THE EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROBLEMS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Higher Education can be defined as all of the educations in the national education system, after secondary education, at least the last four semesters. It can be considered as a symbol of national prestige and each country wishes to ensure that higher education functions effectively and efficiently to avoid losing prestige. In Turkey, universities' efficient and effective functioning seems to be not achieved according to the many authors. So, a deeper examination of the Turkish education system and its stakeholders' interests on higher education through a systematic approach has been aimed in this study. The problems of higher education in Turkey has been analyzed from three main perspectives; purpose, process and structure. In purpose dimension, it has been found out that the purposes of higher education in Turkey are in contradiction. For the, process dimension, it has been seen that higher education institutions face to autonomy problems. Lastly for the structure dimension, the problem that university lecturers and students experience and the issues as the output of higher education system has been analyzed. According to the literature, studied and reports on the problems of Turkish higher education system, it has been found out that the higher education system in Turkey is facing many problems which need to be minimized for the system to be effective.

Keywords: Higher Education, Evaluation, Problems

Introduction

Higher Education is defined as "all of the educations in the national education system, after secondary education, at least the last four semesters" in higher education law number 2547. Universities, which are institutions of higher education, perform the expected functions by their units, such as faculties, institutions, colleges, conservatories etc. Institutions of higher education are expected to perform duties such as training qualified laborers for all sections of society, producing science and technology, strengthening

the community, and leading social changes and developments. Therefore, higher education is a symbol of national prestige. Each country desires to ensure that higher education functions effectively and efficiently to avoid losing prestige (Oğuz, 2004). However, in Turkey, universities' efficient and effective functioning, unfortunately, has not been achieved. The issues of universities in Turkey are seen as highly complicated and chronic (Günay, 2006). The issues underlying these problems date to the foundation of the Republic, and include inflexibility in the organizational structure of higher education and resistance to change on the part of the system in general.

Turkey has not solved the problems in higher education and universities because the experience accumulated throughout the system's history was not adequate and the universities were not structured to promote renewal and growth. Many authors share the opinion that higher education problems in Turkey are unique to this country. Although the situation is different in more traditional regions than it is in more contemporary ones, the education system is become more authoritarian throughout Turkey. It is based on learning without questioning, does not support autonomous identity development, and does not encourage the ability to learn and think freely, in school or at home.

The failure to effectively change the higher education system is connected with several factors that affect even preschool children. Because the public perception is that the university system creates a community of students and teachers who learn by rote without asking questions, such learning is encouraged from a very early age. Autonomous learning is discouraged by fear of exams and critiques, and so students focus on memorization of books and lessons (Özalp, 2006).

Considering the historical mission of universities, it is necessary to create appropriate models to help the system adapt to the future and solve the many problems that currently plague it. Universities have to be institutions which are equipped and organized with the latest technology, guided by a clear and detailed plan for the future, and lacking in serious material or spiritual problems (Ortaş, 2002). Unfortunately, the current situation of universities is incompatible with the stated missions in Turkey, because the universities face a lot of problems, with new ones being added every day.

Higher education institutions, especially in their early years, are faced with major problems with the services that they offer to students such as living conditions and especially housing and transportation services. Many universities have difficulties working with the cities in which they are founded to establish a proper university environment and find that they cannot provide the conditions their students desire. A big part of this is that cities are without a suitable environment for academic life or places such as

libraries, cinemas, theatres, and concert halls that can sustain cultural events (Şenses, 2007).

Having considered the reasons for these problems, we can move on to a deeper examination of the Turkish education system and its stakeholders' interests. I will use a systematic approach to consider the many problems that confront the education system, which will consider problems in higher education according to three dimensions: purpose, structure and process.

1. Problems in Purpose Dimension

Günay (2006) describes the consensus regarding importance of higher education in society thus: Higher educations is an irreplaceable component in social development, economic growth, supporting competitive goods and services' production, formation and protection of cultural identity, sustaining social bonds and finally fight against poverty and supporting culture of peace. An effective higher education can only be made functional by exact and clear purposes. Success in all the works and studies is directly related to the identified aim to be achieved. After all, a thought or an opinion without purpose cannot succeed.

The purpose of higher education in Turkey is stated in law of Higher Education Statue #2547. The purpose of higher education, according to the law, is;

- Training students according to the country's science policy, the society's need for manpower in high levels and various levels in the direction of interests, aptitudes, and skills.
- Research in the scientific fields,
- Broadcasting of all kinds that promotes the progress of science and technology and shows the results of new research and examinations,
- Publicizing government-sponsored investigations and research and reporting their conclusions,
- Publishing the data in words and writings that raise the general level of Turkish society and increase public awareness.
- Promoting universal education.

However, in Turkey, these purposes of higher education have not been sufficiently filled. When the items in the statute are examined in detail, one can see that higher education faces a lot of issues.

Higher education programs aim to give students the required qualifications of the age. Nowadays, it is vital that people can think clearly and effectively, communicate those thoughts in writing, understand critically, evaluate events in a wider framework, and think analytically. In this respect, training programs should be based on the principle of "continuity of learning". Therefore, rather than teaching a lot to individuals,

developing their capacity to learn becomes important. Rather than content-based training objectives, learning- and learner-based approaches should be prioritized. Nowadays, higher education programs can keep pace with the age if they train individuals who can use and produce information, investigate new ideas, try to improve him/herself and his/her environment, and who are co-capable ,open-minded, creative, and versatile critical thinkers, who can contribute to problem solving efforts.

In recent decades, the developments and changes in science and technology have changed educational philosophy, and thus given rise to an educational vision that is more liberal, egalitarian, supportive of the development of individual's imagination and creative thinking skills, interdisciplinary, learning-oriented, and aware of individual differences. From this perspective, the purposes of higher education should be identified in order to fulfil the changing social and individual needs while remaining true to the country's education philosophy. The specified purposes will give much-needed direction to the education system (Oğuz, 2004).

When the purpose of higher education is considered qualitatively and quantitatively; it is seen that the purposes are in contradiction. Rapidly increasing schooling rates can be regarded as a quantitative purpose, but it has negative effects on quality and is in a great contradiction with fulfilling the needs of higher education's social purpose, which is fundamentally aimed at qualitative improvement. When attempts are made to reach the first goal in a short time, especially as it is in Turkey, it happens at the expense of the second goal. To eliminate this contradiction, efforts at diversifying the higher education system's organizations' should be carried out over time to prevent harming the quality of education provided (Şenses, 2007).

2. Problems in Structure Dimension

The history of higher education in our country is fairly short compared to that in developed countries. Efforts to create higher education institutions similar to those in developed western countries began about ten years after the foundation of the Republic in 1923. From this date, the structure of our higher education system has arrived at its current situation after going through many changes in terms of quantity and quality (Ertepınar, 2008).

Since 1981, Turkey Higher Education system has greatly changed in size. Although higher education institutions' spreading had begun much earlier than this year, the law number 2547 has caused greater numerical changes. In Turkey, the higher education system has been experiencing unprecedented growth and structural change, since 1992. Scholars argue that the expansion began in that year because policy shifted its aim from elite education to mass education then.

With the new legal regulation according to the provisions contained in the constitution, nonprofit foundations have been allowed to open private universities. The first such university, Bilkent, was established in 1984 (Aktay, 2003) and several others have sprung up since. In 2008 and 2009, the total number of universities, with 46 new ones, reached 139 in 2009 from just 78 in 2005.

In recent years, one of the issues on the agenda of the public opinions is the problem of universities' autonomy. The autonomy of universities has a tripod structure comprised of executive, financial, and academic autonomy.

Executive Autonomy: Executive autonomy means that the organization can make decisions and has the authority to implement these decisions. When it comes to universities' executive autonomy, it is understood that these organizations are managed and supervised with democratic procedures by the organs they created for their members and the members of university organs cannot be relieved from their duties by the positions outside of university without legal justification. YÖK's structure, the selection criteria of academics of University-Industry Collaboration in recent years, or formation of governing organs all restrict executive autonomy.

With the available YÖK (Higher Education Institute) law, the Rectors who are the top executives of the universities are determined by a partial selection, YÖK's selection from the three that are submitted to them is then submitted to president for approval, and finally the new rector is determined. Determining the rectors of universities are depends on many factors, processes, and stages. Dean assignments are determined in a similar way, but the assignments are under the initiative of the Rectors. Whether the Rector wants the dean is determined by a selection, or whether the Rector wants the three candidates are directed to YÖK to be selected. Assignment of chief of department is under the initiative of the dean. Chief of departments, the only unit to be selected, are determined by the Dean. In the selection of the chief of departments, the candidates, who are obedient are sometimes more preferred instead of good scientists because of political concerns. These situations have a negative impact on institutions, especially in back-country universities.

Financial Autonomy: It is only possible for institutions to work efficiently and use their resources effectively if the institution has financial autonomy. The concept of financial autonomy aims to allow institutions to create income through different channels, to use their income and assets in accordance with their goals, and to have a flexible budget system (YÖK, 2007).

In the developed western countries, the treasury or local government transfers 0.01% of their incomes from exports to research institutions with

the goal of increasing productivity in the subject and providing solutions to problems (Ortaş, 2003).

The methods of financial support of successful works must be developed in the framework of financial autonomy. Specific indicators that reflect the performance in resource allocation should be used to track improvements both between institutions and between units within the organization. These indicators can be related to inputs and in other respects it can be related to outputs. Institutions should be able to give priority to indicators reflecting their own decisions in the use of total budget that will be transferred to institutions. Fairness will be provided equally how transparent and objective these indicators are (YÖK, 2007).

Academic Autonomy: The academic autonomy of universities can explained as being able to choose its research and development fields, curriculum of education programs and course contents with scientists (academic staff) shortly being able to choose what to teach and what to research and who should research or teach given subjects (Günay, 2006).

It is clear that YÖK has failed to effectively manage the rapidly growing higher education institutions. YÖK should be reconstituted in order to make changing and evolving higher education institutions more effective, to make universities more functional by reducing their tasks , and the ensure universties' executive and financial autonomy. Academics should be protected from all external actors' influence and audits by executive and financial autonomy and academic freedom in university.

3. Problems in Process Dimension

Higher education faces many problems in process dimensions and in purpose and structure dimensions. These problems, in detail, can be divided into three problems in dimension of input, problems in dimension of commission and problems in dimension of output.

Problems in dimension of input differ. In this article, these problems are discussed as functioning input; teaching staffs, as current input; the possibilities a university offered, as processed input; and the problems of students studying at the university. With regard to functioning input, the higher education system faces two major problems. These problems are finding qualified faculty members and personnel and faculty members' fee problems.

As a result of the rapid expansion of the higher education system, the deficit of faculty members has reached significant levels in quantitative and qualitative terms (Şenses, 2007). Among the instructors, the ones with authority to give lessons are professors, associate professors and assistant professors, defined as faculty members with faculties' lecturers. According to Higher Education Statue 2547, instructors can be appointed to full-time or

part-time positions from among the persons at the fore with regard to their experience in the field, although they do not have an academic title and generally they take part in the units and vocational high schools which have foreign language preparatory classes, Turkish classes and History of Revolution lessons. However, in practice, this assignment, as a result of needs, can be used for the employment of people who have just finished their master's degrees and have no experience. Such a practice improves the appointed person's status and financial situation, but it is an obstacle on academic progress. And the research assistants are mostly postgraduates who are working as a part-time staff in universities (Ertepınar, 2009).

The success of the higher education system largely depends on the quality of the faculty members. One of the most important measures of the success of a university is training new qualified faculty members. The most critical criterion for evaluating the academic life of a university is the number of doctorates it grants. Success of universities has been limited in this regard. One PhD and one degree of specialization per faculty member in a field are given. One of the main problems in not being able to increase this number is the lack of funds to give PhD students a liveable income. As the number of research assistants cannot be increased, the number of students applying for PhD programs decrease and therefore number of PhD graduates cannot be increased (YÖK, 2007).

Another problem arises from planning campus buildings without thinking students will be pedestrians. In addition, the lack of space for students to socialize in universities is another major issue (YÖK, 2007). To sustain education and training activities effectively students need equipment as well as faculty members. Unfortunately, universities in our country do not have enough teaching equipment.

Internet usage in Turkey, which is a requirement of the information age, has so far been limited to reading newspapers and playing games. Periodic publications and a number of books are online today, but subscriptions are very expensive. Unfortunately some managers see the money that is transferred to libraries as lost money with the understanding of preferring to build a new building, since more acclaim can be gained from physically expanding the university than from bettering its library resources (Ortaş, 2003). Another problem is that students and faculty do not know how to use online databases. Unfortunately, many students and even faculty members cannot benefit from the opportunities the internet offers.

In addition, academic staff engaged in research buys a lot of books out of pocket due to lack sources of university libraries, and due to limited budget they are forced to restrict the resources they want to reach. Public funds must provide of the necessary books and resources because of the cost

of them the individuals' budgets. Researchers could save time and money by holding educational resources in common (Ortaş, 2003).

In Turkey, sources of financing for higher education are covered by the government except some special education institutions that focus on certain periods. The government subsidizes private higher education institutions as well as shouldering this job. The government remains the predominant funder of higher education.

Financing of higher education services in Turkey are provided from various public sources. A supplementary budget method is applied in system of higher education financing. In addition, the Credit and Dormitories Intuition's help given to students with TÜBİTAK's (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) research assistance also help to finance higher education (Meriç, 1998).

In the transition to university, the foundation of ÖSYM (Student Assessment and Placement Center) has not been successful enough to determine students who can make right choices and who have developed leanings. The universities which cannot select their students are preferred by students according to their performance and exam results of ÖSYM. Mostly universities which have foreign languages education and which do not have infrastructure problems are the favorite institutions that are preferred by the students who have the highest score. The universities are preferred because they pledge a serious education and finding jobs easily in the market to their graduates. In another group of universities, students study according to their course instructors for four years and after completing their courses they try to take places as their performance in courses. While urban universities are working to lower the number of BA students and select students with higher scores, most provincial universities have started accepting low scoring students because of the income they bring in the form of additional course fees and income from bilateral education. Furthermore, YÖK has caused the quality of university educations to decrease by collecting students over the limits of quotas. For the future of young people waiting at the gates of the universities, foundation universities or private universities in Cyprus can be a solution in the short term but not in the long term (Ortaş, 2003). The fact that 85% of secondary school graduates cannot attend the university is indicative of the shortage of access that confronts Turkey (Yazıcı, 2009).

Since the beginnings of 1970s in Turkey, the problem of access to higher education, which increases every year, has remained one of the highest-priority problems of our education. More than 65% of the students studying in secondary schools in our country, continue to general high schools, about 35% of them continues to vocational-technical high schools. Access to universities being open to all secondary school graduates without discrimination has made secondary education institutions a bridge that has

rendered the capacity of universities insufficient. Thus, access to higher education has become so limited that the situation is difficult to fix (Arslan, 2004).

In addition, the lack of guidance services in secondary schools has caused students to choose the field they earned instead of the field they desired.

In medium and long term, access to higher education should be determined by students' interests and abilities, not an exam which attempts to evaluate a lifetime of learning in just a few hours. For this, guidance services in our schools should be provided entirely to help determine students' direction according to their interests and abilities, and should be initiated in basic education (Armstrong & Becker, 2004).

Problems in the processing dimension include the issue of hierarchy in universities, the universality problem, spacer member and ancillary services problem, publications and quality problem of universities, lack of university-industry cooperation, and students' lack of attendance to cultural and sporting events. While university should be an institution which social hierarchy is stretched and should give society a certain comfort, in Turkey it is based on a hierarchical structure.

The reason for different ideas not being developed in higher education institutions is also academic hierarchy's being felt in all areas of universities. In general, while academic hierarchy in administrative and economic issues is being considered in the whole world, scientific hierarchy has come to the fore in scientific strategies and the development of policies and evaluation of projects. In our country, because only academic hierarchy is prioritized, the opinion of researchers with low degrees is often not considered. Today, in universities which are dominated by solid and strict hierarchical structures, making hierarchy more flexible as possible and restructuring the management from top to bottom in a democratic way has become a necessity (Ortaş, 2002).

A higher education institution's success in fulfilling its educational, research or public services functions cannot be performed by academic staff alone. The success of these institutions also depends on the existence of a strong and quality support staff (YÖK, 2007).

In Turkey, the problems, on one hand thousands of unemployed university graduates problem, on the other hand the problem of findings support staff to work in laboratories, fields and offices, are the point in question. Many laboratories are being managed by teacher or graduate students if there are any because lack of technical staff. Existing staff is also very inefficient (Ortaş, 2002).

Various universities in Turkey, , give weight to publication abroad and have chosen academic performance evaluations and publications as the

main criterion in evaluation of academic performance, especially decisions relating to academic appointments and promotions. Especially, great importance has been given to articles published in journals indexed by international citation indexes such as Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and books published by international publishers and sections of these books that cannot be compared to studies that published in domestic journals in mother tongue.

Especially with regard the journals that are part of SSCI, it can be said that international publications have several advantages compared to local publications. Foremost among these, generally the studies published in these publications pass through a rigorous assessment process.

It is observed that quality of publications is overlooked while prioritizing the number of publications in assessment processes that aim to improve the quality of research and publication activities. However, it is hard to say that a publication published in abroad is better than a publication published in domestic in one's mother tongue. It is hard to say that a study's being published in a journal that is part of SSCI is always a good measure of quality. For example, it is observed that 26% of economics articles published in 1996 as a part of SSCI were never referenced in the first five years after they were published, and 85% of them have been referenced 10 or fewer times in the same time period. This has caused the social benefits of SSCI to be questioned. As an observer stated, "publication of a scientist has become more important than how much he publishes and especially where he publishes." Commenting on important Turkish publications in the social sciences, some have observed that mentions of Turkey and the Turkish language in the articles may indicate that the articles are simply communicating what is going on in Turkey to an international audience, rather than really contributing to the field on an international scale. (Şenses, 2004).

The concept of university-industry collaboration is understood as a set of work that they do for their technological and economic empowerment by combining existing facilities of universities and industries. In many countries, university-industry collaboration meets the technology needs of industry and industry provides practical application opportunity to universities. This mutual cooperation is accelerating the economic development of countries. In our country, as cooperation and solidarity between industry and university is not at the required level, integration of industries with universities and universities with industries is far below the desired dimensions (Yücel, 1997).

Problems as the output issue include knowledge production, inability in research and development, not taking enough feedback from graduates, and the employment problem.

A significant problem in our universities is the problem of the inability to produce information. When academic studies conducted in Turkey is examined; it is seen that many similar studies are done instead of putting forward something new. The academic quality of these imitated and similar studies is thought-provoking. The education system has settled without judgment or questioning and as a result of emphasizing the number of publications instead of quality of publications in appointments and promotions of faculty members, quality of publications and frequency of citation by other scholars is overlooked (Şenses, 2007) This oversight is the primary reason for not producing information.

Generally two criteria are often used in evaluation of universities and especially universities' function of research. The first of these is graduate (especially PhD) students and number of graduated students. The second is the number of articles published on international citation indexes such as the Science Citation Index(SCI), the Social Science Citation Index(SSCIS) and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index(AHCI). These criteria are important to the academic performance of universities, but they are not sufficient to measurethe function of contributing to the development of local knowledge or the innovation process of the community, both of which are expected of universities. This deficiency has a result such as trivializing research activities, which can contribute to local development, in higher education community (YÖK, 2007)

In a report published Turkey's 2005-2007 Bologna Process, it is stated that although high degree graduates increased four times, PhD graduates increased twice, and that the increase in PhD students is not enough to close the vacancy in teaching staff and researchers (TÜSİAD,2008).

Conclusion

As the result of this research , it is demonstrated once again that the higher education system is facing many problems. Each of the current problems of higher education is a very important point for qualified education. Therefore, there has not been a distinction between problems such as priority problem. However, higher education system should be reconsidered, halting points should be fixed, and the problems need to be minimized for the system to be effective.

In order to prevent problems in the higher education system, the following recommendations are made:

• In order to ensure the future success of our country's higher education for the purposes outlined by YOK, it is necessary for universities to function an environment-oriented function, searching solutions to social problems and

shedding light on them, base university-environment relations to a some concrete basis and a legal base.

• The educations provided in higher education institutions must serve all segments of society according to a philosophy of lifelong education.

• The first step to improve higher education is completing the requirements of the universities and, if necessary, taking appropriate measures for creating capacity, making changes in the quotas of the sections that require manpower.

• DPT, MEB and YÖK must work in coordination to fix these problems and resources must be created to preventuniversities from suffereing large losses as a result of attempts to fix them.

• Turning some of the advanced universities into institutions that train faculty members at the graudate level to be effective researchers and turning new and developing universities into graduate education centers seem to be realistic solutions.

• A new system must be developed to enable parents to transfer millions of money to their kids' university education instead of spending their money on private teaching institutions in their secondary education.

• Working conditions of faculty members and instructors and legal arrangements should be made to support their scientific research and studies.

• Universities need to allocate more funds for researches .Whether as government policy or university policy, increasing this support can improve the quality of scientific research and will be able to lead the way for instructors who cannot research because of economic difficulties.

• People in every level of management in university must obtain some information about managing at least when they are a candidate. For acquisition of this information, getting support from education faculties' education management programs seems reasonable. Thus, inter-university cooperation and disciplines' supporting each other becomes meaningful.

• It is assumed that employees in higher education have a democracy conscience. However, universities' democratic qualifications seem not to be developed according to findings of this study. Including faculty members who say "If an instructor joins management, everyone would be talking all at once ", everyone who works in university should make an effort to be democracy-conscious and participate in management. This can be practiced with development of democracy conscience and activating all the establishments of the all departments in universities by in-service training. For this reason, education in democracy should be given importance.

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