

The Role of Foreign-Educated Scholars in Turkey's Higher Education System: A Narrative Study of Two English Language Teacher Educators

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Abstract

In recent decades, the Republic of Turkey has undertaken a program of reform aimed at modernizing its higher education system. This endeavor has included a comprehensive restructuring of the nation's public universities. In order to meet the urgent need for highly qualified faculty members to staff its state-run higher education institutions, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has turned to a government-sponsored study abroad program through which competitively selected individuals receive funding to pursue graduate degrees at North American and European universities in exchange for service in the Turkish university system. However, due to significant non-return rates of sponsored students and a lack of transparency within the program, its goals have been closely scrutinized; amid these concerns, the contributions of those who do return appear in some cases to go unnoticed. Thus, in order to illuminate the experiences of returning scholars, this study explored the accounts of two English language teachers who received doctoral degrees from foreign institutions, then returned to Turkey to serve as teacher educators. Critical theory was utilized in order to investigate the oppressive power relationships inherent in the Turkish higher education system. The results revealed that as much as these foreign-educated scholars contributed to their respective universities, their ability to provide lasting benefits to Turkish education was minimized by the systemic and bureaucratic barriers they encountered; therefore, the higher education system was unable to achieve the desired goals of the study abroad program.

Keywords: *Turkish higher education; teacher educators; study abroad; educational reform; narrative inquiry.*

Introduction

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the national government has invested vast resources in its educational system, recognizing that the success of the country depends on providing its citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to develop a modern and democratic state. However, despite extensive measures which included unifying the educational system, creating national standards for schooling, and increasing the number of public institutions (Çelik, 2009), these efforts have fallen short of their goals, and the quality of Turkish education has continued to lag behind that of other industrialized countries. Higher education, in particular, which is seen as the key to social

progress and economic success, has failed to live up to international standards. Thus, over the last several decades, the Ministry of National Education has undertaken a program of reform, holding up North American and European institutions as ideal. The government's approach to attaining the desired change has included restructuring and expansion of its state-run universities.

Çelik (2011) points out that the rapidly growing demand for quality education at the university level has led to a critical shortage of qualified faculty members. In order to address this urgent problem, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has enacted an amendment to an existing statute known as Law No. 1416 (Ecnebi Memleketlere Gönderilecek Talebe Hakkında Kanun [Law Regarding Students to be Sent to Foreign Countries], 1929). The original legislation was designed to send qualified students to study in foreign countries in order to meet the country's growing demand for skilled workers. However, under the amendment, the scholarship recipients, who are selected for foreign study through a competitive process, are obligated to return to Turkey upon completion of their graduate degrees in order to serve as faculty in the country's public university system. They are expected to bring with them the new knowledge and innovative educational practices needed to align Turkish higher education with the standards of its international counterparts (Türk Öğrencilerin Yabancı Ülkelerde Öğrenimleri Hakkında Yönetmelik [Regulation Regarding Students Studying Abroad], 1993). Yet, as the result of financial concerns, organizational issues, a high rate of student non-return, and the MoNE's ongoing failure to provide documented evidence of the contributions of returning students (Çelik, 2009), the study abroad program has often been harshly criticized by its detractors, and the expense of sending students to earn advanced degrees in foreign countries has been called into question.

Furthermore, despite the program's ostensible purpose of bringing reform and innovation to the country's universities, the Turkish higher education system, by nature of its hierarchical structure, does not lend itself easily to change. All of the nation's public colleges and universities are overseen by a centralized committee known as the Council of Higher Education, or CoHE (Yükseköğretim Kanunu [Higher Education Law], 1981). This regulatory body has the authority to exert extensive interference in university administration through a series of government policies, resulting in a monumental bureaucracy which tends to reinforce the political rather than the scientific focus of Turkish academia, severely limiting the possibility for any innovation and acting as a major obstacle to change (Arıkan, 2002; Bostrom, 2007; Timur, 2000). Under this system, academic administrators and faculty are recruited according to the requirements set by the Higher Education Law (Yükseköğretim Kanunu, 1981). Teaching contracts are offered for limited periods and may be extended or revoked at the decision of university and CoHE officials. Because tenure, salaries, and even the continuation of employment are dependent to some degree on maintaining the favorable opinion of those in authority, competition and resentment between faculty members are not unusual, and those who propose changes to the curricula or the way that classes are taught are not always well-received (Arıkan, 2002; Çelik, 2009).

As a recipient of the prestigious, yet controversial MoNE study-abroad scholarship, under the provisions of which he would soon find himself serving as a university faculty member, the researcher was well aware of the obstacles inherent in the system. As such, he felt a personal interest in understanding the issues faced by the beneficiaries of this program, who are viewed in some circles as a drain on the country's resources and whose contributions appear at times to go unrecognized. Thus, he elected to conduct his doctoral research on the experiences of two MoNE-sponsored scholars who had returned to Turkey to assume their assigned university positions.

In order to analyze the participants' experiences within the sociopolitical context of their respective academic institutions and reveal the oppressive power structure of the Turkish higher education system, the researcher built his study around a framework of critical theory, a theoretical perspective that is designed to challenge the status quo and illuminate the repressive practices within the current system (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Because the purpose in this case was to represent perception and experience, rather than to demonstrate a scientific outcome, and "narrative inquiry is the study of experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 189), the author elected to present the stories of the study participants in narrative form. By doing so, it was the researcher's aim to give these individuals, who appeared in many ways to have been silenced by their circumstances, the opportunity to speak out and allow their voices to be heard.

Literature Review

In order to gain a perspective on the issues discussed in this study – namely, the views of foreign-educated scholars regarding their experiences in the Turkish university system, along with the obstacles which impair their ability to contribute significantly to scholastic reform – it is useful to establish a conceptual framework for understanding the fundamental structure of the Turkish educational system, as well as the MoNE scholarship program and the issues that affect the ability of foreign-educated academics to have a positive impact on teaching practices and policies.

The Turkish Higher Education System

As part of an initiative to modernize and improve the national education system, all of Turkey's higher education institutions were organized under the CoHE, a centralized council run by a rigid hierarchy of rectors and deans and ultimately controlled by the president of Turkey; this committee was granted ultimate authority over all of the nation's public universities. Çelik (2011) describes the CoHE as an exclusively top-down establishment in which individual institutions lack the autonomy to make decisions regarding academic standards, curricula, or the recruiting of faculty; moreover, this "colossal bureaucracy" (p. 23) severely limits any opportunities for innovation and reform within the educational system. Under these restraints, he reveals that faculty members are frequently weighted down with heavy teaching loads, inadequate salaries, and insufficient classroom resources, while professional standards are not always clearly defined, leading to inconsistencies in recommendations concerning promotion and tenure. Faculty members have little say in the decisions that affect them and often struggle to fulfill their responsibilities with little support from their colleagues or superiors.

Law No. 1416 and the MoNE Scholarship Program

In the early years of the Republic, Turkey was in the process of recovering from the War of Independence. In a drive to develop the skilled workforce needed to serve the rapidly growing economy, the government enacted Law No. 1416 (Ecnebi Memleketlere Gönderilecek Talebe Hakkında Kanun [Law Regarding Students to be Sent to Foreign Countries], 1929). Under this legislation, Turkey's most capable students were selected to receive scholarships to study abroad; after completing their education, they were required to return to Turkey to employ their newly acquired skills and knowledge for the good of the country. However, as the call for quality higher education in Turkey has increased over the last several decades, the focus of this undertaking has shifted from filling positions in the industrial and business sectors to educating academics to serve in the growing number of public universities and infuse modern ideas into the Turkish system (Çelik, 2009, 2011;

Güngör & Tansel, 2008; Tansel & Güngör, 2003; Ubuz, Çakıroğlu, & Erbaş, 2011). As Çelik (2009) explains, consideration for funding is given to those fields of study for which there is the greatest need. Accordingly, with the growing demand for intercultural communication skills and the spread of English as a global lingua franca, increasing numbers of English language teacher educators are among the scholars sent to study at the top universities in the United States and other English-speaking countries.

However, although thousands of elite students have been educated abroad as a result of Law No. 1416, the MoNE has been slow to provide any data regarding the actual contributions of the returning scholars. Because of this, the value of the scholarship program has been frequently questioned, its opponents citing problems with the program's organization and the high rates of student non-return as evidence that the money invested in foreign study is being wasted (Çelik, 2009).

Re-entry Issues of Returning Scholars

While there is a considerable body of research concerning international students, the majority of the literature has focused on the accomplishments of these individuals in their host countries; the most significant aspects of their experiences – the diffusion of knowledge across cultures and the contributions they make once they return to their home countries – have been largely ignored (Altbach, 1991; Goodwin & Nacht, 1984). Consequently, little is known about their professional socialization and any role they have played in educational reform in their countries of origin.

Although there is limited evidence regarding whether the re-entry and integration of foreign students is generally facilitated by home institutions, the few studies which have explored the experiences of returnees concur with Altbach's (1991) assertion that returning scholars do typically play an affirmative role (Choi, 2003; Guo, 1998; Li, 2006; Namgung, 2008; Tong & Wang, 2005). Guo (1998), for example, stated that returning students' knowledge, training and experiences gained abroad did become infused into the curricula and research at their home institutions, also emphasizing that these individuals frequently went on to hold significant leadership roles and were in a position to implement change.

It should be made clear, however, that the contributions of returning students are never accomplished without difficulty. In spite of their overall positive impact, these scholars are often unrealistically expected to readjust smoothly to local conditions (Altbach, 1991). Yet, as Namgung (2008) argues, their motivation is typically worn down by the systemic barriers they face in their home institutions. Nearly all of these academics face common issues such as bureaucratic hurdles, internal politics, poor salaries, and excessive workloads after returning from study abroad (Altbach, 1991; Goodwin & Nacht, 1986). Individual coping mechanisms and success at overcoming these obstacles vary greatly; ultimately, the success of these scholars at readjusting to their institutional and social environment has a tremendous impact on their ability to contribute to the diffusion of new knowledge and cultural ideas in their home countries.

In Turkey, in particular, there seems to be a huge gap between the stated purpose of the MoNE sponsorship program and the reality that is faced by students returning home to teach in the nation's public universities. In addition to widespread problems such as insufficient resources, lack of moral support, and inconsistent professional standards, Turkish academics are subject to strict regulation (Arkan, 2002), which tends to inhibit any attempts at reform. Thus, sending students abroad with the

aim of improving the higher education system, yet upholding the repressive structure of the CoHE, is not likely to be conducive to achieving meaningful change.

Research Design

The researcher undertook this study with the knowledge that MoNE-sponsored Turkish scholars, although given the task of diffusing new knowledge and initiating reform, are in fact kept under rigid control, often facing tremendous administrative and social obstacles when they return to Turkey. The study used critical theory as a means to explore the experiences of two Turkish professors within their academic context and to reveal the repercussions of the restrictive CoHE framework; critical theory permits researchers to challenge the status quo and generate practical knowledge through comprehensive reconstruction of the socio-political structures that limit the opportunities and constrain the potential of individuals operating within an oppressive system (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2007; Nowlan, 2001). In order to elicit the stories of the participants and explore how they constructed their experiences upon returning from the United States to teach in the Turkish university system, the researcher employed a narrative research design. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize, "narrative is the closest we can come to experience" (p. 20); thus, narrative was seen as a natural way to present their histories in a manner that would allow others to more fully comprehend their unique perspectives.

Setting and Participants

The data collection took place in Turkey over a three-month period in the summer of 2007. Two language teacher educators who had earned their PhDs in the United States were chosen as participants through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) in order to meet the specified criteria. The participants were among six individuals who had received their doctorates through MoNE sponsorship and assumed their teaching positions at Turkish universities between 1990 and 2006. Both of the participants had earned their degrees from prestigious U.S. institutions; at the time of data collection, Berk was a male assistant professor who had received his PhD in 2002, while Derin was a female associate professor who had received her PhD in 1998. Names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data collection method used in this study was a series of recorded interviews consisting of open-ended questions; the interview sessions took place at times and locations chosen by the participants. The researcher also took handwritten notes in order to track non-verbal behaviors. Other data sources included public records from the MoNE and CoHE, as well as newspaper articles and personal documents provided by the participants (e.g., published materials, correspondence and curriculum vitae).

Data analysis took place concurrently with the data collection. First, the interview tapes were transcribed and translated into English, and the documents and field notes were sorted and organized. The researcher then read through all of the collected data to get a feel for the information and establish its overall significance. The data were then converted to a research text, using the themes and categories identified by the researcher to create a narrative consisting of the stories of the

participants, as well as the interpretations of the researcher, in order to discover how the information correlated with the research questions addressed by the study.

Credibility Measures

Because trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative research depend mainly on the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000), several methods were employed to ensure the credibility of the findings. Triangulation of the data was carried out through multiple interviews and the use of supporting documents. In addition, the researcher used member checks, peer debriefings and external auditors at various stages of the data analysis process to verify the interpretations of the themes and ensure the validity of the conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Berk – Participant I

Berk was working as an assistant professor of English Language Teaching (ELT) at a leading Turkish university. Although friendly and forthcoming, his frustration and disillusionment with the system were evident from the outset. During the course of the interviews, he elaborated at length on the issues that he felt were keeping him from fulfilling his mission of bringing new ideas and teaching methodologies to his department.

Systemic and Institutional Barriers

One of the first problems Berk disclosed was the lack of cooperation among his colleagues. From the time of his arrival, he sensed animosity from other members of his department. One of the earliest encounters that he described took on a confrontational tone:

An associate professor—an assistant professor at the time—asked me what I studied in my dissertation, and I briefly talked about my dissertation. He said, "What did you find?" and I said, "I found out that contextual factors were very important and that democratic professional development was necessary; one of my findings was this." "Your finding is wrong," he said. I looked at him straight in the eyes, wondering how he could tell me my findings were wrong.

This initial lack of welcome colored his subsequent interactions with his colleagues, and he described how his own attitude became increasingly bitter – a notion which was hard to reconcile with his pleasant, cheerful persona. Yet, he explained, "The more I was humiliated, the more I was put into a box, the more aggressive I became." Adding to this issue, Berk felt that he was regarded with a certain degree of suspicion due to his foreign education, a problem that, according to Arıkan (2002) and Çelik (2009), is frequently faced by Turkish academics who have been educated abroad. Although he was highly qualified, his early attempts at putting his training into practice were often dismissed due to his nominally subordinate job title. As he related:

From the moment I stepped into that university, no one looked at my credentials. What counted was my position. 'No, you can't do that, you are a lecturer; no, you can't do that, you are a lecturer.' That's the only answer I got whenever I tried to do something.

Although he felt that he was qualified to do much more, his designation as a lecturer kept his superiors from allowing him to initiate any new teaching. Instead, he was assigned a heavy load of undergraduate courses and was not permitted so much as to advise a master's thesis.

According to Berk's understanding, he had been sent to study abroad in order to bring back new ideas, yet he constantly met with resistance to any sort of change. "I soon observed that our faculty members were prejudiced ... They were, in general, exceptionally biased; they weren't open to change; they weren't open to learning," he explained, as he described his experience trying to introduce a course in qualitative research to the curriculum:

Qualitative research was a very new thing—I took qualitative research in the United States thinking that people in Turkey are doing quantitative research anyway. There was this problem: When they were sending us, they told us to bring back new things, and we did. Then they said, "What is qualitative anyway? It must be quantitative." But you [the MoNE administrators] told us to bring what was new, and we brought it!

In accordance with Altbach's (1991) and Bostrom's (2007) findings, insufficient resources and poor teaching conditions were further obstacles that Berk encountered as he strove to accomplish his goals. On one occasion, in the winter, there was no heat available in his building, and in another instance, the electricity had gone out; rather than proceeding with a four-hour lesson plan, he was forced to let his students leave, as he was unable to use the media equipment in the classroom. The students themselves were another issue; Berk felt that they had been "silenced" by their years in the oppressive Turkish educational system, and in his view, they lacked resourcefulness and critical thinking skills. He described an assignment for which he had asked his students to prepare some teaching materials:

I tell the kids, "Come on, let's prepare some materials for young learners; let's teach them the colors." They take the red paper and glue it and write "red" on top of it. All forty students did that as material, can you believe it? If we asked anyone on the street "How would you teach kids the colors in English?" they would say, "Stick the red and write 'red' on it."

Berk admitted that, at least in the early years, he had been aggressive and rude to the students – a reaction to the stress he continually experienced. Furthermore, although he tried to maintain a sense of purpose as he strove to transform the rigid, dogmatic approaches to teaching that were prevalent in his department, his resolve eventually wore thin. In the end, even his determination to use English in all of his classes was abandoned in his frustration, reflecting the contention of Namgung (2008) that returning scholars frequently lose their motivation in the face of institutional and social constraints.

Coping Strategies

Despite the lack of cooperation and support in his department and the substandard teaching facilities, Berk was able to deal with his sense of alienation and frustration by working hard on his own personal development. As he put it:

The first few years went down like this, but I kept myself busy publishing articles. I also wrote one book chapter. I basically tried to develop my teaching, but throughout that process, I was lonely. I had to work on my own; there was no support whatsoever.

Berk managed to find some degree of fulfillment in attending seminars, reading journal articles and networking with other academics in his field; these pursuits allowed him to grow intellectually as he strove to contend with the disheartening atmosphere. In addition, in spite of his early difficulties connecting with his students, he was eventually able to establish positive relationships with them. As he explained:

My students have always told me this: "You taught me to look at things from another perspective; none of our professors did that."... I hoped I could give those students something, and they say I did; that's a difference I made in that sense. My graduate students always say how much they benefit from me, because I never told them "no."

His ability to connect with his students did help him to achieve a degree of satisfaction with his job, as they expressed their appreciation for his efforts on their behalf. Yet he was unable overcome his general disillusionment and frustration; at one point, he revealed, he had even turned to a psychiatrist for counseling – a practice which was unusual at the time due to the stigma attached. During the interviews themselves, Berk could not hide the effect that the discussion had on him, periodically turning to an anxiety medication as the unpleasant memories got the better of him.

Contributions

Although the aspirations Berk had held at the beginning of his career had diminished, he did admit that he had been able to make a difference, upholding the arguments of scholars such as Li (2006), Namgung (2008), and Tong and Wang (2005) that returning scholars are often able to make significant contributions as a result of their experiences abroad. "If you ask me, I believe I have contributed to progress," said Berk, mentioning the recognition he had received for his work editing the Faculty of Education Journal. "There are things that the university wants to achieve ... I contributed to this improvement and change. The quality of journals needed to be increased and I joined the Faculty of Education Journal and increased the quality."

When prompted to relate his other contributions to the department, Berk talked about some of the innovations he had brought to his classroom, such as the introduction of critical thinking – a skill that at the time was not widely taught to Turkish students. He also acknowledged that in spite of the general resistance to new ideas, he had been able to implement some positive changes to the curriculum. As he explained:

It was because of me that the Qualitative Research course was accepted to be a part of the department curriculum. It was at my demand that the Film and ELT course was accepted. These were, in my opinion, very important. In our department, the qualitative research course was included in the graduate level curriculum at my urging. And the film course was included in the undergraduate curriculum only with my efforts. In the curricular sense, these were the two big achievements.

In addition to these new courses, Berk related some of his other accomplishments. For instance, although it was unusual for faculty members to offer summer classes, he elected to do so for the sake of his students. In addition, he had made a conscious effort to support the university's publishing house. "I mentioned Erasmus, right?" he added, underlining his role as a coordinator for the European exchange program. "It is very important, because I'm the Erasmus coordinator who made the largest number of connections in the university, in the Faculty of Education. I'm number one among all faculties. I'm the Erasmus coordinator who made the most connections."

Yet despite the acknowledgement that he had in some ways had a positive impact on his university's ELT program, Berk remained discouraged overall. The pressure to conform to the system and his increasing exhaustion had caused him to abandon many of his ideals and adopt a "do as I say, not as I do" approach. He expressed dismay at finding himself slowly becoming a part of the system he despised, and at the time of the interviews, he was considering applying for teaching positions at institutions outside of Turkey.

Derin – Participant II

Derin was an associate professor who, like Berk, was a member of the ELT department at one of Turkey's leading universities. Full of nervous energy, she appeared weighted down with responsibilities and an overloaded schedule at the time of our interviews, keeping up a hectic pace as she managed to balance her frenetic work life with caring for two small daughters. On the whole, the attitude she maintained towards her job and her experiences in the Turkish higher education system was more positive than Berk's, yet she expressed similar frustrations about her colleagues and about the system in general.

Systemic and Institutional Barriers

As with Berk, the negative character of the relationships among faculty members in her department was one of the first issues that Derin mentioned during the interviews, a circumstance which closely reflects Arkan's (2002) findings. Citing intense competition and lack of cooperation as some of the factors that stood in the way of positive change, she confirmed that a sense of common purpose was non-existent among her colleagues:

For instance, a committee or duty comes, people are like "I have this project, I'm working on that paper, I have deadlines, but not very much time" and they say they can't do it. These are just small examples. And you feel sorry for them and think to yourself that they must be really busy; and somebody else takes responsibility for their duties ... Of course, then the tasks at the department are put upon the same few people who always do them.

Furthermore, she related that many of her colleagues maintained an inexplicable air of secrecy, hiding projects and research from other department members, a behavior which she found to be "odd and meaningless." She herself avoided adopting such a self-serving attitude, although at times, she confessed, this made her feel naïve. The arrogance she encountered with faculty members outside the department was no better; she described the second-class treatment directed toward the school of education, where she worked, and noted that "there is such a perception toward us that we are not good enough." Adding to this disrespectful and unfriendly atmosphere, a lack of encouragement from her superiors also served to undermine her generally positive nature. As she confided:

What bothers me the most here in the Turkish system is that—in the United States, when you have even a minor contribution or an idea, it is immediately applauded and appreciated—but here even if you invented something, they would be "hmmm, good" or there would be no response whatsoever ... There is no external encouragement, support or appreciation, and that of course wears on the individual over time. It affects and changes one's self confidence and self-perception, too. In general, there is always praising there, but here you are nothing!

Inhibited by the absence of moral support, Derin struggled under a heavy workload of teaching and administrative tasks. In spite of the plans she had for introducing new courses, the time constraints imposed on her by these other duties prevented her from getting them entered into the undergraduate course catalogue. Furthermore, in agreement with Altbach's, (1991) and Goodwin and Nacht's (1986) contentions that internal politics often create barriers to success, a lack of consistent standards and unfair treatment had initially prevented her from advancing in her career:

There are prescribed rules to obey in any circumstance, and there are also unwritten rules that are not spelled out on paper. This troubles everyone, including me. I could have been appointed as an assistant professor at the time [when she first arrived in her department]; Why wasn't I? Who made that decision? Maybe it would have happened had I pushed for it ... You expect the leadership to objectively assess such things and consider you to be appropriate for the position. You expect them to treat you fairly.

When asked whether she felt that she was adequately compensated for her efforts, Derin admitted, "Money-wise, I don't, that's for sure," noting that for the ten years she had given the university, her salary was painfully small – a circumstance which Çelik (2011) reveals as an ongoing failing of the Turkish system. "All that effort and time one devotes to come to this point [associate professorship] from a research assistant position is all for nothing," she complained.

Coping Strategies

Despite the pressures of an excessive workload, the lack of moral support and the absence of professional standards, Derin maintained a practical attitude towards the challenges she faced, exhibiting a determination that refutes Namgung's (2008) belief in the demotivating effect created by such an environment. Rather than fighting the system, she elected to adjust to it, reasoning that she could best promote the skills and values instilled in her during the course of her studies abroad by tailoring them to fit the Turkish context; as she pointed out, "You cannot wear someone else's dress without altering it; it wouldn't fit you." She emphasized that by gradually introducing new ideas and adapting them so that they were relevant according to Turkish standards, she was often able to achieve her aims. For instance, inspired by a practice she had encountered in the United States, she had integrated the idea of writing reflection papers as an assessment tool. Although this innovation was initially met with resistance, reflective writing had become extremely popular over the years, not only among her students, but with the other professors in her department, as well.

Derin also revealed that, although she often felt ill at ease amidst the air of concealment and lack of cooperation in her department, this uncertainty had in fact contributed to her efforts at improving her position, pushing her to demand promotion to the assistant professorship for which she was in fact qualified. "You have to be completely confident about yourself," she maintained, as she went on to outline her subsequent work at advancing her career:

There are so many people who qualified for the CoHE associate professorships, but could not get a promotion or tenure at this university, because the institutional standards are much higher here than CoHE's ... You have to fulfill all the requirements one way or another in the end; you will have to try hard. And the university raises the bar every year. For instance, you may need five publications according to the current standards, and you do that. Then, right before you apply for the promotion, they increase the requirement to six. You have to be working constantly.

Eventually, through her tireless exertions, she was able to earn her associate professorship and tenure, thus achieving a level of autonomy and control which allowed her to further her plans and initiatives within the department to an extent, in support of Guo's (1998) assertion that returning scholars often advance to positions of greater influence within their institutions.

Contributions

One of her greatest achievements at the time of the study, Derin felt, was the language lab she had established. From her discussion, it was clear that this was her pride and joy:

It is my baby, because I took care of everything first-hand... It's a multi-media computer lab. There are 30 computers linked to each other with a networking system. The instructor can see each student's screen, close it, or project a student's screen to the entire classroom, and can do many other things. All computers are connected to the Internet, and you can have all the students complete the same task at the same time.

Aside from the computer lab, Derin had been the driving force behind a new curricular structure which allowed students the latitude to choose specialized elective courses designed around a core curriculum. However, although she expressed satisfaction about this accomplishment, she refused to take full credit for her efforts. As she emphasized, "These things are not done alone, but as a group," arguing that her fellow department members had also had a hand in this achievement. This sense of collegiality extended beyond her home institution, as she related that she had successfully collaborated with faculty members of other universities on a number of grant proposals. In addition to the contributions she had already made, Derin spoke about her future plans, emphasizing that she would continue to take steps to promote English language teaching in Turkey:

I would like to build a more successful collaboration with other institutions and countries, and conduct grant research. And of course, I'd like the outcomes of these projects to be beneficial for people—I'd like to do the type of projects of which findings have direct implications and impact for people and their lives. To give back, I would like to contribute to the development of English language teaching in Turkey as a service to our field; I would like to contribute to the training of future English teachers.

Overall, Derin felt that despite the challenges she had revealed, she had experienced few problems introducing new ideas, in opposition to the positions taken by scholars such as Arıkan (2002) and Çelik (2009, 2011). According to her beliefs, Turkish academics in general were "fairly open to new initiatives, innovative beliefs and thoughts brought from developed countries, as long as they did not threaten the existence of power and authority." More than Berk, she took pride in the things she had been able to accomplish, believing that the difficulties she periodically encountered would likely exist anywhere else in the world. In the end, she felt her duty to serve her country very strongly and expressed no regret at having returned to Turkey.

Cross-Narrative Analysis

Berk and Derin had many things in common: they were both intelligent and had excellent academic records; both had been recipients of the MoNE's prestigious graduate-study-abroad scholarship and had earned doctoral degrees from major research universities in the United States; and both were hardworking and determined to make a difference in language teacher education in Turkey.

Yet the Turkish academic system was not always welcoming; the rigid bureaucratic patterns of governance and decision-making created substantial obstacles and frequently impaired their ability to infuse new ideas and initiatives. Neither of them received much support from within the system, on either a financial or a personal level, and low pay and scant professional recognition characterized both of their narratives. Their projects and proposals were often thwarted, even in the case of Derin's cherished language lab, which lacked ongoing financial support once it had been established. Another issue was the distribution of authority and the resulting maneuvering that frequently occurred; both participants quickly became aware of the self-serving nature of Turkish academia as they began working at their respective institutions.

Despite the many similar issues they faced, however, the contrasting attitudes of these two individuals often resulted in opposing perceptions of their experiences. While Berk tended to focus on the drawbacks of the system, Derin strove to maintain a positive outlook; and although Berk maintained a perspective of criticism and anger, Derin did her best to work within the institutional constraints. On the other hand, Berk's efforts centered on deeper change, such as the introduction of his qualitative research course; but Derin seemed to feel greater satisfaction with her surface accomplishments, such as the language lab she had established in her department. Although Berk struggled against the oppressive and hostile attitudes he encountered, Derin found it expedient to tailor her approach for the sake of getting along with her colleagues. In the end, Berk saw no hope for improvement under the current system and was making plans to leave; however, Derin was able to work with the status quo and was intent on advancing her career within the constraints of the system, using her position to contribute further to the field of English language teaching. Ultimately, though, it seems that both of these individuals were controlled by the very system they had been charged with transforming; and each was left with the choice of whether to resist or conform. Creating meaningful change, which had been their assigned task, never appeared as a truly attainable goal.

Conclusion

There is a great deal of discourse in Turkey about ambitious development goals and the changes that are necessary in order to achieve them; and it is the academics within Turkey's university system who are expected to spearhead the desired transformation. Yet ironically, academic institutions and their faculty are given little autonomy or power to take on this duty. As can be seen from the experiences of the two professors in this study, Turkish academics are burdened by overregulation, with nationally defined and rigidly enforced rules which inhibit any type of reform initiative. In addition, although academics seem to agree that there is an urgent need for restructuring in higher education, they are often the ones who are unwilling to adapt to new ideas and implement new teaching methods; senior faculty in positions of power in this hierarchical system are especially likely to block transformation out of concern for losing their privileges. Thus, a study of the experiences of academics in Turkey's higher education system cannot help but scrutinize the underlying characteristics and structure of the institutional culture and the overall university system to which they belong.

Sending students to acquire and bring back the knowledge and skills necessary to initiate reform, and yet maintaining a system that rejects such efforts, has resulted in a major contradiction. Although returning academics do manage to contribute to Turkish higher education to some degree, the systemic and institutional barriers they encounter inhibit any potential for meaningful progress, and the country is unable to benefit fully from the MoNE's study abroad sponsorship program. Unless the

repressive structure of the CoHE, as well as the influence of its power-holders, is substantially altered, Turkey is unlikely to reach the higher education goals toward which the country aspires.

Because the ultimate solution to this ongoing issue lies in creating awareness that there is, in fact, a problem, studies such as this one are crucial in calling the attention to the disconnect between the stated goals of the MoNE's study abroad program and the reality that these objectives cannot be realized in the current atmosphere. While the present study is inherently limited by the individual circumstances of the participants and the small research sample, there is evidence which indicates that the experiences of these two academics are far from unique. Thus, it is suggested that further investigation into the experiences of foreign-educated academics be carried out on a broader scale in order to inform the country's academic policy makers and educational planners of the most pervasive problems and identify the steps that are needed to bring about appropriate and practical solutions.

Acknowledgement

This article has been extracted from the author's doctoral dissertation, completed at Indiana University-Bloomington in 2009 under the supervision of Dr. Martha Nyikos. The author wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Nyikos and other members of his dissertation committee, particularly to Dr. Sharon L. Pugh.

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