

Challenges Faced by Iranian Students and Graduates Seeking Education and Employment Abroad: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

This article explores the multifaceted challenges faced by Iranian students and graduates who seek education and employment in third countries. It delves into three major issues: (1) the barriers created by local labor laws that hinder fair competition for foreign candidates, (2) the lack of entrepreneurial skills among Iranian graduates, and (3) the psychological pressures leading to mental health issues and family breakdowns. The findings reveal significant obstacles that impede the successful integration and career advancement of Iranian professionals abroad, offering insights into possible solutions and support mechanisms to address these challenges effectively.

Introduction

In July 2024, the tragic case of an Iranian couple's murder-suicide in Canada (Tabnak News Agency, 2024) highlighted the critical issue of mental stability among Iranian graduates during the immigration process and their struggle for equal rights, financial security, and psychological well-being outside their homeland. The pursuit of higher education and career opportunities abroad has become increasingly popular among Iranian students and graduates, driven by the desire for better educational standards, advanced research facilities, and enhanced career prospects (OECD, 2020;

UNESCO, 2021). However, this journey is fraught with numerous challenges that can hinder their success and well-being. This study aims to comprehensively analyze these challenges to provide a deeper understanding and propose potential solutions for overcoming them.

The prevalence of psychological disorders among Iranian expatriates is a significant concern and several strategies has to be investigated to resolve the matter (Davoudpour, A. R. 2024). The pressures of adapting to a new culture, facing stringent labor laws, and dealing with financial insecurities can severely impact mental health (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). The increasing incidents of mental health crises among Iranian immigrants underscore the urgency of addressing these issues comprehensively. Such concerns not only threaten the society but also endanger the generations of decision makers and law enforces (Davoudpour, A. R., 2024)

Previous studies have shown that immigrants often face higher levels of stress and mental health issues compared to the local population (Berry, 1997; Levecque et al., 2017). The lack of support systems and the feeling of alienation can exacerbate these problems, leading to severe consequences such as family breakdowns and, in extreme cases, incidents like the one reported in Canada. This study delves into the specific challenges faced by Iranian students and graduates, focusing on three major issues: the barriers created by local labor laws that hinder fair competition for foreign candidates, the lack of entrepreneurial skills among Iranian graduates, and the psychological pressures leading to mental health issues and family breakdowns.

By exploring these challenges, the study aims to shed light on the systemic and personal barriers that Iranian graduates face and to propose actionable solutions that can help mitigate these challenges. The findings of this research are intended to inform policymakers, educational institutions, and support organizations about the necessary interventions to improve the integration and well-being of Iranian graduates abroad.

Unequal Competition in Job Markets

Local Labor Laws and Employment Opportunities

Foreign students and graduates often encounter significant barriers in the job markets of host countries due to stringent local labor laws and employment regulations. These regulations are designed to protect local workers and ensure that job opportunities are available to citizens before considering foreign nationals. Consequently, Iranian graduates frequently find themselves at a disadvantage, struggling to secure positions even when they have the requisite qualifications and skills.

Regulatory Challenges

For instance, in many European countries, the labor market regulations mandate that employers must conduct a labor market test to demonstrate that no suitable local candidate is available for the position before hiring a non-EU national (Eurofound, 2020). This process is both time-consuming and costly, deterring many employers from considering international candidates. The stringent requirements often lead to a situation where Iranian graduates are overlooked, despite their qualifications and potential contributions to the workforce.

Case Study: Germany

Germany's employment policies serve as a significant example of these challenges. The Federal Employment Agency requires employers to prove that they have exhausted all avenues to find a suitable candidate within the EU before they can hire a non-EU national. This "labor market test" is a substantial barrier, making it exceedingly difficult for Iranian graduates to find employment in their fields of study (Federal Employment Agency, 2021). Additionally, the bureaucratic hurdles associated with obtaining work visas and permits further complicate the job search process, leaving many Iranian graduates in a state of limbo, unable to secure stable employment.

Discrimination and Bias in Recruitment

Cultural and Educational Discrepancies

Another significant barrier is the cultural and educational disparity between Iranian graduates and their local counterparts. Many employers in host countries may have preconceived notions about the quality of education in Iran or may not be familiar with the Iranian educational system's standards and curricula. This lack of familiarity often leads to unconscious bias, where employers may undervalue the qualifications and experience of Iranian graduates (Said, 2019).

Social and Networking Challenges

Furthermore, networking plays a crucial role in securing employment opportunities in many countries. Iranian graduates often struggle to build professional networks in their host countries due to language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to local professional communities (Nawaz, 2018). This lack of networking opportunities can significantly hinder their ability to access job openings and professional development resources, further entrenching their disadvantage in the job market.

Lack of Entrepreneurial Skills

Educational System and Market Familiarity

The Iranian educational system, while strong in theoretical knowledge, often falls short in equipping students with practical skills and entrepreneurial acumen. This gap in practical education and market familiarity leaves many graduates ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of competitive job markets abroad. The emphasis on rote learning and memorization over critical thinking and problem-solving skills limits their ability to innovate and adapt to new challenges (Amiri, 2020).

Entrepreneurship Education

Integrating entrepreneurship education into the Iranian curriculum could significantly enhance the employability and innovation

potential of Iranian graduates. Programs that focus on practical business skills, such as market analysis, business planning, and financial management, can provide students with the tools they need to create and sustain their ventures. Studies have shown that entrepreneurship education can foster a culture of innovation and self-reliance, empowering graduates to contribute to the economy and society effectively (Liñán & Chen, 2009).

Case Studies in Entrepreneurship

Global Best Practices

Countries like Israel and the United States have successfully integrated entrepreneurship into their educational systems, producing a generation of innovative thinkers and business leaders. For instance, the Israeli education system includes programs that promote creativity, critical thinking, and practical business skills from an early age (Gimeno, 2014). Similarly, American universities often have dedicated entrepreneurship centers that provide students with mentorship, funding opportunities, and incubator spaces to develop their business ideas (Kuratko, 2005).

Recommendations for Iran

To emulate these best practices, Iran could consider establishing entrepreneurship hubs within universities, offering workshops, mentorship programs, and seed funding for student startups. Additionally, fostering partnerships with global entrepreneurship networks and institutions could provide Iranian students with valuable exposure to international markets and business practices (Fayolle, 2013).

Psychological Pressures

Mental Health Issues

The psychological toll of living and working abroad is a significant concern for Iranian graduates. The stress associated with adapting to a new culture, overcoming language barriers, and navigating complex immigration processes can lead to severe mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and psychosis (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). The isolation and sense of alienation in a foreign

environment can exacerbate these mental health challenges, making it crucial to address them proactively.

Stress Factors

Several factors contribute to the mental health challenges faced by Iranian graduates abroad. These include the fear of failure, uncertainty about their future, and the pressure to succeed in a new and often hostile environment. The lack of a supportive social network and cultural isolation further intensify these pressures, increasing the risk of mental health disorders (Smith, 2014).

Family Dynamics and Breakdown

Impact on Family Relationships

The stresses of living abroad also extend to family dynamics, often leading to significant strain and, in some cases, family breakdowns. The challenges of securing employment, maintaining financial stability, and dealing with the bureaucratic hurdles of residency and work permits can place immense pressure on individuals and their families. This pressure can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and, in severe cases, the breakdown of family relationships (Sluzki, 1979).

Case Study: Iranian Families in the Diaspora

Research has shown that Iranian families in the diaspora often experience unique challenges related to cultural adaptation and identity. The generational gap between parents and children, differences in cultural norms, and the struggle to maintain cultural heritage while integrating into a new society can create significant tensions within families (Amini, 2006). These challenges highlight the need for support systems that address the psychological and social needs of both individuals and families.

Solutions and Recommendations

Policy Interventions

Host Country Policies

To address the challenges faced by Iranian graduates, host countries should consider revising their labor laws to facilitate fair competition for foreign nationals. This could include streamlining the labor market test process, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace (ILO, 2020). Additionally, host countries could implement policies that encourage the hiring of international graduates, such as tax incentives for employers who hire foreign nationals and support for integration programs.

Iranian Government Initiatives

The Iranian government could play a crucial role in supporting its citizens abroad by establishing consular services that provide guidance on legal, financial, and psychological issues. Moreover, creating networks of alumni and professional associations abroad could help Iranian graduates build connections, access job opportunities, and receive mentorship and support (Ghazanfari, 2017).

Educational Reforms

Curriculum Enhancement

Revamping the Iranian educational system to include practical skills and entrepreneurship training is essential. Universities should collaborate with industry leaders to design curricula that bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world applications. Additionally, fostering partnerships with international educational institutions could provide Iranian students with exposure to global best practices and diverse perspectives (Morris, 2013).

Global Networking Opportunities

Encouraging Iranian students to participate in international exchange programs, internships, and research projects can enhance their global outlook and professional skills. Institutions could also establish partnerships with foreign universities and research centers to facilitate student exchange and collaborative research opportunities (Wadhwa et al., 2007).

Mental Health Support

Counseling and Support Services

Developing comprehensive mental health support services for Iranian graduates abroad is crucial. This could include providing access to counseling, support groups, and mental health workshops tailored to the needs of expatriates. Additionally, creating online platforms for peer support and mental health resources can help individuals connect with others facing similar challenges (Vega et al., 2017).

Family Support Programs

Implementing family support programs that address the unique challenges faced by Iranian families in the diaspora can help mitigate the strain on family relationships. These programs could offer counseling, family therapy, and community-building activities to strengthen family bonds and support healthy family dynamics (Mojtabai, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Iranian students and graduates face multifaceted challenges when seeking education and employment abroad. These challenges include unequal competition in job markets due to local labor laws, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, and significant psychological pressures that can lead to mental health issues and family breakdowns. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving policy reforms, educational enhancements, and robust support systems for mental health and family well-being for Iranian residents abroad. By implementing these solutions, both host countries and Iran can create an environment that supports the successful integration and flourishing of Iranian graduates abroad.

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