

Navigating the complexities of academic pathways in Turkey: A Currere-based exploration

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Abstract

This autobiographical study explores the author's academic journey in Turkey, highlighting the dynamic and complex nature of this path within a challenging socio-economic context. Using Pinar's concept of *currere*, the study employs a multidimensional autobiographical approach—encompassing regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical moments—to explore the author's academic journey and preparation for a career in academia within Turkey's unique educational landscape. By analyzing the author's experiences through these phases, the study uncovers key factors influencing his academic development in Turkey, including the challenges of navigating the academic system and the strategies I used to overcome them. The research highlights the critical role of self-reflection and personal narratives in understanding and navigating the complexities of academic life in Turkey, particularly for graduate students and emerging researchers. From employing the method of *currere*, I learned much about my journey through Turkey's academic career processes, emphasizing the interaction between personal experiences and systemic factors in shaping academic success and career progression. This study contributes to the broader *currere* literature by offering a detailed personal examination of academic career preparation and development in Turkey, providing perspectives that may resonate with or inform experiences in very different settings.

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Introduction

The academic journey is a dynamic process that extends beyond mere knowledge acquisition, shaping both individual and professional identities in profound ways. Graduate education is a pivotal phase in this journey, providing students with the opportunity to pursue in-depth knowledge and gain expertise in specific fields (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This phase is marked by numerous complex challenges, including academic and social adjustment, intensive research activities, and rigorous thesis work, all of which require self-discipline and high motivation (Deniz, 2020; Tinto, 2012). Despite these challenges, this phase is crucial for students as it develops critical thinking, analytical evaluation, and scientific inquiry skills, which are essential for future academic and professional success (Trowler, 2008). Gardner (2009a) emphasizes the importance of these skills in enhancing students' academic and

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professional success, stating that the development of critical thinking and research skills is crucial for graduate students' future careers. Although academic life is demanding, it provides significant benefits that help students progress toward their career goals (Johnson, 2016a). Bourdieu (1988) notes that the cultural capital gained in academia strengthens individuals' social and professional statuses. Moreover, this capital provides opportunities to build professional networks, both nationally and internationally, and to engage with diverse cultural perspectives, thereby broadening one's vision (Nicholas et al., 2015). These networks are crucial as they enable students to establish global collaborations and participate in interdisciplinary studies (Altbach et al., 2010; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

While these aspects of academic life may be universal, their manifestation and impact can vary significantly depending on the person and her/his grappling with particular socio-economic and cultural contexts, in my case Turkey. This study explores my personal academic journey in the field of educational administration within Turkey's challenging context using Pinar's (1975, 2015, 2020) concept of *currere*. This autobiographical method encourages deep introspection of educational experiences, offering a lens through which to view the complexities of academic life in a middle-income country. Through a multidimensional autobiographical approach (Miller, 2005), I aim to highlight the challenges and dilemmas related to my academic development, hoping these personal experiences might resonate with individuals planning academic careers in similar as well as very different countries and socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Graduate education in countries like Turkey faces unique challenges that are often overlooked in global academic discourse (Deniz, 2020, 2022). Despite these obstacles, there is a lack of in-depth studies that address how students in such contexts navigate their academic journeys and develop careers. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the personal and professional challenges encountered during my academic journey in Turkey, including the uneven quality of education, my efforts to balance academic and work responsibilities under socio-economic constraints, and navigating what I feel is the undervalued landscape of higher education in Turkey. Focusing on these specific issues, I seek to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping my academic pathway in middle-income Turkish society. Additionally, through Pinar's (1975, 2015, 2020) concept of *currere*, which enables individuals to make sense of their educational journeys through personal experiences and stories, I've strived to develop an awareness of the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader systemic issues in graduate education. This awareness includes the unique challenges faced by being a graduate student and independent researcher in Turkey, the impact of socio-economic factors on academic development, and the ways in which my personal narratives can inform my understanding of larger educational systems.

The significance of this study lies not only in its examination of a singular life but also in its potential to illuminate broader patterns and issues in academic journeys in similar as well as very different contexts. While the findings from this autobiographical study cannot be generalized, they might offer valuable insights that, when interpreted in light of existing scholarship, can contribute to understanding of academic career processes in countries with dynamic socio-economic conditions, such as Turkey. The results of this study could also offer insights for policymakers, educational leaders, and academic institutions committed to improving academic career paths, encouraging deep discussions on educational policy and

practices (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988). By highlighting the specific challenges and strategies of a graduate student in a middle-income country, my study advocates for more inclusive and context-sensitive academic policies and practices. The research question guiding my study is: How might the personal experience of one person's navigation of graduate education in Turkey, as examined through the lens of *currere*, illuminate the broader challenges and opportunities faced by graduate students? To explore this question, I will engage in a version of the *currere* process, analyzing my experiences in relation to context, background, and education in Turkey. This approach allows, I find, for a nuanced exploration of the intersection between personal narrative and broader systemic issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

To frame this study within a conceptual context, I draw upon the concept of *currere*, an autobiographical method that facilitates introspection and broader self-understanding, first introduced by Pinar (1974). *Currere* serves not only as a tool for personal reflection but also as a means to contextualize one's experiences within broader educational and societal frameworks. The concept of *currere* generally refers to the course of a subject "through conversation, ongoing dialogical encounter among students and teachers in classrooms but also within oneself in solitude" (Pinar, 2020, p. 51). However, this concept encompasses deeper and more layered meanings. It emphasizes that individuals engage in a complex dialogical process, not only with others but also with the people and places they research, including living or deceased politicians, parents, and their past and future selves (Doll, 1993; Pinar, 2012). Downey (2020, 2023) notes that engaging in reflective analysis or autobiography ultimately involves an attempt to make sense of who we are, where we come from, why we are here, and where we are going. Similarly, I believe this concept provides a highly suitable framework for exploring a person's singular academic journey within a specific context, including in terms of discipline and career. In this study, I use *currere* as both a methodological approach and a conceptual framework to explore my academic journey, enabling deep reflection on the intersection of personal experiences and the broader academic context in Turkey.

Pinar (2012) suggests that *currere* is ideal for individuals, especially teachers and academics, who continuously seek to reconceptualize and understand the impact of social, personal, and educational change on their lives while striving for ongoing self-development. To use the method of *currere*, there are four steps/moments to be considered: "the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the syncretical" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45). These four moments represent temporal and reflective movements for autobiographical work aiming to understand one's educational experience through contemplation and inquiry (Pinar 2012, 2015). Each of these stages or moments has a particular task in helping one make sense of the self. In the regressive phase, one looks to the past, while in the progressive phase, one contemplates the future. Through the analytic and synthetic phases, one attempts to understand the present. Individuals progress through these stages, sometimes quietly and sometimes through prolonged reflection, to develop self-knowledge and gain insights into personal and professional challenges such as navigating career paths, understanding institutional dynamics, and addressing systemic issues in education (Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Pinar, 2015).

To better structure this study and effectively reflect on the concept of *currere*, I have organized my reflection into the four stages defined by Pinar (2012): regressive, progressive, analytical,

and synthetic. Each section will begin with an explanation of the stage's purpose, followed by key insights from my autobiographical reflections. Throughout these sections, I will explicitly describe my own *currere* reflection and writing processes, creating a bridge between the academic discussion of each phase and the personal narratives presented. This approach will help illustrate how the *currere* methodology can be applied to understand the complexities of academic life in Turkey. Finally, in concluding this study, I will summarize the results obtained within the framework provided by the concept of *currere* and synthesize these reflections.

Regressive: Exploring the Past to Understand the Present

As emphasized by Pinar (1975, p. 22), the regressive moment is a critical phase in the *currere* methodology where “one returns to the past,” allowing an individual to reexamine their lived or existentially experienced past. This autobiographical approach was chosen for this study as it offers a unique lens to explore the complexities of academic life in Turkey, particularly from the perspective of an emerging researcher navigating this challenging landscape. Through free association, the individual virtually relives past experiences, expands upon them, and reinterprets them with a new understanding (Pinar 1975, 1994). In this process of regression, the person seeks not only the memories that are consciously accessible but also those buried deep within the unconscious (Pinar, 2012). The essence of this moment lies in a complex interplay between the past itself and its reconstruction in the present. As Pinar (2023) notes, regression involves “returning to an earlier moment, immersing oneself in it, in its tone, mood, ambiance, its specificity” (p. 13). Pinar emphasizes that the regressive phase affords “temporal regression in service of reconstructing one’s subjective experience of the present” (2023, p. 174). This dual nature of regression—both immersing in the past and informing the present—is crucial to the *currere* process.

Applied to the context of my academic career in Turkey, the regressive moment allows for a deep exploration of education-focused experiences shaped by various institutional, social, and biographical dynamics unique to this setting and to me. This approach enables me to understand the roots of my professional identity and knowledge base within the specific context of Turkey’s academic landscape. Through this process, I can scrutinize the turning points in my educational journey, the educators I encountered, the courses I took, and how these experiences, set against the backdrop of Turkey’s educational system, guided my career (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Consequently, the impact of past experiences on current academic attitudes and approaches can be more clearly articulated (Pinar 1978, 1995), providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by emerging researchers in Turkey. With this perspective, I will share my educational experiences and observations up to my postgraduate education in educational administration, sometimes highlighting general themes and other times focusing on specific anecdotes that illustrate the unique challenges and opportunities present in Turkey’s academic landscape.

Background

I grew up in a major industrial city in the western part of Turkey, although my roots lie in the eastern region. Raised by middle-income yet very dedicated parents, I completed my primary and secondary education at a relatively mediocre school located near my home. I distinctly

remember the change of our class teacher when we transitioned to the second grade. The sadness of this change was compounded by the fact that our new teacher was more disciplined and strict compared to our previous one. This was due to several factors: most of the students came from low socio-economic backgrounds and were inclined toward violence, bullying, and substance abuse (particularly among the boys). Moreover, our school operated on a dual education system and housed approximately 3,500 students in two small buildings. As a result, until a new school opened in the area around my third or fourth grade, we were around 66 students in a classroom of about 30 square meters. These conditions perhaps explain the strict and disciplined demeanor of our primary school teacher. Whenever I recall that period, I am reminded of the 1995 Hollywood movie “Dangerous Minds,” known for its underrated music, including “Gangsta’s Paradise.” Although the situation was not as extreme as in the film, our primary and secondary school conditions were quite difficult.

During my primary school years, Turkey was experiencing significant political instability, turmoil, and economic crisis. This was felt across all sectors of society, including education. When I transitioned to secondary school, the physical conditions of the school did not change, but thanks to a new school opening in the area, our class size was reduced to about 45 students. Due to my success in the high school entrance exam, I attended a relatively better high school. The students there generally came from middle to upper-middle socio-economic backgrounds and were successful in their studies. Additionally, the country was experiencing a noticeably better phase in terms of economy and security. My high school years were academically unproductive; I largely relied on the foundation I built during secondary school and the high school entrance exam to get through. In my final year of high school—in a country known for its exams—I prepared rigorously for the university entrance exam. This experience of navigating Turkey’s exam-centric education system would later inform my understanding of the pressures faced by students and the need for educational reform, themes that would become central to my academic work. Given my prior success in social studies since primary school, I chose this field. Although the faculty I attended was well-established, it was extremely modest in terms of quality. This experience of studying at a prestigious but under-resourced institution would later inform my perspectives on the challenges facing higher education in Turkey.

Throughout my undergraduate education, I worked hard to achieve the necessary GPA and score in the Selection Exam for Academic Personnel and Graduate Studies (ALES)—similar to the GRE in the USA—to qualify for a scholarship for postgraduate education provided by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey. Despite achieving the required scores, there were limited quotas in my field, and I remained on the waiting list. Consequently, my dreams of attending Columbia University were dashed. This experience of navigating Turkey’s complex and often frustrating scholarship system would later become a key point of reflection in my academic work on educational policy and access to higher education. However, several factors provided me with the strength and direction to pursue graduate education in Turkey. I will elaborate on these factors in the next section.

Introduction to Graduate Education

In this section, I will share additional details about my academic journey in the field of educational administration, reflecting on how my experiences are shaped by and reflective of broader trends in Turkish academia and society. Exploring this journey through the lens of *currere* allowed me a deeper understanding of the interplay between personal experiences and societal contexts in shaping academic careers in Turkey. First, I would like to discuss the

perceptions of leadership in the society where I was born and raised, followed by my childhood and youth memories of leadership.

I come from a society that produces strong leaders or provides a suitable environment for their emergence. Historically, the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, and even earlier Turkish states have always produced strong leaders. For us as a society, this has been at least as important and valuable as collective achievements. Perhaps as a reflection of this, we are a society highly inclined toward hierarchy, with a high power distance — meaning we tend to accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, leaders and managers are treated with great respect and reverence. However, I observe that this attitude is beginning to change with Generation Z. The shift in societal attitudes towards leadership has significant implications for the field of educational administration in Turkey, which has become central to my research interests. As for me, I have always had a more moderate attitude toward leaders since my childhood. To this day, I neither excessively glorify nor overly criticize leaders. For me, the value of leaders is directly related to the work they do and how they accomplish it. Thus, when evaluating leadership, I assess from this perspective.

My inclination toward the field of educational administration began during my doctoral studies, thanks to a mentor with whom I had the opportunity to take classes during my undergraduate studies and who has always trusted and supported me since then. This mentoring experience, which is not uncommon in Turkish academia but was particularly impactful in my case, undoubtedly had a positive effect on me. As I previously mentioned, my dream for postgraduate studies was to study abroad—especially in the United States. My mentor introduced me to another faculty member who had pursued his postgraduate education in the United States (with the same scholarship I desired) and returned to our faculty as a professor. He provided me with extensive information about the scholarship program and postgraduate education there. Near the end of my undergraduate studies, when I met him again, he mentioned that they were opening a master's program in educational administration and that he would be accepting five students. Knowing about my postgraduate ambitions, he advised me to apply. I remember sharing this with a colleague who said, "If you can't go to the United States, it would be great to be a student of someone who has just returned from there."

Through the process of *currere*, I recognize how these interactions and decisions were pivotal moments in shaping my academic trajectory. They reflect not only my personal aspirations but also the broader context of academic opportunities and limitations in Turkey, particularly for emerging researchers seeking international exposure.

Two Barriers: Age and Lack of Experiences

When I applied for an international scholarship, I also applied for postgraduate education at the faculty where I completed my undergraduate studies on the recommendation of a mentor, this in case I didn't receive the scholarship. This dual application strategy reflects a significant moment in my academic journey, one that I revisit through Pinar's concept of the "regressive moment" to understand how past experiences shape present aspirations and actions. It also highlights the challenges and uncertainties faced by emerging researchers in Turkey, particularly those aspiring to international education.

I was invited for an interview for the master's program. During this period, I purchased a few books and did some readings on educational administration and leadership. When the interview time came, I answered the questions asked about the field. Then I was asked very difficult questions outside of my field. As soon as I started answering one question, another completely unrelated question was asked. Frankly, I tried to keep my composure and answer the questions immediately as they were asked. I thought, perhaps naively, that they were testing me in this way. Although I did not know my interview score, I was accepted into the master's program due to my high GPA and ALES (GRE) scores. Reflecting on this experience through Pinar's regressive moment, I understand how these challenging interview questions were a formative experience, testing and thereby encouraging my resilience and composure under pressure. This experience also provided insight into the often intense and unpredictable nature of academic selection processes, in Turkey and, no doubt, elsewhere.

After starting the master's program, one day in class, the topic of the interview process came up. My mentor, who was also my advisor during my master's studies, mentioned that none of the questions asked to me—referring to their difficulty—were asked to any of my classmates. He said he didn't even know the answers to many of the questions I was asked. As the classes progressed, the head of the interview committee, who was also the head of the department, made remarks during the lessons indicating that he was uncomfortable with my age and the fact that I had just graduated. The average age in our class was nearly 40, and at 23, I was the youngest.

I acknowledge that educational administration is a field of practice, and having more extended teaching and school administration experience is undoubtedly beneficial. This tension between theoretical knowledge and practical experience is a recurring theme in Turkish academia, particularly in applied fields like educational administration. Through the lens of *currere*, I now see how this experience shaped my understanding of the complex interplay between age, experience, and academic merit in Turkish higher education. I tried to compensate for what I felt were my disadvantages with diligent work and by listening to the professional experiences of my classmates, sometimes formally and sometimes informally. I believe I succeeded in this endeavor, in part because I was the first among my peers to graduate from the master's program.

Since educational sciences are generally strong in universities located in Ankara, I applied to Hacettepe University, which was strong in educational administration, for my doctoral studies. I was invited for a written exam. Following a very successful exam, I was accepted into the doctoral program. I vividly remember the day I went for my first class. Since I did not know where the department classrooms were, I was a bit late. When I finally found the classroom, I wanted to make sure by knocking on the door and asking if it was the correct class. One of the students responded, "But this is a doctoral class; you might be in the wrong place." I replied that I was there for the doctoral class. Another student then asked, "Are you a direct-entry doctoral student?" with an attitude suggesting disbelief. I confirmed that I was a regular doctoral student. At that moment, the responsible academic said, "Some people advance early in academia. I wouldn't be surprised if he also becomes an associate professor early." This comment was undoubtedly positive for me.

However, during both my master's and doctoral studies, I was aware that my age and lack of extensive teaching or administrative experience caused some of my classmates and professors to view me somewhat dismissively, especially during the course periods. This experience

highlights the often rigid expectations and hierarchies within Turkish academia, where age and experience are often valued over potential and academic performance. My general approach was to acknowledge that this situation was true and focus on overcoming my deficiencies. I applied for an associate professorship one and a half years after graduating, and in September of last year, based on the jury reports, I became one of the youngest individuals to receive the title of associate professor in the field of social sciences in Turkey. Additionally, I might be the youngest person to achieve this from outside the university. This achievement, while personally significant, also reflects my compliance with broader trends in Turkish academia, where titles and formal qualifications often carry significant weight. Since beginning my postgraduate education and professional life in Turkey, the value of academic titles has diminished greatly in my eyes; they now hold little significance for me. However, in the culture I live in, titles are highly valued, and people's behavior is shaped accordingly. At this stage, I sincerely hope that the title of associate professor will only serve to facilitate my entry into the university. This reflection has led me to critically examine the role of academic titles and hierarchies in shaping scholarly identity and opportunities in Turkey.

Progressive: Envisioning the Future of Academic Careers in Turkey

In the progressive moment of the *currere* methodology, one focuses on the future, imagining what has not yet happened and does not currently exist. This phase is particularly relevant to exploring the future of academic careers in Turkey as it allows for a critical examination of both personal aspirations and systemic challenges within the Turkish academic landscape. Pinar (2012) emphasizes that the future, like the past, is experienced in the present moment. Thus, expressing one's fears, hopes, and expectations regarding the future allows individuals to understand the present and themselves more deeply. This process plays a crucial role in shaping personal and professional goals (Pinar et al., 1995). By reflecting on these future visions, I can evaluate my current situation and potential futures.

The progressive moment also enables me to identify ways to improve myself, and to explore potential advancements in my careers, which is vital for maximizing both my current capacities and potential (see Noddings, 2013). When applied to the autobiographical context of an academic career in Turkey, this moment reveals the subjective transformations and intellectual innovations needed within this country's unique academic environment. As an emerging researcher in Turkey, I use this progressive moment to identify the necessary strategies to achieve my future academic goals and ideals. This has involved focusing on how future-oriented thinking can shape my current research within the constraints and opportunities of the Turkish academic system. This approach encouraged me to find creative solutions to existing academic problems as I advance knowledge in my field (see Kolb, 2014). Additionally, during the process of future planning, I was able to more clearly define roadmaps for my future professional development, hopefully enhancing the long-term sustainability of my career (see Gardner, 2009b). The visionary perspective provided by the progressive moment allowed me to make conscious and strategic decisions in my career and personal life. This in-depth thinking and planning process about the future played a critical role in helping me achieve my academic and professional goals, thereby guiding me towards a more successful and fulfilling career (see Brookfield, 2017).

Challenges of Non-Academic Work-Life

Currently, I work as a researcher at a prestigious institution similar to the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the United States. This position provides a unique perspective on the intersection of academic research and governmental institutions in Turkey. However, this job presents two significant dilemmas for me, dilemmas reflective of broader challenges faced by many emerging researchers in Turkey. Firstly, while this institution is one of the few in Turkey that offers scholarships and project support for research, my employment here limits my eligibility to apply for such support. This situation hinders my goals of pursuing post-doctoral studies and submitting project proposals. It also highlights the limited funding opportunities available for academic research in Turkey. Secondly, instead of focusing on academic work, I spend five days a week engaged in full-time administrative tasks. As a result, I face difficulties in maintaining academic productivity, and despite my wife's invaluable support in this regard, this situation continues to prove personally challenging. This experience reflects a common challenge in the Turkish context, where administrative duties often take precedence over research and teaching, potentially hindering academic development.

I look forward to a time when I can be more involved in research and projects at a university. To prepare for this, I am striving to strengthen my academic work. My fear is that I may have to stay in this or a similar non-academic job for an extended period, which, while it may not completely derail my career path, certainly slows it down. As I think about the future through the lens of *currere's* progressive moment, I see it as a continuous struggle, similar to my current internal battle. I imagine myself moving towards a time when I can engage more with academic research and projects, striving to transition from my current administrative role to a more research-focused position. This vision reflects not only my personal aspirations but also the broader challenges and opportunities within Turkey's academic system.

This reflection was an important step toward maximizing both my current capacity and potential. Determining the necessary strategies to achieve my future academic goals and ideals helps me find creative solutions to existing problems. Whether I remain in my current position or transition to academia, I will continue to learn new things and conduct research. Imagining my future in this way allows me to accept whatever comes with a sense of clarity and determination, knowing that I am always moving toward my goals while also contributing to the broader discourse on academic career development in Turkey.

Analytic: Examining the Interplay of Past, Present, and Future in Turkish Academia

The analytic moment in the *currere* methodology involves deep self-examination, where individuals strive to understand how the past influences the present and shapes visions of the future. In the context of this study, this moment allows for a critical examination of my experiences in the Turkish context, highlighting both personal challenges and systemic issues. According to Pinar (2012), this process involves discerning how past experiences are inherent in present and future imaginings. As Pinar (2020) notes, by delving into the present, one can explore past experiences to uncover what has been hidden, rejected, or neglected. This reflective process reveals the intricate relationship between past and present and highlights how past experiences can influence future aspirations. Pinar and Grumet (1976) emphasize the temporal complexity of this process by posing the question: "How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both?" (p. 60). Pinar (1994) further instructs that

during this analytic moment, one should “describe the biographical present exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them” (p. 25). This approach allows individuals to gain a deep understanding of their life stories, offering an opportunity to reevaluate the interactions between personal history and future aspirations.

The analytic phase is not merely about self-reflection but also about subjective reconstruction. This process of subjective reconstruction involves reinterpreting past experiences and present circumstances in light of new understanding, leading to a transformed perspective on one’s academic journey. As I engage in this analytic process, I begin to reconstruct my narrative, reshaping my understanding of my place within the academic landscape and potential future trajectories. This reconstruction is particularly significant in the Turkish context, where systemic challenges often necessitate a reimagining of one’s professional identity and goals.

In my academic journey in Turkey, this process facilitates a comprehensive reflection on my identity and career path by considering past events and experiences alongside current circumstances and future goals within the Turkish academic landscape. Such self-reflection illuminates forgotten or overlooked moments from the past and helps uncover future potential (Mezirow, 1991). This was particularly beneficial in my academic and professional journey, where inner dialogue and confrontation with the past enabled me to better understand my place within the field and make more informed career decisions. For researchers and educators generally, Pinar’s (1975) *currere* approach can encourage a continuous reconceptualization of educational experiences, adding richness and depth to personal learning and teaching processes. This reflective practice not only enhances personal and professional growth but also fosters deeper engagement, leading to more meaningful and transformative educational experiences (Brookfield, 2017; Grumet, 1988).

Through this process of reflection and reconstruction, I am not only examining my past experiences but also actively reshaping my understanding of these experiences and their implications for my future in the Turkish context. This reconstruction allows me to reframe challenges as opportunities for growth and to develop new strategies for navigating the complex academic landscape in Turkey. In this analytic moment, I will share insights about my journey and future aspirations through the lens of past experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of why I am in my current position. By integrating reflections on where I have been and where I am going, this process supports a more intentional and reflective approach to personal and professional development. This form of self-analysis has proved crucial for developing a coherent and evolving sense of (my)self that is responsive to both past influences and future possibilities (Kegan, 1982).

The Context

Since my undergraduate years, I have been working towards meeting the requirements for postgraduate education and becoming a research assistant in Turkey. This journey has been shaped by the unique challenges and systemic issues within the Turkish academic landscape. I had hoped that I would achieve this goal very quickly. At the time of applying, candidates for research assistant positions at public universities were ranked based on the average scores of the ALES (GRE) and the Foreign Language Examination (YDS). The candidate with the highest average score would be appointed to the position. Given that my score was higher than those of individuals appointed in previous years, I was confident that I would become a

research assistant. However, shortly before my graduation, this practice was abolished and appointments were left to the procedures and practices determined by university administrations. Certainly, the autonomy of universities to select their personnel based on compatibility can be seen as a positive development. However, this situation has made certain points vulnerable to exploitation.

During my master's studies, I had the opportunity to apply for various academic positions, and this process provided me with valuable insights into the complex nature of hiring practices in universities. The methods used to evaluate candidates included written exams and interviews, but these processes sometimes fell short of my expectations. The evaluation criteria were not always clear, and the results could be surprising at times. These experiences led me to believe that hiring processes in the academic world should be more transparent and objective. At the same time, I came to understand that each institution may have its own unique hiring policies and that these processes can evolve over time. These observations and experiences have significantly shaped my understanding of academic career paths and institutional practices.

Turning Point

The opportunity to work at an international education institute was one of the turning points in my career. While I was applying for academic positions, I had also applied for the administrative position of assistant expert at this institution. The selection process for this role was rigorous, with the exam being conducted not by the institution itself but by a partnered university. When the results were announced, I discovered that I was the only candidate who had passed the written exam for the two available positions in my field. The subsequent interview went very well, and I was accepted into the institution. This institute, an autonomous public institution established in 2016, is responsible for operating international school activities globally at the K-12 and higher education levels. Structurally, due to its status as a public institution, it is organized similarly to the French AEFÉ schools.

I consider this experience a "turning point" because it provided me with extensive knowledge and practical development in educational administration and leadership. During my more than five years with the organization, I have traveled to 25 different countries across four continents for school guidance and inspection activities. By experiencing different cultures and educational systems firsthand, I have gained invaluable insights into various topics, including the educational structures of countries, national educational regulations, school principals' management approaches, school climates, student behaviors, disciplinary issues, and inspection systems. The vision this process has provided has allowed me to conduct empirical research in my doctoral thesis, this based on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions across four different continents. More recently, I have started working on a book that focuses on my practical experiences in international schools.

Reflecting on the impact of these past experiences on my current trajectory, I recognize how the knowledge and skills I acquired at this institute have profoundly influenced my academic and professional development. This institute offered me a unique opportunity to gain practical experience in my field, an opportunity that might not have been as readily available in an academic position at a university. Recognizing this, I have fully embraced and maximized the potential of this opportunity. I have fully embraced and maximized the potential of this opportunity, even as, through this analytic moment, I recognize my situation as caught within a quid pro quo.

Quid Pro Quo

I enjoy reading books on international relations, world history, diplomacy, global economics, and security. These books captivate me because they broaden my mind and provide different perspectives, which I find valuable in understanding the complexities of some issues. Currently, I am reading Niall Ferguson's (2018) *The Square and the Tower*. In this book, Ferguson discusses the role and importance of networks in global power struggles, dedicating a special section to Henry Kissinger. Kissinger's diplomacy embodies the concept of "quid pro quo," or "something for something," which was particularly evident in the balancing acts between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

In academia, especially in university hiring processes, I have observed similar factors at play. I've noticed that these processes can sometimes be complex and influenced by different elements such as institutional needs, personal relationships, and academic qualifications. While each institution has its own hiring policies, the desire of many academics like myself is for these processes to be more transparent and merit-based. From my own experiences and observations, I've seen that qualified candidates sometimes face challenges in these processes. These observations have helped me understand the systemic difficulties in entering the academic world and have prompted me to think about potential improvements in this area.

Personally, I try to adopt a harmonious approach in communication and avoid conflicts, especially in my professional life. During my postgraduate education and academic work, I prioritized learning new things and being productive. I did not focus on forming strategic connections to achieve specific goals. The analytic moment has helped me understand why I have struggled to secure a position in academia.

Synthetic: Reconstructing Academic Identity through Integration

The synthetical moment in *currere* involves a piecing or placing together, offering a unique perspective on the complexities of academic life, particularly in the context of graduate education in countries like Turkey. It is a moment where "listening carefully to one's own inner voice in the historical and natural world, one asks what is the meaning of the present?" (Pinar, 2012, pp. 46-47). This phase is crucial for understanding how graduate students navigate their academic journeys and develop their careers in challenging contexts.

Unlike other self-reflection theories, *currere*'s synthetical moment is not merely reflective but actively constructive, involving a dynamic interplay between the self and its environment. The subjective synthesis of one's past, present, and future "provides a different passage to a different past" (Pinar, 2020, p. 50), thereby reconstructing one's subjectivity not only for self-understanding but also for reorienting and remobilizing the individual. As Pinar (2023) notes, "In the fourth moment or synthetic phase, one gathers oneself, pulls oneself together (for the moment at least), becoming subjectively present, able to act in the private and public worlds in which one finds oneself embedded" (p. 2). This reconstruction is particularly significant for graduate students in middle-income countries who often face unique challenges in their academic pursuits.

To bridge an academic explanation with my personal narrative, I will describe my own *currere* reflection process. In synthesizing my experiences, I reinterpret my past not as a fixed narrative but as a dynamic element, evolving with new insights and understandings, enabling

identity transformation (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). This process has allowed me to better understand the complexities of my academic journey in Turkey. The synthetical moment emphasizes integrating learning processes with personal and cultural narratives, highlighting a holistic journey that encompasses personal growth and transformation beyond mere knowledge acquisition. In my case, this integration has helped me navigate the unique challenges of graduate education in Turkey, where individual effort often drives postgraduate education.

While theories such as Bruner's (1991) work on the narrative construction of reality and Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory have provided valuable insights into reflective practices, *currere* distinguishes itself through its emphasis on reconstruction and its specific phases of reflection. *Currere's* synthetical phase fosters a "dynamic interplay between the self and environment" that is constructive and reconstructive regarding the person's engagement in the world, conceived as private and public, subjective and social, political, historical as well as academic, institutional, and professional.

Through my personal *currere* process, I have uncovered previously unexplored aspects of myself, particularly in relation to my academic development in the Turkish context. This approach aided me in setting strategies to achieve future academic goals, fostering creative solutions to current academic challenges, and advancing my knowledge base (Mezirow 1991). Planning for the future has helped me chart a clearer roadmap for my professional development, thereby enhancing the long-term sustainability of my career (Kolb, 2014).

Academic Development in the Turkish Context and its Effects on Scholars' Personal and Professional Trajectories

Reflecting on my academic development through the lens of *currere* has provided unique insights into the challenges and opportunities of postgraduate education in Turkey. From the first day of my postgraduate education journey, I have made a tremendous effort to develop myself academically. In countries like Turkey, postgraduate education is often a process driven by individual efforts. In this context, the role of one's advisor is of vital importance, and advisor selection is usually made by the department without student input. When a student wishes to change their advisor, they can encounter numerous obstacles.

My experience illustrates the complexities of academic life in Turkey. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with the advisor I desired. Although the faculty where I completed my master's degree was a mid-level institution, I was able to leave with a strong foundation thanks to the guidance of my advisor. This experience enabled me to pursue a Ph.D. at one of Turkey's most prestigious universities.

The synthetical moment of *currere* has allowed me to reflect on the profound impact various scholars have had on my academic journey. During my undergraduate years, I had the opportunity to engage with the works of Cemil Meriç, a cultural critic and profound thinker who significantly shaped my intellectual framework and worldview. Meriç's insights into cultural critique deeply resonated with me and influenced my approach to academic inquiry. Another influential scholar I encountered during my undergraduate studies was Henry Giroux, whom I discovered through my readings on critical pedagogy. His ability to address a diverse range of fields deeply impressed me and expanded my understanding of the intersections between education, politics, and society. Viewed through the lens of *currere*, these

influences highlight the complex interplay between personal experiences and academic development. Finally, William F. Pinar, the originator of *curre*, holds a special place in my academic journey. I first heard about Pinar from a mentor, and we have discussed his work extensively over the past decade. Pinar's concept of *curre* particularly impressed me, especially considering that he published this groundbreaking work at the age of 27, which showcased his innovative scholarship.

In synthesizing these influences and experiences, I've gained a new perspective on the academic culture in Turkey compared to other countries. I have observed that scholars outside Turkey tend to become more productive as their experience grows, a trend I attribute to the influence of different academic cultures. In Turkey, there is often a decline in academic output after attaining the ranks of associate professor and full professor. In contrast, many researchers in the West continue to conduct significant research and produce high-impact publications even in the later stages of their careers. This observation, revealed through my *curre* process, has become a guiding principle for my academic career. It inspires me to remain productive and strive to make significant scientific contributions at every stage of my career, despite the challenges present in the Turkish academic context.

Discussion

This section aims to interpret the findings from the autobiographical *curre* study in the context of academic experiences, socio-economic issues, and institutional constraints faced by graduate students in Turkey and other middle-income countries. By doing so, I bridge the particularity of this individual *curre* study with broader scholarship on academic career paths in challenging socio-economic and institutional dynamics, thus addressing both the illumination of a singular experience and the broader implications for graduate students in similar contexts.

Reflecting on the Past: The Regressive Moment

Pinar's concept of the "regressive moment" provides a valuable framework for understanding how past experiences have shaped my academic journey in Turkey, highlighting the importance of critical self-awareness but also contributing to the reconstruction of the present moment, providing, as Pinar suggests, "a different passage to a different past." My primary and secondary school years, marked by economic hardship and educational challenges, instilled in me resilience and determination to overcome obstacles. Despite my desire to study abroad being thwarted, several factors provided me with the strength and direction to pursue graduate education in Turkey. Growing up in a socio-economically diverse environment and facing challenges during my formative years significantly contributed to my steadfast commitment to academic goals. The encouragement from mentors was instrumental in shaping my aspirations and academic development. This reflection process reveals how personal experiences intersect with broader socio-economic factors in shaping academic trajectories in Turkey, a common theme in the literature on education in developing countries (e.g., Çelik & Gür, 2013; Gür, 2016). The challenges I faced are reflective of the broader struggles encountered by many graduate students in middle-income countries, where economic constraints often shape educational paths and career choices.

Envisioning the Future: The Progressive Moment

Pinar's (2015) "progressive moment" has allowed me to frame my present circumstances as a critical step toward my future academic goals within the Turkish academic landscape. As a researcher at the institute, I have faced significant obstacles that impede my academic progress. These challenges reflect broader institutional constraints in Turkish academia, as also documented by other researchers (Aydın, 2017; Demir, 2018; Özoğlu et al., 2016), who highlight the systemic issues in research funding and career advancement. The prestigious nature of my present institution ironically restricts my access to essential scholarships and project support, highlighting a systemic issue in the Turkish context where institutional affiliations can limit rather than expand opportunities. My current role involves extensive administrative duties that detract from my academic productivity—a common challenge faced by many non-academic researchers in Turkey. This situation aligns with findings from studies on academic workload in developing countries (e.g., Teichler et al. 2013), emphasizing the need for institutional reforms to support research-focused career paths. These experiences are not unique to Turkey but are shared by graduate students and early-career researchers in many middle-income countries, where institutional prestige can paradoxically limit opportunities for growth and advancement.

Analyzing the Present: The Analytic Moment

Pinar's (2012) concept of the "analytic moment" provides a framework for critically assessing the structural barriers within the Turkish academic system and their impact on career trajectories. This analysis reveals how personal experiences are deeply intertwined with systemic issues, reflecting the complex interplay between individual agency and institutional structures in shaping academic careers (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013). Despite these challenges, my commitment to academic integrity and excellence has been reinforced. The analytic phase has helped contextualize my journey within the broader landscape of academic challenges in Turkey, highlighting the interplay between personal aspirations and institutional constraints. My experiences with the academic appointment process in Turkey have revealed systemic issues. The "quid pro quo" nature of appointments reflects broader power dynamics within Turkish academia, often prioritizing connections. This observation aligns with research on academic nepotism in developing countries (e.g., Altbach, 2015), highlighting the need for more transparent and meritocratic systems. These insights contribute to our understanding of the challenges faced by graduate students and early-career researchers in middle-income countries, where navigating complex institutional dynamics is often as crucial as academic excellence for career advancement.

Synthesizing Experiences: The Synthetical Moment

The synthetical moment of *currere* encourages the integration of diverse influences into a coherent intellectual framework. This phase demonstrates the unique contribution of *currere* in fostering a holistic understanding of one's academic identity, distinguishing it from other reflective practices by emphasizing the reconstruction of self through temporal integration (Pinar, 2012). From the outset of my postgraduate studies, I have made significant efforts to advance academically, often navigating the individualistic nature of higher education in Turkey. The synthetical moment has allowed me to integrate what I learned from influential scholars like Cemil Meriç, Henry Giroux, and William F. Pinar, creating a cohesive intellectual

identity that drives my future work within the Turkish academic context. This synthesis reflects the complex process of identity formation in academia, particularly in contexts where global and local influences intersect (Marginson, 2014). The synthetical moment of my *currere* journey illustrates the unique challenges and opportunities faced by graduate students and early-career researchers in middle-income countries as they navigate between local academic traditions and global scholarly discourses.

Implications

This study explores the complexities of the academic journey in Turkey through the lens of Pinar's *currere* methodology (Pinar, 1975), providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by graduate students and early-career researchers in this unique context. By employing a multidimensional autobiographical approach, the study critically examines the author's academic career within Turkey's specific socio-economic and cultural environment. The regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic moments of the *currere* method are not static entities but dynamic orientations that interact to shape the author's academic identity (Pinar, 2012; Pinar, 2020). This approach not only illuminates the author's personal journey but also offers broader insights into the challenges and opportunities within Turkish academia. The regressive moment facilitated an exploration of how past experiences, particularly those shaped by Turkey's educational system and socio-economic conditions, influenced this author's current academic attitudes and professional identity. The progressive moment enabled future-oriented thinking for setting professional goals, especially within the constraints of the Turkish academic system. The analytic moment provided a framework for critically assessing the impact of systemic issues on the author's academic trajectory, namely, the "quid pro quo" nature of academic appointments in Turkey. Finally, the synthetic moment allowed for the integration of these perspectives into a cohesive academic identity capable of navigating the unique challenges of Turkish academia.

I trust that this study can contribute to the *currere* literature by offering insights into academic career processes in countries with similar socio-economic dynamics as Turkey. Such conditions underscore the need for educational leaders and policymakers to consider the unique challenges faced by graduate students and early-career researchers and to develop supportive policies and practices that foster academic growth and development. Moreover, the study highlights the crucial role of mentorship and supportive academic environments in overcoming barriers to academic success in Turkey, where individual effort often drives postgraduate education (Deniz, 2020; Johnson, 2016b). Reflections on influential scholars and personal experiences provide valuable lessons for graduate students in Turkey on the importance of building strong professional networks and seeking guidance from experienced mentors. Additionally, this study emphasizes the need for systemic changes in Turkish academia, particularly in terms of transparency for emerging researchers.

Future research should continue to explore the diverse experiences of academics in various socio-economic and cultural contexts, with a particular focus on countries with challenges similar to Turkey (Altbach, 2004). This exploration is crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that academics face in different regions. By examining the specific factors that influence academic careers—such as economic conditions, cultural expectations, and institutional support systems—researchers can identify

common patterns and unique differences that shape academic experiences (Ota, 2013; Teichler et al., 2013). Future studies could also investigate the role of mentorship and professional networks in different cultural contexts, providing insights into how these relationships contribute to academic success, particularly in systems where personal connections significantly influence career trajectories. Research into effective strategies for balancing administrative duties with academic productivity in contexts similar to Turkey could offer valuable insights for non-academics navigating these challenges.

Conclusion

Working with Pinar's *currere* methodology as applied to my academic journey in Turkey has provided me with valuable insights into the complexities of academic life within this unique socio-economic and cultural context. This methodology has allowed me to critically examine my past experiences, envision future possibilities, analyze present challenges, and synthesize these elements into a comprehensive understanding of my academic identity. The *currere* method, distinct from other reflective practices, has enabled a deep reconstruction of my academic self, highlighting the temporal and subjective interplay between past, present, and future in shaping academic trajectories. This process has not only contributed to my personal growth but also offers a nuanced perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by graduate students and early-career researchers in Turkey and other middle-income countries. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on academic career paths in developing countries, offering a unique autobiographical perspective that bridges personal experience with broader institutional and socio-economic factors shaping higher education in Turkey and similar contexts. By illuminating these experiences through the lens of *currere*, this study provides valuable insights for graduate students, early-career researchers, policymakers, and institutions navigating the complex landscape of academia in middle-income countries. Ultimately, by continuing to explore and understand the diverse experiences of academics worldwide, particularly in contexts like Turkey, the academic community can become more adaptable and resilient. I hope that this study can serve as a starting point for broader discussions on academic career development in countries with social, economic, and institutional dynamics similar to Turkey's.

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