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Academic Capitalism: A University or a Company?

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Abstract

The role and purpose of higher education in contemporary societies are frequently discussed. It has been argued that capitalism's drive for dominance in society extends to academia and education as well. Academic capitalism entails that the academia should prioritise serving market goals and the economy, over society and scholarly pursuits. Slaughter and Rhoades (2000) contend that academic capitalism results in the perception of higher education as a branch of the business world, where universities serve neoliberal tendencies. According to Apple (2004), neoliberal policies and education pursue goals such as spreading an unfounded ideology dubbed the 'free market', significantly decreasing state responsibility in responding to social needs, emphasizing competitive structures inside and outside of schools, diminishing people's anticipation of economic stability, and imposing cultural and bodily 'discipline' as the central storyline. Neoliberal restructuring of universities commodifies higher education, making it more of a product than a public service. Moreover, students are turned into mere consumers and the academia is isolated from traditional values. Consequently, this study discusses the impacts of neoliberal policies in academia within the context of academic capitalism.

Keywords: *Academic Capitalism, Market-Oriented Higher Education, Neoliberalism, Universities*

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Introduction

The hegemony that capitalism seeks to establish in almost every field is also felt in the field of education. With the fact that we are in a cycle in which inequality of opportunities, injustice, and labor exploitation prevail from pre-school education to undergraduate and graduate levels, and afterward in recruitment processes, we are trying to receive/offer education, have a job/profession, and produce/disseminate science. Students spend their childhood and adolescence with exams, private teaching institutions, private schools, and private tuition as if they were in a competition. They are forced to keep the necessities of life and humanization in the background, such as getting a quality education, being able to discover their own world and themselves, liberation, being aware of what is happening in the world and in the country, questioning, criticizing, being able to speak out, participating in cultural/social activities, and often they cannot even realise them.

With the adjustment programmes prepared in the 1980s in cooperation with the IMF and the World Bank, the neoliberal understanding officially entered the field of education (Sayılan, 2006). The erosion of basic human rights and social citizenship rights caused by the neoliberal understanding of education has caused serious damage in the field of education (Yıldız, 2008). It is obvious that neo-liberal policies have paved the way for the establishment of private schools and private universities, which can almost be called businesses, with the aim of turning the educational institution into an institution responsible for serving the goals of the capitalist market. Aksoy (2005) states that the neo-liberal policies in the developed and underdeveloped countries are accompanied by policies aimed at directly or indirectly reducing social expenditure and removing education and health from public goods. In this regard, education, a public entitlement, has been commodified, thereby reducing it to a purchasable and saleable item. The fundamental truth that every individual has the right to a free, quality education under equitable conditions is increasingly disregarded. The neoliberal education policy aims to meet the profit goals of the private sector, satisfy market demands, ensure economic development and achieve similar neoliberal targets.

With capitalist globalisation, higher education institutions are being restructured based on global and local power relations in line with the neoliberal societal project (Ünal, 2009). One specific illustration of this restructuring can be seen in the rise of private universities, which proponents of the foundation university discourse seek to reduce. The number of private universities is now nearly equal to that of state-run universities. For instance, according to the Higher Education Information Management System (2021), there are 203 universities in

Turkey, consisting of 129 state universities and 74 private universities. Among the 57 universities located in Istanbul, there are 13 state universities and 44 private universities. These statistics reveal a growing concern; the number of private universities trading public knowledge as a commercial commodity is on the rise.

Ünal (2005) criticises the ideology-driven transformation that neoliberal policies are attempting to establish in the fields of education and science. She argues that universities are primarily viewed as institutions that provide vocational training, and higher education programs are evaluated based on their links with employment. Universities are institutions tasked with the responsibility of producing and disseminating knowledge, advancing scientific and social development, addressing societal issues, and providing solutions. Academic autonomy is an indispensable prerequisite for performing these functions effectively. It is imperative that every academic enjoys academic freedom to conduct their academic and scientific activities, as prescribed by the World Universities Service (1988). The academic operates within a societal system that is ultimately influenced by social, political, aesthetic, and moral ideals, which inevitably shape their value judgments. Therefore, it is impossible to approach science without any convictions, values, tendencies, or beliefs (Özlem, 2010).

Higher education has become an establishment striving to endure in a system where academic capitalism displaces academic self-governance and autonomy, transforming higher education institutions into firms that cater to market targets. Such institutions carry on their scholarly and academic endeavours while collaborating with the private sector. The university is an institution dedicated to the pursuit of scientific knowledge, free from profit motives. It provides a platform for scientists to freely express their ideas and engage in scientific research, while education is not commodified and sold for financial gain. Importantly, every individual has access to this fundamental right on equal terms (World University Service, 1988; Waters, 2009). In this context, Gallagher (2012) highlights the corporate portrayal of universities, which exposes a profound void within the entire educational framework within and outside the national borders. It is therefore appropriate to assert that educational institutions have become ‘companies’ expected to operate within the sphere of academic capitalism, owing to the impact of neoliberal policies.

Academic Capitalism: A University or a Company?

Academic capitalism dictates that the purpose of universities and scientific research should be geared towards achieving set market targets and serving the economy, rather than society and academic pursuits. As indicated by Slaughter and Rhoades (2000), this perspective views higher education as a sub-domain of economics, with universities catering to neoliberal inclinations. In this respect, Apple (2004) argues that neoliberal policies and education aim to

disseminate a fictitious narrative of an unrestricted free market, decrease state accountability in addressing societal requirements, prioritise competitive structures within and beyond educational institutions, lower economic securities expectations, and enforce cultural and body regulation. The perception of academia and universities as profit-making entities exposes the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal policies.

Hei-hang Hayes Tang (2014) defines academic capitalism as the commercialisation of academic programmes, the growth of private universities, the monetisation of knowledge, and profit-driven academic activities. Tang (2014) stresses that within the framework of academic capitalism, universities and academic departments are seen as economic bodies, and resource allocation is determined by performance rather than academic and individual intellectuality. In this context, academic capitalism seems to aim at reshaping universities and scholars into economic instruments that fulfil neoliberal objectives. As Aksoy (2021) contends, this reflects a drive towards commodification of higher education, which transforms it from a public service into a consumer product. In addition, this results in the alienation of these institutions from their traditional universal values. The prevailing circumstances have facilitated the incorporation of core tenets of neoliberalism, exemplified by notions of competition, productivity, profit, market, and remuneration, into academic discourse.

Capitalist Market Relations and Academia

Jessop (2018) asserts that academic capitalism has emerged in economies founded on capitalist market relations. He explores and interprets this development in five dimensions, discussing these dimensions under the headings ‘commercialisation,’ ‘capitalisation,’ ‘partial commercialisation of mental labour,’ ‘financialisation,’ and ‘capital-dependent system.’ According to Jessop (2018), the dimension of ‘commercialisation’ involves producing education and research for sale, through means such as school fees, private schools, distance learning, and commercial research. The dimension of ‘capitalisation’ reveals the impact of the capitalist market economy on higher education, leading to the consolidation of commercialisation processes. In the realm of ‘partial commercialisation of mental labour’, Jessop highlights how this circumstance transforms and undermines intellectual labour in a hierarchical manner, given its focus on low cost and high profit targets, resulting in loss of professional status and constriction of teaching and research autonomy.

Jessop (2018) argues that the aspect of ‘financialisation’ has a dual nature in academia. Firstly, it is viewed as a lucrative area for investment with the influx of capital, and secondly, the market forces from prominent universities, colleges, and research companies make it an attractive option for profitable investments. In this context, the equalisation of returns from other sectors is emblematic. In the final dimension, known as the ‘capital-dependent system,’

education and research are limited to serving the profit motives of the market as a financial commodity. This can be achieved by securitising investments and revenue streams (Jessop, 2018). To illustrate this development, Jessop explains how there are attempts to fully privatise universities and research institutions and integrate them into the global market economy.

Jessop's (2018) five dimensions regarding academic capitalism are interconnected. A logical conclusion is drawn that in an academic system characterised by commercialisation, capitalisation, and financialisation, it is unavoidable for intellectual work to be commodified and reliant on capital. It can be argued that the capitalist management system attempts to dominate all aspects of social and institutional life, normalising the concept that individuals and organizations should work towards this end as a tool of the neoliberal economy and market. It is evident that academic capitalism also fosters a perception and functioning that conform to these neoliberal principles through imposed transformations.

In the capitalist approach, the education system operates to meet the demands of capitalism; however, Marxist approach extends beyond this function and defines education as a political arena for struggle (Ünal, 2013). Thus, education, guided by Marxist principles, strives to promote individual humanisation and emancipation, as opposed to the goals of education set forth by the capitalist approach. According to Gasper (1998; cited in Skordoulis, 2021), Marxist scholars propose that science represents a socially embedded approach to uncovering the concealed causes of the world, and that scientific advancement can potentially challenge the dominant ideology's underlying assumptions. In this context, Marxism's approach to education and science centres on the humanisation, liberation, and understanding of humanity, nature, phenomena, and events. It also focuses on conducting research and discovery for social benefit and raising individuals through education. On the other hand, capitalism's approach to education and science revolves around the market goals of the capitalist economy. It is clear that the objective of academic institutions in training individuals is to serve the demands of the market and carry out research in line with capitalist principles.

The Impact of Academic Capitalism on University Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Science aims to objectively research the realities of individuals and societies, proposing solutions to their problems and maintaining existing progress through social and human accountability. Through this, we strive to leave a positive legacy for future generations. At a conference convened in Nice by UNESCO in 1950, several characteristics expected of world universities were identified, including the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the quest for truth wherever it may be found and a tolerance for differing perspectives. Additionally, universities were expected to operate independently of political influence, to seek to promote freedom, justice, and human dignity through their research and educational endeavours, and

to provide mutual assistance and support on both a moral and material level on the international stage (International Association of Universities [IAU], 1998). In this context, it is unlikely that these goals will be achieved in a system where academic freedom and university autonomy lack solid foundations. Instead, universities may become institutions that serve capitalism, leading to the interpretation of academic capitalism as a breach of academic freedom and university autonomy.

The notion of academic freedom is defined in numerous ways in the literature. It denotes the liberty of academic staff to perform their teaching responsibilities in accordance with their beliefs and knowledge, as well as to publicise their opinions within their field (Ashby, 1966), the freedom of academic staff to research, study, teach and publish without any external hindrances (Tight, 1988), and the entitlement of faculty members and researchers to carry out research and communicate their opinions in diverse scientific fields devoid of any apprehension of proscription (Brown, 2006). Academic freedom refers to the liberty of faculty members to conduct scientific research, share outcomes, present views and recommendations on social issues, devise solutions, mentor scholars, and perform scientific operations within the bounds of academic and scientific protocols. The parameters that define the scope of faculty members' activities are set by academic and scientific guidelines. To ensure practical reflection of this freedom, it is suggested that market objectives should not supplant academic and scientific goals.

In addition to academic freedom, it is imperative to establish university autonomy to avoid potential damage caused by academic capitalism within the higher education sphere. An autonomous university possesses the ability to govern itself without any external control (Neave and Van Vught, 1994). It has autonomy from the central government, political power, and market, and has the right to set its own rules within legal boundaries. Furthermore, it can utilise its own resources effectively and efficiently, and engage in academic activities and other affairs with its own organs, such as research, education, external studies, and other related activities. Moreover, it is independent of all other forces from the state and society in devising its own policies (World Universities Service, 1988). University autonomy enables institutions to resist capital dependence, such as academic capitalism, commercialisation, competition, and banker education, which are subsets of the economy and politics, and similar neoliberal agendas. By pursuing its objectives through scientific methods, the university can attain independence from the capitalist system, allowing it to operate autonomously.

Neoliberalism redefines academic freedom and autonomy as responsibility and accountability to society. It places many duties and responsibilities on universities based on these concepts, such as simplifying theoretical knowledge into applicable packages and

turning them into easily-implemented procedures through computers (Ünal, 2009). University autonomy serves as a safeguard of scientific liberty; therefore, the loss of university autonomy results in universities falling under the influence of external individuals and institutions, leading to the curtailment of scientific freedom through direct or indirect means (Aksoy, 2021). These external actors are typically those who possess capital and political power. Private universities must confront the economic and political agendas of political authorities, as well as the commercial objectives of individuals and firms with capital. Furthermore, they must navigate the context of a neoliberal higher education system wherein public universities operate within political guidance.

Neoliberal Transformation of Academia within the Market Conditions

The primary aim of universities and academic staff, which is to conduct independent, unbiased, and valid scientific research, and disseminate the findings for the betterment of society, has been substituted by 'dependent' research driven by high economic gains, catering to market demands and aligned with political and neoliberal economic policies. Özlem (2011) argues that science has adopted an industrial production-style approach, with universities becoming increasingly profit-oriented and controlled by the private sector, prioritising capitalist demands in the education of students. This has resulted in the marketing of medical products and drugs masquerading as scientific research, exemplifying this situation. In order to disseminate scientific information, this entity markets private hospitals, pharmaceutical companies in medical and agricultural sectors, and private schools and universities through television programmes and social media platforms in various fields such as health, education, and agriculture. Although experts in these areas share their knowledge, this approach enables several scientists to profit.

Özlem (2011) argues that academics have recently demonstrated a tendency to integrate into the social and economic order. This tendency is particularly evident in capitalist societies led by the bourgeoisie, where studies that do not align with the wishes of capitalist production centres are almost nonexistent in universities. Van Kampen (2012) highlights the idea that universities should be operated as a business has become ingrained and is now the main focus in academia, which includes horizontal and vertical management that emphasises 'evaluation and commercialisation.' In this context, similarly, Lynch (2006) points out that the market orientation of universities has greatly weakened the position of the arts, humanities and critical social sciences, since much of the research and teaching in these fields does not directly serve the for-profit sector; their task is to educate for the public sphere, for civil society, not for profit. However, in the context of the neoliberal overhaul of universities, it is apparent that this situation is shifting. Scientists are increasingly viewed as solely responsible for conducting

research in line with market targets, and universities are seen as institutions that concentrate on preparing the workforce needed by the market, where academic studies are carried out in this direction.

Gallagher (2012) points out the current issues being raised in the US and the UK higher education systems;

- The erosion of academic experience as a developmental and transformative public good, and its replacement by the credentialism that treats education as a commercial or business transaction,
- The promotion of corporate culture of conformity which undermines independent, critical, and creative thinking,
- The counterproductive managerialist stranglehold both on academic work and on fully transparent and participative university governance.

According to Gallagher's analysis of higher education systems in the UK and US academic capitalism has led to the commodification of education and academia. This has resulted in restrictions on independent and critical thinking, as well as a lack of transparency and participatory management.

No Money, No Science

As another situation where the influence of academic capitalism is seen, research in certain fields, particularly in the medical industry, may be ghost-authored, whereby companies produce research on behalf of scientists or research institutes to increase consumer confidence in their commercial products and services (Jessop, 2018). This situation highlights the exploitation of science by companies for their own gain. 'Fee-based journals' that publish academic research at high prices can also be analysed in the context of academic capitalism. It is arguable that one of the most significant manifestations of economic objectives over scientific objectives are these journals and publishing houses. Jessop (2018) suggests that there is an increasing prevalence of predatory journals and publishing houses that aim to profit from scientific research by exploiting authors, referees, or editors for economic gain. These actions can be considered an ethical violation, as the quality of research publications is often overlooked in favour of quantity (Bulger, 2002). In this context, Waters (2009) criticises the profit motive in academic publishing and suggests that it fosters a culture that prioritises production and marketability over publication quality.

There is pressure to carry out 'dependent' research with high economic returns, in line with political and economic regulations that cater to market needs. In this context, Van Kampen (2012) argues that research that focuses increasingly on output has altered the essence

of academia and that universities should not only create knowledge but also disseminate it instead of concealing it for financial gain. Waters (2009) similarly critiques the emphasis on production in academic studies, stating that the hiring process is influenced by the number of publications, leading to what they describe as an 'academic explosion', and he criticises the detrimental impact of capitalism on academia, arguing that academic work has entered a period of decline and producing numerous futile publications as a result of the imposition of productivity.

Frith (2020) contends that academic studies should be 'few but concise', highlighting the corrupting effects of the 'publish or perish' culture and 'fast science', which prompt academics to take shortcuts. As a result, researchers face the challenge of producing a high quantity of publications in a short time frame, pressured by neoliberal policies that govern their place within academia.

Open access to research is another crucial concern within the related context (Swan & Brown, 2005). It refers to the storage of publications in an online archive, allowing for unrestricted accessibility to scientific research, as well as limitless distribution, interoperability, and long-term archiving (Bethesda, 2003). The availability of open access articles offers more people access to research findings, thereby enabling a wider dissemination of information (Lawrence, 2001). However, equitable access to scientific information and research results cannot be attained due to restricted access to certain publications that require payment. One can argue that scientific knowledge is commercialised and marketed, hindering academia's objective of disseminating scientific knowledge and rendering social benefits. It is fair to say that this scenario is a clear cut consequence of academic capitalism and a major source of its sustenance.

Hegemony of Economic Rationality and Private Universities

The influence of capitalism on the academic sphere is a crucial issue concerning both education and science. Evidently, academic capitalism has resulted in the exacerbation of disparities in educational access, a deterioration in scientific quality, and the subordination of scientists to market forces, reducing them to mere 'objects of capitalism'. Ünal (1999) argues that education, under the control of development, necessitates raising manpower up to the required extent for economic development of the country, and not more than that. She emphasises that further increases will lead to wasteful use of resources and that this can be considered as economic rationality (Ünal, 1999). According to Gorz (1989), counting and calculation is the starting point of economic rationality. In this way, elements such as the returns of a production, yield, amount of work, and earnings are quantified and made predictable and controllable. Emotions and aesthetic qualities in work and production are

detached from this process. One of the most fundamental elements of capitalist labour is that the product is produced not to be used by oneself, but to be sold in the market and consumed by others. In this context, the purpose of work is not to produce to fulfil one's own needs (from the capitalist point of view) but to make profit (Gorz, 1989).

In relation to economic rationalism, Insel (2012) similarly argues that the idea of economism on which economic rationality is based aims to turn people into an ever more useful cog in the economic wheel, which turns not to satisfy people's needs but mainly to reproduce itself. In this regard, the reduction of scientists, regarded as academic subjects, to the objects of neoliberalism in a system that lacks academic freedom and prioritises economic rationality indicates that they have become instruments designed to serve the market, as argued by Aksoy (2005), market competitiveness often leads to the compromise of educational principles, with a greater emphasis placed on commercial objectives in educational affairs. Aksoy (2005) highlights the negative impact of this situation on students and all those involved in education, who should be the primary beneficiaries of educational practices.

Devolving the state's duties and responsibilities in education to foundations, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies, as well as the rise in private universities, exacerbates the wealth disparity among students, increases inequalities, and presents a significant barrier to university education for the underprivileged (Yıldız, 2008). In this context, it is evident that academic capitalism has reshaped universities into educational enterprises catering to neoliberal objectives. The primary aim is to facilitate economic mobility in urban areas and subsequently across the country, in line with market demands. This viewpoint treats students as customers and universities as entities that sell education and science for remuneration.

Slaughter and Leslie (2001) suggest that students increasingly favour private universities due to the neoliberal policies, which have led to a perception that attaining a degree from such institutions holds greater weight in securing employment. This in turn creates competition between public and private universities, ultimately making it challenging for students to choose public alternatives, whom private universities perceive more as customers (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). Private universities appear appealing on the surface due to their financial resources surpassing those of state universities. Nonetheless, they operate as corporations trading education and socio-cultural prospects as commercial commodities. This scenario could be construed as capitalism's intrusion into the academic realm.

Conclusion

The impact of neoliberal policies and practices since the 1970s has affected academia, attempting to bring about a transformation in this field. It seems that capitalist objectives, including those related to competition, profit, productivity, wages, privatisation, market orientation and capital dependency, have been enforced upon universities and academics for this purpose. Through these practices, academia is viewed as a means of facilitating the realisation of political and economic policies. Universities, academics and students are being transformed into neoliberal entities that serve this purpose. Privatisation in the education sector specifically affects universities, which in turn, sustain a dependence on the market's requirements, expectations and profit motives for both their education and research activities.

Academic capitalism can be understood as the conversion of the academia into a commercial enterprise characterised by the presence of private universities, compulsory fees, paid journals, scientific research that conforms to market objectives, and a perception of universities as institutions that solely produce professional personnel. Therefore, it is evident that capitalism's imposition of economic concerns and market targets in academia has caused significant harm to education and science. Such impositions have reduced academic staff and students to mere tools serving the market.

Despite all these, it is feasible to establish an academic environment that safeguards the autonomy of universities (financial, administrative, and academic autonomy) and upholds staff's academic freedom. This can be achieved without compromising academic and societal objectives for political, economic, neoliberal or market-based objectives. To accomplish this, the transformation of universities into commercial enterprises should be avoided, universities should be restructured from companies and their traditional structure based on free science and universal values reinstated. An autonomous academia that is detached from political, neoliberal and market-oriented objectives and interests should be created. This will require concerted efforts to overcome the negative impact of capitalism on the academia and move away from academic capitalism. It is essential for all members of society, particularly the academic community, to possess an understanding of this issue and take action with a critical awareness and social accountability to establish and execute appropriate policies towards its resolution.

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