



NATIONAL REPORT ON UNIVERSITY LIFE LONG LEARNING: TURKEY

THEME: QUALITY

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Introduction

This report provides a brief overview about quality in life-long learning in universities in Turkey based on the literature and the author's perspectives. Few research studies and reports on university life-long education that are available in the literature on university life-long learning are also incorporated into the review.

Current Situation

The official policy on lifelong education in Turkey has been set in 1973 through the Basic Education Law 1739 (Ministry of National Education-MONE, 1985). This legislation indicates that lifelong educational opportunities will be organized by various public and private bodies to help adults adapt to scientific, technological, economic, social and cultural development, to improve their technical and professional skills, to fill in the educational gaps such as literacy, health and nutrition. Lifelong education has been provided by a variety of institutions ranging from the universities to ministries. There are 912 adult education centers around the country (Duman, 2002). In addition, Practical Craft Schools for Girls, Advanced Handicraft Institutes, and Technical Education Centers for Adults, Apprenticeship Training Centers, and Evening Craft Schools also serve as lifelong education centers. All these centers function as part of the MONE. Lifelong education has been given more attention in Turkey in the last decade.

Universities have an important role in lifelong education. Traditionally, universities used to be cited for two basic missions: research and teaching. They were regarded as the producers of scientific knowledge and providers of university education at different levels. However, the contemporary university also observes a third mission: sharing scientific knowledge with the society and contribute to social and economic development in the society (Eurydice, 2011). Turkish universities are no exception in this mission. The university's mission in life-long learning has been clearly emphasized in the Strategic Plan for Higher Education Document by the Higher Education Council (2007), a body which is constitutionally responsible for planning, coordinating and overseeing higher education activities in Turkey. In line with this mission, universities, plan and offer courses, seminars and training programs for university students, public and private organizations, international



institutions. Some these activities are determined based on the needs indicated by the receiver organizations and others are determined by the continuing education centers based on the common interest areas. The courses may be offered both on campus and out of campus, and there is a growing interest in providing continuing education through internet as well. In addition to services provided through continuing education centers, the universities also contribute to lifelong learning theory the consultancies they provide to various private and public organizations and NGOs. As a result of all these activities a close cooperation and interaction is established between the university community and the receiving organizations (Arslan, 2008).

Middle East Technical University in Ankara is to be one of the first universities in Turkey to establish a Continuous Education Center. The center was developed in order to “develop the cooperation of the university with public institutions to, private sector, and international institutions via offering continuing education programs in the fields on which the university has excelled and is experienced, contributing to the development of Turkish industry and progress, and carrying out such services to the international arena” (Arslan, 2008, p.140).

Many universities established centers for continuing education with flexible programs to provide lifelong learning opportunities for adult learners from various sectors in the society. These centers appear under different names such as “continuing education center,” “lifelong learning center,” “continuing education research and education.” These centers aim to contribute to Turkey’s competitiveness in all fields, strengthening human development, increasing social cohesion, ensuring regional development, and increasing quality and effectiveness in public services (GPA, 2007). These centers mostly serve individuals who aim to update their professional knowledge, look for career change and improve their perspectives through new knowledge and skills. In this sense, continuing education centers have important roles in establishing and keeping the communication and collaboration between universities and the society.

By the year 2008 there were 34 centers actively offering services in state universities and 9 were available in private universities (see Table 1). They were established mainly as continuous education centers in state universities.

Table 1
Continuing Education Centers in Turkey, 2008

Centers	State Universities		Private Universities	
Continuing Education	24	70,6%	6	66,7%
Continuing Education Research and Application	4	11,8%	3	33,30%
Lifelong Learning	3	8,80%		
Entrepreneurship Research and Application	1	2,90%		
Informatics Continuing Education	1	2,90%		
Continuing Education and Program Development	1	2,90%		
Total	34	100%	9	100%

Source: Arslan, 2008.

Discussion

John Dewey once said “the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education... and the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth” and emphasized the value of improving individuals’ potential for learning as well as creating a context in which individuals continuously seek for new learning opportunities. This statement can be a benchmark for assessing the quality of continuous learning opportunities. Then, how would the life-long learning opportunities provided at university continuous education centers be rated in this respect? The history of university life-long learning in Turkey within the context of continuous learning centers indicates that there has been a concern in relation to quality; however, this concern has not led to systematic assessment of these activities. There are some case-specific clues with regard to achieving quality in these activities, but then these clues prove insufficient to make generalized statements about the quality of university life-long learning countrywide. As a result, there appears to be a need to establish a quality assurance system in providing research based education for life-long learners. This is necessary both for the provider institution in having a transparency in the continuous learning activities and for the receivers to know in advance the level of quality established in these services.

Another area of problem in relation to quality assurance in university life-long learning is lack of sharing and cooperation among the life-long education providers in universities. They organize the life-long activities mostly based on the professors’ areas of interest and the demands coming from the receiver individuals and institutions. Therefore the coverage of topics as well as the extent of education varies greatly each year. Systematic needs assessment studies are rarely done to determine the life-long learning needs of individuals



and institutions, and as a result, one has difficulty in assessing the sufficiency of higher education institutions in meeting the life-long learning demand in the society.

There is a need to analyze the life-long learning needs in the society systematically and a comprehensive plan for meeting these needs based on the potential and the sources available at universities. In addition, venues and events should be organized for the universities to share their experiences and expertise in life-long learning, and collaborate to enrich the services they provide in this area. To meet these needs, higher education institutes must develop clear strategies and vary the tools and programs they use in continuous education. There could be degree programs leading to a diploma, mid-term programs leading to a certificate and short term education opportunities for individuals to learn and develop skills in relation to specific purposes. The level and form of these learning opportunities should be based on a thorough analysis of social, economic, technological and cultural challenges in the society as well as career goals of the individuals.

Although there is a growing interest in lifelong education that universities provide to various segments of the society, the research on lifelong learning in universities is almost non-existing for the Turkish literature. The review produced for this brief national report mainly cited only two direct research studies on university continuing education centers by Arslan (2008) and Celik (2007), and some figures obtained from the State's Statistical Institute. This overview can be an initiative in conducting research on how university lifelong learning impacts service providers as researchers and educators, and buyers as practitioners of private and public enterprises.

References

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