

Migrant Workers and Higher Education: Paradoxes of Democratization of Higher Education

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Abstract

Migrant Workers and Higher Education issues seem two different contradictory topics. Many research on migrant workers often associates them with pragmatism activities, the working class, and marginal groups. On the other hand, Higher Education (HE) is more often associated with idealistic spaces, middle classes, and academics environment. This paper presents the phenomenon of Indonesian migrant worker-students in South Korea. We found the increasing number of Indonesian migrant workers who pursue higher education through overseas Indonesian Open University (Universitas Terbuka) in Korea and ICT-based Korean local universities. We examine how migrant workers take advantage of the transformation of higher education. We try to answer whether higher education experienced democratization will reduce social inequality, or on the contrary, it will be trapped in an educational capitalization that sharpens the gap. Keywords: democratization, higher education, migrant workers, capitalism

Abstrak

Isu Buruh Migran dan Pendidikan Tinggi tampaknya merupakan dua topik yang bertolak belakang. Banyak penelitian tentang pekerja migran yang sering mengaitkan mereka dengan kegiatan pragmatis, kelas pekerja, dan kelompok marginal. Di sisi lain, Perguruan Tinggi lebih sering dikaitkan dengan ruang idealis, kelas menengah, dan lingkungan akademik. Artikel ini menyajikan fenomena mahasiswa pekerja migran Indonesia di Korea Selatan. Kami menemukan peningkatan jumlah pekerja migran Indonesia yang melanjutkan pendidikan tinggi dengan memanfaatkan pendidikan berbasis teknologi informasi dan komunikasi. Kami mengkaji bagaimana pekerja migran memanfaatkan transformasi pendidikan tinggi dalam mencapai kapital budaya dan status sosial. Kami mencoba menjawab apakah pendidikan tinggi yang mengalami demokratisasi akan mengurangi ketimpangan sosial, atau justru akan terjebak dalam kapitalisasi pendidikan yang mempertajam kesenjangan.

Kata Kunci: demokratisasi, pendidikan tinggi, pekerja migran, kapitalisme

INTRODUCTION

Discussing the concerns of migrant workers and higher education appears to mix two seemingly disparate topics. Many studies on migrant workers link them to practical activities, the working class, and marginalized communities. As a result, as reported by Lee 2003, Choi and Choi 2005, Astuti 2005, Rahman and Fee 2009, Ueno 2010, Andrevski and Lynham 2014, Ardli Johan Kusuma; Michael Ryan York; Rizki Hari Wibowo 2015, Subadi 2016, Ponorogo and Hamidah 2016. migrant workers are associated with degrading qualities such as

low-skilled, unskilled, and weak. Higher education, on the other hand, is more frequently linked with utopian places, the middle class, and academic environments.

Research on Higher education is probably one of the most popular subjects yet least analyzed in the academic world (Gleason 2018). Higher education is also subject to conform to social achievement, political, and economic goals. This paper attempts to present a discussion on migrant workers and higher education relations from a cultural studies perspective to seek an alternative to transform higher education to stand for the marginalized groups to achieve broader social and political change. Political policy initiatives aim to meet the perceived needs of the changing economic and social conditions of the global community.

Higher education is a dynamic zone of possibilities, and achieving that aim will remain a question of want and intention based on blind ideology and belief (Maton, 2004). Higher education, on the other hand, is undergoing substantial upheaval and transition. Higher education is now more accessible to a wider range of people in more diverse ways than it has ever been previously in human history. Higher education has played an important role in defining the transformation of society needed to adapt to its era for a long time.

Higher education today is created to satisfy the needs of the previous industrial revolution, when mass production was fueled by electricity, but technical progress is so rapid that traditional systems are no longer fit for the present automated economy (Gleason 2013). Demographics, population (both rising and diminishing), global health, literacy, inequality, climate change, nuclear proliferation, and other factors all pose substantial challenges to higher education. When students graduate, the world awaits them with demands that are vastly different from those of earlier generations.

This paper presents the phenomenon of the increase of Indonesian migrant worker students in South Korea based on our empirical studies in 2018-2019. The interest of Indonesian citizens working abroad is quite high. The increasing number of Indonesian Migrant Workers has also related to the increasing interest of them in improving higher education. In May 2016, the number of migrant workers spreads in various countries was 97,349. UT reported that in 2014 as many as 1,139 Indonesian migrant workers were registered as UT students. Although the figure was only 0.28% of the total UT students, it showed an increasing trend (Padmo, 2015).

We look at how migrant workers are taking advantage of higher education's development. Finally, we want to know if higher education has undergone democratization and, as a result, has reduced social inequality or, on the contrary, has been locked in an educational capitalization that has widened the gap. We're looking at how power, dominance, inequality, and injustice manifests in distinct educational contexts through relationships, practices, and subjectivity. From a cultural standpoint, we consider education to be a socio-

cultural realm that cannot be fully comprehended without consideration of the local social and cultural environment. (Yang & Yi'en Cheng, 2018).

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Educational Fundamentalism

Higher education institutions aim to develop a capacity for academic achievement and knowledge retention among graduates to prepare productive lives. Higher education incorporates services into the community as part of their learning culture. Therefore education is often claimed as an investment for the community, companies, and individuals. Increased education seems to lead to better professional qualifications and, on the other hand, individuals increase their ability to adapt and obtain and process information, and their capacity for independent thinking. It seems, from time to time, improvement in (professional) education goes hand in hand (at least in some cases), by better economic outcomes and other positive outcomes.

Education is not synonymous with, but includes, the formal school system, and its definition and practice are increasingly evolving depending on the setting and scenario. Education is not synonymous with, but includes, the formal school system. This system has played an important role in the development of colonial and post-colonial societies, as well as the nation-state as a political form (Martin, 1993). As evidenced by migration studies of the late colonial or post-colonial world, education has played a critical role in the world as a vehicle of social and economic mobility for people aspiring to middle-class position.

Higher education is a relational setting that is global, national, and local at the same time (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Välimaa, 2004). International organizations, government and national systems, professions, e-learning corporations, and others are all involved in this interaction. Although most higher education activities are related to the state system, a separate global component is becoming increasingly essential, relating to each national higher education system while simultaneously being external to all of them.

Higher education often described as having a negative correlation with the working class (for example, Willis, 1977, MacLeod, 2018), but often the underlying perception is pathological identity (Ghail, 1996). The solution that often offered is in the form of class mobility to get out of working-class identity (Lawler, 1999; Reay, 2001).

Conceptualization of working-class identity as an obstacle that needs to be overcome depends on the assumption that it is an invalid identity (in the field of education), so it may need to deny any attribution of value to the working class. Some studies claim that the culture of the working class seen more positively; for example, (Savage 2000) found that apart from economic capital, most working-class informants want to describe their social identity as

"normal." Education is often taken for granted in response to upward mobility for the working class (Ingram, 2009).

Advanced education considered a sign of an increment in human resources or the capacity of the individual concerned. Advanced education installments considered as an intermediary for the useful limit and commitment of the individual. Alvesson (2013) saw that there are a few intricacies here. The relationship between's more broad instruction and major league salary (and for the most part admittance to more renowned and alluring position) can be clarified by factors that signal training or worth as accreditations. Training as a flagging framework implies their instructive status shows the capacity of knowledge, dependability, model work of people. In any case, not learning or fitting the bill to get the material, however completion of education as a proxy of intellectual capacity. The relationship between's schooling level and income, at that point, covered the causal impacts of insight, constancy, and the class foundation that prompts higher pay. all in all, a couple of individuals accept that conventional accreditations have a solid sign of one's capacity (Lazear, 1977).

Politicians often see higher education as a form as a way to escape from working-class backgrounds. Policies often assume that the working class from deficit positions and higher education can help them in higher social mobility. It creates conditions where those who are interested and in power can promote individual lifestyles (e.g., higher education) as something more valuable than others (Loveday, 2015).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a critical ethnographic method to support the theoretical framework. Critical ethnography is a way to apply a subversive worldview to the logic of general cultural inquiry (Thomas, 1993). We choose ten informants who were determined purposively. In addition to the ten core informants, the researchers also conducted targeted discussions with groups of migrant workers students.

This research uses several data collection techniques—observations made in several locations in Indonesia and Korea. The observation continued with in-depth interviews with the informants. In-depth interviews conducted to uncover the story and life journey of Indonesian migrant workers. This life story is useful to see the stages of historical change with aspirations, desires, and hopes in the lives of migrant workers. This in-depth interview will also examine how migrant worker-students defines their lives and relates them to the past and the future.

RESULT and DISCUSSION

Higher education for migrant workers : Consumption or investment?

Indonesian migrant worker-students in Korea often consider the decision to continue higher education as consumption, or if they are called

investments, it is not capital investments that they can use at any time as other capital such as land, houses, and jewelry. As migrant workers-students, they feel they have more value than other migrant worker friends. The status of the student has changed people's views about migrant workers, especially those in the home country.

The results of interviews with informants revealed that they chose to continue higher education because of the delayed ideals, which, when they in Indonesia to go to university seemed very difficult due to various obstacles, primarily financial. When in Korea, with the basic salary they received, migrant workers feel able to finance the tuition fee offered by universities.

Besides, according to migrant workers, this is an opportunity for them to get a bachelor's degree (credentials). They manage their income, and there is no obligation to send their money back home. If they have to send a portion of their income to families in the country, only for specific purposes such as a big thing that will be bought, celebration or helped parents, this kind of situation is slightly different from some cases where Indonesian migrant workers are the backbone of the family.

Achievement as a scholar is closer to increasing prestige or confidence to counter the status as a migrant worker. Higher education for migrant workers can be seen as a way of accumulating cultural capital. The cultural capital then converted back into the status of social networks to facilitate the reproduction of class gains (mobility). Thus, the pursuit of higher education is not always about education or learning, but it is often deeply embedded in a particular social context. It motivated and shaped by socially and culturally desires and imaginations (Yang & Yi'en Cheng, 2018). Migrant workers in South Korea have realized when returning to their home country even with a bachelor's degree does not mean that formal employment opportunities will be wide open to them, while millions of "native" scholars are fighting for jobs.

The increase of their income in Korea and the affordability to pay the tuition fee while in Korea gives the impression that spending on education costs is not something that too burdensome for the Indonesian migrant workers. An increase in income is associated with achieving a higher school as a simple result of the income effect. The amount of their income in Korea is not influenced by their educational background or status as students. Migrant workers who choose to continue higher education try to meet higher needs, where basic needs have been met. Alvesson (2013) put it in the concept of consumption of higher education as a grandiosity, which is meant an effort to give themselves, workgroups or work organizations, or even the community around us, a positive image - if somewhat superficial - is well polished. As far as possible, education symbolically upgrades one's status, more impressive by ignoring the issue of substance. Grandiosity involves the representation or loading of phenomena such that they appear as attractive as possible within the framework of what seems reasonable.

Increased education level seems to lead to better professional qualifications. Furthermore, individuals increase their ability to adapt and obtain to process the information and their capacity for independent thinking. It seems, from time to time, improvement in education goes hand in hand (at least in some cases), by better economic outcomes and other positive outcomes. At the same time, the relationship between education and productivity is often presented as a causal relationship, almost a natural law. The investment in higher education often assumed to the greater economic prosperity; such observations often simplify the problem. For example, that rich countries have higher education than developing countries, or people with more extensive education have higher incomes than others. Correlation is undoubtedly not the same as a causal relationship (Alvesson, 2013).

The consumption of higher education is also affected by the pressures of globalization. Globalization that affects all aspects of life requires education to be submissive and obedient to greater market power. Symptoms of higher education liberalization have strengthened and led to industrialization. Higher education is demanded to seek its funding to survive. Higher education has used business logic, various strategies to carried outselling the educational services. The strategy is by opening university branches abroad or by establishing cooperation between universities and other institutions, such as Universitas Terbuka (UT-Korea) with The Indonesian Workers and Protection Service Centre (BNP2TKI).

Market forces have shifted the role of the government, which was initially very dominant. The autonomy of higher education allows universities to develop themselves by utilizing the existing market, but instead, they are trapped in various kinds of problems; eventually, higher education is shackled in the logic of industrialization. When universities entered into the stream of industrialization, the commodification of education occurred (Nugroho, 2002). Higher education can seek funding locally by selling educational services to the community quickly and profitably, but on the other hand, in higher education is experiencing a degradation in the quality of education. Conversely, higher education can maintain the quality of education but difficulties in providing education funding. So that higher education can be quickly marketed by formulated as fast-food., quickly eaten by consumers, quickly produces again, quickly creates prosperity (Zamroni, 2008).

Meanwhile, the government faced competition on human resources at the global level. Success in obtaining a degree from higher education is not only seen as an individual achievement, at a more collective level; education is now also considered to pave the way for national greatness. A significant political ambition in many countries to become a country with intensive knowledge, win world education championships, and continue to lead the world in economic terms.

In the context of UT Korea, for example, on a national scale, UT helps the government in creating Indonesia's influential and competitive human resources. UT provide easy access to "luxury" for ordinary people. However, UT is confined to the supra structure of higher education, which makes education subject to market logic. Something offered to migrant workers is competitiveness through credentials and identity through student status, which is a symbol that represents the middle class. These symbols are perpetuated and reproduced even by the migrant workers themselves.

Democratization of Education a Contradiction to Capitalism

Technology also a path for the liberalization of higher education. Higher education has transformed. In this era, ICTs seemed to be the answer to higher education access solutions that led to the democratization of higher education. The democratization of education is the idea of a way of life that prioritizes rights and obligations and equal treatment for all citizens. The democratization of higher education, as described by Trow (1962) in Storrs (2016), promises greater access to more significant students. However, the link between capitalism and democracy has long been a discussion that will not end. That democracy will grow and develop solidly in line with the growth of the capitalist economy in which the essence of a democratic society is a product of the capitalist economy (Sihono, 2011), but Schumpeter (2017) realizes the contradiction between democracy and capitalism.

One consequence of the democratization of higher education is the explosion of institutions that have emerged to meet the mass demand and stratification of these institutions. For example, in this case, UT is a local (domestic) university – Transnational. The myths developed include leading state universities, and world-class universities continue to be institutionalized and provide information on public perceptions about what colleges or universities are. This myth has created paradoxical legitimacy in the higher education sector.

Democratization created the need for various types of institutions, but the search for legitimacy in the higher education sector is driving isomorphic change and encouraging regular campus missions to be able to serve non-regular students effectively. The University continues to explore other sectors beyond higher education where there is potential to create programmed and institutional legitimacy. This including the business sector, specialized professional sectors, and the socio-cultural environment.

Deliberate multi-liminality in which institutions gain legitimacy from various overlapping environmental sectors simultaneously offers a response that helps universities in their mission and s maintain the access promised by the democratization of higher education (Storrs, 2016). Higher education fails to compensate for pre-existing social inequalities but also helps to confirm, legitimize, and reproduce those inequalities to the next generation (Marginson,

2016). Our higher education system has moved from facilitating upward mobility to exacerbating social inequality. Higher education fosters a society that increasingly resembles the caste system, to live in different social strata.

Increased interest in labor education and mobilization of financial resources to complete this task has become a significant feature in the history of capital. Capital does not care about the needs of workers and lets it be the initiative of workers to reproduce themselves biologically, psychologically, and culturally based on low wages. Workers mostly perform their duties well because they have no choice. Marx might face this situation, and perhaps because of that, he left the question of the social reproduction of the labor force in his capitalist economic theory (Harvey, 2014).

Ong (1996) complements Harvey's idea by looking more specifically at how the universalistic criteria of democratic citizenship regulate a variety of different subject categories or how the location of these subjects within the nation-state and global economic conditions builds up their citizenship. Even the study of citizenship that takes into account its impact on capital accumulation and consumption has looked at potential strategies for political change to rebuild civil society.

Rare attention focused on the everyday processes by which people, especially immigrants, are subjected to nation-states. If workers do not reproduce themselves or work too hard and get premature death in mines and factories (or commit suicide due to overwork, as is often the case in factories in China), and if easy capital access to surplus labor somehow blocked, then capital cannot reproduce. Marx was aware of this danger when he saw that limits must be placed on the tiring working hours and the rate of exploitation that kills, and the state's law to reproduce capital because it is tantamount to protecting the lives of the workers (Harvey, 2014).

In capitalism, fears of the reproduction of an adequate quality of labor power coincide in many parts of the world with a political project of a reformist bourgeoisie to create a "respectable" working class that will refrain from riots and revolutions. Skilled and trained workers might reasonably expect a higher level of remuneration than unskilled labor, but would be very much different from accepting the idea that higher wages are a form of return on workers' investment in their education and skills. The problem, as shown by Marx in his sharp criticism of Adam Smith (Harvey, 2014), is that workers can only realize the higher value of skills by working for capital under conditions of exploitation so that ultimately, capital reaps the benefits of labor productivity higher, and not the workers themselves.

It appears that higher education participates in the allocation and marketing of young people's aspirations, where students are framed as consumers whose educational desires are increasingly co-opted into the commercial agenda. Thus, the discourse of "opportunity to win a degree" that helps frame a local understanding of prestigious education. The belief that this

system offers the possibility of extensive university education contributes to widening participation, and by extension, represents a more democratic moment of education and learning (Yang & Yi'en Cheng, 2018).

The tagline of borderless education and democratization serve to cover the complexity of hierarchy through this system, even when it opens additional pathways for young people seeking credentials. It is important to note how the experience of transnational education exists formed through the reproduction of power relations and the hierarchies of value. However, many of them are able to continue university education, compared to youth who are most disadvantaged by migration opportunities—besides the financial abilities of student migrant workers facing uncertainty in employment prospects.

Migrant workers-students also do not have access to various job opportunities, unlike their peers who study regularly at various universities. Although they are aware that their decisions are not based on opportunities to get a job, it is also primarily due to a lack of trust in the program and credentials by employers and tenants, which can be attributed to several factors, including stereotypical views about the quality of students and programs.

The second point relates to how higher education for migrant workers has been postulated to have the impact of democratization on participation in higher education. The case of student migrant workers indeed shows the possibility of expanding university participation for more youth, and which serves as a discourse that appeals to popular imagination, including the personal perceptions of migrant workers. There is an assumption that some university programs are better than others. For example, in the case of Korea, that migrant workers studying at CHUFs are more promising because they will get a Korean diploma that can be used globally, whereas for UT students think however UT is one of the universities a reputable country and using the standards of state universities in Indonesia.

Transnational mobility and connectivity in higher education are undoubtedly becoming more profound and broader as a result of globalization. These processes tend to be faster as technology improves. Nonetheless, this research shows that higher education for migrant workers remains strongly shaped by the global structure of hegemony and hierarchy around the authority of knowledge, the prestige of institutions, and the reputation of the state.

CONCLUSION

Higher education specifically for migrant workers in industrialized countries currently adopts “globalization” and “internationalization”- often in ways that reflect the dominant worship of techno-fetish - as a strategy to increase the interest of migrant workers. In comparison, migrant worker students often use their participation in higher education as an alternative route to overcoming local-based barriers to accessing higher education. Instead of considering it as an investment, migrant workers in Korea think that this is a

reasonable consequence of increasing income. Consumerist values appear in the growing transactional relationship that has been entered by migrant worker-Students, which also raises expectations about how useful their higher education experience is. Consumption of higher education can be seen in the idea of education as a "private property" driven by the market.

More broadly, with the critical and cultural analytical perspectives, we hope, through this article, to open more critical conformations about the current state and future direction of higher education, especially in the information age. There (N. W. Gleason, 2018) are many predictions and announcements about future "needed" skills, which for us all seem primarily unrelated to how socio-cultural and geographical actors are involved with higher education as a means to realize locally defined aspirations and social desires. In a sense, ICTs that considered to make higher education more democratic fail to challenge the continued hegemony of the world of business and capitalist economics that have an impact on higher education where hierarchy and inequality always reproduced in the process.

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