



DCA ACADEMIC BRIEF

AB-2024-08

Türkiye's Educational and Science Diplomacy Activities in the United States

Educational Mobility, Scientific Cooperation, and Soft Power

AUTHOR

Prof. Zeliha Tufan koçak

AFFILIATION

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University
Member of the Board of the Federation of All
European Academies (ALLEA) and the Research
and Innovation Committee (REIC)

BASED ON

Türkiye's Educational and Science Diplomacy
Activities in the United States

Educational Mobility, Scientific Cooperation, and
Soft Power



ABOUT THE SERIES

The DCA Academic Brief Series presents concise and accessible summaries of scholarly discussions hosted or supported by the Diyanet Center of America. The series seeks to make academic scholarship available to wider audiences engaged in religious education and community learning.

Executive Summary

Educational and science diplomacy have become increasingly important components of international relations, particularly in an era shaped by global mobility, technological competition, and transnational challenges. This study examines Türkiye's educational and science diplomacy activities in the United States, emphasizing student mobility, graduate education, and research collaboration as strategic instruments of soft power.

The study argues that educational exchange extends beyond the transfer of knowledge. International education fosters intercultural understanding, professional networks, and long-term institutional cooperation that strengthen diplomatic relations. Drawing upon both historical examples and the author's professional experience in educational diplomacy, the study demonstrates that students and researchers serve not only as learners but also as informal ambassadors who contribute to mutual understanding between societies.

Particular attention is given to Türkiye's long-standing overseas scholarship programs, especially those implemented under Law No. 1416. While these initiatives have produced generations of highly qualified scholars, the study argues that changing academic environments require significant institutional reforms. Stronger coordination among universities, funding agencies, and public institutions would improve the effectiveness of scholarship programs and facilitate the transfer of scientific knowledge to Türkiye throughout the period of overseas study rather than only after scholars return.

The study also explores science diplomacy as an increasingly important dimension of higher education. International research partnerships, academic networks, and cooperation among universities, governments, and scientific organizations have become essential for addressing global challenges such as public health, climate change, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies. Türkiye's recent participation in international science diplomacy initiatives demonstrates the growing importance of integrating educational policy with research cooperation and diplomatic engagement.

Ultimately, the study argues that educational and science diplomacy should be understood as long-term strategic investments rather than isolated scholarship programs. Sustainable international partnerships require institutional continuity, professional coordination, and policies that strengthen both academic excellence and global collaboration. By integrating education, research, and diplomacy, Türkiye can

further enhance its international visibility while contributing to the production of scientific knowledge and the development of lasting international partnerships.

KEY POINTS

- Educational and science diplomacy have become strategic instruments of soft power in an increasingly interconnected world.
- International student and researcher mobility contributes not only to academic development but also to long-term diplomatic, institutional, and societal cooperation.
- Türkiye's overseas scholarship programs have produced significant academic capacity but require institutional reforms to address the changing dynamics of global higher education.
- Stronger coordination among universities, funding agencies, and government institutions can improve the effectiveness of international scholarship programs and research collaboration.
- Science diplomacy should be integrated into national higher education and innovation policies to strengthen Türkiye's global scientific engagement.

CENTRAL QUESTION

How can Türkiye strengthen its educational and science diplomacy through international academic mobility and research cooperation?

CORE ARGUMENT

Educational mobility and scientific cooperation should be viewed as long-term strategic investments that enhance both academic excellence and international influence.

MAIN CONTRIBUTION

The study combines historical analysis, policy observations, and diplomatic experience to evaluate Türkiye's educational and science diplomacy in the United States while proposing institutional improvements for future cooperation.

PRIMARY AUDIENCE

Scholars of higher education and international relations, policymakers, university administrators, scholarship agencies, and graduate students interested in science diplomacy.

1. Why This Study Matters

International education has never been solely about acquiring knowledge. Throughout history, scholars have traveled across regions in pursuit of learning, creating intellectual networks that connected institutions, societies, and cultures. These traditions demonstrate that academic mobility contributes not only to individual education but also to the exchange of ideas, the development of trust, and the formation of lasting international relationships.

In today's interconnected world, educational mobility has acquired even greater strategic significance. International students and researchers serve as bridges between countries by facilitating scientific collaboration, expanding professional networks, and strengthening intercultural understanding. Consequently, educational exchange has become an important component of diplomacy and an increasingly valuable instrument of national soft power.

Türkiye's engagement with the United States illustrates this broader transformation. For more than a century, student exchanges, government scholarship programs, and institutional partnerships have contributed to the development of academic expertise while fostering long-term cooperation between universities and research institutions. These experiences demonstrate that educational diplomacy extends beyond scholarship funding to include sustained institutional engagement and scientific collaboration.

The study argues that future success depends not only on increasing the number of students studying abroad but also on creating stronger connections among universities, government agencies, funding organizations, and international research networks. Such cooperation can maximize the impact of overseas education while strengthening Türkiye's capacity for scientific innovation and global engagement.

KEY INSIGHT

Educational mobility is not merely an investment in individual students; it is a strategic investment in international partnerships, scientific collaboration, and long-term diplomatic relations.

2. Educational Mobility as an Instrument of Soft Power

Educational and science diplomacy have become central components of international engagement. Beyond academic training, international education promotes mutual understanding, strengthens institutional partnerships, and expands scientific cooperation. Students and researchers therefore serve not only as learners but also as informal ambassadors who contribute to long-term diplomatic relations.

Türkiye's educational ties with the United States have developed through scholarship programs, university partnerships, and academic exchanges for more than a century. These initiatives have helped cultivate highly qualified scholars while creating durable institutional networks between the two countries.

The *Open Doors Report* illustrates the changing nature of this relationship. While early reports focused primarily on educational policies and cultural influence, contemporary reports emphasize student mobility, research collaboration, and the economic contributions of international students. This evolution reflects the growing strategic importance of higher education in international relations.

KEY INSIGHT

Educational exchange creates lasting scientific and diplomatic networks that extend far beyond the classroom.

3. Strengthening Türkiye's Science Diplomacy

The study argues that Türkiye's overseas scholarship programs remain valuable but require greater institutional coordination. Stronger collaboration among universities, funding agencies, and government institutions would enable scholarship recipients to contribute more effectively throughout their studies rather than only after returning home.

The author also highlights the importance of expanding partnerships with leading universities and international research organizations. Science diplomacy initiatives undertaken in Washington, D.C., demonstrate that sustained institutional engagement can strengthen Türkiye's visibility within global research networks and create new opportunities for scientific cooperation.

KEY INSIGHT

Science diplomacy is most effective when education, research, and international cooperation are pursued through coordinated institutional strategies.

4. Challenges and Future Directions

The study identifies several challenges that limit the effectiveness of Türkiye's educational and science diplomacy. International scholarship programs often operate through fragmented institutional structures, while communication between scholarship recipients and their home institutions remains limited during the period of study abroad. This weakens opportunities for continuous knowledge transfer and collaborative research.

To address these challenges, the study recommends strengthening coordination among universities, public institutions, and funding agencies. Greater institutional visibility, formal partnerships with leading universities, and sustained engagement with the Turkish academic diaspora would improve both the quality and long-term impact of educational diplomacy.

Rather than viewing scholarship recipients solely as future employees, they should be recognized as active participants in international research networks who can contribute to Türkiye's scientific and diplomatic objectives throughout their overseas education.

KEY INSIGHT

Effective educational diplomacy depends on institutional continuity, strategic partnerships, and sustained international engagement rather than scholarship programs alone.

Concluding Reflections

Educational and science diplomacy has become an essential component of international cooperation in the twenty-first century. As global challenges increasingly require scientific collaboration across national borders, countries must invest not only in educating talented individuals but also in building durable academic and institutional partnerships.

Türkiye possesses a long tradition of supporting international education through government scholarships and academic exchanges. Building upon this legacy requires adapting existing programs to the changing realities of global higher education by strengthening cooperation among universities, policymakers, funding organizations, and researchers.

Ultimately, educational mobility should be understood not simply as an investment in human capital but as a strategic mechanism for expanding scientific collaboration, strengthening international trust, and enhancing Türkiye's global engagement.

Academic Contributions

This Academic Brief makes four principal contributions:

- It highlights education and science diplomacy as complementary instruments of soft power.
- It evaluates Türkiye's overseas scholarship system within the broader framework of international academic cooperation.
- It emphasizes the strategic importance of institutional partnerships and research networks for sustainable science diplomacy.
- It offers recommendations for strengthening Türkiye's international academic engagement through better coordination, visibility, and long-term collaboration.

Selected References

Koçak Tufan, Z. (2024). *Tools of Science Diplomacy in the Triangle of Researcher, Fund Provider, and Bureaucracy*.

Koçak Tufan, Z. (2023). *Turkish and Other International Students in the International Education Reports of America*.

Koçak Tufan, Z. (2025). *A Perspective on Turkish Government Scholarships*.

Koçak Tufan, Z. (2025). *Strengthening Global Ties: The Critical Need for Science Diplomacy and Türkiye's Potential*.

Makdisi, G. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*.

Source Study

	Primary Source Türkiye's Educational and Science Diplomacy Activities in the United States Educational Mobility, Scientific Cooperation, and Soft Power
--	---

This academic brief is an accessible presentation of the principal themes and arguments developed in the source study. It does not replace the full scholarly text or its detailed references.

Editorial Note

This brief is intended for educational use. It summarizes a scholarly discussion without presenting the Diyanet Center of America as a policy institute, think tank, or body issuing binding academic judgments.

DCA ACADEMIC BRIEF SERIES