Underemployment of college graduates: is doing anything better than doing nothing? *

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Abstract

Across low-income countries, limited prospects for high-skill employment and poverty push numerous college graduates into jobs which do not require a college degree. These types of experiences may be advantageous or detracting for the new graduates. In order to examine this issue, we conducted a field experiment in Burundi which elicited preferences of employers with respect to low-skill job experience of recent college graduates. The dataset we acquired through this experiment also allowed us to analyze gender discrimination in hiring. The experiment was supplemented with an employers' survey that aimed to investigate the underlying mechanisms at play. Results show that mentioning a low-skill experience on a resume increases the likelihood of being hired, and we did not find evidence of gender discrimination at the initial stage of the hiring process. Interviews with employers suggest that they perceive people with low-skill experience as persevering, hardworking and disciplined rather than persons facing financial difficulties or less competent compared to their classmates. These findings suggest that early graduates may gain an advantage in the hiring process by taking up and signaling their low-skill experiences.

JEL Classification: J23, J65, J71, J81, C93
Keywords: Low-skill Jobs; Underemployment; Job Search; Signaling; Employers' Preferences; Field experiment; Audit study; Incentivized Resume Rating

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1 Introduction

Enrollment in higher education is increasing worldwide (UNESCO, 2022). However, a significant number of students graduate into low-skill jobs, meaning jobs that do not require a college degree. The exact number of people affected by this form of underemployment is not known, especially in low-income countries, which most of the times measure time-related underemployment only (Benes and Walsh, 2018). In the United States, where data on skill-related underemployment of recent college graduates is available and regularly updated, it is estimated at 39.5% (New York Fed, 2022). It is possible that the rate of skill-related underemployment could be even higher in low-income countries, such as Burundi, the context of this study, where most people cannot afford to be unemployed. This situation is of concern to policy makers as well as graduates themselves who invest large sums of money in higher education. Be that as it may, there are reasons to think that low-skill experiences may either enhance or diminish the likelihood of obtaining a job that is commensurate with one's qualifications.

There are arguments to suggest that recent college graduates may benefit from taking on low-skill jobs. For instance, low-skill jobs increase current income, can potentially signal soft skills to employers such as perseverance and may improve matching by allowing individuals to better understand their career preferences. Such jobs may also increase appreciation for high-skill jobs and build discipline. On the other hand, people may avoid taking up a low-skill employment for fear of being trapped in a low equilibrium as the low-skill job reduces the time available to search for jobs that require a college degree. Furthermore, the knowledge gained in college may decay during the low-skill employment period, decreasing chances of obtaining a college-level job in the future. Low-skill experience may also be viewed as a negative signal by employers, who may infer lower ability from this information. Additionally, individuals aspiring to high-profile jobs, such as top government positions, may be hesitant to take on low-skill jobs due to concerns about social reputation.

The primary objective of the present study is to investigate employers' preferences with respect to low-skill job experience, with the following research question: what is the impact of signaling low-skill experience to employers on the likelihood of being hired? The field

experiment we conducted, typically called an audit study or a correspondence study (Gaddis, 2018)[1], provided valuable data on gender discrimination in hiring. Hence, the secondary objective of the paper is to investigate gender discrimination in hiring in the context of a developing country, a key concern for researchers and policy makers.

To elicit preferences of employers with respect to low-skill experience and gender, we started with a group of real resumes of students who were one month from finishing their bachelor studies at the University of Burundi, in the faculty of economics and management. By using graduates' actual CVs, we obtained a variety of formats and other idiosyncrasies that reflect the material that hiring managers typically review. These resumes were modified such that the period since graduation corresponded to one year and they do not mention any post-graduation experience. Starting from this pool of CVs, we created a new set of resumes which was similar to the first one, except with the addition of low-skill experience. We used data on the types of low-skill jobs past graduates have done after graduation in the previous year to generate types of low-skill jobs that we randomly populated the resumes with. We similarly modified the resumes with respect to gender. Therefore, half of the resumes sent out for evaluation by different employers were CVs of individuals with low-skill experience and the other half appeared as CVs of persons without low-skill experience, holding constant all other characteristics. Likewise, half of the resumes sent for evaluation were CVs of females and the other half appeared as CVs of males.

Results of the experiment show that resumes with low-skill experience were evaluated higher than resumes without such experiences with a statistically significant difference. This finding implies that, all else equal, employers prefer job seekers with low-skill experience rather than individuals with no experience at all. We analyze the heterogeneity of the gender and low-skill experience treatments with respect to resume and evaluator characteristics. Main results are robust to different specifications and we benchmark the effect size against

[1]Strictly speaking, researchers conduct audit studies by sending auditors, or actors, in response to real job offers. This was the first approach to experimental analysis of discrimination in the labor market (See Fix and Turner (1998) for an overview of such studies). In correspondence studies, which became relatively prevalent in the 2000s, researchers send fictitious resumes in response to job offers instead of persons Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004); Jowell and Prescott-Clarke (1970). However, following common practice (Gaddis, 2018), we use the two terms interchangeably.

other effects identified in the literature. Regarding gender, we do not observe a statistically significant difference between resumes of males and females, which is congruent with previous studies that found that gender discrimination increases with the level of responsibilities of occupations (Baert et al., 2016; Valfort, 2020). Post experiment interviews are consistent with the audit study findings and reveal that employers perceive people with low-skill experience as hard working, disciplined and persevering individuals rather than individuals with financial difficulties, incompetent or less qualified compared to classmates. Qualitative evidence further suggests that employers may value more low-skill experience which they think develop competences such as communication and working with others.

The first contribution of this paper pertains to the analysis of the impact of low-skill experience after studies on hiring decision. Previous studies have analyzed the effect of low-skill experience during studies (Baert et al., 2016; Kessler et al., 2019). Baert et al. (2016) investigate how student work experience during studies affects later employment outcomes. They find that such experiences do not affect the probability of employment in the future. The authors explain this finding as possibly resulting from a combination of a positive effect of signaling certain skills and motivation, and a negative effect of signaling social background and disinterest in academic studies. Kessler et al. (2019) analyzed the value of summer jobs such as barista, server or cashier for US students during their studies and found that employers do not value them (non-significant coefficient). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the impact of low-skill experiences *after* studies on the likelihood of being hired.

More generally, our work supplements previous research which has investigated the impact different resume signals, including race (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004), marital status (Arceo-Gomez and Campos-Vazquez, 2014), religion (Valfort, 2020), resume mistakes (Sterkens et al., 2021) and gender (Bohren et al., 2022). Researchers are typically interested in investigating preferences that employers do not indicate in job adverts either because it is forbidden[2] (some countries have prohibited discrimination in recruitment based on race,

[2]For example, the US law prohibits discrimination based on race, national origin, gender, pregnancy, religion, disability, age, military service or affiliation, wealth, genetic information and citizenship status (Baert, 2018)

religion, sexual orientation, etc)[3] or because of social desirability (for instance, employers might not be willing to admit in interviews that they prefer higher-class employees).

As Baert et al. (2016) allude to it, perhaps low-skill experience is a signal of poverty with a detrimental consequence on the hiring decision. Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) conducted an audit study to investigate the effect of social class signals on entry into large US law firms by randomly assigning signals of social class and gender to otherwise similar CVs. The authors find that law firms prefer higher-class men relative over lower-class men or women, and also higher-class women. Lawyers explain that higher-class in itself confers an advantage because of the elite culture and clientele of large law firms. In the case of higher-class women however, the class advantage is dampened by a negative stereotype that portrays them as less committed to full-time, intensive careers. In the context of this study, since low-skill experience is often a consequence of low income, it could be that employers deduce from such a signal that the job candidate is from a lower-class.

Our analysis of the impact of low-skill experiences feeds into the literature on skill-related underemployment, a topic which has received little attention in the economic literature (Barnichon and Zylberberg, 2019) particularly the demand side of the problem (Brunello and Wruuck, 2021). The issue of underemployment has been mainly investigated from the perspective of high skilled workers rather than employers. It has been advanced that high skilled workers search for low-skill jobs in order to maximize chances of obtaining a job quickly by avoiding relatively tense competition for high-skill jobs (Barnichon and Zylberberg, 2019). The migration literature has also documented the issue of underemployment of high skilled workers who migrate to developed countries (Lo et al., 2019). We contribute to this literature by analyzing underemployment of recent college graduates from the perspective of employers.

Furthermore, given the paucity of experimental studies on labor market discrimination in developing countries (see meta-analysis of Baert (2018), this study contributes to this important literature by analyzing gender discrimination in the context of Burundi. It has

[3]See for instance Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) for racial discrimination, Valfort (2020) for discrimination based on religion and Drydakis (2009) for sexual orientation.

been argued that employers may find hiring females more costly than otherwise similar males when considering absence related to pregnancy and childcare responsibilities (Becker et al., 2019). However, discrimination against men has also been documented (Valfort, 2020) and overall, gender discrimination is thought to be occupation specific (Baert, 2018). Moreover, research shows that women tend to be discriminated against for high responsibility occupations while the reverse is observed for men (Valfort, 2020).

Understanding preferences of employers with respect to low-skill experience is also important for policy. Previous research suggests that expectations about how workers will be treated in the labor market may affect their investment (Lang and Lehmann, 2012). In the specific case of low-skill jobs, preconceptions may affect their take-up or their signaling in interviews or on resumes. Hence, this study is of interest for organizations in charge of advising job seekers (as well as job seekers themselves). With respect to gender, our finding of absence of discrimination at the early stage of graduates' career should encourage young job seekers to seek out various opportunities regardless of their gender.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. In the following section, we present the context of the study. In Section 3, we provide details on the study design and present results in Section 4. We conclude in Section 5.

2 Context of the study

With a population of approximately 12 million people and a gross national income per capita of USD 800 (PPP), Burundi is currently ranked among the poorest countries in the world (World Bank, 2022). The majority of Burundians is young, with an estimated 65% of the population below the age of 25 (World Population Prospects, 2022). In what follows, we present the labor market, higher education and institutional contexts. We first emphasize differences in activity according to level of education and age, in accordance with the target population of this study, namely the population of young people who have just completed higher education. We also emphasize contrasts between urban and rural areas because data shows that these differences are important. By underlining the rural-urban duality, we highlight the characteristics of our field of experimentation, the economic capital

Bujumbura[4] and the most urbanized province of the country.

The latest national labor market survey (INSBU, 2022) provided the most recent dataset on labor market indicators with a countrywide coverage, from which we draw the statistics below. The data shows that the employment rate, which is the ratio of the employed population to the working age population (6 460 883 people), is high (75.6%), with a similarly high employment rate for young people (15 to 35 years) (67.0%). However, Bujumbura stands out from other provinces, with a relatively low employment rate (48.7%)[5].

As a corollary to the high overall employment rate, the level of unemployment is low (2.8%), with the following idiosyncrasies: unemployment is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas, with respective rates of 17.2% and 1.1%, it is highest in Bujumbura where it stands at 24.5%, and it increases with the level of education (see Table 1). Representing 60.2% of the working age population, young people aged 15 to 35 are relatively more affected by unemployment. The unemployment rate for this age group is 4.3%, while it is only 1.2% for the 36-64 age group and 0.1% for individuals aged 65 and above. Furthermore, the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is estimated at 7.8%. In urban areas, the NEET proportion is 16% compared to 6.4% in rural areas, with the highest percentage in Bujumbura (18.3%).

Nonetheless, the Burundian labor market, like that of other developing countries, is better described by underemployment rather than unemployment. In fact, 53.4% of the employed are actually underemployed, i.e. they work for less than 40 hours per week. Underemployment is predominant in rural areas where the main economic activity is agriculture. In urban areas, it is estimated at 27.7%, with Bujumbura being the least affected (18.5%). Underemployment decreases with the level of education, with a rate of 57.9% among people with no education and 25.4% among people with higher education.

Moreover, many activities pay very little, thus hiding the reality of the unemployment problem in the country. The high employment rates and conversely the low unemployment

[4] *Mairie de Bujumbura* in full.

[5] These employment statistics include persons of working age (15 years and older) who, during seven days prior to the survey, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services in exchange for remuneration or profit, whether in the formal or informal sector.

rates should be assessed taking into account the fact that 68.9% of the population earns less than USD 50 per month. Jobs in rural areas are poorly paid, USD 30 per month compared to USD 82 per month in urban areas, but the level of remuneration increases with the level of education (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary statistics of the Burundian labor market

Level of education	Unemployment (%)	Underemployment (%)	Median income (in USD)	Enrollment
None	1.0	57.9	15	-
Primary (or Fundamental)	1.6	51.9	19	2 756 241
Secondary (or Post-Fundamental)	10.3	45.3	53	239 645
Higher education	18.2	25.4	135	63 428

Notes: (1) The unemployment rate measures the number of people who want to work but do not, even though they are available for work and are actively looking for work, as a proportion of the labor force. The rate used is the broad unemployment rate, that is, it includes persons who at the time of the survey were available for work but did not look for work and persons who looked for work but were not immediately available to work. (2) The underemployment rate is calculated with respect to the number of hours worked, using an official reference of 40 hours per week. (3) Enrollment by level of instruction has been calculated based on the fundamental and post-fundamental levels, whereas other statistics use the primary and secondary levels of education. Fundamental education begins at age 6 and lasts 9 years, after which students take a national exam for entry into post-fundamental education, which lasts 3 years. Before this reform was introduced in 2013, primary school started at 6 years and lasted 6 years after which students took a national exam to enter secondary school which also lasted 6 years. (4) Income data has been converted to dollars at the official rate of BIF 2076.32 per USD, as of December 12, 2022.
Sources: INSBU (2022), MENRS (2021a) and MENRS (2021b).

For what concerns the higher education system, Burundi had 63 428 students in 2021 (a 73% increase since 2011) distributed over 49 institutions of higher learning. The University of Burundi, that we worked with for our experiment, is a public and tuition free university, and the largest higher learning institution in the country. Most of its campuses are located in Bujumbura where it attracts students mainly from poor backgrounds from all over the country. While the number of students in the higher education system is much lower than the number of students in primary schools (2 756 241), the amount spent on the former (USD 21 557 574)[6] is higher than that spent on the latter (USD 7 889 445). In addition, the small number of students in higher education should not obscure the importance of this sector, as these young people are a particularly critical group. If they are not employed, they may engage in activities that pose a risk to themselves and to society. Moreover, the number of students should be assessed in relation to the jobs available. The government employs only 2.9% of the working age population, private enterprises and associations (6.3%) and NGOs (0.1%). The remaining jobs (90.7%) are in agriculture, where households are the "employers", while higher education graduates tend to refrain from engaging in this sector.

With respect to the institutional framework, there are three main public structures directly in

[6]Expenditures for the 2020-2021 school year.

charge of matters related to employment: OBEM (*Office burundais de l'emploi et de la main d'œuvre*), ABEJ (*Agence Burundaise pour l'Emploi des Jeunes*) and PAEEJ (*Programme d'Autonomisation Economique et d'Emploi des jeunes*). The first is a public employment service that was created to operationalize the national employment policy. OBEM is responsible, among other things, for registering job offers and applications, collecting and analyzing information on trends in the labor market, and informing and advising job seekers. The other two structures focus on youth employment and aim to improve employability and entrepreneurship by mainly offering training on various topics and providing loans. However, there is a crucial institution in the functioning of the labor market which is missing. Contrary to developed countries where unemployment protection systems have been present for a long time, Burundi, like many other developing countries, does not yet have such a scheme.

3 Study design

A major concern with the classic approach to audit studies, in which researchers send many fictitious resumes to real job openings, is deception: employers waste their time pursuing fake applicants which could make them disregard real job candidates in the future and impede the validity of future research. Furthermore, deception is becoming more problematic as this method becomes more popular. Indeed, the number of audit studies has grown substantially in the last two decades (Baert, 2018), following the seminal work of Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) on racial discrimination in the US[7]. There is general consensus that experiments which use deception should not be published in economics journals (Charness et al., 2022). Not only is deception viewed as unethical, it has been argued that being deceived generates suspicion with repercussions on judgment and decision-making (Ortmann and Hertwig, 2002). However, audit studies are viewed as an exception due to the lack of an alternative solution to obtain data on the crucial issue of labor market discrimination (Kessler et al., 2019; Charness et al., 2022).

[7] Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that individuals with white names receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews compared to people with African-American names. Contrary to previous audit studies that were conducted in-person and consequently relied on small samples, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) were able to obtain a sample size close to 5000 observations by responding to job offers using fake resumes instead of real actors.

To get around the concern of deception, Kessler et al. (2019) introduced the strategy of Incentivized Resume Rating (IRR). In the IRR strategy, employers evaluate resumes known to be hypothetical but are incentivized to indicate their true preferences by an offer of real job seekers' CVs that correspond to their evaluations. We adopted an IRR strategy for our audit study. Instead of us engaging directly with employers, a human resource company we partnered with, Infinity Group (IG)[8], sent them resumes for evaluation. Prior to evaluating the CVs, IG informed the employers that their evaluations would be used to send them employees in the future that correspond to preferences they have indicated.

A total of 800 CVs were sent to 40 employers for evaluation. Out of the 40 employers that we targeted, 37 provided us with their evaluations and responded to follow-up questions. Those who did not respond were not available in the period that our data collection partner, IG, contacted them. Each employer was given 20 randomly selected resumes to evaluate. We stratified the sampling such that each employer receives 10 CVs with low-skill experience, 10 CVs without low-skill experience, 10 CVs of males and 10 CVs of females. We show the template of the letter that was sent to employers by IG in appendices A2 and A3. We targeted employers who are among the largest in the country and who had either hired a worker through IG or employed a worker who has a contract with IG. This list of employers includes Brarudi, an affiliate of Heineken International, multinational banks and international NGOs. We show in Table 2, some descriptive statistics of the sample of organizations included in the study.

The rest of this section proceeds as follows. We provide details on the creation of resumes in sub-section 3.1. In sub-section 3.2 we discuss resume evaluation and employers' interviews. We describe our treatment variables, i.e. low-skill experience and gender, in sub-sections 3.3 and 3.4 respectively, before presenting the data in sub-section 3.5 and regression models in sub-section 3.6.

[8]IG's services include human resources hiring and management, marketing and communication and project management. Since the company was created in 2018, it has provided its services to the corporate sector (Bank, Industry, Large construction companies), International NGOs and other organizations.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of organizations that participated in the study

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Year the organization started its activities in Burundi	37	1998.541	19.167	1952	2021
Number of employees	37	147.081	338.866	6	2000

Data source: The year when the organization started its activities in Burundi and the number of years were obtained by the research team directly from employers.
Note: The list of employers which participated in the study is the following : Action Aid, Akeza.Net, Banque Burundaise de Commerce et d'investissement (BBCI), BCB (Banque de Crédit de Bujumbura (BCB), Bancobu (Banque Commerciale du Burundi), Best imprimerie, Bi-Switch, Bicor, Brarudi, Clinique de l'œil, DHL, Ecobank, DIFO, Ercon, Finbank, FSCJ Microfinance, Groupement ADP-MD2P, Hope Design, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Jimbere Magazine, Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), Kaz'O'Zah, Liquides, Modern Dairy Burundi (MDB), Memisa, Metalusa, Mutualité Santé Plus, Play International, SOFEPAC, Savonor, Socabu, Socar AG, Socar Vie, Sogerbu, TwoFiveSeven Arts, Université du Lac Tanganyika (ULT) and Zebra Electronics.

3.1 Creating a pool of resumes

In March 2022, we surveyed economics and management graduates of 2021 from the University of Burundi with the main goal of collecting data on the kind of low-skill jobs they do. Out of 139 students surveyed in a cohort of 203 students, 18% had done a high-skill job and 34% had done the following low-skill jobs after graduation: Phone credit sales agent (13), Data Entry Agent and Enumerator (7), Cashier (3), Waiter (3), Petty trader (3), Welder (2), Call center agent (1), Clothing salesperson (1), Milk seller (1), TukTuk driver (1), Security guard (1), Chicken trader (1), Driver (1), Photographer (1), and other low-skill jobs (8). The rest of the students (48%), had no experience whatsoever.

In May 2022, we hired a training firm (Called *Cabinet MARC.*) to train students that were finishing their bachelor studies in June 2022 on how to make a resume. The training had a general objective of developing the participants' skills on how to navigate the hiring process in a training session called "How to attract the recruiter's attention?". More specifically, the training aimed to teach participants the basic rules of making a good CV and touched on how to write a cover letter and how to succeed in a job interview. The methodological approach followed in the training was a participatory one with the use of an inductive method, starting with the trainer's presentation, exercises and then discussions. The training took place in the

computer room of the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Burundi over a period of 10 days, with 6 hours per day. In the end, 249 students benefited from this training and 248 of them provided their resumes.

We subsequently randomly selected 200 CVs among the 248 that were collected, to use in the audit study. This strategy provided us with a starting pool of CVs that reflects idiosyncrasies that are realistic and that employers typically review. We then created three other copies of these initial CVs that are similar except for gender and low-skill experience. We thus obtained 200 CVs of males with low-skill experience, 200 CVs of males without low-skill experience, 200 CVs of females with low-skill experience and 200 CVs of females without low-skill experience. Names, contact information and other identifying information were hidden prior to sending the resumes for evaluation (See sample resume in appendices A4 and A5).

3.2 Resume evaluation and employers' interviews

Since employers were aware that there would be no immediate recruitment following their evaluation, we were concerned about ensuring that their choices are as close as possible to their true preferences. We made sure in the letter that was sent to employers as well as in oral contacts that IG managers had with them that resume evaluators are aware that the value of the proposed incentive (future job candidates propositions from IG that correspond to indicated preferences) is positively correlated with the accuracy with which they report their preferences. No other incentive was provided and prior to evaluating the CVs, employers were not informed that we are interested in estimating the impact of low-skill experiences.

After evaluating the CVs, each employer was invited to respond to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to: (1) directly elicit preferences of employers with respect to low-skill experience; (2) obtain further information on employers' perception of low-skill experience. The employers were asked to choose between employing an individual without post-graduation experience or an individual who has been doing different types of low-skill jobs, chosen among the 15 from our earlier survey. On the positive side, we asked

whether employers think that people with low-skill experience have grit and discipline. On the negative side, we asked whether they think such individuals are of lower ability compared to their peers or if they think they have financial difficulties.

The order of the questions was randomized to take into account potential preview or priming effects (Kahneman et al., 1992). The first kind of randomization concerned the following question which was asked for 15 different types of low-skill jobs: "Would you hire a job candidate: (a) without experience in any type of employment or (b) with 12 months of experience in [...] after graduation". For half of employers, choice (a) appeared first and for the other half choice (b) appeared first. The second type of randomization was related to the idea that employers may value low-skill experience more or less depending on whether they are taking into account that such experiences may affect soft skills development. Hence, half of the employers were made to reflect on the importance of soft skills in their organization by asking them to respond to two questions: (1) How important are soft skills (such as communication skills, interpersonal skills and being on time) in your organization? (2) Which soft skills do you look for when making a hiring decision? After responding to these questions, they were asked to indicate their preference relative to low-skill experience. The other half of employers were first asked to indicate their preference relative to low-skill experience and then were asked to respond to the two questions that relate to the importance of soft skills. The third kind of randomization concerned attributes employers associate with low-skill experience. Employers had to score between 1 and 10 the following attributes: perseverance, hardworking, discipline, financial difficulties, incompetent and less qualified compared to classmates. The order in which the attributes appeared on the screen was different for each employer. We provide the full questionnaire here. The set of choices was randomized with Stata and displayed on a tablet using SurveyCTO.

3.3 The "low-skill treatment"

To test the preferences of employers with respect to low-skill experience against the counterfactual of doing nothing, the CVs were modified such that they appear to employers as corresponding to job candidates who have been on the market for a year. Among the 800 CVs in our sample, 400 were "treated" with a low-skill experience, i.e. we added a

work experience section in the resume, randomly chosen from the list of different types of experiences, with more weight given to more common experiences. The other 400 CVs served as a control group. The low-skill experiences themselves were grouped in two categories. The first group consisted of experiences which lasted between one and three months, which we call short duration low-skill experiences. The second group consisted of experiences which lasted between 9 months and 12 months, which we call long duration low-skill experiences. The starting dates of the jobs corresponded to actual starting dates obtained from our survey of past experiences of graduates. We show in appendices A4 and A5 a sample of resumes sent out for evaluation as well as the evaluation sheet used to score the CVs (Appendix A6). The part that was added to half of the resumes is section 12 under the heading "Expérience". As is shown in the descriptive statistics, adding this small section on low-skill experience increases the average length of the CVs, a confounding effect that we control for in all our analyses.

3.4 The "gender treatment"

Specifying gender on one's resume is a common practice in Burundi. This information was present on all initial 200 CVs and we modified it such that half of the 800 CVs are of males and the other half are of females. Since the CVs were written in French, modifying the gender on the CVs implied modifying the gender of other words for grammatical correctness, notably the gender of work experiences. For instance, instead of writing "vendeur d'unités" on a CV of a female, we wrote "vendeuse d'unités". We also replaced high school seminaries, i.e. catholic schools reserved for boys, with a mixed catholic school, the « Lycée Clarté Notre Dame de Vugizo », which is usually ranked close to seminaries.

3.5 Data

The data on resume evaluations that we use in this study was collected between July and August 2022 in Burundi, on a sample of 37 employers and each employer evaluated 20 resumes. The final dataset we use has 712 observations instead of 740 observations for two reasons. First, 10 CVs were mistakenly not scored. Second, for 18 other CVs, individuals did not indicate either their year of birth, their marital status or where they went for high school.

We show that our results are robust to including the 18 observations without controls, and by imputing averages for missing observations. Each CV was given a score between 1 and 10 corresponding to hiring interest for a specific job. We show the evaluation sheet used in Table A3. The employer could rate a CV with respect to a maximum of 3 jobs an individual with the given profile could occupy in the organization. The list of proposed jobs are shown in Appendix A3. In addition to evaluating the CVs, each of the 37 employers responded to a questionnaire which aimed to uncover the thought process of the evaluator.

3.6 Methodology for regression analysis

The regression analysis focuses initially on how low-skill experience and gender affect the likelihood of being hired using the simplest specification. The likelihood of being hired is proxied with a score between 1 and 10 that employers gave to CVs when asked to evaluate whether they would be interested in hiring the candidate. Hence, our baseline specification is the following ordinary least square model:

$$CVScore_{i,m,j} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 LSExperience_i + \alpha_2 Gender_i + \alpha_3 Pages_i + \varepsilon_{i,m,j} \quad (1)$$

with $CVScore_i$ the score given to CV i by a hiring manager m for a specific job j. $LSExperience_i$ a variable equal to 1 if the CV mentions low-skill experience and 0 otherwise, $Gender_i$ a variable equal to 1 for a CV of a female individual and 0 for a CV of a male individual. Since the length of the CV increases when we add a low-skill experience section, we systematically control for this confounding effect by adding the variable $Pages_i$, which is the number of pages of CV i. $\varepsilon_{i,m,j}$ is an idiosyncratic error.

$$CVScore_{i,m,j} = \beta_0 + \alpha_1 LSExperience_i + \alpha_2 Gender_i + \beta_3 Pages_i + X\theta + \phi_m + e_{i,m,j} \quad (2)$$

In the full specification (Equation (2)) we add control variables (vector X) and employer fixed effects (ϕ_m) to our basic specification. X includes the year of birth of the job candidate and whether the individual is married or not. We also control for whether the job candidate

went to a secondary school in the economic capital Bujumbura[9]. X also includes the number of extra curricular trainings indicated on the CV, the gender of the evaluator, the size of the evaluating organization measured in terms of the number of employees and the number of years since the organization started its activities in Burundi. We include employer fixed effects to allow employers to have different mean ratings. Given the design of the experiment, adding fixed effects and control variables should not affect our estimates of interest α_1 and α_2 in Equation (1) as these additional controls should be orthogonal to the resume characteristics of interest, i.e. low-skill experience and gender. Furthermore, we analyze the heterogeneity of the gender and low-skill experience treatments effects estimated in Equation (1) along resume and evaluator characteristics by including corresponding interaction terms with the treatment variables.

The previous specifications assume linearity with respect to the CV score. We relax this assumption by estimating a generalized ordered logit model (Williams, 2016) as a robustness check. We also check whether our results hold for different ways of coding the dependent variable.

4 Results

We first present descriptive statistics using the dataset we acquired. We then present our main regression results in sub-section 4.2. In sub-section 4.3, we analyze heterogeneity of results before conducting robustness checks in sub-section 4.4. We conclude the results section with a discussion of mechanisms underlying the quantitative results, using data from the post-evaluation survey we conducted with hiring managers, in sub-section 4.5.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 3 shows summary statistics for the dependent variable, treatment variables and independent variables grouped into resume characteristics and evaluator characteristics.

[9]In field preparation meetings we had with human resource experts from IG, they indicated that employers frequently express demand for individuals who are fluent in French and English, and that those skills are not well taught outside the capital.

Although hiring managers had the option of providing up to three different evaluations for three different types of jobs, we provide in Table 3 statistics for the evaluations of the first job only. This is because the second and third evaluations contain substantial missing observations. We show that treatment effects become more noisy as we include the second and third score, which is consistent with evaluators paying relatively more attention to the first job proposed.

Table 3 shows that the average resume score is 4.6 and the scores range from 1 to 10. Approximately half of resumes are CVs of females[10] and half of them show low-skill experience. The duration of low-skill experience variable, which is an alternative way of coding the low-skill treatment variable, was generated such that 25% of the CVs showed a duration of three months or less and 25% of CVs showed a period between 9 and 12 months. The resumes which were evaluated had between one and three pages. The CVs showed that individuals were born between 1986 and 1998, considering that the normal age if the individual had not repeated a year and had started primary school at age 6, was 1998. Approximately 4% of resumes are of married individuals. 15% of the CVs are of individuals who went to a high school in Bujumbura. Most individuals mentioned two trainings or less on their CVs and one individual mentioned 10 trainings. Approximately half of the 712 CVs were evaluated by women. The organizations which evaluated the resumes had between 6 and 2000 employees and were present in Burundi for 70 years for the oldest and 1 year for the most recent in the country.

Even though we do not have evaluation data for all 800 CVs, we still have balance on almost all our covariates. None of the means of covariates in Table 4 is significantly different for the male and female groups. As we expected, covariates are also balanced for the low-skill experience treatment except for the *number of pages* variable which is on average higher for the treatment group than the control group (Table 5). Therefore, we systematically control for the number of pages when estimating the impact of the low-skill experience treatment. Table 6 shows that when we split the low-skill treatment group into a high-duration group (9-12 months) and low-duration (0-3 months) group, we obtain less balance of covariates. In

[10]We do not obtain a perfect 50-50 split because we did not obtain evaluations for all 800 CVs.

Table 3: Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean/Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variable					
CV score	712	4.628	2.241	1	10
Treatment variables					
Gender	712	0.499	0.5	0	1
Low-skill experience	712	0.5	0.5	0	1
Duration of low-skill experience	712	0.757	0.836	0	2
Resume characteristics					
Number of pages	712	1.949	0.26	1	3
Year of birth	712	1994	1.914	1986	1998
Married (=1 if married)	712	0.044	0.204	0	1
High school in Bujumbura	712	0.15	0.358	0	1
Training	712	1.086	1.165	0	10
Evaluator characteristics					
Gender of evaluator	712	0.486	0.5	0	1
Number of employees	712	149.513	340.436	6	2000
Years in Burundi	712	23.709	19.01	1	70

Notes: *Duration of low-skill experience* is a categorical variable equal to 0 if an individual has no low-skill experience, 1 if the individual has a low-skill experience of 3 months or less and 2 if the individual has a low-skill experience between 9 and 12 months. For *Year of birth*, we show the median and show the mean for all the other variables. Training is the number of extra curricular trainings mentioned on resumes such as IT or leadership training, that individuals took before entering the job market. *Years in Burundi* is the number of years the organization has been operating in Burundi.

fact, this lack of balance concerns all covariates except *training*, *year of birth* and *married*. As a result, heterogeneity analysis of the *low-skill experience* treatment by its duration includes the list of covariates as controls but may be biased by unobservable confounders. To verify that we are comparing comparable groups for heterogeneity analysis with respect to gender, we check for balance of covariates along the four groups that are generated by the interaction of the *gender* and *low-skill experience* treatments. This randomization test does not show any statistically significant difference among covariates except for the number of pages (See Table A1).

Table 4: Balance tests for the *Gender* treatment

		(1)		(2)	t-test
		Male		Female	p-value
Variable	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	(1)-(2)
Number of pages	357	1.950	355	1.949	0.988
		[0.013]		[0.014]	
Year of birth	357	1993.751	355	1993.930	0.213
		[0.103]		[0.100]	
Married (=1 if married)	357	0.039	355	0.048	0.571
		[0.010]		[0.011]	
High school in Bujumbura	357	0.148	355	0.152	0.892
		[0.019]		[0.019]	
Training	357	1.039	355	1.132	0.286
		[0.059]		[0.064]	
Gender of evaluator	357	0.485	355	0.487	0.942
		[0.026]		[0.027]	
Number of employees	357	150.199	355	148.823	0.957
		[18.007]		[18.104]	
Years in Burundi	357	23.768	355	23.651	0.935
		[1.011]		[1.005]	

***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level. Standard errors in brackets

Table 5: Balance tests for the *Low-skill experience* treatment

		(1)		(2)	t-test
		0		1	p-value
Variable	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	(1)-(2)
Number of pages	356	1.916	356	1.983	0.001***
		[0.016]		[0.010]	
Year of birth	356	1993.826	356	1993.854	0.845
		[0.103]		[0.099]	
Married (=1 if married)	356	0.042	356	0.045	0.855
		[0.011]		[0.011]	
High school in Bujumbura	356	0.160	356	0.140	0.464
		[0.019]		[0.018]	
Training	356	1.098	356	1.073	0.773
		[0.065]		[0.059]	
Gender of evaluator	356	0.486	356	0.486	1.000
		[0.027]		[0.027]	
Number of employees	356	150.315	356	148.711	0.950
		[18.058]		[18.053]	
Years in Burundi	356	23.809	356	23.610	0.889
		[1.013]		[1.003]	

***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level.
Standard errors in brackets

Table 6: Balance tests for the *Duration of low-skill experience* treatment

		(1)		(2)		(3)	t-test	t-test	t-test
		None		3 months or less		9 months or more	p-value	p-value	p-value
Variable	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	(1)-(2)	(1)-(3)	(2)-(3)
Number of pages	356	1.916	173	1.988	183	1.978	0.003***	0.016**	0.624
		[0.016]		[0.012]		[0.017]			
Year of birth	356	1993.826	173	1993.769	183	1993.934	0.752	0.533	0.406
		[0.103]		[0.147]		[0.135]			
Married (=1 if married)	356	0.042	173	0.035	183	0.055	0.681	0.514	0.365
		[0.011]		[0.014]		[0.017]			
High school in Bujumbura	356	0.160	173	0.104	183	0.175	0.083*	0.663	0.055*
		[0.019]		[0.023]		[0.028]			
Training	356	1.098	173	1.156	183	0.995	0.608	0.323	0.171
		[0.065]		[0.091]		[0.075]			
Gender of evaluator	356	0.486	173	0.538	183	0.437	0.266	0.283	0.058*
		[0.027]		[0.038]		[0.037]			
Number of employees	356	150.315	173	209.867	183	90.896	0.096*	0.023**	0.001***
		[18.058]		[35.372]		[9.006]			
Years in Burundi	356	23.809	173	27.757	183	19.689	0.030**	0.013**	0.000***
		[1.013]		[1.554]		[1.220]			

***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level.
Standard errors in brackets

4.2 Regression results

We show in column (1) of Table 7 parameter estimates of our baseline model (Equation (1)). We find that gender does not affect the chances of being hired and having a low-skill experience increases the likelihood of being hired. Given our study design, these results are robust to the inclusion in the model of controls for resume characteristics (Column (2)), evaluator characteristics (Column (3)) and evaluator fixed effects (Column (4)).

Although some of the other covariates are significant, they cannot be given a causal interpretation. For instance, younger students tend to be born in the capital Bujumbura which induces a positive correlation between *Year of birth* and *High school in Bujumbura*. Had we not controlled for where the person went for high school, the coefficient on *Year of birth* would have been biased. Similarly, the data suggests that older, more established organizations in the market tend to employ women more in management positions, inducing a positive correlation between *Gender of evaluator* and *Years in Burundi*. Generally, we cannot rule out the presence of unobserved confounders.

Referring to our preferred specification in column (4), results show that mentioning a low-skill experience on one's CVs increases the Likert score approximately by 0.47 and the impact is statistically significant at 1%. Even though the effect size may appear small, the magnitude of the increase is not the main issue here. The most important is that all else equal, a person with a low-skill experience is preferred to a person without it, while gender does not make a difference. If there had been other characteristics which could be given a causal interpretation, we would have compared their estimated effects with the effect of low-skill experience. The second-best comparison we can make is to compare the coefficient on *Low-skill experience* with the coefficients on other independent variables. We find that the magnitude of the effect of *Low-skill experience* is the largest among all independent variables followed by *Gender of evaluator*. We finally compare the impact of low-skill experience with impacts of other signals estimated in Kessler et al. (2019), who also use a Likert score as a dependent variable. In the context of the US, Kessler et al. (2019) found the following impacts of resume signals: GPA (2.13), Top Internship (0.90), Second Internship (0.47), Work for Money Jobs during studies (0.12), Technical Skills (0.047), Female and White (-

Table 7: Impact of gender and low-skill experience

VARIABLES	(1) CV Score	(2) CV Score	(3) CV Score	(4) CV Score
Gender (=1 if female)	-0.009	-0.039	-0.038	-0.014
	(0.167)	(0.168)	(0.159)	(0.101)
Low-skill experience	0.462***	0.469***	0.479***	0.473***
	(0.169)	(0.168)	(0.160)	(0.100)
Number of pages	-0.061	-0.132	-0.196	0.108
	(0.277)	(0.278)	(0.247)	(0.179)
Year of birth		0.088**	0.109**	0.032
		(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.026)
Married (=1 if married)		-0.086	-0.044	-0.250
		(0.396)	(0.393)	(0.227)
High school in Bujumbura		0.023	0.077	-0.114
		(0.242)	(0.225)	(0.164)
Training		0.153**	0.126*	0.145**
		(0.073)	(0.069)	(0.060)
Gender of evaluator			0.440***	
			(0.165)	
Number of employees			-0.001***	
			(0.000)	
Years in Burundi			0.038***	
			(0.005)	
Constant	4.521***	-170.736**	-212.742**	-58.953
	(0.552)	(85.821)	(84.543)	(52.391)
Observations	712	712	712	712
R-squared	0.011	0.022	0.124	0.648
Resume characteristics	NO	YES	YES	YES
Evaluator characteristics	NO	NO	YES	NO
Evaluator FE	NO	NO	NO	YES

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Column (4) shows the adjusted R-squared

0.15), Male and Non-White (-0.17), Female and Non-white (-0.009). The effect of low-skill experience is similar to the effect of a second internship and is superior to the effect of "work for money" jobs during studies. We can draw from this comparison that mentioning low-skill experience has a meaningful impact on the chances of being hired in comparison with other resume signals.

The non-significance of the gender effect can be interpreted as a lack of gender-based discrimination at an early stage of the hiring process and for early career job candidates. This may not be the case for other stages of the hiring process, for example during interviews, or for relatively senior positions. Nonetheless, this result is surprising given that the average age in our sample is 28, in a context where the median age of women at first union is 20.3 and median age of women at first birth is 21.5 (DHS, 2018)[11]. One might expect that employers would discriminate against women who are likely to be pregnant and have childcare responsibilities, as it has been observed in other contexts (Becker et al., 2019). However, the result is consistent with the literature that found that discrimination against women increases as the level of responsibility of the occupation increases (Valfort, 2020). The result is also consitent with the finding that gender discrimination is occupation specific (Baert, 2018). Zhang et al. (2021) identified discrimination of women in hiring mainly in the following sectors: computer and mathematics, architecture and engineering and sales. Only the sales sector is represented in our study but is not predominant (See Appendix A3).

4.3 Analysis of heterogeneity

We analyze the heterogeneity of the main results in Table 8. We first analyze the effect of the duration of the low-skill experience on the likelihood of being hired. We then analyze the heterogeneity of the gender and low-skill experience treatments with respect to resume and evaluator characteristics.

Column (1) shows that the effect of low-skill experience for males (0.59) is higher than the general effect found previously (0.47) and statistically significant at 1%. Conversely, the effect of low-skill experience for females (0.36) is lower than the average but statistically

[11]Estimates from the last demographic and health survey conducted between 2016 and 2017.

significant at 5%. Results in column (2) suggest that the longer the duration of the low-skill experience the more the likelihood of being hired increases. We do not find significant differences of the treatment effects with respect to the year of birth of an individual, whether they are married or not, whether they went to a high school in Bujumbura or not, the number of trainings they did, the gender of the evaluator, the number of employees of the evaluating organization nor the number of years the organization has been present in the country. It could be that the latter dimensions of heterogeneity are not important for the employers when they are assessing the value of low-skill experience. However, we cannot rule out that this absence of significance is due to a lack of statistical power.

It would have been interesting to estimate the heterogeneity of the low-skill treatment with respect to the types of low-skill experiences individuals typically do but since the study design does not allow that, we have asked directly the question to hiring managers. We discuss the corresponding results in sub-section 4.5 below.

4.4 Robustness checks

As a first robustness check, we change the coding of the dependent variable by making it binary with a cutoff at the Likert point of 5. It could be that evaluators were using "system 1" (Morewedge and Kahneman, 2010) when scoring the resumes, meaning that, instead of making a fine distinction between the resumes, they tended to score the resumes above or below the cutoff of 5 depending on whether they are interested in the profile or not. Consistent with previous findings, Table 9 shows the effect of low-skill experience (approximately 0.13 - Column (4)) is positive and significant at 1%, meaning that signaling low-skill experience increases the probability of obtaining a CV score above 5 by 13 percentage points. The effect of gender is still not significant.

As a second robustness check, we estimate a generalized ordered logistic model to test if the impacts of the treatment variables vary along the Likert scale. We therefore categorized the resume score variable as follows: Likert scores of 1 to 3 were recoded 1, scores of 4 to 6 were recoded 2 and scores of 7 to 10 were recoded 3. This allows to estimate the impact of low-skill experience on the probability of obtaining a score in category 1 compared to categories 2 and

Table 8: Heterogeneity of gender and low-skill experience treatments

VARIABLES	(1) CV Score	(2) CV Score	(3) CV Score	(4) CV Score	(5) CV Score	(6) CV Score	(7) CV Score	(8) CV Score	(9) CV Score
Gender (=1 if female)	0.101	-0.014	-25.231	0.002	-0.009	-0.037	-0.067	-0.031	0.132
	(0.146)	(0.101)	(103.096)	(0.104)	(0.107)	(0.151)	(0.193)	(0.170)	(0.253)
Low-skill experience	0.589***		144.422	0.498***	0.464***	0.391***	0.584***	0.449***	0.332
	(0.143)		(104.102)	(0.103)	(0.109)	(0.148)	(0.193)	(0.171)	(0.253)
Gender*Low-skill	-0.231								
	(0.199)								
3 months or less of low-skill experience		0.326**							
		(0.142)							
9 months or more of low-skill experience		0.612***							
		(0.124)							
Low-skill*Yearofbirth			-0.072						
			(0.052)						
Gender*Yearofbirth			0.013						
			(0.052)						
Low-skill*Married				-0.565					
				(0.441)					
Gender*Married				-0.349					
				(0.412)					
Low-skill*Highschoolinbujumbura					0.066				
					(0.322)				
Gender*Highschoolinbujumbura					-0.042				
					(0.323)				
Low-skill*Trainings						0.076			
						(0.110)			
Gender*Trainings						0.018			
						(0.117)			
Low_skill*Genderofevaluator							-0.215		
							(0.320)		
Gender*Genderofevaluator							0.056		
							(0.320)		
Low-skill*Numberofemployees								0.000	
								(0.000)	
Gender*Numberofemployees								-0.000	
								(0.000)	
Low-skill*YearsinBurundi									0.006
									(0.009)
Gender*YearsinBurundi									-0.007
									(0.009)
Constant	-61.178	-58.648	-115.623	-59.658	-59.072	-59.616	-215.476**	-213.770**	-217.388**
	(52.262)	(52.119)	(85.704)	(52.499)	(52.517)	(52.540)	(84.534)	(85.083)	(85.291)
Observations	712	712	712	712	712	712	712	712	712
R-squared	0.670	0.671	0.670	0.670	0.669	0.670	0.125	0.125	0.126
Resume characteristics	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Evaluator characteristics	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Evaluator FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Note: In column (1), the p-value for the significance test of the coefficient on Low-skill experience plus the coefficient on Gender*Low-skill (0.358) is 0.0106.

Table 9: Impact of gender and low-skill experience: binary dependent variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
VARIABLES	OLS	OLS	Logistic	Logistic
Gender (=1 if female)	-0.015	-0.016	-0.015	-0.022
	(0.035)	(0.025)	(0.035)	(0.038)
Low-skill experience	0.108***	0.110***	0.109***	0.128***
	(0.036)	(0.025)	(0.036)	(0.038)
Number of pages	-0.026	0.001	-0.027	-0.068
	(0.067)	(0.052)	(0.068)	(0.066)
Year of birth		0.005		0.018*
		(0.007)		(0.010)
Married (=1 if married)		-0.112***		-0.076
		(0.043)		(0.087)
High school in Bujumbura		-0.061*		-0.026
		(0.036)		(0.049)
Training		0.031**		0.021
		(0.014)		(0.017)
Gender of evaluator				0.183***
				(0.037)
Number of employees				-0.000***
				(0.000)
Years in Burundi				0.009***
				(0.001)
Constant	0.339**	-8.643		
	(0.132)	(13.478)		
Observations	712	712	712	712
R-squared	0.013	0.555		
Resume characteristics	NO	YES	NO	YES
Evaluator characteristics	NO	NO	NO	YES
Evaluator FE	NO	YES	NO	NO

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

We report marginal effects at the mean for the logistic regressions. The logistic model does not converge if we include fixed effects.

3 (columns (1) and (3)) and category 3 compared to categories 1 and 2 (columns (2) and (4)) and thus we are able to estimate two coefficients of the impact of low-skill experience instead of one. Table 10 shows that low-skill experience reduces the probability of obtaining a score in category 1 compared to categories 2 and 3 by approximately 8 percentage points while it increases the probability of being in category 3 compared to categories 1 and 2 by around 5 percentage points. These results suggest that low-skill experience has positive effects at the bottom as well as the top of the distribution.

Table 10: Impact of gender and low-skill experience: generalized ordered logistic estimates with dependent variable in 3 categories

VARIABLES	(1) Reference Category = 1	(2) Reference Category = 3	(3) Reference Category = 1	(4) Reference Category = 3
Gender (=1 if female)	-0.017	-0.015	-0.005	-0.014
	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.029)
Low-skill experience	-0.075**	0.045	-0.088**	0.055*
	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.030)
Number of pages	-0.009	-0.000	0.012	-0.016
	(0.059)	(0.051)	(0.058)	(0.046)
Year of birth			-0.025**	0.013
			(0.010)	(0.008)
Married (=1 if married)			0.068	0.038
			(0.096)	(0.083)
High school in Bujumbura			-0.055	0.058
			(0.051)	(0.044)
Training			-0.027	0.016
			(0.019)	(0.014)
Gender of evaluator			0.021	0.153***
			(0.037)	(0.032)
Number of employees			0.000*	-0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Years in Burundi			-0.006***	0.008***
			(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	712	712	712	712
R-squared				
Resume characteristics	NO	NO	YES	YES
Evaluator characteristics	NO	NO	YES	YES
Evaluator FE	NO	NO	NO	NO

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Coefficients are marginal effects at the mean
Category 1 corresponds to CV scores between 1 and 3 and Category 1 corresponds to CV scores between 7 and 10.

In Table 11, we estimate the impact of the treatment variables while combining scores given for the first type of job, the second and the third. In Column (1), we reproduce the main result obtained in Table 7 where the dependent variable is the score given for the first type of job. In Column (2), the dependent variable is the score given for the second type of job and in Column (3), the score given for the third type of job. Column (4) shows results for the three types of jobs after appending all the scores in the dataset. The effect of low-skill experience is largest and most significant in Column (1) and decreases in magnitude and in significance from column (2) to (4). These results are consistent with evaluators being less attentive in their evaluations for the second and third job compared to the first job, thus inducing attenuation bias in the estimates.

We also conducted a robustness check where we added the 18 observations we deleted because of missing observations for control variables. We show in Table A2 in the Appendix that our results are robust to the inclusion of these and replacing missing observations with means.

4.5 Mechanisms

After evaluating resumes, the 37 hiring managers were invited to express directly their preferences with respect to low-skill experience. Employers were asked to choose between hiring: (a) an individual without any type of post-graduate professional experience or (b) an individual with 12 months of low-skill experience after graduation. The managers were asked to respond to the question in the context of a college graduate who has been 12 months on the market. The types of low-skill jobs were randomly chosen from the set of experiences used in the audit study: Phone credit sales agent, Call center agent, Cashier, Clothing salesperson, Milk seller, TukTuk driver, Waiter, Security guard, Petty trader, Chicken trader, Driver, Photographer, Welder, Data Entry Agent and Enumerator. The managers had the option of expressing their preferences for up to five types of existing jobs in his/her organization. Among 645 choices expressed, 75% were in favor of low-skill experience, which is consistent with the audit study results.

Next, we asked employers to evaluate on a Likert scale how they perceive in general post-

Table 11: Impact of gender and low-skill experience: three types of jobs

VARIABLES	(1) CV Score	(2) CV Score	(3) CV Score	(4) CV Score
Gender (=1 if female)	-0.014	-0.033	-0.062	-0.025
	(0.101)	(0.118)	(0.160)	(0.072)
Low-skill experience	0.473***	0.287**	0.275*	0.388***
	(0.100)	(0.116)	(0.155)	(0.071)
Number of pages	0.108	0.247	0.139	0.195
	(0.179)	(0.230)	(0.301)	(0.138)
Year of birth	0.032	0.050	0.042	0.041**
	(0.026)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.018)
Married (=1 if married)	-0.250	-0.342	-0.601*	-0.356**
	(0.227)	(0.222)	(0.329)	(0.163)
High school in Bujumbura	-0.114	-0.281	-0.246	-0.177
	(0.164)	(0.189)	(0.230)	(0.111)
Training	0.145**	0.104	0.124	0.137***
	(0.060)	(0.067)	(0.095)	(0.041)
Constant	-58.953	-94.224	-79.159	-79.928**
	(52.391)	(60.996)	(61.093)	(35.130)
Observations	712	410	277	1,399
R-squared	0.669	0.771	0.763	0.693
Resume characteristics	YES	YES	YES	YES
Evaluator characteristics	NO	NO	NO	NO
Evaluator FE	YES	YES	YES	YES

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

graduate experience in the low-skill jobs. We show their responses in Table 12. The results suggest that employers perceive job seekers with low-skill experience as perseverant, hard working and disciplined, rather than people with financial difficulties, generally incompetent or relatively incompetent compared to classmates. The list includes purposely qualifiers that have a close meaning, such as perseverance and hard working, to check consistency of responses.

Table 12: Employers' perception of low-skill experience

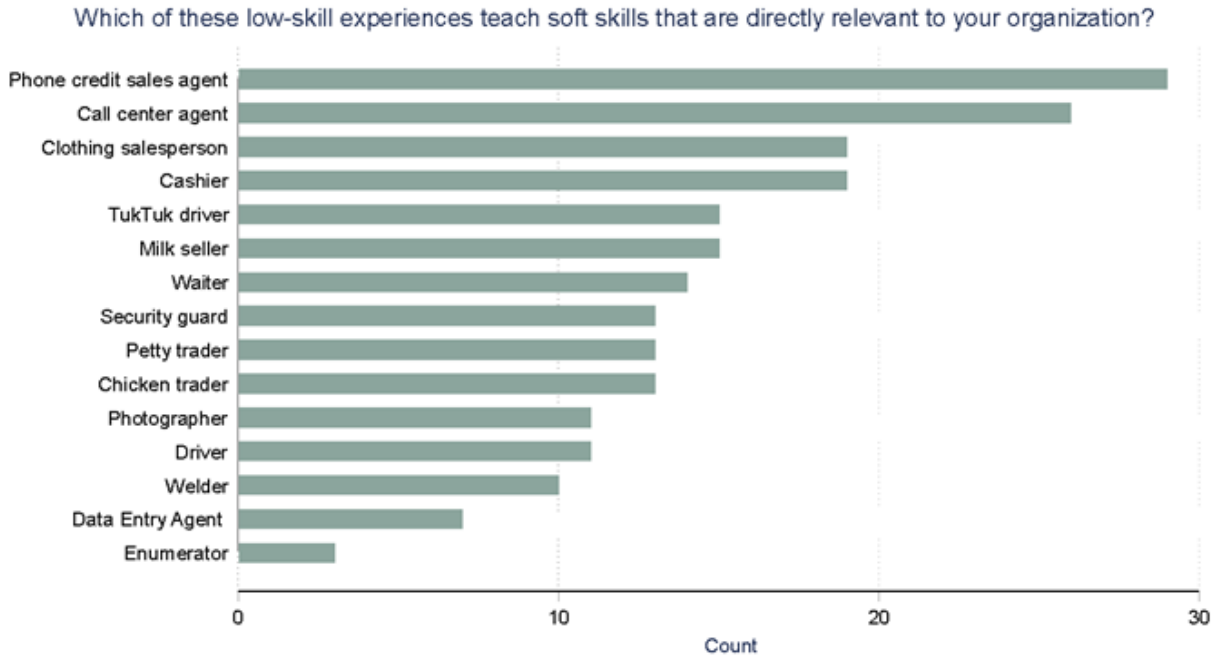
Experience in low-skill jobs suggests that the job seeker is:	Mean of a 10 points Likert Scale
Persevering	8.05
Is a hard worker	7.22
Has discipline	5.59
Has financial difficulties	3.51
Incompetent	2.27
Is less qualified compared to classmates	1.86

Note: The order of these attributes in the survey was randomized

In pre-survey interviews with out of sample employers, they insisted on the importance of developing soft skills on the job, such as communication skills, showing up on time at work (discipline) and others. We therefore investigated whether low-skill jobs might be a way of developing such soft skills. We asked employers about the importance of soft skills in their organization. We found that they value soft skills with an average of 7.5 of the Likert score and a standard deviation of 2. We also asked them to indicate which low-skill experiences teach soft skills that are directly relevant to their organization. Their answers are shown in Figure 1. The figure suggests that employers might be valuing jobs that involve speaking to clients such as sales jobs more than jobs that do not require this skill such as enumerator and data entry jobs.

As a complement to the previous questions, we asked employers the kind of soft skills they look for when making a hiring decision. Figure A1 shows the corresponding word cloud in which the size of each word reflects the frequency by which it was reported. Employers insisted on the importance of communication skills including oral communication, written communication, public speaking, eloquence and interaction with people. The next skill that

Figure 1: Ranking of low-skill jobs by employers



came up frequently is teamwork or team spirit. Employers also insisted on politeness or respect, and sense of initiative. Other soft skills frequently mentioned include punctuality, friendliness and flexibility. Overall, the word cloud illustrates the primacy of interpersonal skills in the hiring process. This suggests that employers may value more low-skill experience which they think develop such competencies.

5 Conclusion

Using an audit study strategy which avoids deception, this paper investigated preferences of employers with regard to low-skill experience of recent college graduates in economics and management. The focus was on examining the impact of various types of low-skill experiences, such as working as a phone credit sales agent, a waiter, a security guard and other positions that do not necessitate a college degree, on the likelihood of being employed in a high-skill job.

We find that individuals who mention a low-skill experience on their resume are more likely to be hired than individuals who do not mention any experience. We analyze the heterogeneity

of the low-skill experience treatment with respect to resume and evaluator characteristics. Results indicate that the positive effect of low-skill experiences is more pronounced for male job seekers compared to female job seekers, and it increases with the duration of such experiences. However, the preference for low-skill experience does not vary with respect to the gender of the evaluator, the size of the organization of the employer, and a set of other dimensions of heterogeneity. Furthermore, our main findings are robust to different specifications. Post-experiment interviews with employers suggest that they value the low-skill experiences because they signal grit, discipline and a hard-working character rather than financial difficulties or relative incompetence. These results are encouraging for the many recent graduates who lack opportunities related to their studies in absence of social assistance for job seekers.

The findings of this study have two important implications with respect to the guidance that should be provided to young graduates in the labor market. Given that expectations of how employers will perceive different experiences can affect their uptake and signaling, the first implication is that graduates should be encouraged to consider taking on low-skill jobs while they wait for employment which corresponds to their qualification. The second implication is that graduates should be informed that signaling such experiences to potential employers may improve their chances of being hired.

In fact, it is crucial for young graduates to perceive a particular value of low-skill jobs. Underemployment was a significant factor contributing to the popular uprisings that occurred in many countries of the Arab world starting in 2010, as reported by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2011). The sense of frustration among the youth was exacerbated by the fact that their parents had invested a significant amount of money in their education, with the hope of providing them with a better future, only to see them end up in low-skill jobs or no job at all. It is therefore important that young people who are forced to take on low-skill jobs do not feel alienated from the career they aspire to, especially in contexts where social security coverage, including unemployment and pension schemes, do not exist.

In addition to its primary focus, this study also examined gender discrimination at an early stage of the hiring process, i.e. during CV screening. The findings indicate that employers

do not discriminate with respect to gender. This result is consistent with previous research, which has identified gender discrimination in senior rather than junior positions. The absence of gender discrimination early in their careers should encourage young job seekers to pursue a variety of opportunities regardless of their gender. This conclusion is important as it could help young graduates making career choices.

An interesting avenue for future research would be to investigate how preferences of employers vary with respect to different types of low-skill job experiences, different fields of study of jobs seekers and different high-skill jobs being applied for. However, such a study would require a sample that is larger than the one used in the present study. The limiting factor in such an experiment is finding enough employers to evaluate many resumes.

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6 Appendix

Figure A1: Soft skills that employers look for when making a hiring decision

Table A1: Balance tests for the interaction of the gender and low-skill experience treatments

		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	t-test	t-test	t-test	t-test	t-test	t-test
		Male+Low-skill		Female+Low-skill		Male+No Low-skill		Female+No Low-skill	p-value	p-value	p-value	p-value	p-value	p-value
Variable	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	(1)-(2)	(1)-(3)	(1)-(4)	(2)-(3)	(2)-(4)	(3)-(4)
Number of pages	179	1.989	177	1.977	178	1.910	178	1.921	0.587	0.003***	0.012**	0.017**	0.047**	0.730
		[0.014]		[0.016]		[0.023]		[0.023]						
Year of birth	179	1993.698	177	1994.011	178	1993.803	178	1993.848	0.116	0.611	0.465	0.301	0.415	0.828
		[0.144]		[0.136]		[0.147]		[0.146]						
Married (=1 if married)	179	0.039	177	0.051	178	0.039	178	0.045	0.594	0.991	0.784	0.602	0.795	0.793
		[0.015]		[0.017]		[0.015]		[0.016]						
High school in Bujumbura	179	0.128	177	0.153	178	0.169	178	0.152	0.515	0.289	0.529	0.682	0.982	0.666
		[0.025]		[0.027]		[0.028]		[0.027]						
Training	179	0.994	177	1.153	178	1.084	178	1.112	0.180	0.447	0.316	0.599	0.756	0.828
		[0.074]		[0.092]		[0.092]		[0.091]						
Gender of evaluator	179	0.492	177	0.480	178	0.478	178	0.494	0.830	0.791	0.959	0.960	0.790	0.751
		[0.037]		[0.038]		[0.038]		[0.038]						
Number of employees	179	149.575	177	147.836	178	150.826	178	149.803	0.962	0.972	0.995	0.934	0.957	0.977
		[25.439]		[25.697]		[25.566]		[25.582]						
Years in Burundi	179	23.849	177	23.367	178	23.685	178	23.933	0.811	0.936	0.967	0.874	0.779	0.903
		[1.431]		[1.410]		[1.433]		[1.437]						

***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level.
Standard errors in brackets

Table A2: The impact of low-skill experience: taking into account missing observations

VARIABLES	(1) CV Score	(2) CV Score	(3) CV Score	(4) CV Score
Gender (=1 if female)	0.035	0.023	0.021	0.023
	(0.165)	(0.165)	(0.157)	(0.099)
Low-skill experience	0.451***	0.459***	0.463***	0.436***
	(0.166)	(0.166)	(0.158)	(0.101)
Number of pages	-0.089	-0.081	-0.168	0.126
	(0.243)	(0.243)	(0.220)	(0.166)
Year of birth		0.024	0.037	0.008
		(0.048)	(0.051)	(0.022)
Married (=1 if married)		-0.065	-0.020	-0.247
		(0.400)	(0.400)	(0.222)
High school in Bujumbura		0.051	0.114	-0.109
		(0.234)	(0.219)	(0.160)
Training		0.143**	0.117*	0.142**
		(0.070)	(0.066)	(0.056)
Gender of evaluator			0.380**	
			(0.164)	
Number of employees			-0.001***	
			(0.000)	
Years in Burundi			0.038***	
			(0.005)	
Constant	4.560***	-43.788	-70.126	-11.501
	(0.482)	(94.712)	(101.945)	(43.379)
Observations	730	730	730	730
R-squared	0.010	0.017	0.116	0.664
Resume characteristics	NO	YES	YES	YES
Evaluator characteristics	NO	NO	YES	NO
Evaluator FE	NO	NO	NO	YES

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Note : From columns (2) to (4), missing observations for Year of birth, Maried and High school in Bujumbura are replaced with means.

Table A3: Type of jobs suggested by resume evaluators

Accountant	Financial Analyst
Accounting and Financial executive	Monitoring and Evaluation
Accounting and HR Manager	Grant Accountant
Accounting Department Executive	Head of Accounting Department
Accounting Internship	Head of Credit Department
Administration and Finance Assistant	Head of Operations
Administration Assistant	HR Assistant
Administration Executive	HR Assistant
Administrative and Financial Director	Human Resources Clerk
Administrative and Financial Intern	Internal Auditor
Administrative Manager	Inventory Manager
Administrative Secretary	Journalist
Assistant Accountant	Local Purchasing Agent
Assistant Manager	Logistics
Automotive Underwriter	Logistics Manager
Bank Operation Officer	Logistics Officer
Billing and Collection Department	Logistics/security Department
Branch Manager	Logistics/Security Manager
Business Banker	Management and Warehouse Department
Teller	Management Control Department
Claims Department	Marketing Agent
Collection officer	Marketing/Commercial Officer
Collection Service	Miscellaneous Operations Officer
Collections Controller	Order Manager
Commercial Attache	Personnel Manager
Commercial Department Executive	Production Agent
Communication Officer	Production Manager
Community Manager	Program Manager
Cooperative Facilitator	Project Manager
Credit Analyst	Public Relations
Credit Department	Sales Agent
Credit Officer	Sales Manager
Credit Risk Officer	Sales Representative
Customer Service Agent	Sales Representative Internship
Customer Service and Marketing	Team Leader
Data Entry in Accounting	Technical Sales Executive
Direct Sales Representative	Treasury Custody
Finance Officer	Underwriter trainee

Figure A2: Template of the letter sent to employers (Page 1)

Bujumbura, le 30 mai 2022

A Monsieur/Madame le Directeur Général de .....

à Bujumbura

Objet : Etude des préférences des organisations partenaires/collaborateurs

Réf. : ...../IG/MK/05/2022

Madame/Monsieur le Directeur Général,

Je vous présente mes compliments et sollicite votre participation à une évaluation que nous conduisons sur les préférences des employeurs burundais. Cette évaluation permettra à INFINITY GROUP de vous fournir à l'avenir et au besoin, des travailleurs correspondant aux préférences que vous aurez indiquées.

L'insertion professionnelle des jeunes ! Une équation à « n » inconnues que l'Etat, le Système Educatif, les Pourvoyeurs d'Emplois – acteurs des Secteurs tant Public que Privé, les Bailleurs de Fonds Internationaux, etc... tentent de résoudre par tous les moyens. Les Jeunes se plaignent de ne pas avoir suffisamment accès à l'emploi, alors que les Employeurs potentiels se plaignent de n'avoir pas une main d'œuvre, adéquatement préparée pour le milieu professionnel. INFINITY GROUP souhaite apporter sa pierre à la résolution de ce problème sur base d'une théorie de changement selon laquelle : Si les pourvoyeurs d'emplois communiquent mieux leurs besoins en ressources et participent à la mise à niveau des jeunes à travers leur responsabilité sociale et que les capacités des jeunes sont renforcées et adaptées aux besoins du marché, alors les jeunes auront un meilleur accès au marché du travail burundais.

En effet, dans le cadre de l'amélioration continue de nos services et pour mieux préparer nos formations à l'endroit de certains lauréats, potentiels employés de demain, nous souhaitons mieux connaître les profils de candidats qui vous intéressent le plus. Nous vous demandons ainsi d'évaluer les 20 CVs en annexe sur une

Figure A3: Template of the letter sent to employers (Page 2)

échelle de 1 à 10 en utilisant la fiche d'évaluation également en annexe. Pour ce lot spécifique de CVs, il s'agit de profils de candidats ayant terminé leur Baccalauréat en Sciences Economiques et de Gestion en mai 2021 à l'Université du Burundi. Après avoir terminé l'évaluation des CVs, nous vous demandons de répondre à quelques questions supplémentaires pour nous aider à mieux comprendre les besoins de votre entreprise/organisation/institution. Cette activité prend environ 20 minutes. Plus vous évaluerez soigneusement les CVs, mieux nous pourrons vous proposer les profils adéquats. Il serait préférable que les CVs soient évalués par un haut cadre qui participe habituellement dans les décisions d'embauche afin d'augmenter la précision de nos recommandations.

En espérant une suite favorable, je vous prie d'agréer, Madame/Monsieur le Directeur Général, l'expression de ma haute considération.

Irvine Floréale Murame
Managing Director

CPI :

- A Monsieur / Madame l'ADGA
- A Monsieur / Madame le DRH

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info@infinitygroup.bi
www.infinitygroup.bi
NIF: 4001100017
RC: 12607/18

Figure A4: A sample of the resumes sent for evaluation (Page 1)

CURRICULUM VITAE

1. **Nom de famille :**
2. **Prénom :**
3. **Contact :**
4. **E-mail :**
5. **Date de naissance : 1995**
6. **Genre : Féminin**
7. **Nationalité : Burundaise**
8. **Etat civil : Célibataire**
9. **Profession : Sans**

10. Formation :

Établissements fréquentés	**Périodes**	**Diplômes**
Université du Burundi	**2019-2021**	**Baccalaureat**
Lycée communal MUSIGATI	2015-2017	DiplomeA2 en gestion et comptabilité
Lycée communal NGARA	2011-2015	Certificat du tronc commun
Ecole primaire NGARA I	2004-2011	

11. Formations parascolaires

Institutions	**Périodes**	**Certificats/Attestations**
Formation de l'entrepreneuriat : club new vision new genereration(2020)	3mois	Certificat d'entrepreneuriat
Université du Burundi	2 Mois	Stage académique
Lycée technique de la foi	En cours de faire	Bénévole : enseignant du cours de comptabilité générale

12. Expérience

Type	**De**	**A**
Agent Lumicash	Juin 2021	Aujourd'hui

13. Niveaux des langues connues (par compétence de 1 à 5, 5 étant le maximum) :

Langue	Lu	Parlé	Ecrit
Kirundi	5	5	5
Français	4	4	3
Anglais	3	2	2
Swahili	4	3	3

14. Connaissances informatiques : Outils bureautique (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access…).

15. Centre d'Intérêts et loisirs : Cinéma

16. Les personnes de référence :

Les personnes qui peuvent témoigner la véracité de notre expérience susmentionnée sont :

1. , Enseignant-Chercheur à la FSEG (Université du Burundi)
   Téléphone :
   E-mail :
2. , Enseignant-Chercheur à la FSEG (Université du Burundi)
   Téléphone :

1

Figure A5: A sample of the resumes sent for evaluation (Page 2)

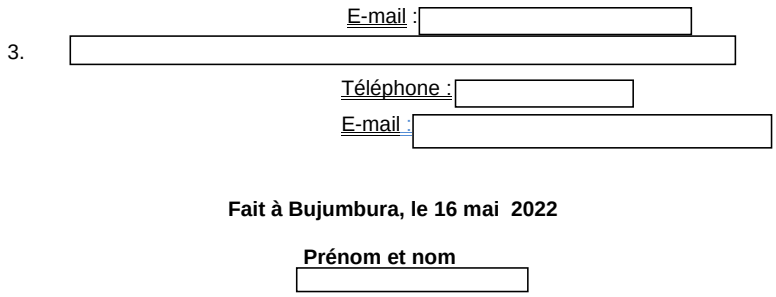


Figure A6: Resume evaluation sheet

Infinity GROUP
WE PROVIDE SOLUTIONS

OUTIL D'EVALUATION DE CVs

INFINITY GROUP réalise une étude qui vise à améliorer l'adéquation entre les travailleurs et les entreprises et autres employeurs du Burundi. Nous vous demandons d'évaluer sur une échelle de 1 à 10 les CV joints de jeunes diplômés en économie et gestion de l'Université du Burundi. Vos choix seront utilisés pour vous fournir des recommandations de travailleurs qui pourraient convenir à votre organisation. Plus vous évaluerez les CV avec soin, plus nous serons en mesure de trouver des candidats appropriés pour votre organisation. Les noms des candidats ainsi que de leurs référents ont été rendus anonymes pour des raisons de confidentialité.

Nom de l'évaluateur de CVs

Nom de l'organisation

Titre de l'évaluateur de CVs

Date

Intitulé du poste ou des postes qui pourrait(ent) être occupé(s) par un détenteur d'un diplôme de Baccalauréat en Economie et Gestion sans expérience connexe.

Poste 1

Poste 2

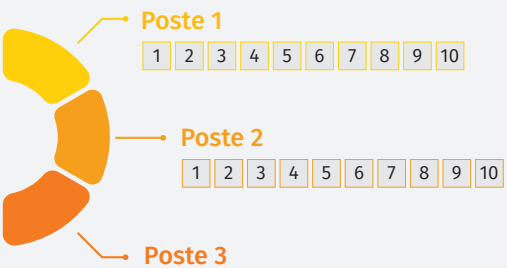
Poste 3

SCORE DE CHAQUE CV

Sur une échelle de 1 à 10, quel intérêt portez-vous à l'embauche de ce candidat ?

(Encerclez le chiffre correspondant : 1 est "Pas du tout intéressé" et 10 est "Très intéressé").

N'évaluez que la qualité du candidat. Supposez que le candidat accepterait une offre s'il en recevait une.



Poste 1
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poste 2
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poste 3
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Quel montant recommanderiez-vous comme salaire mensuel de départ si le candidat est offert le poste ?

Poste 1

Poste 2

Poste 3