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Political appointments to rector positions: a shifting landscape in Turkish academia

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Abstract
This paper examines the shifting landscape of higher education in Turkey, highlighting a disconcerting trend of politically motivated appointments, coined as "parasailing." Departing from traditional merit-based norms, this practice of appointing professors without necessary approvals disrupts the academic environment, prompting concerns about the integrity of higher education institutions. The paper introduces the term "parasailing" to elucidate this phenomenon, emphasizing the connection between the appointed professor and their academic destination. In contrast to the widely used term "parachuting," in Turkish academia the proposed terminology offers a better understanding of the appointment process. The subsequent sections provide an overview of the Turkish academic landscape, explore the origin of the term "parachuting," review existing literature, define "parasailing," and connect it to different philosophical thoughts. Overall, this paper contributes to a broader comprehension of the challenges facing Turkish higher education, urging a reconsideration of appointment procedures.

1 Introduction

The landscape of higher education in Turkey is undergoing a profound shift, marked by increasing instances of political interference. For the purposes of this paper, "political interference" refers to the involvement of government officials or political entities in the decision-making processes of academic institutions, particularly in the appointment of key positions. "Political appointment" is defined as the selection of individuals for academic or administrative posts based on their political affiliations or loyalty rather than academic merit or qualifications. The focus of this paper is on the appointment of rectors within Turkish universities, a process increasingly influenced by political considerations.

In the paper, I also coin a new term "*parasailing*" to describe this procedure. "*Parasailing*" refers to these kinds of politically motivated appointment of professors without the necessary approvals, feedback or considerations by the academic units and existing academic post-holders. The dominant term being used for these practices in Turkish academia since 2019 is actually *parachuting*, which I believe is not fully and clearly describing the extend of this practice. While "parachuting" suggests a descent from nowhere and also depending on external conditions landing on anywhere, the proposed term "parasailing" highlights the connection between the appointed professor and their academic destination. This shift in terminology underscores the link between the individual and the academic sphere, offering a more nuanced understanding of the appointment process.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I shortly give an overview of the Turkish academic landscape and discuss how the term parachuting has origined from there. Next, in section three, I provide a short review of the existing literature and aim to shed light on the differences and similarities between existing research and current

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paper. Then in section four I define the term parasailing and discuss its suitability to describe the political appointments in academia. In section five I discuss how one can connect the parasailing term to different philosophical thoughts. Finally, in the last section I conclude.

2 Political interference in Turkish academia

2.1 Theoretical background

To analyze the impact of political appointments on Turkish higher education, this paper draws on theories of political interference and academic freedom. In this context, political interference refers to the involvement of government officials, political entities, or individuals with political affiliations in the governance and administrative processes of academic institutions. This interference often manifests in the appointment, promotion, or dismissal of academic and administrative personnel based on political considerations rather than academic merit or qualifications. Political appointment, a subset of political interference, specifically denotes the selection of individuals for academic or administrative positions primarily due to their political affiliations, loyalty, or connections rather than their professional credentials or suitability for the role. In Turkish academia, political appointments are frequently observed in the selection of rectors, deans, and other senior university officials. This practice undermines the principles of academic autonomy and meritocracy, leading to concerns about the overall quality and independence of higher education institutions. Moreover, the Political interference theory suggests that external political forces can undermine the autonomy and integrity of academic institutions. The theory of academic freedom emphasizes the importance of independence from political pressures to maintain the quality and credibility of educational and research activities. These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics and implications of political appointments in academia.

Firstly, the theory of political interference, which posits that external political forces can significantly impact the autonomy and functioning of academic institutions, serves as a cornerstone for this analysis. This theory highlights how political entities can exert control over academic decisions, thereby influencing the direction and integrity of educational and research activities. (See [1, 4, 28], and [36] for evidence for and impact of political interference on higher education).

Additionally, the theory of academic freedom is crucial to understanding the implications of political appointments. Academic freedom emphasizes the necessity for scholars to operate without undue external pressures, ensuring that their teaching, research, and public service are guided by scholarly principles and intellectual inquiry [3]. The erosion of academic freedom through political appointments jeopardizes the independence of academic institutions and their ability to contribute to society meaningfully.

Moreover, organizational theory, particularly as it relates to university governance, provides insights into the dynamics of leadership and decision-making within academic institutions [13, 31]. This theory helps elucidate how political appointments disrupt traditional governance structures and processes, leading to a shift in the organizational culture and priorities of universities.

The analysis of political interference in Turkish higher education draws on several established theoretical frameworks. The concept of political interference in academia is explored in works such as Altbach [2] and Berdahl [6]. The theory of academic freedom is also well articulated in studies like Karran [21]. Additionally, organizational theory as it relates to university governance is thoroughly examined in Clark [13].

2.2 Evolution of the Turkish academia

The Turkish academic landscape, renowned for its rich history and contributions to scholarship, operates within a framework that traditionally values academic culture, autonomy, and freedom. Academic autonomy refers to the ability of academic institutions to govern themselves without external interference, ensuring that educational and research activities are guided by scholarly principles rather than political agendas. Academic freedom is the principle that scholars should have the freedom to teach, discuss, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction. These principles are crucial for maintaining the integrity and quality of higher education in Turkey.

Turkish academia has in recent times been grappling with a phenomenon colloquially known as "parachuting." Anecdotal evidence suggests that the term has started being used in Turkish academia since 2019. The term itself has previously been used in the Republic of Korea (See [19]) to criticize bureaucratic appointments by the president, when the

appointed candidates were not qualified for the job. Independently, this term has also emerged in Turkey as a descriptor for politically motivated appointments that transcend the traditional merit-based procedures, marking a departure from the established norms within Turkish higher education. Traditional merit-based procedures in Turkish academia primarily operated within a collegial governance model, emphasizing peer review and departmental evaluations. Job advertisements were publicly posted on academic job boards, followed by rigorous peer reviews and evaluations by departmental committees. These processes were designed to ensure transparency, academic integrity, and the selection of candidates based on scholarly merit and academic achievements. The collegial model fostered a collaborative decision-making environment, promoting institutional autonomy and protecting academic freedom. Despite these measures, it is acknowledged that even traditional models faced challenges such as managerial pressures, which could compromise academic integrity. The traditional collegial model of university governance has faced increasing challenges from managerial pressures, a phenomenon well-documented in higher education literature. Deem [14] explores the rise of 'manager-academics' and new forms of public management in UK universities, while Marginson and Considine [32] examine the emergence of the 'enterprise university' in Australia. Slaughter and Leslie's [41] concept of 'academic capitalism' further illuminates how market-like behaviors have permeated academic institutions, often at odds with traditional academic values. These studies provide a critical backdrop for understanding the tensions between traditional academic governance and politically influenced managerial approaches in Turkish universities. However, the overarching structure aimed to uphold quality and meritocracy in academic appointments.

To understand the roots of "parachuting" in the Turkish academic landscape, a brief exploration of the historical context is imperative. Turkey has a long-standing tradition of higher education dating back to the late nineteenth century during the Ottoman Empire. The establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 marked a significant turning point, bringing transformative changes across various sectors, including education.

The evolution of universities in Turkey over the past century reflects the nation's commitment to modernization, development, and the cultivation of a knowledge-based society. In the early years of the Republic, the Turkish government prioritized the establishment of a robust education system to foster a modern and secular society. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic, numerous reforms were implemented, including the adoption of a new alphabet and the restructuring of the education system. The first universities, such as Ankara University in 1923, were founded to provide higher education opportunities and contribute to the nation's intellectual and cultural development. The period following the 1950s witnessed a significant expansion of higher education in Turkey. The number of universities increased, and new faculties and departments were introduced to address the growing demands of a developing society. During this era, the government focused on enhancing access to education, promoting research and innovation, and fostering a diverse range of academic disciplines. Several technical universities were established during this time, emphasizing the importance of science and technology in Turkey's progress. The 1980 military coup brought about a period of political instability, affecting higher education in Turkey. The government implemented changes to the curriculum and university administration, aiming to maintain order and control over educational institutions. Despite challenges, this period also saw the establishment of new universities, emphasizing the government's commitment to providing educational opportunities across various regions.

However, the academic landscape in the country has undergone notable shifts, particularly in the approach to administrative appointments within universities. Historically, the autonomy of universities in Turkey was upheld as a fundamental principle, allowing academic institutions to govern themselves independently. This autonomy was seen as crucial in fostering an environment conducive to free thought, research, and intellectual exploration. However, shifts in political dynamics have introduced changes that have sparked debates surrounding the interference of political entities in academic affairs. Particularly, during the cold war era, many academics who were labeled as leftists or communists by different governments were expunged from academia, but particularly so in 1940s and early 1980s [20].

The Higher Education Council (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu or YÖK in Turkish) was established in 1981 following the military coup in 1980, with the primary goal of restructuring and overseeing the higher education system in Turkey. It is then constitutionalized with the 1982 constitution that was approved by a referendum under military rule. Its establishment was marked by a top-down approach, consolidating control over universities and faculty appointments. The authoritarian nature of its inception set the stage for a historical pattern of curbing academic freedom. YÖK's creation brought about a centralized decision-making process, concentrating power in the hands of a few officials. This centralization has often translated into bureaucratic interference in university affairs, limiting the autonomy that academic institutions should ideally enjoy. The council's influence over faculty appointments, promotions, and dismissals has been a point of contention, as decisions are frequently made based on political considerations rather than merit [18].

While YÖK was (at least on paper) intended to enhance the quality of higher education in Turkey, it has also been criticized for imposing a one-size-fits-all approach, neglecting the diverse needs and characteristics of individual universities. The council's regulations and guidelines have sometimes stifled creativity and autonomy, hindering universities from adapting to changing educational paradigms. One of the most significant challenges to academic freedom has been the politicization of key appointments within universities. YÖK's role in approving or rejecting candidates for administrative positions, including university rectors and deans, has been a contentious issue. This has led to the perception that loyalty to the government or adherence to specific political ideologies is prioritized over academic competence. YÖK's influence has at times manifested in the suppression of dissenting voices within the academic community. Scholars critical of government policies have faced repercussions, including job insecurity, dismissal, and even legal action. This climate of fear has contributed to self-censorship, limiting the free exchange of ideas and inhibiting academic inquiry [16].

After its establishment, YÖK had full authority in recommending a number rectoral candidates to the president of the country. With some democratic transition after 1991 elections, the role of the YÖK has been limited to some extent. In 1992, with the leadership of some faculty of Bogazici University, a somewhat system was adopted, where full-time faculty members were voting for top three candidates that were sent to YÖK, which could then forward these (with possible reordering of the candidates if it wishes) names to the president of the country, who will then make the final appointment. But then this system was brought to an end by the current president of the country in November 2016, when the president refused to appoint one of the three names forwarded to him by YÖK for the possible rectorship of Bogazici University. He then went ahead and abolished the elections by a presidential decree. After this date, YÖK started to advertise rectorship positions on its website. Candidates then directly apply to YÖK and YÖK, likely sends some recommendation to the president. The president then makes a unilateral decision taking or not taking into account what YÖK recommends.

Even though the current president of the country, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power (First as a prime minister and then as a president) in late 2002 with the promise of abolishing YÖK; over time, but particularly so after 2016, he has strengthened his government's control over all higher education institutions. With all the procedural changes, currently all university presidents (Public or private) are appointed by the president and these presidents have almost unlimited power over recruitment processes in their respective institutions. All these developments were not really faced with much effective opposition, with one exception that has been still developing since January 2021, when the rector of a private university (who was also an ex-member of the ruling political party) has been appointed by the president to the rectorship of the one of the top public universities in the country, Bogazici University. This appointment led to a fierce opposition by students and academics of the university. (See [9] for an excellent account of the development at Bogazici University). Several months later in July 2021, this rector has been dismissed but a new political appointee, now from inside the university, is pursuing his policies and even in a stricter and more oppressing ways, including about 70 "parachuting appointments" to academic posts as of February 2024 [7].

The term "parachuting" has its roots in the manner, in which high-ranking university officials and professors are appointed, particularly under the current political climate. Traditionally, academic appointments were conducted through rigorous processes, involving posting job advertisements on academic job boards, peer reviews, departmental evaluations, and adherence to academic meritocracy. However, the landscape has witnessed a shift, with political entities taking a more direct role in appointing rectors and other influential figures within universities. The term "parachuting" captures the essence of these appointments, signifying a sudden descent into academic positions without the usual checks and balances. It reflects the perception that individuals appointed through this process seemingly appear out of nowhere, descending into positions of influence without the traditional ascent through the academic ranks.

The roots of "parachuting" can be traced to the intertwining of politics with higher education administration. The Turkish government, through changes in legislation, has assumed a more direct role in appointing rectors, a role traditionally left to university communities. The influence of political ideologies, affiliations, and considerations has permeated the appointment process, leading to a departure from the meritocratic principles that were once foundational to Turkish higher education. The term "parachuting" encapsulates the perception that these appointments are swift, unanticipated, and influenced by external political factors rather than academic merit. It has become a symbolic expression of the challenges faced by Turkish academia as it navigates the delicate balance between political interests and academic autonomy.

The emergence of the term "parachuting" has not only found resonance within academic circles but has also permeated public discourse. The public, including academics, students, and broader society, has become increasingly vocal about the potential consequences of political interventions in academic appointments. The term serves as a focal point for discussions surrounding the erosion of academic integrity, the impact on research quality, and the broader implications for the reputation of Turkish universities. In essence, "parachuting" has become a loaded term that encapsulates the challenges faced by Turkish higher education in maintaining its historical commitment to academic autonomy amidst

evolving political landscapes. It is a term that reflects not only the mode of appointment but also the broader implications for the academic environment in Turkey. As we go deeper into the dynamics of "parachuting," it becomes apparent that this term is not merely descriptive but carries profound implications for the future trajectory of Turkish higher education.

3 Literature on parachuting

Parachute appointments is used in the literature to describe a specific appointment structure, mostly prevalent in East Asia, but particularly in Republic of Korea.

For example, Lee and Rhu [24] as well as Hahm and Heo [19] provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of parachute appointments (or code appointment) within the context of Korea. While the focus of these papers is on the political appointments of individuals into public and private corporations, it shares a common thread with the academic context in Turkey, as both situations involve political interventions in appointment processes. The South Korean practice sheds light on the dynamics of informal networks and political interventions in the formation and management of these networks. It emphasizes the politicized nature of parachute appointments, highlighting the active engagement of politicians, the president, and the ruling party in creating and sustaining these networks. In drawing parallels to the Turkish academic landscape, where politically appointed rectors and professors disrupt the traditional merit-based appointment processes, the Korean case offers a comparative lens. The term "parachuting," as introduced in the Korean context, becomes a concept that resonates with the challenges observed in the Turkish higher education system. Both scenarios involve the injection of external political influence into traditionally autonomous spheres, influencing the composition of leadership and potentially compromising the integrity of these institutions.

Furthermore, the two papers from Korea cited above also raise questions about the institutionalization and stability of parachute appointments. These themes are pertinent when considering the potential long-term effects of politically motivated appointments in Turkish academia. The insight that parachute appointments are neither institutionalized nor stably managed in Korea prompts a critical examination of the sustainability and consequences of similar practices within Turkish higher education.

In a similar context, Lee and Rhyu [25] explore the complex dynamics of informal networks, specifically focusing on the phenomenon of parachute appointment. This book chapter builds upon the revelations from a Samsung whistleblower, highlighting the disbursement of "teokgap" expenses and the influence wielded by large corporations over policy-making entities. Drawing parallels between the Korean context and the Turkish academic landscape, both instances involve the intersection of politics and institutional structures, showcasing how informal networks proliferate despite efforts toward democratization and globalization. The chapter's analysis of the legalization trap, where formalization may inadvertently strengthen informal networks, resonates with the challenges observed in the Turkish higher education system. By examining specific cases and the operational mechanisms of informal networks within some law firms the chapter offers theoretical insights that can inform discussions on politically motivated appointments in Turkish academia. The comparison with Japan's Amakudari (descent from heaven) and the U.S. revolving door practices adds a comparative dimension, enriching the understanding of the broader implications of informal networks. Overall, this book chapter contributes a nuanced perspective that aligns with the thematic underpinnings of the challenges posed by politically influenced appointments in both the corporate and academic spheres, providing a valuable reference for the broader discourse on governance and institutional integrity. (Also see a similar paper by [26]).

A final example of the use of the parachuting is observed in Koop and Bittner [22], where the authors provide a distinct perspective on the impact of candidate nomination pathways on subsequent legislative roles and behavior within the Canadian political context. While their focus is on parliamentary roles and behaviors, a parallel can be drawn to the Turkish academic landscape, where politically appointed professors disrupt traditional merit-based processes. The term "parachuting" takes on a different connotation here, referring to candidates appointed by party leaders rather than academic figures. Despite the contextual differences, both papers investigate the consequences of appointments and interventions in their respective systems. Koop and Bittner's examination of how appointed candidates serve distinct roles in Parliament offers insights that can be analogously applied to the Turkish academic sphere, where the repercussions of politically motivated appointments extend beyond mere position-holding to impact the overall academic environment. Both papers contribute to discussions on the consequences of appointments in their respective domains, shedding light on the broader implications for governance structures and institutional integrity.

The exploration of parachute appointments in East Asia, particularly in the Republic of Korea and Canada, establishes a foundation for understanding the broader implications of politically influenced appointments. The Korean examples

illuminate the dynamics of informal networks and political interventions, revealing parallels with the Turkish academic landscape where politically appointed figures disrupt the traditional merit-based processes. The comparative lens provided by these cases, encompassing both corporate and academic spheres, sets the stage for a nuanced examination of the challenges posed by external political influence on institutions. Transitioning into the second part of the literature review, the focus shifts to broader themes such as academics' preferences, institutional autonomy, and challenges faced by higher education systems in Spain, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, and Brazil. The discussion of these diverse perspectives with the specific case of politically motivated appointments in Turkish academia enriches the comparative analysis, offering a unique contribution to the existing literature. The current paper stands out by scrutinizing the distinct challenges posed by "parachuting" in Turkish universities, expanding the discourse on the intersection of politics and academia within a unique socio-political context. This deliberate shift in focus adds depth and specificity to the broader conversation surrounding external interventions in university appointments, highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of challenges faced by higher education systems globally.

In this regard, the paper by Sanz-Menendez and Cruz-Castro [39] focused on the academics' preferences for hiring and promotion systems, identifying factors such as beliefs, values, personal experiences, and socialization. While their focus is on the preferences within the academic employment system in Spain, it aligns with the current paper as both discuss the complexities of preferences and values in recruitment processes. The current paper, addressing politically motivated appointments in Turkish academia, complements this perspective by offering insights into a distinct aspect of the recruitment process marked by external political influences.

Moreover, Hayden and Thiep [34] discuss the need for institutional autonomy in Vietnam's higher education system. This paper, relevant to the current paper, highlights the importance of autonomy in higher education institutions. While their focus is on Vietnam's comprehensive transformation and the necessity of autonomy, the current paper paper contributes by examining the implications of politically appointed rectors in Turkish universities. Both papers, though in different contexts, touch upon the critical theme of institutional autonomy, offering valuable insights into how external influences impact the functioning of educational institutions. Also see a similar paper by Sagintayeva and Kurakbayev [40] on developments in Kazakhstan.

Finally, Arantes [5] chronicles the recent challenges faced by Brazil's higher education system, particularly the clash with the far-right government. In a similar vein, the current paper explores the politically motivated appointments in Turkish academia, shedding light on external influences affecting the functioning of universities. Both papers contribute to the broader discourse on the challenges facing higher education in different countries, emphasizing the impact of political decisions on academic institutions. While Arantner focuses on Brazil, the curren work provides insights into the Turkish context, enriching the comparative analysis of the challenges encountered by higher education systems globally.

In considering the cases of the Republic of Korea, Canada, Spain, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Japan, and Brazil, it is essential to understand that each of these countries has developed unique modes of state regulation and political regimes. These diverse systems significantly influence their higher education governance and management structures. For instance, the centralized control in Vietnam contrasts with the relatively decentralized system in Canada. Such variations impact the degree and nature of political interference in academic appointments. Higher education institutions globally face increasing interferences affecting their institutional autonomy, primarily driven by state policies and political market forces. Recognizing these differences is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of parachuting and parasailing phenomena in academia.

Given the short literature review above, the current paper on politically motivated appointments in Turkish academia stands out amidst the diverse array of works reviewed. While some papers from Korea and Canada explore the consequences of appointments in different contexts, the current work provides a unique lens by focusing on the Turkish higher education landscape. It looks at the phenomenon of "parachuting" where politically appointed rectors disrupt traditional merit-based processes, introducing a novel perspective not only in terms of content but also in its application to the academic realm. Moreover, in comparison to works discussing academics' preferences in Spain and institutional autonomy in Vietnam, the current paper takes a distinct trajectory by scrutinizing the specific challenges posed by politically motivated appointments in Turkish universities. By doing so, it contributes to the literature by offering insights into the intersection of politics and academia in a unique socio-political context, broadening the understanding of the implications and consequences of external interventions in university appointments beyond the existing research landscape.

While the phenomenon of political appointments in academia has been studied in various international contexts, the specific practice of 'parachuting' or 'parasailing' in Turkish higher education has received limited scholarly attention. This study builds upon broader investigations of political interference in Turkish academia, such as Doğan [15], Tutkal [44], and Celik [11] In this regard, this study aims to contribute to this growing body of literature by focusing on the

specific mechanism of politically motivated appointments and their implications for academic integrity and institutional autonomy in Turkish universities.

4 Defining "parasailing" and its ramifications

To comprehensively understand the practice of "parasailing," it is essential to dive into its definition and explore the subsequent ramifications on the academic environment. Again, I define "Parasailing" in the context of academia as the politically motivated appointment of professors without necessary approvals, disrupting the merit-based tradition of academic appointments. In this regard, one can argue that the compromise to academic meritocracy raises significant concerns about the integrity of higher education institutions in Turkey. Expanding on this, it becomes pertinent to consider how "parasailing" disrupts the traditional fabric of academic institutions. Meritocracy, a concept introduced by M. Young in [47], has been widely critiqued for its implications in education and beyond. Recent works such as Wooldridge's "The Aristocracy of Talent" [46] and Markovits'"The Meritocracy Trap" [33] argue that meritocratic systems, while ostensibly fair, can perpetuate inequality and undermine true academic integrity. These critiques highlight the paradoxes within meritocratic frameworks, where the ideal of merit-based advancement may clash with the realities of socioeconomic disparities and institutional biases. Acknowledging these critiques is essential in understanding the complexities surrounding merit-based procedures in academia.

The appointment process, traditionally grounded in merit, undergoes a paradigm shift, introducing a dynamic where political affiliations may outweigh academic qualifications. The implications of such a shift are far-reaching, affecting not only the academic standing of institutions but also the morale of faculty members and the overall academic environment. In this sense, there is also a psychological impact of "parasailing" on the academic community. Faculty members, accustomed to a merit-based system, may find their morale and motivation compromised in an environment where political connections become a determining factor in appointments. This shift can lead to a decline in productivity, hindered research output, and a potential brain drain as academics seek environments where meritocracy is upheld. The exploration of the psychological impact also extends to the student body. Students, who are the primary beneficiaries of quality education, may witness a decline in the overall academic environment. The erosion of meritocracy could lead to a diminished learning experience, negatively impacting the nation's future workforce and intellectual capital.

The choice of the term "parasailing" instead of "parachuting" to describe the context of politically motivated appointments in Turkish higher education is deliberate and carries nuanced implications that align with the nature of these appointments. The use of "parasailing" encapsulates the essence of these appointments more accurately for several reasons.

The first argument will be about connected ascent and controlled descent that are unique characteristics of parasailing as opposed to parachuting. In parasailing, the individual is harnessed to a parachute-like wing and towed by a boat, allowing for a controlled ascent and descent. This metaphor aligns with the idea that individuals appointed through political connections are lifted into academic positions. The term recognizes that their rise is not solely based on merit or qualifications but rather tethered to political or ideological affiliations.

The second argument will be about continuous connection to external forces. In parasailing, the individual remains connected to the boat throughout the activity, maintaining a continuous link to external forces. Similarly, individuals appointed through political channels in academia maintain ongoing connections to external political forces, shaping their decisions, actions, and potentially compromising academic autonomy. This mirrors the sustained dependency of individuals appointed through political connections on external political forces. Their academic journey is continually influenced by these external factors, reflecting a prolonged connection rather than a one-time descent.

Thirdly, the metaphor is also very much related to directional control and external influence. In parasailing, the boat driver controls the direction and speed, exerting influence on the individual's experience. Similarly, in parasailing appointment, political appointees in academia may find themselves subject to external influence, with their decisions and actions directed or influenced by the political entities that facilitated their appointments. Moreover, in parasailing, the boat operator has significant control over the parasailer's experience. Similarly, political entities exert considerable control over the academic experience when appointments are made for reasons other than academic merit. "Parasailing" conveys a heightened sense of external influence and control compared to the more neutral term "parachuting."

Next, the descent in parasailing can lead to variable landing points based on the decisions of the boat operator. Similarly, individuals appointed through political connections may end up in academic positions without adherence

to traditional merit-based criteria, potentially leading to varied outcomes in terms of their impact on academic institutions. A somewhat related argument is about towing influence. The boat exerts influence by towing the parasailer in a specific direction. Similarly, politically appointed individuals may find themselves being towed or influenced by political agendas. The term "parasailing" captures the directional influence that external political forces may have on academic decision-making.

External factors such as wind and waves can introduce unpredictability into the parasailing experience. In the academic context, similarly, political appointees bring unpredictability to academic institutions, as their decisions and priorities may be influenced by external political considerations rather than a steadfast commitment to academic principles. In essence, the term "parasailing" captures the interconnectedness, external influence, and potential unpredictability associated with politically motivated appointments in Turkish higher education. It paints a vivid metaphorical picture that resonates with the dynamics at play, providing a more contextually relevant and evocative descriptor than the more general term "parachuting."

Moreover, parasailing is a visible and often public activity, with the individual soaring in the air. The visibility of the parasailing metaphor aligns with the public nature of academic appointments. Political appointments are often observable by the academic community, making the term "parasailing" an apt choice to describe a process that is not discreet but rather conspicuous.

On the other hand, parasailing can encounter turbulence due to external factors. In the context of politically motivated appointments, turbulence may arise from the unpredictable nature of external political dynamics. The term "parasailing" captures the potential for disruption and uncertainty in academic environments influenced by political considerations.

Furthermore, parasailing is often associated with recreational activities and leisure. The use of "parasailing" introduces a recreational connotation, subtly suggesting that the political appointments may not be solely driven by academic considerations but could also serve other, potentially non-academic, interests.

Overall, the term "parasailing" emerges as a rich and multi-dimensional metaphor that encapsulates the complex dynamics of politically motivated appointments in Turkish higher education. It not only highlights the ascent and descent but also emphasizes sustained dependency, external influence, visibility, potential turbulence, and the recreational connotation associated with these appointments.

The phenomenon of 'parasailing' in Turkish academia has profound ramifications, as evidenced by several empirical studies and documented cases. For instance, politically motivated appointments have been shown to erode faculty morale, undermine the quality of academic output, and compromise the integrity of educational institutions. A study by Gokturk and Yildirim-Tasti [17] highlights how such appointments disrupt the academic ecosystem, leading to a decline in research productivity and academic freedom. Additionally, high-profile cases, such as the controversial appointments at Boğaziçi University, illustrate the immediate and long-term impacts on the university's reputation, governance, and academic standards.

In conclusion, the examination of "parasailing" in Turkish higher education reveals a disruptive practice marked by politically motivated appointments, challenging the conventional merit-based traditions of academic appointments. This section has focused on the definition of "parasailing" and its profound ramifications on academia, exploring the shift away from meritocracy and its impact on faculty morale, academic productivity, and the overall educational environment. The deliberate choice of the term "parasailing" as opposed to "parachuting" has been thoroughly justified, drawing nuanced parallels that vividly capture the dynamics at play, including the connected ascent and descent, continuous external influence, directional control, and the potential for turbulence.

5 Parasailing through sociological lenses

The practice of "parasailing" in Turkish higher education, marked by politically motivated appointments that circumvent traditional academic approval processes, raises profound philosophical questions about the nature of academia, ethics, and the role of knowledge in society. To examine this complex intersection of power, politics, and intellectual pursuit, this section engages with philosophical perspectives, drawing on the works of prominent philosophers to critically analyze the implications of "parasailing" within the Turkish academic context.

Political philosophy, as articulated by thinkers like Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt, provides a lens through which to examine the power dynamics inherent in "parasailing." Foucault's concept of "power/knowledge" suggests that power and knowledge are deeply intertwined; those who control knowledge wield power, and conversely, those in power shape the knowledge that prevails [38]. The politicization of academic appointments, as seen in "parasailing," disrupts

the delicate balance between knowledge and power. In the context of "parasailing," the appointment of professors based on political, religious, or ideological connections challenges the traditional ideals of academia as a space for the pursuit of objective knowledge. Arendt's emphasis on the public realm as a space for shared political action and dialogue [10] becomes relevant. The intrusion of political interests into the academic sphere disrupts the autonomy necessary for intellectual exploration and debate, potentially compromising the very essence of the university as a space for critical inquiry.

Philosophical discussions on ethics, particularly virtue ethics and utilitarianism, shed light on the moral implications of "parasailing." Aristotle's virtue ethics underscoring the importance of cultivating virtues such as fairness, justice, and integrity can also be extended to the domain of higher education [12]. "Parasailing," by its nature, subverts these virtues, as appointments are made based on political affiliations rather than academic merit. The erosion of meritocracy raises ethical questions about fairness and the equitable distribution of opportunities within academia. Additionally, utilitarian perspectives that prioritize the greatest good for the greatest number highlight the potential harm caused by "parasailing" to the broader academic community. When appointments are made for political reasons rather than based on qualifications, the overall quality of education, research, and intellectual output may suffer. This ethical dimension emphasizes the responsibility of academic institutions to prioritize the common good over narrow political interests.

Epistemological considerations, rooted in the philosophy of knowledge, become crucial in understanding the ramifications of "parasailing." The works of philosophers like Plato and Thomas Kuhn offer insights into the nature of knowledge and how it is legitimized within academic institutions. Plato's allegory of the cave prompts reflection on the nature of truth and the role of philosopher-kings in guiding society [29]. In the context of "parasailing," the appointment of professors based on political connections challenges the traditional notion of scholars as guardians of knowledge and truth. It introduces the possibility of a distortion of knowledge for political ends, potentially undermining the very foundations of intellectual pursuit. Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions introduces the idea that paradigms within disciplines can shift over time [23]. However, for such shifts to be valid, they must be based on rigorous examination and evidence. "Parasailing," by appointing academics without adherence to established disciplinary norms, introduces a potential disruption to the epistemic foundations of academic disciplines.

Existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus emphasize individual autonomy, authenticity, and the responsibility of individuals to create meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe. In the context of "parasailing," the imposition of politically appointed figures challenges the autonomy of individual academics to pursue their intellectual endeavors authentically. Sartre's notion of "bad faith"—the self-deception individuals engage in to conform to societal expectations [37]—can be applied to academics appointed through "parasailing." The pressure to align with political ideologies may lead scholars to compromise their authentic pursuit of knowledge, engaging in a form of intellectual self-deception to conform to externally imposed expectations.

Pragmatist philosophers such as John Dewey emphasize the instrumental value of practices and institutions. From a pragmatic perspective, academic integrity is not only a moral imperative but also a pragmatic necessity for the effective functioning of educational institutions [35]. Dewey's emphasis on the role of education in fostering democratic values aligns with the critique of "parasailing" as undermining the democratic ideals inherent in academic institutions. When appointments are driven by political considerations, the diversity of thought, essential for a vibrant academic community, is compromised. Pragmatically, this jeopardizes the very purpose of education as a means to cultivate informed and engaged citizens, very much needed in a well-functioning democratic society.

Moreover, some sociological perspectives may also provide valuable insights into the structural, systemic, and societal dimensions of this phenomenon. For example, structural functionalism, a sociological perspective often associated with Emile Durkheim, focuses on the functions and dysfunctions of social structures. In the case of "parasailing," the disruption caused by politically driven appointments challenges the functional equilibrium of academic institutions [45]. Durkheim would argue that these disruptions can lead to anomie—a state of normlessness and confusion—within the academic community, jeopardizing the stability and functionality of the entire educational system. Moreover, the structural–functional perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of societal institutions. The intrusion of political motivations into academic appointments not only disrupts the functioning of educational institutions but also has ripple effects across society. The compromised quality of education and research may ultimately impact the workforce, innovation, and societal progress.

Next, conflict theory, as advocated by Karl Marx, focuses on power dynamics, social inequalities, and the role of ideology in perpetuating these disparities [8]. The practice of "parasailing" exemplifies a power struggle within Turkish higher education. The politically appointed figures consolidate power, using their positions to reinforce specific ideologies, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of social inequality. In this context, the appointments made through "parasailing" can be seen as a form of symbolic violence, a concept introduced by Pierre Bourdieu. The manipulation of academic

appointments becomes a tool for the dominant political ideology to assert its symbolic power, reinforcing its cultural hegemony over academic institutions and shaping the narrative within the intellectual sphere.

Symbolic interactionism, as used by George Herbert Mead, focuses on how individuals construct their identities through social interactions and symbols [30]. In the domain of "parasailing," the symbolic meaning attached to academic appointments is very much distorted. Instead of being symbols of scholarly achievement and expertise, appointments become symbols of political affiliation. The sociological lens of symbolic interactionism allows us to explore how this distortion affects the self-perception of academics and students. Academics appointed through "parasailing" may grapple with a perceived lack of legitimacy, as their appointments are not based on traditional markers of academic success. Similarly, students may question the authenticity of their education, as the symbolic value of academic titles becomes entangled with political considerations.

Institutional theory, particularly the works of Erving Goffman, offers insights into how organizations establish and reinforce norms and values [43]. The intrusion of politically motivated appointments challenges the established norms within academic institutions. Goffman's concept of "impression management" becomes relevant as institutions attempt to manage the image of academic legitimacy while simultaneously compromising it through "parasailing." This sociological perspective prompts an examination of how institutional norms are constructed, maintained, and disrupted. The practice of "parasailing" introduces a parallel institution, one that operates based on political considerations rather than academic merit. Understanding the dynamics between these competing institutional forces is crucial for comprehending the sociological impact of such practices.

The concept of social capital, as developed by Pierre Bourdieu, becomes instrumental in understanding the role of networks and connections in the practice of "parasailing." Bourdieu's notion of social capital emphasizes the advantages gained through social connections and networks [27]. In the context of Turkish higher education, the appointments made through "parasailing" can be seen as a manifestation of accumulated social capital, where political connections override traditional academic qualifications. Moreover, the erosion of trust within academic communities, a consequence of "parasailing," has implications for the social capital within these networks. The compromised trust may hinder collaboration, information exchange, and the collective pursuit of academic goals, contributing to a decline in the overall social capital of the academic community.

Finally, sociological perspectives on social movements, such as the works of Charles Tilly, allow us to understand the potential for resistance and advocacy within the academic community [42]. "Parasailing" may give rise to social movements advocating for academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and merit-based appointments. Analyzing the sociological dynamics of these movements provides insights into how collective action can challenge established norms and foster change within academic institutions. The role of intellectuals, as described by Antonio Gramsci, becomes crucial in articulating a counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges the dominant political ideology driving "parasailing." In conclusion, examining "parasailing" through a sociological lens offers a thorough understanding of the structural, power-related, and societal implications of this practice. By drawing on various sociological perspectives, we gain insights into the complex interplay between individuals, institutions, and broader societal forces. This sociological analysis contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Turkish higher education, highlighting the need for sociologically informed strategies to address and mitigate the impact of "parasailing" on academic institutions and society at large.

The philosophical perspectives discussed in this paper, while critical of 'parasailing', can also be applied to analyze other higher education governance models. For instance, the managerial model, often characterized by efficiency and accountability measures, can similarly compromise academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Conversely, the collegial model, though promoting collaborative decision-making, is not without its challenges, such as potential bureaucratic inertia. By applying these philosophical lenses to various governance structures, we can better understand the complex dynamics at play in higher education and the comprehensive nature of academic integrity and autonomy.

In summary, the practice of "parasailing" in Turkish higher education raises profound philosophical and sociological questions about power, ethics, knowledge, individual autonomy, and the instrumental value of academic integrity. Engaging with these perspectives not only deepens our understanding of the challenges posed by "parasailing" but also provides a framework for critically evaluating the broader implications of such practices on the philosophical foundations of academia. By integrating these philosophical or sociological analyses, we can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand and advocate for the preservation of the essential principles that underpin the pursuit of knowledge in higher education.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the current paper has examined the phenomenon of "parasailing" in Turkish higher education, elucidating the politically motivated appointments that deviate from traditional academic approval processes. The exploration began by providing historical context, detailing the evolution of Turkish academia and the establishment of the Higher Education Council (YÖK) in 1981, marking a shift towards centralized control. The paper then looked into the concept of "parasailing," drawing parallels with similar practices in South Korea, and proposed an alternative metaphor to capture the essence of these politically driven appointments. Through an extensive review of literature, the paper explored the implications of "parasailing" from various angles, incorporating perspectives from political philosophy, ethics, epistemology, existentialism, pragmatism, and sociological theories such as structural functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, institutional theory, social capital, and social movements. Each perspective contributed to the understanding of the various different challenges posed by "parasailing" to academic integrity, knowledge production, and societal values within Turkish higher education.

Beyond the immediate focus of the paper, the implications very much extend to the broader literature on higher education practices. The case of "parasailing" serves as a noteworthy example of how political interference can risk the foundational principles of academic institutions, including meritocracy, institutional autonomy, and the pursuit of knowledge for the betterment of society. The paper underscores the urgent need for international scholars and policymakers to critically examine and address such challenges, recognizing the global relevance of protecting academic integrity and preserving the role of universities as bastions of knowledge. By bringing attention to the complex interplay of power, ethics, and knowledge in the context of "parasailing," this paper contributes to a growing discourse on safeguarding the core values of higher education institutions worldwide. It calls for continued research, collaborative efforts, and informed strategies to counteract the erosion of academic principles and uphold the essential foundations of universities as crucibles for intellectual exploration and societal advancement.

Author contributions The sole author is responsible for the whole paper.

Data availability We do not analyse or generate any datasets in the study because our study is a philosophical exploration in the study of higher education.

Declarations

Competing interests On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no competing interest.

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