

## **The Changing World of Work and Youth: A Comparative Research of Australian and Turkish University Students' Perceptions about the Changing World of Work**

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**Abstract:** The world of work is changing for many people living in post-industrial countries across the globe. The aim of this paper is to compare Australian and Turkish university students' perceptions about the changing nature of work in relation to their future prospects as employees. This research found that university students in post-industrial Australia were relatively optimistic about the changing nature of work as well as the opportunities for finding employment after graduating from university. By comparison Turkish students were more concerned about issues such as global competition and the perceived lack of opportunities for finding permanent full-time employment after graduating from university. Turkish students were also concerned about the dearth of opportunities for finding flexible employment which would allow them more time to engage in leisure activities. Despite the divergence of perceptions between these two cohorts of students, there were shared positive views that engagement in tertiary studies would lead to better life outcomes.

**Key words:** Transformation of work % Youth % Turkey and Australia

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The world of work has been dramatically transformed in the past 30 years. A new era driven by the emergence of increased information technology has brought people closer together and created a global economy. The consequences of the global economy include changes to the global division of labour whereas most of the economic output of high income countries is in the service sector. Additionally national governments no longer control the economic activity that takes place within their borders. Another consequence of the global economy is that large business corporations now operate internationally and control a vast share of the world's economic wealth.

This has produced less of a reliance on traditional institutions such as the welfare state and placed the onus on individuals to be more flexible in terms of the types of employment they are able to enter. In addition the former social guarantee of the welfare state of an earlier era has been replaced by new forms of capitalism which are characterised by increased economic flexibility and high mobility. The ways people work have also altered with more participating in part-time, casual, or contract

employment. This is particularly the case for students and young women who are more likely to gain part-time rather than full-time work [1-3].

Some sceptical commentators argue that current workplace changes have made the experience of work less positive for many people, while other commentators are more optimistic. According to non-sceptical commentators, one of the most important effects of workplace and labour market changes in recent decades has been to increase people's security by ensuring they maintain their jobs and ensuring there are alternative pathways to other forms of employment should they be retrenched [2].

By comparison, those who are less positive claim that as labour markets become more flexible, employment security is less assured. This view maintains that the decrease in the number of full-time jobs has resulted in an increase in part-time work opportunities which are characterised by low pay rates and high staff turnover and the possible exploitation of workers. Changes to the global labour market have resulted in alterations to the composition and dynamics of the workplace with a stress on the need for greater flexibility. There has also been an increase in the regulation of employment and a greater

stress on monitoring the performance of employees. Markets are therefore more competitive due to changes in technology and how work is organised [4].

As stated previously, for most people, the greatest threat posed by globalization is increased employment insecurity. According to the result of one research project, 40 per cent of British employees feared for their jobs while 60 per cent argued that their sense of job insecurity had increased. Some of the contributing factors for an increase in negative employee perceptions were attributed to the changes in work caused by global restructuring, shifts in employment patterns and the reduction of employment opportunities due to global restructuring within multi-national companies [5, 6].

Other surveys from high-income countries support the notion that there has been a significant decline in people's perceptions relating to their employment security. These surveys also show that workers across a number of countries report that employment security ranks as one of the most important qualitative aspects of their job. This highlights that, for the majority of people, employment security is an important dimension when considering the quality of employment in terms of securing an ongoing source of income and a desirable standard of living [4, 7].

By comparison, optimists hold the view that increased competition leads to greater technical and commercial innovation which in turn leads to a more flexible, skilled and motivated workforce. In addition, the focus on greater employee flexibility has the potential to extract more labour and greater productivity from their workforce. Therefore, flexibility becomes a double-edged concept. There is a definite inverse relationship between employment flexibility and employment security, at least in the medium term. This is evident from more recent surveys conducted in developed countries which concluded that increased labour market flexibility led to greater employment insecurity. In the long term it is therefore possible that sustained flexibility might make workers 'expect' less security [4, 5].

There has been a considerable increase in temporary employment in the EU-15 countries during the last decade. As a proportion of overall employment growth, this is especially the case in countries such as Germany, Portugal and Spain. By comparison there has been a decline in Denmark and the UK. In the EU-15 countries, part-time work as a percentage of total employment increased slightly from 16% to 20% from 1995 to 2005. However cross-country variation is far greater over time, with only 5% of people in Greece working part-time

compared to 46% in the Netherlands in 1999. By comparison in the new member states, part-time work as a percentage of total employment on average fell slightly between 1997 and 2005 [5].

#### **The Changing World of Work in Australia and Turkey:**

These significant changes to the nature of work on the global stage have impacted on non-European countries as well. For example, in Australia, work and working life have undergone significant social and economic changes due to a shift in reliance from primary to secondary industries and a growth in the service sector. Additionally, changes as to how people work have been brought about by industry restructuring, and a move from a centralized bureaucratic system to a more decentralized system. This has resulted in the growth of a more causal workforce characterised by more part-time employment opportunities with employees often working longer hours. Around 3.3 million people were engaged in 'non-traditional' work in 2004, in the Australian employment sector representing approximately one third of all employed people. Overall, this number has grown since 1998. Part-time and casual work has become more common with a greater number of people working in the service sector in areas such as hospitality [8, 9]. A high number of people employed in these sectors reported that they felt insecure in terms of maintaining their employment status. For example, according to a survey conducted by AuSSA (2003), one in eight respondents stated that they were "very likely" or "fairly likely" to lose their jobs in the next year [2].

The former security offered by the welfare state has given way to open economic processes that require markedly different responses from individuals, their communities and their governments [10]. The rapid changes and innovations associated with the world of work have resulted in increasing labour force participation rates of women and young people and a growth in the service and information technology sectors. These forms may be jointly described as 'non-traditional work', in that they differ from the previous stereotype of a person, usually male, employed in an ongoing capacity in someone else's business for a long period of time [8].

Youth labour markets in particular have undergone major changes which are only partly evident in the changing employment rates for young people. More full-time students are now engaged in part-time jobs in Australia. The percentage of young Australians who work in areas such as retail and hospitality while studying is comparable with their peers in the United States [11]. For example, recent statistics show that the average year

eleven and twelve student works approximately 20-25 hours per week while studying (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2006).

By comparison, economic and social life has seen a rapid transformation in Turkey due to the forces of globalization and the countries push to gain EU membership. These changes in turn have pushed Turkey to economic transformation through an adoption of neo-liberal policies. After the economic crisis in 2002, the Turkish economy grew by approximately 7% by 2007, which was higher than the EU average. This was partly attributable to a marked increase in foreign investment which boosted the economic growth level and resulted in more neo-liberal structural reforms in economic and political life.

However, the current neo-liberal transformation has created protectionist reactions in Turkey like many other countries. Accordingly, young people appear to be confused and worried about their future employment prospects and resultant life-styles despite obtaining a formal academic qualification.

However compared to Australia, there are far less opportunities for young people to gain part-time employment while studying. According to the World Bank, Employers and workers are not taking full advantage of the changes introduced by the 2003 Labour Law that allowed people to obtain more part-time work in Turkey. For example, only about 9 % of female wage and salary earners work fewer than 35 hours a week in Turkey [12].

Despite the corpus of research about the changing nature of work and its impact on employees, there is a dearth of studies which document how these changes have impacted on young people while they are undertaking tertiary studies. Moreover there are no existing studies that have provided a comparison of young people from highly developed countries such as Australia to developing nations like Turkey. This research attempts to bridge this gap by providing a comparative study of young people's perceptions about the changing nature of work as they prepare for their place as future employees in Australia and Turkey.

#### **MATERIAL NADMETHOD**

The data for this study was collected from students in an Australian and a Turkish university. The samples were selected randomly and the survey carried out in classrooms by research assistants and academics. Three hundred and seventy-four students enrolled in Business Administration and Social Sciences courses from Turkey

and 320 students from Australia enrolled in Arts and Social Science courses participated to the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary and was administered by the researchers to the students at the conclusion of lectures at both sites.

All of the survey questions were categorical based on the Likert type ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). There was no intention to construct any scale or any model based on a specific hypothesis. Rather the researchers asked students to respond to a number of statements to answer the broader research question of; "*What are the students perceptions about the changing world of work across these two countries?*"

Additionally all of the questions in this paper were based on theoretical explanations about the changing nature of work which was discussed previously. The researchers assumed that Australian youth were more confident in interacting with the free market economy and the transformation of work. However Turkey has been gradually opening its economy to global competition which may result in Turkish youth gaining more of an acceptance about economic change. Despite this there is still scepticism in Turkish society about whether the increase in neo-liberal structural reforms will result in the country gaining full membership into the European Union. For example, according to the European Union Public Opinion Survey (Eurobarometer), Turkish public opinion for gaining membership into the EU fell to under 50 percent in 2006 [13]. Furthermore, the protectionist reaction in Turkey has increased over the last 5 years in opposing the impacts of rapid global transformation.

#### **RESULTS**

Australia is a more developed country compared to Turkey, which is slowly entering a new phase of industrialisation. Therefore it is not surprising that this research show that Australian students come from families with higher levels of income, have parents with higher levels of educational qualifications and possess more disposable income compared to their Turkish counterparts. In the Turkish context it is worth noting the disparity between the education levels between parents and children in the Turkish sample. This is despite the current trend which has seen more Turkish women entering the workforce due to more access and participation in education. However in this sample the majority of Turkish mothers of university students did not have formal educational qualifications due to the social-cultural environment they grew up in. (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic comparison: Means and Standard Deviation

Country		Age	Year	Famiy income	Expenditure Monthly	Mother Education	Father Education
Tyrjet	Mean	20,2941	1,9000	1757,0629	455,5758	1,8687	2,4027
	N	374	370	302	330	358	365
	Std. Deviation	1,99842	,93022	1372,66088	346,36625	1,00256	1,16473
Australia	Mean	22,1003	1,5331	6008,7273	1131,0976	2,8467	2,8185
	N	319	317	110	164	300	281
	Std. Deviation	7,64149	,89106	12803,515	1259,15397	1,10781	1,13977
Total	Mean	21,1255	1,7307	2892,2160	679,8381	2,3146	2,5836
	N	693	687	412	494	658	646
	Std. Deviation	5,45874	,92989	6957,12496	840,04061	1,15857	1,17135

Table 2: Are you working casual/part time or full time ?

			Country		
			Turkey	Australia	Total
Are you working part time or full time?	Full time work	Count	19	20	39
		% within Country	5,1%	7,2%	6,0%
	Casual/Part time work	Count	24	197	221
		% within Country	6,5%	70,6%	34,1%
	Not working	Count	327	62	389
		% within Country	88,4%	22,2%	59,9%
Total	Count	370	279	649	
	% within Country	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Chi-Square: 309,299, Df: 2, p<, 000

Table 2 shows the striking differences between Australian and Turkish students in relation to the numbers of students who work while attending university. In this study only 11.6 percent of Turkish students worked part -time or full- time compared to over 77.8% of Australians who worked either part-time (70,6 %) or full-time (7.2%).

Working while attending university is common in the Australian context where part-time work is relatively easy to find. By comparison, this trend is not the same in Turkey where the majority of young people are economically dependent on their parents for a longer period of time. However the degree of economic independence of youth in any country is dependent on a number of variables such as; the individual's characteristics, intensity of the work experience, family wealth, as well as community, economic, and cultural contexts [14].

From a cultural perspective, Turkish and Australian societies are in two different polarities. Australian culture is more individualistic, which emphasises attributes such as being independent from others as well as the immediate family. In some cases this results in

Australian youth leaving home to live independently while attaining paid work while having less of a dependency on others.

In more collectivist cultures such as Turkey individuals are integrated into groups. In these types of collectivist societies people are integrated into strongly, unified in-groups from birth within extended family formations (including uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting the young in exchange for unquestioning loyalty [15].

Turkish culture is therefore on the collectivist side of the axis developed by Hofstede [15]. Being independent from the family is therefore not as common in the Turkish context compared to the experiences of young Australians. Turkish youth tend to live with their families, which finance their lifestyles. The Turkish families' expectations of their children differ to that of their Australian counterparts. For example, most Turkish families expect that their children will respect them while working very hard at their university studies. The family does not expect that their children will gain paid employment while studying, which is in stark contrast to their Australian counterparts.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney Test Ranks

	Country	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Employment security is very important for me	Turkey	371	359,97	133548,50
	Australia	320	329,80	105537,50
I am worried about the increasing global competition in the labour market	Turkey	371	410,58	152324,00
	Australia	320	271,13	86762,00
I haven't any unemployment fears about my future	Turkey	372	337,92	125704,50
	Australia	320	356,48	114073,50
Luck and good contacts are more important than working hard in order to be successful	Turkey	371	370,44	137431,50
	Australia	320	317,67	101654,50
High wages are more important than careers	Turkey	373	368,09	137297,50
	Australia	319	321,26	102480,50
Obtaining flexible employment is more important than high wages	Turkey	373	312,13	116425,00
	Australia	319	386,69	123353,00
The fewer hours one spends working and the more leisure time available the better.	Turkey	371	274,68	101905,50
	Australia	319	427,87	136489,5
I prefer telework (from home) to office work	Turkey	369	300,30	110811,00
	Australia	317	393,79	124830,00
I have enough time for leisure activities	Turkey	370	357,78	132380,00
	Australia	316	326,78	103261,00
Spending my free/leisure time doing activities I enjoy makes me a more productive person	Turkey	370	300,88	111324,00
	Australia	318	395,26	125692,00
I believe that the future will definitely be better for me	Turkey	374	334,47	125092,50
	Australia	319	361,69	115378,50

Table 4: Test Statistics of Mann-Whitney Test (a)

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcox on W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Employment security is very important for me	54177,500	105537,500	-2,203	,028
I am worried about the increasing global competition in the labour market	35402,000	86762,000	-9,575	,000
I haven't any unemployment fears about my future	56326,500	125704,500	-1,256	,209
Luck and good contacts are more important than working hard in order to be successful	50294,500	101654,500	-3,591	,000
High wages are more important than careers	51440,500	102480,500	-3,295	,001
Obtaining flexible employment is more important than high wages	46674,000	116425,000	-5,103	,000
I prefer telework (from home) to office work	42546,000	110811,000	-6,449	,000
The less hours one spends working and the more leisure time available the better	32899,500	101905,500	-10,453	,000
I have enough time for leisure activities	53175,000	103261,000	-2,217	,027
Spending my free/leisure time doing activities I enjoy makes me a more productive person	42689,000	111324,000	-6,730	,000
I believe that the future will definitely be better for me	54967,500	125092,500	-1,926	,054

a Grouping Variable: Country

Moreover traditional Turkish families assume that their children will support them in later life after they have retired from the workforce. This constitutes a kind of unwritten bond between the child and his/her parents who have mutual interests and responsibilities. Families therefore make maximum sacrifices for their children and in return expect their children to make sacrifices when they have completed their university studies.

The second possible reason of this differentiation in youth participation in paid employment relates to the nature of higher education in both countries. In Turkey for example, there is very strong competition among young people to gain university places. In addition there is a belief that paid employment while studying may compromise the students academic performance as well as disrupting their social relationships and networks [14].

Finally, the nature of the employment market in each country is a factor which determines the opportunities for students who seek work while studying. The data shows that in non-traditional countries like Australia over a third of all students have access to casual or part-time jobs. By comparison, casual and part-time work opportunities are much more limited in Turkey. Therefore for Turkish students it is quite difficult to find casual or part-time work compared to Australians.

The researchers utilised the Mann-Whitney U test for understanding the differences between Australian and Turkish students' perceptions about the changing world of work. The results of this test show that there are statistically significant differences across a number of categories between the two countries relating to perceptions about employment security, global

competition in the employment market, the importance of luck and good social networks, high wages, flexible employment, tele-work, shorter working weeks and participation in leisure activities (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3 illustrates that the need for employment security mean ranks higher for Turkish students (359, 97) than Australians (329, 80). The recent economic crisis in the Turkish economy increased the demand of employment security which may be one factor for the high Turkish ranking. It could be argued that Turkish youth (Mean rank: 410, 58) are worried about the increasing global competition in the labour market compared to young Australians (Mean rank: 271, 13).

On the other hand as a former colonised-settler state, Australia has always been firmly integrated in the global economy [11]. However Turkey has a different history and competitive culture compared to Australia. Globalization has brought a profound transformation in the values, culture and everyday lives of young people. The openness of economies and the exposure of youth to foreign goods, services and information have encouraged the development of an international youth culture and facilitated the spread of Western cultural practices which may not be always positive. Rapidly developing communication technologies have enabled many young people from countries large and small to access information that may otherwise have been previously unavailable to earlier generations of youth [16].

Furthermore young Australians perceive that the world has changed and that there are more uncertainties compared to previous generations [10]. Moreover the recent global recession has produced more pessimism and uncertainty about the chances of gaining employment after graduating from university for both Turkish and Australian students. The research indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between Australian and Turkish students' perceptions about employment prospects. As global competition and technological changes increase along with the global slowdown the decline in people's perceptions about obtaining paid employment is more evident world wide.

According to the World Values Survey, 72 % of Turkish people consider that work should always be the highest priority [17]. On the other hand Turkish students believe that luck and good contacts are more important than working hard in order to be successful. There is no doubt that luck and especially good social networks are very important in promoting positive opportunities for attaining paid work in this country. However the lack of social and economic rationalization in Turkey has increased the importance of social networks as well as the

value of family connections compared to Australians. ( $p < .000$ ).

Seventeen point two per cent of Turkish and 13.5 % of Australian students believe that high wages are more important than the types of careers they obtain ( $p < .001$ ). This research therefore indicates that the majority of students in both cohorts subscribe to other factors which are deemed as more important when considering the types of jobs they will obtain after university. For example, 47.3 % of Australians and 33.2% of Turks think that obtaining flexible employment is preferable to obtaining a high wage. Despite the relative dearth of part-time employment in Turkey young people indicated that they would prefer to work from home and have flexibility in their work hours.

The data shows that Australian youth work hard. However they do not view work as a virtue or a way of salvation for them. They believe that it is preferable to spend less hours working and more time following leisure pursuits compared to Turkish students. In essence Australians seek a work/life balance as a way of life. To this end, only 31.6% of Australians agree that work is preferable to leisure compared to 72.2 % of Turks. This may be because the post-industrial new capitalism is eroding the values of work. Becoming more flexible and pursuing short-term work is becoming a focus point for defining durable personnel purposes and a sense of self-worth. Sociologically, work therefore serves ever less as a forum for stable, social relations [1]. While Australian youth complain about not having enough time for leisure activities due to study and work commitments they do spend a significant amount of time indulging in leisure pursuits.

Finally while the research could not statistically find significant differences in the students' perceptions about their futures in the Mann-Whitney Test ( $p < .054$ ), there is an indication that Australians (80 %) are more optimistic than Turks (67.3 %). However it can be concluded that overall both cohorts of students remain quite optimistic about their futures.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Turkish culture and education systems glorify hard work which is emphasised as a virtue of character and a means to obtaining increased life chances. However participation in leisure activities is not perceived to be as important as engaging in work within Turkish culture. It can be argued that Turkish students' perception of work is more idealistic because most of them are not involved in any type of paid employment while attending university.

On the other hand, Australian youth are more realistic about the world of work due to the experience they gain while studying. For the majority of these young people time spent participating in leisure activities is deemed as just as important as work within Australian culture. A possible explanation for aspiring to a work/life balance for Australians is that this culture is less collective and more individualistic meaning that the competitive market economy eliminates the people who don't display a strong work ethic.

It can be surmised that globalisation has produced shared experiences for young people across the world. However this study highlights that variables such as culture tradition, history and life experiences impact of how young people perceive their futures with regards to employment after competing tertiary study. This may account for Australian students possessing more confidence about the changing world of work compared to their Turkish counterparts.

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