

   Turkey’s public diplomacy aims to promote its voice and vision to a wider audience across the world, overcome negative perceptions and stereotypes about the country, build a positive self-image, and reconnect with past Arab and Muslim societies across various regions, particularly the Middle East. Furthermore, Turkey seeks to establish itself as a model country and a significant regional and global actor. Today, where “image shaping reality,” Turkey must dispel prejudices and correct misperceptions about itself. The fashion industry’s emphasis on image serves as an analogy for countries and their public diplomacy, as Turkey must change its negative image and misconceptions (Kalın, 2011). The significance of public diplomacy has become increasingly recognized globally, as traditional diplomacy is no longer sufficient, and soft power has become more important. As a result, every government requires public diplomacy activities to succeed (Akçadağ, 2009).

   The credibility and efficacy of a country’s policies determine the effectiveness of its public diplomacy, as soft power plays a significant role in shaping a country’s international reputation. Soft power is rooted in the idea of "value-based” power and refers to how attractive a country is and how much it deserves to be looked up to by others. The legitimacy of a country’s soft power is characterized by others' recognition of its policies. Soft power encompasses a variety of sources, including culture, education, the arts, media, tourism, economic cooperation, and diplomacy, and is a product of their combination, providing insight into a country's cultural diversity and social capital (Keene, 2018; Melissen, 2019).

   Turkey has emerged as a prominent player in global forums like the G-20, NATO, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, among others. Recent developments in Turkey’s domestic and foreign affairs have led to a fascinating narrative that showcases the country’s diverse and multi-faceted character. As Turkey continues to grow as a regional power and global actor, it is crucial to effectively communicate its dynamism and development to national and foreign audiences. This is especially important since public opinion plays a significant role in shaping global politics and decision-making processes. Therefore, countries, multinational organizations, NGOs, and other institutions must understand and effectively use public diplomacy to achieve their goals. The strategic communication and public diplomacy efforts of Turkey play a pivotal role in safeguarding its long-term national interests, enhancing regional effectiveness, and fulfilling international obligations. Therefore, prioritizing Turkey’s public diplomacy becomes an imperative strategic endeavor.

2. Turkish Scholarship Program (Türkiye Bursları Programı)

   Türkiye Scholarships stands out as a distinctive scholarship program that not only offers financial aid but also ensures students’ admission into their desired academic programs. This sets it apart from other scholarship programs worldwide. The program’s mission goes beyond providing a university education; it also aims to enrich students’
experience in Turkey through social, cultural, and academic extracurricular activities. Over the years, there has been a remarkable surge in the number of applicants, escalating from approximately 40,000 in 2012 to around 150,000 in 2019. The application process, available in eight languages through an online platform, evaluates candidates based on their academic achievements, extracurricular involvements, and other professional qualifications. Türkiye Scholarships covers a wide range of long-term programs, encompassing undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and includes benefits such as university admission, dormitory accommodation, tuition fees, monthly stipends, and Turkish language courses. Short-term scholarships may offer a subset of these benefits, depending on the specific program.

In the year 2020, the Türkiye Scholarship program granted long-term scholarships to 1,757 students pursuing undergraduate degrees, 832 students pursuing master's degrees, and 492 students pursuing Ph.D. degrees. In terms of other scholarship categories, the Research Scholarship received 27 applications out of 187, while the Success Scholarship received 194 applications out of 1,030. Moreover, 25 students were awarded short-term scholarships for language courses, 253 for undergraduate studies, 37 for Ph.D. programs, and 27 for various other study programs.

The Türkiye Scholarship program prioritizes the development of the students' skills and abilities to contribute to their country's progress. The program focuses on local needs in fields that can help students acquire the skills necessary for the development of their own country. During the country planning preparations, the program carefully considers various factors, such as the candidates' vision as scholarship recipients and their potential impact on their home country. The program also values the contribution that students can make to the relationship between their country and Turkey, making it a crucial consideration in the selection process (Türkiye Burslari Annual Report, 2020).

3. Effects of Turkish Scholarship Program on Turkey's Soft Power

Offering scholarships to international students is a common practice for many countries to enhance their soft power and improve their international reputation. By attracting international students to study in their universities, countries can showcase their academic excellence, cultural diversity, and openness to the world. This can create positive impressions of the country among the international community and help build long-term relationships with foreign countries and their citizens. Turkey's scholarship programs for international students are a good example of public diplomacy practices aimed at enhancing the country's soft power.

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During the "Turkey Talks" program, part of the "International Student Academy" initiative by YTB, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, highlighted the significant level of enthusiasm in choosing Turkey as a destination for studying. He expressed that,

"We hope for an increase in the number of students who come to Turkey in the upcoming years (15/5/2019, ytb.gov.tr)."

Moreover, he said that Turkey had demonstrated its soft power to the entire world through YTB, noting that soft power is at work with all of its elements in Turkey's foreign policy.

“Today, foreign policy areas have expanded so much that our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and parliament members cannot reach all. Today our soft powers are at work with all of its elements in our foreign policy. And YTB is the leading one. We are showing the soft power of Turkey to the entire world through YTB (15/5/2019, ytb.gov.tr)".

Foreign Minister M. Çavuşoğlu has expressed that diplomacy has evolved and foreign ministries alone are no longer sufficient for effective diplomacy. Turkey has been making diplomatic efforts through various institutions in different areas, with soft power elements being operated by other institutions, such as the YTB scholarship program which has become the most successful program.

Recent research has underscored the significance of soft power in diplomacy, which involves leveraging cultural and ideological resources to influence the behavior of other nations (Nye, 2019). It has been observed that countries with greater soft power are more successful in achieving their diplomatic objectives (Hassan & Yasin, 2021). Additionally, think tanks have gained increasing importance in shaping foreign policy and public diplomacy (Tiezzi, 2021).

Public diplomacy entails utilizing public relations tactics to cultivate strategic relationships between organizations and international audiences (Grunig, 1993). It involves coordinated efforts by companies, institutions, or governments to establish mutually beneficial connections with public in other countries (Wilcox et al, 1992). Public diplomacy practices are transforming the traditional concept of diplomacy, as they aim to influence and persuade foreign publics to adopt specific policies. In today's interconnected world, states have a broader platform for engagement than traditional diplomacy, making public diplomacy a key application in foreign policies. Governments, political parties, and multinational corporations all employ public relations strategies to influence foreign publics. The expansion of international media, the internet, social media, global business, and global politics has further emphasized the importance of public diplomacy and international public relations (Mellisen, 2019). These practices are often seen as policies based on soft power, seeking to win the support and goodwill of the foreign public (Nye, 2021), Golan (2015) suggests that public diplomacy is a subset of political public relations, with the government as the primary organization and the foreign public as the primary audience.

The Turkey Scholarships program offers comprehensive financial support to highly qualified international students pursuing higher education in Turkey, enhancing their career prospects and making them valuable assets to the countries that sponsor their studies (Gopal,
2016). Graduates of the program are also likely to become influential opinion leaders or social agents in their home countries, serving as a bridge between Turkey and their respective nations (Scott-Smith, 2008; Snow, 2020). Consequently, Turkey views the recipients of its scholarship program as strategic investments in soft power.

As part of its public diplomacy strategy, Turkey regards its international student graduates as potential ambassadors who can effectively represent Turkey in foreign countries. Abdullah Eren, the President of YTB, considers scholarship recipients as an integral part of Turkey's public diplomacy endeavors (ytb.gov.tr).

"Turkey has a highly valuable standing and a powerful vision that it takes in the international arena. You, our volunteer ambassadors, will talk about this vision of Turkey when you return to your country. It is quite important that this vision is conveyed directly by you (15/5/2019)."

Turkey has specifically targeted Indonesia for its scholarship program due to several factors. Firstly, Indonesia is a large country with significant economic potential and a substantial population, making it an attractive candidate. The shared Muslim population between the two nations and Turkey's perception of Indonesia as a prominent player in global politics and economy further enhance its appeal for the scholarship program (Tempo.co, 2021). Indonesia's membership in the G20, along with its strong political and economic standing, adds to its desirability as a destination for Turkish students (G20.org., n.d.).

According to records from the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) until 2019, more than 500 Indonesian Turkish Scholarship recipients have graduated and secured employment in various fields such as politics, government, academia, and business. This study specifically focuses on alumni working in the Indonesian government sector, including ministries, banks, institutions, and universities. As these alumni now serve in key positions within the Indonesian government, they represent a valuable asset and a significant soft power investment for Turkey. Musa Budak, the YTB Coordinator, echoed this sentiment (YTB).

"Yes, of course, the public or government sector is an important area in developing relationships between Turkey and Indonesia. They will act as a locomotive in the development of this relationship. The bureaucrats are more important. We want them to have an important part or role in their country (Interview, 29/09/22)."

Indonesian bureaucrats are tasked with serving the state and working towards the government's objectives and programs, as outlined in Indonesia's highest constitution, UUD RI 1945 no. 43 Tahun 1999. In accordance with this provision, Indonesian civil servants are obligated to uphold Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and demonstrate their commitment to the state and government while carrying out their responsibilities in government and developmental endeavors (Shelviana, 2015). They also have the authority to make decisions, policies, and laws related to their respective sectors. Therefore, the presence of Turkish alumni working in the Indonesian government sector provides an opportunity for Turkey to promote their values, interests, and messages through them. This was confirmed by Musa Budak, YTB Coordinator,
"Our students are very valuable and important to us. After they get an education in Turkey, they will go back to their country. We see them as our ambassador, Turkey's ambassador. This ambassador is not only working in one or two-sector, but they will also work in several sectors, such as politics, economy, society, culture, and between public. Our graduates on the connection between these publics (Interview, 29/09/22)."

Turkey regards international students who participate in the Turkish Scholarships Program and engage with YTB as representatives or agents. These exceptional students are more likely to succeed in their future careers than their peers, making them a valuable soft power investment for Turkey. Soft power can have both immediate and long-term effects, and the benefits of the scholarship program are mostly seen over the long term. In an interview, the soft power of Turkey was evident in the responses of the participants, who expressed a strong affinity towards Turkey and a special inclination towards the country in all circumstances. One respondent even mentioned that,

"Yes, of course, I will choose Turkey. Currently, there are several projects in the ministry that are in collaboration with Turkey. One of them is to make a floating power plant on the ship. This is to provide electricity in several secluded areas in Indonesia. We already know Turkish people and how they work."

Soft power refers to a method of building influence over time through mutual communication and interaction, rather than through immediate policy outcomes. This is why the relationship-building aspect of public diplomacy, particularly among non-governmental actors, is the most important and mutually beneficial dimension (Leonard, 2002).

Scholarship activities are an example of a people-oriented move, particularly through students, that can contribute to relationship-building and, in turn, increase a country's soft power. The social interaction between students and the countries that provide scholarship support shapes the long-term outcomes of the activity and reflects the identities and perspectives of those countries on the global stage. These identities and interests are closely intertwined, with identities serving as the basis for interests (Wendt, 1992).

Therefore, scholarship activities can be viewed as part of a country's political goals and international interests, with the aim of conveying their values and ideas to the rest of the world through international students and increasing their soft power in the international arena. This is particularly important given the increasing importance of soft power in international relations.

Since 2019, several studies have highlighted the importance of soft power and public diplomacy in international relations. For example, Haider and Malik (2019) argue that soft power can be used as a tool for conflict resolution and building international partnerships. Similarly, Olimat (2020) suggests that soft power can be used to promote democratic values and increase a country's global influence.

Other studies have focused specifically on the role of scholarship programs in increasing soft power. For instance, Liu and Wei (2019) highlight the impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative scholarship programs on its soft power in participating countries. Similarly, Toma & Boros (2020) examine the impact of the Erasmus+ program on the European Union's soft power.

In addition to scholarship programs, cultural diplomacy has also been recognized as an important tool for building soft power. For example, Kim and Lee (2019) suggest that the
Korean Wave, or Hallyu, has contributed significantly to South Korea's soft power in East Asia.

Effectively managing a scholarship program can wield remarkable and enduring soft power influence. When students study in a country as scholarship recipients, they often develop a sense of gratitude and affinity towards the government that provided the scholarship. Such sentiments were clearly expressed by interviewees from diverse career backgrounds, underscoring the far-reaching and lasting effects of scholarship initiatives on soft power. The overarching objective is to ensure that international students depart with a positive impression, thereby contributing to the program's medium to long-term outcomes. Nonetheless, the intricate and prolonged nature of scholarship programs poses challenges in their evaluation.

Moreover, the Turkish Scholarships program has fostered a shared identity among its international students as proud “Turkish graduates.” The program strategically employs various activities to maintain the enduring bond between its graduates and Turkey, generating sustained impacts. High-ranking officials, including the Turkish President and Foreign Minister, have openly acknowledged the program's exceptional capability to project Turkey's soft power to the global stage, with the President lauding international students as esteemed ambassadors for Turkey.

CONCLUSIONS

Indonesian bureaucrats hold vital positions across diverse sectors, enabling them to shape decisions, policies, and laws. In this context, Turkey has a golden opportunity to disseminate its message, values, and interests to Indonesia through its esteemed alumni. Recipients of Turkish scholarships, having embraced Turkey's values and political principles, are poised to share them with their colleagues and peers in Indonesia. These alumni are potential advocates of Turkey, driven by their Turkish education and experiences to strengthen the bond between the two nations. The Turkish Scholarship Program has significantly bolstered Turkey's soft power, and its impact is expected to grow as Turkey expands its efforts for current and prospective international students.

This study highlights the significant role that educational scholarship programs can play in enhancing a nation's soft power and diplomatic influence. The Turkish Scholarship Program has facilitated academic and cultural exchange and created a network of alumni who serve as cultural ambassadors for Turkey. To maximize this potential, it is recommended that Turkey continue to invest in and expand its scholarship programs, particularly targeting strategically important countries like Indonesia. Additionally, Turkey should establish robust alumni networks and support systems to maintain strong connections with graduates, encouraging ongoing engagement and collaboration. This approach will ensure that the positive perceptions and experiences of alumni translate into enduring diplomatic and cultural ties, further amplifying Turkey's influence and soft power on the global stage.

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