

**Exploring Labor Market Outcomes at Binational Universities:  
Two Countries, One University, Binational Careers?**

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**Abstract**

Transnational education (TNE) is predicted to play a large role in the future landscape of international higher education. Binational universities are transnational, higher education institutions formed by two governments constituting a collaborative form of TNE. Despite career factors being one of the primary motivators for participating in TNE (Knight & McNamara, 2014), we know very little about student expectations and experiences with career attainment at binational universities. This study explored the role of labor market outcomes at the binational Turkish-German University. A convergent parallel mixed methods case study design was adopted, and data collection included a survey of students and graduates (n=571) as well as interviews with key stakeholders (n=4). This research enlarges the debate on the relation between international experience and employability and provides new insight into the labor market relevance and returns of higher education programs.

*Keywords:* transnational education, binational universities, international higher education, Germany, Turkey, internationalization

**Introduction**

Transnational education (TNE) refers to the movement of programs and providers serving students where they are located, in contrast to students and scholars moving to pursue education abroad. Knight and McNamara (2017) differentiate between TNE that is independent (e.g. international branch campuses) and collaborative (international joint universities). Binational universities are a

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subtype of the latter. My master's thesis research explores the role of labor market outcomes at binational universities, using the Turkish-German University (TGU) as a case study.

Binational universities are typically formed on the basis of a legal agreement between two countries, although a range of funding and governance structures exist. Binational universities are established and administered by various different countries like Germany, Japan, and Russia. Turkey provides a robust foundation for studying binational universities due to its national internationalization strategy, which includes a target to increase education cooperation with foreign governments (Kammüller & Bachmann, 2020), and its involvement in being both a provider and host country of binational universities.

The Turkish-German University is a public, binational university in Istanbul, Turkey. It is supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK), and over 30 German universities providing academic and mobility provision. Despite being subject to Turkish higher education legislation, the TGU combines both countries' academic traditions, building on a deep and interconnected history covering centuries of exchange. It offers over a dozen study programs across five faculties that aim to support binational academic cooperation, educate graduates on the unique Turkish-German relationship, and promote university-industry collaboration.

### **Research Questions**

The main research question being addressed is what role labor market outcomes play at the TGU as a binational university. This is approached from the institutional, student and alumni perspectives. The main themes addressed are the goals, expectations, and motivations for labor market outcomes in addition to the actual outcomes of alumni. Particular attention will be paid to group similarities and differences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Most studies apply human capital theory to associations between educational attainment and labor market outcomes (Cai, 2012). In recent years an extension referred to as transnational human capital (THC) has emerged, which includes the combination of foreign language abilities, international work and study experience, and intercultural skills (Gerhards & Hans, 2013). It has primarily been applied to studies investigating immigration, employability and international education experiences (Belderbos, 2020; Medrano, 2016; Zweig et al., 2004). As this thesis deals with the relationship between the attainment of a binational education and labor market outcomes, THC provides a foundation that ties both together.

### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

A convergent parallel mixed methods case study design was adopted, involving the simultaneous collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2012). Data collection included a survey of students and graduates (n=571) as well as interviews with key stakeholders (n=4). The survey consisted of five categories: profile information; motivation for choosing the TGU; TGU reputation related to career outcomes; binational education and labor market relevance; and employment and career outcomes. Interviews with stakeholders expanded on these themes. Survey results will be analyzed for group comparisons and interviews will be analyzed using deductive coding following the code list that emerged from the literature.

### **Innovative Contribution to Comparative and International Higher Education**

There has been a call for more research investigating international joint universities (Knight & Liu, 2017). Despite career factors being one of the primary motivators for participating in TNE (Knight & McNamara, 2014), we know very little about binational university expectations and experiences with career attainment. Due to the political flair that binational universities exhibit, most research has focused on this aspect. My study examines the opposite end of the spectrum by investigating student and graduate experiences.

Transnational education is predicted to play an important role in the future landscape of international higher education. With the onset of the global pandemic came an increased awareness for development of internationalization at home. In contrast to international branch campuses, binational universities offer a mutually beneficial, collaborative TNE model deserving of more attention in a world fraught with mobility restrictions. This study is one of the first that examines the labor market outcomes of graduates from binational universities. It enlarges the debate on the relation between international experience and employability and provides new insights into the labor market relevance and returns of higher education programs from binational universities, with specific consideration of the Turkish context.

#### Author Note

Jessica Schüller is a graduate student in the Erasmus Mundus *Research and Innovation in Higher Education* (MARIHE) program in Austria and Finland, specializing in institutional research. Prior to joining MARIHE, she worked in international higher education practitioner roles in the United States and Germany. LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/jessicaschueller](http://www.linkedin.com/in/jessicaschueller). Twitter: @JessSchueller

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