

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE CONTINUING EDUCATION CENTERS AT TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Continuing education centers mainly organize activities for the society in the fields that have gained importance on the improvement of individuals with a view of career building, improving professional knowledge and skills, achieving new skills and supplying individual development needs. Such centers have been established within universities through the principle of making continuing education accessible to everyone as a starting point for a lifelong learning process. These centers which aim at providing continuing education, implement more flexible programs compared to those executed at higher education institutions. In this study, the structure and functions of Continuing Education Centers at Turkish Universities are investigated. The scope of the study includes all the centers that have web pages established under state and public universities in Turkey. Data pertaining to structure and functions of the centers meeting this criterion, the number of which is 43 in total comprising 34 state and 9 private universities, have been evaluated. As a result of the study it was discovered that these centers had very similar foundation principles and organizational structures.

Keywords: Continuing education centers, lifelong learning, public and state universities

INTRODUCTION

Continuing harmonization and adaptation in line with the changing situations is seen as a necessity for individuals, societies and organizations for sustaining their existence. This necessity strengthens the interaction between education and life. This process of interaction enables societies and organizations to take initiatives against changing scientific, technological and social circumstances. Today change is not only observed as "harmonization-adaptation" but also as "need-necessity" in consequence of interaction in social and organizational environments. Such developments not only affect all educational levels but also force the universities to consider lifelong learning among their educational objectives. Under such circumstances, the task and responsibility of following the changes in technology and economy, and supplying the labor force demanded by the market has been emphasized. In line with these developments universities started establishing education, research and application centers taking the principle of making continuing education accessible to everyone as a starting point. These centers that aim at providing continuing education implement more flexible programs compared to those executed at higher education institutions. These applications aim at providing time and cost effective access to education for different structures of the society or individuals.

In Turkey, such centers established under state and private universities continue their activities with the same goals and on same legal foundations but under different names. These centers are structured and operate under the rector's office with names such as "continuing education center", "continuing education research and application center", "lifelong learning center", "entrepreneurship research and application center", "continuing education center of informatics", and "continuing education and program development center".

Although such centers existed only in a limited number of universities at the beginning, continuing education centers either exist or are at the process of establishment in numerous state and private universities in the present day.

Although the communication among these institutions that have been established under similar universities and that share similar goals is at a very low level and there is almost no attempt of making joint efforts or sharing their experience with each other, a recent interest in communication among themselves and EUCEN (European Universities Continuing Education Network) started.

In this study, the structure and functions of Continuing Education Centers at Turkish Universities are investigated. The scope of the study includes all state and public universities in Turkey. During the collection of data the web pages of continuing education centers were accessed and these centers were investigated under two groups: structure and function.

METHODOLOGY

This study was organized as a "scanning model" that aims at evaluating the structure and functions of the continuing education centers at Turkish universities. Scanning model is a research approach that aims at describing the past and present status as it is.

The scanning model can be applied with the aim of obtaining a general judgment about the larger universe comprising a multiplicity of elements through the study of the entire universe or a sample or group extracted from it. In this research the active continuing education centers in Turkey have also been investigated using the data obtained after a national and international literature review.

AIM OF THE STUDY

In order to reach productive, conscious individuals and societies open to continuing learning and improvement, for the continuing education implementations that undertake the missions:

- To determine the continuing needs of humans in view of their characteristics,
- To provide services for supplying the determined needs,
- To implement programs that promote the process of "education for everyone" corresponding to the conditions of the society we live in, we need to;

- Share the scientific knowledge with persons and organizations while associating the theory and implementation and thus contributing solution of the individual and social problems
- Establish the similarities and the differences among the continuous education centers under universities while proposing ways of sustaining communication and cooperation among them.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research universe encompasses the continuing education centers of all state and private universities in Turkey. However, due to time and cost limitations only those centers that have web pages have been included in the scope of this study. The number of these universities is 43 in total comprising 34 state and 9 private universities.

THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH

The research is composed of three phases: Firstly, the web sites of both state and private universities have been scanned in order to find out whether they have a continuing education center or not. Secondly, an analysis concerning the structure and functions of the mentioned centers is undertaken. Lastly, the obtained data has been evaluated.

FINDINGS

The reasons for establishing continuing education centers

Although the *raison d'être* for the establishment of continuing education centers have been differently justified for state and private universities they share similar goals. This joint goal is defined as: "Contributing to the development of the cooperation of the university with public and private sector and international institutions through the execution of short and long term education-training programmes in the fields of interest and research other than the ones on which taught courses are given, both at undergraduate and graduate levels, and development of various consultancy projects." Foundation principles of the continuing education centers belonging to some of the universities are given here.

The first center to be opened in Turkey named "Continuing Education Center" is that of Middle East Technical University. This center was founded in order to "develop the cooperation of the university with public institutions, private sector and international institutions via offering continuing education programmes in the fields on which the university has excelled and is experienced, contributing to the development of Turkish industry and progress, and carrying such services to the international arena".

Gazi University, Research and Application Center for Continuing Education was founded on the following principles:

"contributing to the cooperation of the university with public institutions, private sector and international institutions through organizing education programmes in all fields of interest, except the academic programmes and degrees offered by the university."

The aim of establishment text of the Entrepreneurship, Research and Application Center which was established as for the same legal basis and having the same goal under Atatürk University says: "Entrepreneurship and realizing scientific studies with small size businesses, organizing short term and long term education programmes without any academic degree for the new and experienced entrepreneurs and contributing to local development and the development of local and international institutions through sharing the results of these studies and the experience gained."

As for private universities, the foundation principle for the Continuing Education Research and Application Center under TOBB University of Economics and Technology is stated as follows: "Determining the need for qualified personnel in Turkey for different working fields and the new fields that might arise as a result of the process of development and growth, offering certificate programmes that enable the public to find qualified jobs, introducing new technologies and teaching related knowledge and skills to the workers of the improving and changing world of business and establishing cooperation with domestic and international institutions."

In the given examples it may be observed that although they have different names under state and private universities, such as continuing education center, research and application center for continuing education and entrepreneurship research and application center, it is clearly seen that the foundation principles of these institutions are similar.

Structure of Continuing Education Centers

Continuing Education Centers become operative after their regulation, which is prepared in accordance with Higher Education Law No. 2547, is published in the official gazette. When the names of these centers in the regulations and their structure are investigated one comes across remarkable differences. Table: 1 summarizes the names and numbers of the continuing education centers established under 34 state and 9 private universities.

Table: 1
Organizational structure patterns of continuing education centers

	State University		Private University	
	#	%	#	%
Continuing Education	24	70,6	6	66,7
Continuing Education and Research and Application	4	11,8	3	33,3
Lifelong Learning	3	8,8		
Entrepreneurship Research and Application	1	2,9		
Informatics Continuing Education	1	2,9		
Continuing Education and Program Development	1	2,9		
Total	34	100,0	9	100,0

A variety of structures exist in the process of establishing continuing education centers as shown in Table: 1. The majority of these structures are constituted by Continuing Education Centers (SEM) (70,6%), followed by Continuing Education Research and Application Centers (11,8%). The same table shows that private universities are also engaged in such institutions. A number of private universities offer education and training to individuals and enterprises in a variety of fields.

Organization of The Center

When the organizational patterns of the continuing education centers are studied it might be seen that the most eminent formation is "director + administrative board". In some of the centers the structure has been organised as "director + administrative board + advisory board" or "director + administrative board + coordination group". Table: 2 shows these structural patterns.

Table: 2
Organisational Bodies of Continuing Education Centers

Organizational Bodies		State University		Private University	
		#	%	#	%
	director + administrative board	17	50	5	62,5
	director + administrative board + advisory board	13	38,2	3	37,5
	director + administrative board + coordination group	4	11,8		
	Total	34	100,0	8	100,0

It is observed that the centers are commonly organised in the director + administrative board pattern.

Accepted as a traditional structure, the board members in this pattern are selected from among faculty members working in different fields.

In the context of continuing education, this method has been generally accepted in terms of providing services in a diversity of areas. However, in some structures the advisory board has been formed within the process.

Academic Fields and Titles of the Directors In a majority of the centers, the Rector appoints the director and the vice-director who is nominated by the director from among the faculty members.

In a very small number of cases chairpersons are appointed instead of directors. The administrators managing the continuing education centers are usually faculty members.

The academic fields and titles of the directors are given in Table: 3.

**Table: 3
Academic Fields and Titles of the Directors**

		State University		Private University	
		#	%	#	%
Academic Field of the Director	Engineering	6	24,0	1	16,7
	Pharmacy	1	4,0		
	Medicine	3	12,0		
	Agriculture	1	4,0		
	Management	9	36,0	2	33,3
	Linguistics	1	4,0		
	Educational Sciences	3	12,0		
	Music	1	4,0		
	Physical Education			1	16,7
	Political Sciences			1	16,7
	Technical Education			1	16,7
	Total	25	100,0	6	100,0
	Academic Title of the Director	Professor	11	44	3
Associate Professor		4	16		
Assistant Professor		6	24	1	16,7
Senior Lecturer		3	12	1	16,7
Instructor		1	4		
Non-academic				1	16,7
Total		25	100,0	6	100,0

The administrators of the continuing education centers are generally professors.

This situation might be presumably accounted for by the phrases in the regulations of these centers and the expectancy of employing senior officials as administrators. The administrative board runs under the control of the director and is composed of at least five members. The number of the board members equals that of the number of the academic units at the university at most. The case is different for private universities. The administrative boards of the continuing education centers at most of the private universities are composed of representatives from both the inner and outer shareholders. The similar tasks specified to administrative boards are:

“The Administrative Board gathers upon the call of the director. The board takes decisions on the agenda prepared by the director. The administrative board takes decisions by simple majority. The Administrative Board determines the principles concerning the preparation of the activity report to be prepared by the director at the end of each term, evaluates the presented report and prepares the working schedule for the following terms.

Proposes the conditions for the certificate of achievement and the like to be given at the end of the programmes to the university senate. Moreover, the Administrative Board is authorised to and responsible of determining the courses/programmes to be opened, the person responsible for the implementation of teaching/training and the payments to be made. Prepares the budget of the center.”

Advisory Boards or Coordination Groups exist only in some of the centers. The duties of this unit are: "Gathers twice a year upon the call of the director. Evaluates the activities of the center and makes suggestions concerning the center."

Fields of Activity of the Continuing Education Centers

When the fields of activity declared in the regulations of the centers are grouped it is seen that the centers undertake the following activities:

- Offering, planning and coordinating courses, seminars, and training programmes for the university staff, students, public and private sector, NGOs, international institutions and individuals in the fields they need,
- Organising courses and lectures open to participation both in and out of the campus,
- Offering online education programmes for various age and interest groups via Internet,
- Organising special training programmes for state and private institutions,
- Developing programmes for all age groups and in all desired fields that are instructional, and entertaining, and that aim at improving mental and physical health, increasing citizenship responsibilities and are in support of a participating society,
- Organising the educational activities and providing the necessary equipment and material for the courses to be offered by the relevant departments of the university,
- Organising programmes for saving free time and realizing active group work in and out of the campus that aim at forestation, fighting bad habits and the like,
- Publishing and organising activities that improve reading habits,
- Increasing international cultural and scientific exchange and organising trips to improve solidarity,
- Providing scientific consultancy services to real and legal persons outside the university, preparing subsidiary projects and offers,
- Organising continuing education, public education, on the job training, planned vocational and non-vocational seminars, workshops on demand and public conference activities on the basis of "education for everyone" and "lifelong learning" principles and making publications on and issuing certificates for such activities if necessary,
- Supporting and encouraging the scientific and technical research and applications sustained at different units of the university,
- Establishing cooperation and information exchange with similar domestic and international institutions and centers,
- Running other activities in the scope of continuing education.

Education Programmes Offered by Continuing Education Centers

Continuing education centers offer programmes for the entire society in the fields that have gained importance in the improvement of individuals, institutions and society with a view of career building, gaining secondary occupation fields, improving vocational knowledge and skills, achieving new skills and supplying individual development needs. The programs applied and activities realized at the continuing education centers have been grouped according to their aim, function and target audience. Table: 4 shows the mentioned programmes.

Table: 4
Programme Variety in a Continuing Education Center of a University

		State University		Private University	
		#	%	#	%
Education Programmes	Vocational Training	27	14,0	10	16,9
	Computer education	25	13,0	10	16,9
	Language Education	25	13,0	9	15,3
	Health Education	11	5,7	1	1,7
	Education for the Handicapped	8	4,1	–	0,0
	Career Building	18	9,3	6	10,2
	Culture and Arts	17	8,8	5	8,5
	Sports Education	6	3,1	–	0,0
	Workshops	5	2,6	1	1,7
	Conferences	24	12,4	9	15,3
	Authentic Programmes	27	14,0	8	13,6
	Total	193	100,0	59	100,0

DISCUSSION

Continuing Education programmes offered for individuals, institutions and society are very new phenomena for our society. Turkish universities have important responsibilities in this field. Because, universities are the last stage of education where knowledge and skills are gained at a high level. These institutions constitute the heart of knowledge economy.

The outputs of the university are among the most important inputs of the socio-economical system. When the nature of knowledge economy and the transformations that took place in the labor market and the nature of education in view of this process are analyzed (Çelik, 2007); adjoining the requirements of the age with the needs and conditions appears as being conceived as the mission of the continuing education centers of the universities. This phenomenon led the developed countries to attempt at contributing to economic and social life for developing and supporting lifelong education and achieving high-quality, effective, long-term educational gains.

The European Commission defines the concept of continuing education, which is a novel term for Turkey as follows; "all the educational activities realised throughout the life with individual, social, institutional or employment oriented perspectives for improving knowledge, skills and competences". In line with this definition, universities are encouraged to develop continuing education activities for meeting the targets of the government in England. Universities play a key role in continuing education in England with the programmes designed to increase public support for higher education and supply highly qualified labor force. The Finnish case is relatively special for continuing education.

In Finland, continuing education centers have important roles in sustaining interaction between universities and the public. In this country where such centers aim at achieving local development, establish links between universities, the producers of knowledge, and the market, the users of knowledge.

Continuing education system is well developed and organized in Germany. In Germany universities compete with adult education market and other private lifelong learning activities. Government provides financial support to the adults to join such courses. The rate of attendance to the courses is very high (Mark R, 2006).

There is not any coordinating organization for continuing education providers in Turkey. Thus, there is a lack of communication among continuing education centers. The efforts of sharing good cases and searching solutions for joint problems are very low. The structural problems of the continuing education centers remain unsolved due to lack of organization. Because mutually recognized quality systems cannot be developed due to the lack of a joint decision making mechanism. The efforts initiated by METU Continuing Education Center on establishing a national network are prolonged. The reason for establishing a national network is defining quality standards for the education given at continuing education centers, maintaining communication among centers and joining EUCEN in the further phases.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, we are living in an age of multi-dimensional and rapid change, intensive competition, and growing ambiguity with increasing risks and opportunities for individuals, organizations and nations. Turkey aims at increasing competitiveness and employment in all fields, strengthening human development and social solidarity, ensuring regional development, and increasing quality and effectiveness in public services (Ninth Development Plan: 2007-2013). It is a common problem for all nations to correspond to change, to keep pace with the developed nations and to keep active labor force without transforming it to inactive labor force. In order to achieve this goal developing active labor force policies and making education responsive to labor demand have become compulsory. A portal of access to the academic world is opened through the continuing education centers at the universities to those people who; want to update their professional knowledge as graduates, want a change in their career and search for new knowledge and skills as individuals, could not receive higher education due to personal or professional problems.

It is recommended that continuing education centers realize the following for effectively establishing cooperation networks in order to go beyond their existing potential and offer further, more diverse, and more functional educational programmes:

- The lack of an institution that can constitute communication and cooperation among these centers of continuing education in Turkey has negative causes some negative conditions such as inability to develop the adult education. That's why a "Continuing Education Centers Association" which will supply communication and coordination among the continuing education centers while realizing a high standard education and making the certificates given valid should be established.
- The centers of continuing education should be reformed into establishments that would analyze the local needs and create projects with the aid from state institutes and local authorities.

- The centers mentioned should follow the social and labor needs arising in their neighborhood and must seek for resources needed for the projects aimed at these needs.

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