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Works carried out by higher education institutions for academic evaluations and quality improvement studies

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Abstract

The higher education area remains, as in the world, as an ever increasing area of interest. The increase in the inter-university mobility of student and academics and the easiness in the data sharing generated the issue of quality and compatibility in the higher educational area. The academic quality is compared and evaluated with a few criteria. In our country, some works are undertaken in the framework of EU harmonization process and lifelong learning concept. Quality improvement studies and the basics of outcome evaluation that are undertaken by the Council of Higher Education of Turkey, and a regulation were issued in this context. In this study, we consider the quality improvement attempts carried out by the Council of Higher Education of Turkey and by Turkish universities.

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1. Introduction

The advance in communication technologies and tying up of the World with the WEB is a great advantage for using societies. In our century, labor-intensive markets are gradually replaced by knowledge-intensive markets. The abolition of political national boundaries and the easiness of labor mobility due to globalizing world rendered the educational collaboration and the concept of quality more significant. In this context, the continuous quality improvement of universities, which are the largest producers of knowledge, becomes more important. Knowledge acquired in universities is used by interested people and decision makers. This is why processes to ensure the scientific truth, safety and validity of the knowledge become significant.

2. European Higher Education Area

Some works are undertaken particularly in the framework the importance attributed to the knowledge in Europe. Ministers of education of EU countries signed the Bologna declaration in 1999. In the declaration, the formation of the European Higher Education Area and by the way the knowledge sharing, employment and student and academics mobility is encouraged. It is also interesting to note the recognition of the diploma equivalences as a precaution to increase the collaboration and competition among European institutions. Also known as (AKTS/ECTS), the European Credit Transfer System provides to students easiness in terms of free circulation and labor migration. Development of comparable criteria and methods are prescribed to enable quality comparisons. One of

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the most concrete results of the works undertaken in EHEA within the Bologna process is the establishment of ENQA in 1998. ENQA is the most important actor of such works in Europe (Durman, 2005).

To follow up the process and observe the developments, Prague (2001), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009) and Budapest-Vienna (2010) declarations were later issued (YÖK, 2012).

Quality assurance system in Higher Education of Europe has a four-step structure:

1. Establishment of independent institute on quality assurance issue,
2. Creation of internal and/or external evaluation factors in terms of quality assurance,
3. Provide to participations of stakeholders studies on this subject,
4. Publishing of outcomes.

3. Academic evaluation and quality improvement studies carried out by council of higher education

There have been important steps in order to standardize state institutions and organizations and improve the quality for the membership of Turkey to the European Union and these steps have been watched by public opinion. One of these areas is higher education area. Improvement of European higher education area, support for student activity and facilitating of credit transfer which are overemphasized in Bologna and other declarations published later on are only some of the studies that are carried out in this direction.

“Regulations on Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Councils of Higher Education” which form a basis for these studies came into force in 2007. In regulations, the arrangement of the studies which are carried out on the subject of “Education and training, research activities in the Council of Higher Education and evaluation of administrative services, quality improvement, approval and recognition of quality level with "external evaluation process” is the main purpose (YÖDEK, 2012).

With the aim of servicing to these studies, “Council of Higher Education Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Committee” selected by an Interuniversity Council has been constituted. The committee consists of a student representative and 9 members who are serving in different universities, experienced in the subject of academic evaluation and quality improvement and come from the areas of basic sciences, engineering sciences, social sciences and health sciences.

In regulations, tasks of the Committee are as follows:

a) To specify the strategies relevant to the evaluation of academic and administrative services of the Councils of Higher Education in accordance with the strategic plan and purposes of the Council, improvement of quality, approval and recognition of quality levels; Specifying the processes, methods and principles and report them to the Councils of Higher Education when needed,

b) According to the (a) article of the first subsection of this clause, to analyze the annual evaluation reports prepared by the councils of higher education with the scope of strategies, methods and principles that will be developed (or to get them analyzed) and to present the Report of Higher Education Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Committee which is prepared on its own or will get prepared to the presidencies of supreme boards of the Council of Higher Education,

c) Among the quality improvement studies that come from the academic evaluation and quality improvement boards of higher education institutions, to share the model practices with the other higher education institutions,

d) In accordance with the strategic plan and purposes of the Council of Higher Education, to participate in international mutual recognition and quality improvement studies in Higher Education in the name of the Council of Higher Education and to make these studies advance in national level,

e) In accordance with the strategic plan and purposes of the Council of Higher Education, to specify the methods and principles for the independent agencies and institutions or boards that can carry out the academic evaluation and quality improvement studies in national level to be given “Quality Assessment Certificate of Incorporation” by the

Council of Higher Education; within this scope, to analyze the applications and present them to the Council of Higher Education for ratification,

f) Within the scope of mutual recognition studies in Higher Education, to specify the methods and principles for the certificate of incorporations of independent agencies and institutions or boards that have “Quality Assessment Certificate of Incorporation” in international level and can carry out the academic evaluation and quality improvement studies in Higher Education Boards to be recognized by the Council of Higher Education,

g) To specify the methods and principles for the agencies and institutions or boards which have Quality Assessment Certificate of Incorporation and are stated in (e) and (f) article of the first subsection of this clause to be able to sustain their authorities stated in the Regulations and for the annulment of this authorities by the Council of Higher Education when needed,

h) To give support to the Council of Higher Education in every arrangement related to the approval and ratification of academic evaluation, quality improvement and quality levels of the Council of Higher Education.

4. Ongoing Studies on Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement at University Level

Higher education activities are carried out via 103 state universities, 62 foundation universities and seven foundation vocational schools in Turkey in March 2011. Each higher education institution has "Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Committee" in itself for the purpose of academic assessment and quality improvement.

Duties of the Council took place mentioned in the regulations as follows:

a) In relevant higher education institution, in line with the strategic plan and objectives, evaluation of academic and administrative services, to carry out all kinds of studies to improve quality and approve the quality level,

b) To carry out “Internal Assessment” studies and accordingly preparing internal evaluation report or having it prepared, in relevant higher education institution,

c) To make necessary preparations and to support external evaluator institution or agency in the case of the relevant higher education institution’s having external assessment,

d) To work in close relationship with Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Committee, to carry out studies towards procedures and principles determined by the Commission and to share the model practices with the Commission,

e) To announce Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Committee’s decisions to the relevant academic units of higher education institution, to follow its practices and their results,

f) To support the reports of Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Commission that will be given to the upper higher education boards.

In this context, academic evaluation and quality improvement should be seen as a four-stage process:

- 1.Strategy Planning Process,
- 2.Institutional (Self-and Environment) Assessment Process,
- 3.Periodic Monitoring and Improvement Process,
- 4.Performance Indicators (YÖDEK, 2012).

5. Principles of Internal and External Evaluation in Higher Education Institutions

An internal assessment of the institution of higher education is the process of probe within the scope of internal assessment of once a year in January and February of the previous year's education, training and research activities and administrative services and quality improvement activities. Each university's report is collected in Higher Education Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Commission and presented to relevant upper board by converting into a single report. The institution's strategic plan and implementation guidelines for internal evaluation, performance indicators and control, effective and efficient use of financial resources in line with objectives and targets, measuring student satisfaction in the process of education, lifelong learning training activities and

evaluations of the academic aspects of satisfaction relevant to scientific studies are at the forefront. There are instructions for universities' academic evaluation and quality improvement efforts.

The figure below shows us the 2010 YOK report related the number of academic publications by Turkish Universities (YOK, 2011).

THE FIGURE OF TOTAL UNIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS PUBLISHED IN SCI+SSCI+AHCI IN 2010 (FIRST TEN UNIVERSITIES)

*** ONLY "FULL PAPERS" HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED**

Universities	SCI	SSCI	AHCI	Gross Total	Net Total	Number of Teacher	%
1 Istanbul Üniversitesi	1480	121	29	1630	1570	2606	0,60
2 Hacettepe Üniversitesi	1092	134	20	1246	1204	1394	0,86
3 Ankara Üniversitesi	1060	68	6	1134	1134	1712	0,66
4 Ege Üniversitesi	1091	74	10	1175	1126	1532	0,73
5 Gazi Üniversitesi	1009	102	47	1158	1115	1932	0,58
6 Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi	814	157	27	998	952	754	1,26
7 Atatürk Üniversitesi	734	42	10	786	763	1143	0,67
8 Selçuk Üniversitesi	701	48	11	760	740	1293	0,57
9 Erciyes Üniversitesi	648	28	3	679	667	533	1,25
10 Istanbul Teknik Üniversitesi	607	54	9	670	644	988	0,65

6. External Evaluation

In case of Higher Education Institution's approval an independent inspection agency which has "Quality Assessment Registration Certificate" may be accompanied by its internal evaluation process. The validity of "Quality Certificate" which will be taken as a result of assessment is five years period. This document may be obtained on the basis of the institution or can be obtained on the basis of the academic unit or program.

Periodic Review and Improvement Process

The last stage of ensuring continuity of quality assurance and quality healing is the periodic review. Control in higher education institutions on a regular basis is the greatest assurance of quality. In this process, the institutional self-assessment results and outcomes are discussed and reviewed with the participation of academic / administrative staff. The results of this process also produce the data of performance evaluation.

7. Performance Evaluation

Performance is a term that describes the potential of a person or how can he/she uses his/her knowledge and skills in order to achieve goals and expectations (Yıldız et al., 2008). Similarly corporations need evaluation at education, training and research activities potential. Organization's performance indicators are also identified while making strategic plan. The assessment is based on pre-determined performance indicators to measure at the end of the periods of activity.

6. Conclusion

In the 21st century, with the concept of power that is changing its means and tools, more importance is assigned to “knowledge factories”. In order to place our country in front rows to obtain and develop a certain quality level in higher education area, to improve the process and outcomes and to always go ahead, our higher educational institutions will play a significant role. Universities deploy efforts to improve their internal control mechanisms. But the external control has not yet reached a standard and an institutional structure. The public support is necessary to achieve the support of the private sector and the establishment of institutional infrastructure. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Durman reports the need to have a national “Quality Agency” in especially the area of quality performance evaluations. Besides, he also defends the necessity to perform the quality improvement and evaluation in the program basis in the higher education area (Durman, 2005). When evaluating in the candidacy process of the EU, it becomes important to obtain the quality and some standards. More efficient works are therefore expected from the upper council and higher educational institutions.

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