

Academic Incentive as a Control Strategy in Academic Labor Process: A Case Study From Social Sciences in Turkey

Selin ATALAY*

Ege University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Sociology, Izmir, Turkey

*Corresponding Author:
E-mail:selin.atalay@ege.edu.tr

Received: February 27, 2018

Accepted: May 04, 2018

Abstract

In the era of monopoly capitalism, all areas including services which are subject to exchange relations are being commodified. This is the case in higher education. Through neoliberal policies which form the ideological base for this commodification process, the services which were previously provided by the state are being privatized. To understand and explain the effects of this commodification process of higher education on the academic profession, qualitative research has been conducted as part of a PhD thesis. In-depth interviews have been carried out with 28 teaching members from the departments of psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, geography and art history who are working in public or foundation universities located in the cities of Istanbul and Izmir. Academic incentive mechanisms have been discussed and analyzed in the context of proletarianization of professionals. The study showed that instead of intrinsic rewards, academics are concentrating on monetary rewards such as academic incentives. This is seen as a control strategy, where academic labor is losing control over academic labor process. This can be interpreted as part of the process of proletarianization of academics.

Keywords: Academics, Commodification, Control, Labor Process, Turkish Higher Education

*This study is built on the PhD thesis which has been prepared in Ege University, General Sociology and Methodology Program under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Hale Okçay and has been successfully defended on July 14, 2017. It is an expanded and revised version of the abstract presented in 3rd International Congress on Political, Economic and Management Sciences 08-12 November 2017, Belgrade, Serbia.

Akademik Emek Sürecinde Bir Kontrol Stratejisi Olarak Akademik Teşvik: Türkiye’de Sosyal Bilimlerden Bir Vaka Çalışması

Özet

Tekelci Sermaye döneminde, hizmetler de dahil olacak şekilde, piyasa ilişkilerine konu olan tüm alanlarda metalaşmanın gerçekleştiği görülmektedir. Bu durum yükseköğretim alanı için de geçerlidir. Bu metalaşma sürecine ideolojik temel sağlayan neoliberal politikalar yoluyla, geçmişte devletin sunduğu hizmetler özelleştirilmektedir. Yükseköğretimin metalaşması sürecinin akademisyenlik mesleği üzerindeki etkilerini anlamak ve açıklamak üzere, doktora tezinin alan çalışması kapsamında niteliksel bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çerçevede, İzmir ve İstanbul illerinde bulunan devlet ve vakıf üniversitelerinin psikoloji, sosyoloji, tarih, felsefe, coğrafya ve sanat tarihi bölümlerinde çalışan 28 öğretim üyesi ile derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Akademik teşvik mekanizması, profesyonellerin proleterleşmesi kuramı çerçevesinde ele alınmış ve tartışılmıştır. Çalışma, akademisyenlerin içsel ödüller yerine parasal ödüller üzerine yoğunlaştıklarına işaret etmiştir. Bu durum, akademik emeğin kendi emek süreci üzerindeki kontrolü yitirmesine sebep olan bir kontrol stratejisi olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bu değerlendirme, akademisyenlerin proleterleşmeleri süreci çerçevesinde ele alınabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akademisyenler, Emek Süreci, Kontrol, Metalaşma, Türkiye’de Yükseköğretim

INTRODUCTION

As capitalism progresses, all areas which were not subject to exchange relations are expected to be commodified. As neoliberal policies take effect as the new ideological base of capitalism, public services which were previously held by the state at the time of the ‘welfare state’ are being privatized. Neoliberalism involves the “corporatization, commodification and privatization of hitherto public assets” [1]. Higher education in this sense is becoming privatized and commodified. Welch defines commodification of higher education as: “*What is meant by commodification is the treatment of higher education as a commercial commodity. That is, wealth is the basis for the distribution of educational ‘goods’, and the valuing of education by individuals and governments is largely according to its relative financial return, as compared with other forms of investment*” [2]. Higher education is seen as another commodity which is regarded and organized in profit terms [3].

Universities are going through a transformation process in line with the commodification of higher education.

The idea of higher education known as the ‘Humboldtian Model’, has been built on the philosophical contributions of Humboldt, Fichte and Schleiermacher. University of Berlin was founded by Wilhelm von Humboldt and served as a pioneer of a new model in higher education, termed the ‘Humboldtian’ model of higher education. This model, which has been influential throughout the world since 19th century, has been built on the belief that higher education should be a public service but also that the university as the place for higher learning should be a place where scientific development will be carried out without the chains of state oppression and the bourgeois interests [4, 5, 6]. Throughout the world Humboldtian Model is being replaced by the ‘American Model’ of higher education.

Scholars are discussing how the American higher education is taken as a model and has been replacing the Humboldtian model throughout the world in various national systems. This is referred to as the ‘Americanization of Higher Education’ [7, 8, 9]. We can say that there are some basic characteristics of this model which have had their influence throughout the world in the neoliberal era.

Altbach states that the American model is seen as the “gold standard” throughout the world and respected in its leadership in research and its ability to serve a large number of students. “*Entire academic systems are reengineered to reflect such U.S. practices as the course credit system, competition among academic institutions, the coexistence of public and private universities and colleges, diversity in institutional missions and goals, accountability within and among academic institutions, and the organization of public universities and colleges into state systems*” [10]. Certain characteristics of this higher education model are in accordance with the application of neoliberal policies. Privatization, standardization, competition through output, emphasis on ‘accountability’ in higher education all signify the institutionalization of new performance systems where output is carefully calculated, monitored and controlled.

American influence in Turkish higher education may be traced back to 1950s, when the ‘Land-Grant’ universities were incorporated into the system. This type of university was operationalized to enable development in the Anatolian area [11]. However, the ‘Americanization’ of higher education becomes evident after a state agency called the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) was founded in 1981. This agency which has become the central authority in the higher education system has allowed the establishment of foundation universities. After the establishment of the first private² university in 1984, 76 private universities have been founded until today. There are a total of 109 public universities throughout Turkey [12]. If we look at the recent draft law proposed by Turkey’s Council of Higher Education, we can see the aim of transforming higher education. This can be referred to as the “Americanization” of higher education in Turkey. The draft law has presented 5 fundamental principles and aims which are: “1. Diversity 2. Institutional autonomy and accountability 3. Performance evaluation and scientific competition 4. Financial flexibility and diversity in resources 5. Quality assurance” [13]. These principles and aims can be seen as indicative of the Americanization process of higher education in Turkey.

Academics are a central actor in this transformation process of higher education throughout the world. Academic work is becoming precarious where lifelong careers are replaced with part-time work. For Example, Teichler et al. [14] state that only 14% of the academics in Argentina are working as full-time. The percentage of total contingent faculty in the USA, the country that has the biggest higher education market, is shown to be 70 whereas the percentage of tenure line is 30 in 2015 [15]. In 1992, Rajagopal & Farr, announce that part-time faculty constitute more than one third of all Canadian faculty and remind us of Braverman’s perspective on the stratification of the labor force [16]. Braverman [17] states that as capitalism progresses, there will be splits in the labor force where more occupations will be degraded and while some workers remain as privileged in that occupation, increasing number of workers will form an ‘underclass’.

The conditions of academic work are changing and becoming more precarious. Managerial control over the academic labor process is increasing where academic work is intensified, rationalized and routinized; academic skills are being redefined and depreciated. Academic work is being

*2 These universities are officially called foundation universities. However, many scholars who have examined the governance and the financial structure of these institutions have referred to them as private universities (Vatansever & Gezici- Yalçın, 2015; Arslan &

standardized through performance criteria, the conception and the execution are separated, where each one is divided into further criteria that can be supervised, calculated and controlled [18, 19, 16]. These changes are considered as signs of de-professionalization [20] and proletarianization of academics [21, 22].

MATERIALS and METHODS

Looking at all these developments, for our PhD dissertation, we have aimed to analyze and understand the transformation of higher education and the change in academic profession in Turkey. Using maximum variation and snowball sampling techniques we have carried out in-depth interviews with 28 academics from 17 public and private (foundation) universities located in the cities of Istanbul and Izmir. Due to the general departmental structure, we have identified the Faculty of Letters as the best representative of social sciences in Turkey and accordingly the sample has been consisted of academics working in Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, History, Art History and Geography departments.

Keeping in mind that the transformation of higher education is progressing as a whole and commodification and privatization are encompassing all disciplines and fields, social sciences was selected because an insider’s approach was considered to be more operational in designing and carrying out in-depth interviews. There are basic differences between the research and teaching in natural sciences and social sciences. Especially the publication processes may differ [23], leading to differing performance criteria. There may be hierarchical differences between various disciplines [18]. Social sciences have been selected on these grounds.

In order to better grasp the effects of the privatization process, we have conducted in-depth interviews mostly with (19) teaching members working in private universities. Interviews with (9) academics from public universities were carried out to enable a comparison. Basic attributes of the sample have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Attributes of the Sample

Title	University	City
Assist. Prof. Dr: 16	Classification	Istanbul :20
Assoc. Prof. Dr : 7	A : 2	Izmir : 8
Prof. Dr. : 5	B : 7	
	C : 10	
	D(public) : 9	
Gender	Foundation/	Age
Female :15	Public	33- 72
Male :13	Foundation : 19	
	Public : 9	

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that even though ‘new public management strategies’ were transforming public higher education, there were major differences in the working conditions of academics from private and public universities. Furthermore, there were differences among private universities which led us to classify these universities as type A, B and C. Different types meant different institutional capital structures which also meant different working conditions.

‘Proletarianization of professionals’ was the theoretical starting point that we have used in explaining these

developments. Smith & Wilmott [24] argue that, various types of labor will be going through the same process that the manual labor has gone through. The process they refer to is the one which involves a fundamental difference between labor and labor power.

What gives capitalism its unique form is stated to be the labor process. A worker possesses a potential which has not yet been realized. This is called labor power. Labor power is purchased by the capitalist and it is turned into labor (production) at the end of a labor process [25]. Braverman, takes this fundamental difference between labor and labor power and forms the basis of the 'Labor Process Theory' [17] which was used as the theoretical framework in our study. The control over this labor process is the subject of struggle between the worker and the capitalist [26]. This is a process where capitalist uses different strategies of control and the workers try to implement control by using resistance strategies [27].

The struggle over control of the labor process can be seen in all aspects of production including the commodified services. As a result of capitalist strategies, the labor process for all workers including professionals is expected to be rationalized, routinized and subject to higher levels of market competition. Proletarianization of professionals is a process where professional labor loses control over its labor process and working conditions [28, 29] where these types of labor will submit to capitalist control through constant performance assessment [30].

This performance assessment is followed by various types of reward and punishment mechanisms that subject the worker, the professionals to increasing control. These mechanisms ensure that the laborer is operationalizing her maximum potential in a strategic way. This was seen to be the case in our study. Academics from type A, B, C and D universities placed importance on the reward mechanism of 'academic incentive'.

Performance based pay may be regarded as one of the strategies implemented in neoliberal higher education and may be related to seeing the worker a "homo-economicus" [31]. Monetary rewards may be used to control labor process and as a means of motivating the workers. Once workers are adjusted to working in a specific rhythm, and the labor process is under the control of the management, these types of rewards are abdicated [17].

Academic Incentive has become an official practice in 2014 after a change in Higher Education Personnel Law. Incentive is organized as: "*In every calendar year, based on completed national or overseas projects which are a contribution to science, technology and art, research, publication, design, exhibit, patent and also references, abstract presentation in international conferences which have a scientific committee and the academic rewards, received for the previous calendar year, academic incentive will be calculated out of hundred for the academic personnel*" [32].

In foundation universities it was seen that academics were paid an amount depending on their institution's policy and the type of publication. Academics from public universities were paid if their academic activity performance scores were above 30. Some academics stated that they themselves did not conduct research or produce publications to receive these monetary rewards but they were able to generally observe a big effort in their environment for these rewards: "*There are some academics who only focus on these rewards; this depends on that university's policy. When the monetary reward for publication is high, some academics*

bend over backwards for these. A good amount of money comes from there" (Participant 25, Asst. Prof. Male, C).

There are some academics who act strategically to get performance rewards. For example, Participant 20 (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Female, B) says: "*Well, it is like this... We can apply there [for incentives] twice a year. When it is twice a year I always fill the quota. This year I am thinking of acting more cautiously and applying for the one which pays the most. Last semester two [publication] of mine were in Turkish; the English one came out later. They pay more for English and... I would have received more if I had applied with the English [publication]. Now I am waiting for that one*". This participant is strategically organizing her applications according to the reward structure.

Participant 3 (Prof. Dr. Female, D) states that academic incentive in public universities has enabled an increase in productivity, that it motivated academics to publish more. Participant 23 (Asst. Prof. Dr. Male, D) states that, academics are now organizing their research and publications according to the academic incentive. Participant 27 (Asst. Prof. Dr. Female, D) explains how this organizing will take place: "*I think for myself when I am to publish something. Like it was published last December. I said alas! Wish it was published in January because I would have received the incentive. This is very absurd. You might have to call that journal's editor saying 'do not publish [my work] me in the December issue, publish me later'. But is it very absurd. It is not nice to try that*". When the incentive concentrates on publishing yearly, academics will have to show a certain effort to organize accordingly.

Participant 28 (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Male, D) also states that he did not receive the incentive, receiving 28 points when the lower limit was 30 points. This was because he did not diversify his publications: "*People have started going for publications which will bring more points. The academic endeavors that will not bring performance points are being subordinated, disregarded, depreciated. As a matter of fact, we may not see them at all in the future*". We can see from this participant's reply that, once the reward becomes the most important target to be reached, academic production is expected to change accordingly. The activities which do not provide performance scores are to lose importance and to be abandoned in the future

We can see from this study that academic incentives can be regarded as a control strategy in the academic labor process. Academics are carrying out their research activities in a way which will enable them to reach high performance scores. The performance criteria are decided upon by the institutions and by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). These criteria are operationalized in ensuring that academics produce certain types of research output in a certain amount of time. This means that the academics are losing their control over their labor process. We can also expect a change in academic production, in line with the criteria implemented by institutions.

This could be analyzed as part of the process of proletarianization of professionals. Academics as professional labor are losing their control over their labor process and are becoming subject to control by outer sources. Through the Americanization of higher education, we can see the effects of commodification of higher education service throughout the world. This study shows that this could be regarded as the case in Turkey where academics from different university structures are controlled through various strategies such as academic incentives.

REFERENCES

- [1] Harvey D. 2006. "Neo-Liberalism as Creative Destruction," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 88, no. 2, pp. 145-158, p.153.
- [2] Welch A. R. 1988. "For Sale, by Degrees: Overseas Students and the Commodification of Higher Education in," *International Review of Education*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 387-395, p. 388.
- [3] Lynch K. 2014. "Control By Numbers: New Managerialism and Ranking In Higher Education," *Critical Studies in Education*, pp. 1-18.
- [4] Charle C. and Verger J. 2005. *Üniversitelerin Tarihi*, Ankara: Dost Kitabevi Yayınları.
- [5] Tekeli İ. 2003. "Dünya'da ve Türkiye'de Üniversite Üzerine Konuşmanın Değişik Yolları," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 97, pp. 123-143.
- [6] Tekin S. 2003. "Neoliberalizm, Teknik Akıl ve Üniversitenin Geleceği," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 97, pp. 144-163.
- [7] Borghans L. and Cörvers F. 2016. "The Americanization of European Higher Education and Research," in *American Universities in a Global Market*, C. T. Clotfelter, Ed., Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 231-268.
- [8] Itoh A. 2002. "Higher Education Reform in Perspective: The Japanese Experience," *Higher Education*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 7-25.
- [9] Mollis M. 2001. "The Americanization of Higher Education Reforms in Argentina," *World Studies in Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 29-46.
- [10] Altbach P. G. 2002. "The American Academic Model in Comparative Perspective," in *In Defense of American Higher Education*, P. G. Altbach, P. J. Gumpert and D. B. Johnstone, Eds., Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 11-37, p. 11.
- [11] Erdem A. R. 2012. "Küreselleşme: Türk Yükseköğretimine Etkisi," *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 109-117.
- [12] Atalay S. 2017. "Neoliberal Policies And Higher Education: A Comparison Between Sociology And Psychology Departments With Regard To Public And Private Universities In Turkey," *Sosyoloji Dergisi*, no. 35, pp. 45-59,
- [13] YÖK, "Yeni Yükseköğretim Yasasına Doğru," 2013. [Online]. Available: <http://yeniyasa.yok.gov.tr/?page=yazi&c=90&i=120>. [Accessed 10 04 2015], p. 4.
- [14] Teichler U., Arimoto A. and Cummings W. K. 2013. *The Changing Academic Profession: Major Findings Of A Comparative Survey*, Dordrecht & Heidelberg & NewYork & London: Springer.
- [15] AAUP,"Research,"03 2017. [Online]. Available:<https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Academic%20Labor%20Force%20Trends%201975-2015.pdf>. [Accessed 25 08 2017].
- [16] Rajagopal I. and Farr W. D. 1992. "Hidden Academics: The Part Time Faculty in Canada," *Higher Education*, vol. 24, pp. 317-331.
- [17] Braverman H. 2008. *Emek ve Tekelci Sermaye*, İstanbul: Kalkedon.
- [18] Miller H. 1996. "Academics and Their Labour Process," in *White- Collar Work the Non-Manual Labour Process*, C. Smith, D. Knights and H. Willmott, Eds., London, Macmillan Press, pp. 109-137.
- [19] Symth J. 1995. "Introduction," in *Academic Work*, Buckingham, SRHE & Open University Press, pp. 1-16.
- [20] Roberts K. A. and Donahue K. A. 2000. "Professing Professionalism: Bureaucratization and Deprofessionalization In The Academy," *Sociological Focus*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 365-383.
- [21] Powelson M. W. 2011. "The Proletarianization of the Academy: California State University- Northridge and the California Budget Crises," *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, no. 18, pp. 10-24.
- [22] Wilson T. 1991. "The Proletarianisation of Academic Labour," *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 250-262.
- [23] Huang M.-h. and Chang Y.-w. 2008. "Characteristics of Research Output in Social Sciences and Humanities: From a Research Evaluation Perspective," *Journal of The American Society For Information Science and Technology*, vol. 59, no. 11, pp. 1819-1828,.
- [24] Smith C. and Willmott H. 1996 "The New Middle Class and the Labour Process," in *White- Collar Work the Non-Manual Labour Process*, C. Smith, D. Knights and H. Willmott, Eds., London, Macmillan Press, 13-34.
- [25] Marx K. 2014. *Grundrisse*, İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları.
- [26] Nichols T. 1980. "The Capitalist Labour Process," in *Capital and Labour*, T. Nichols, Ed., London, The Atholone Press, pp. 21-41.
- [27] Burawoy M. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent*, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- [28] Derber C. 1983. "Managing Professionals: Ideological Proletarianization and Post-Industrial Labor," *Theory and Society*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 309-341.
- [29] Oppenheimer M. 1996. "Profesyonelin Proleterleşmesi," in *Meslekler ve Sosyoloji*, Z. Cırhinlioğlu, Ed., Ankara, Gündoğan Yayınları, 1996, pp. 151-168.
- [30] Crowley M., Tope D., Joyce C. L. and Hodson R. 2010. "Neo-Taylorism at Work: Occupational Change in the Post-Fordist Era," *Social Problems*, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 421-447.
- [31] Ünlütürk Ulutaş Ç. 2011. *Türkiye'de Sağlık Emek Sürecinin Dönüşümü*, Ankara: NotaBene Yayınları.
- [32] YÖK,"Yükseköğretim Personel Kanunu," [Online] Available:<http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2914.pdf>. [Accessed 10 5 2017], p. 6036-2.