

# An Analysis of the Mission and Vision Statements on the Strategic Plans of Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of higher education institutions. The sample of the study consisted of 72 public universities. Strategic plans of the universities were accessed over the internet, and the data collected were analyzed using content analysis. The findings show that statements on providing services for the education of a qualified work force are the most common on the mission statements of the universities. "Having universal, sufficient, and competent knowledge" was among the most frequently used phrases on the mission statements of the universities. In vision statements, universities mostly emphasized services concerning their research function. "Becoming a well-known, leading, and respected research university both nationally and internationally" was among the most commonly underlined messages.

## Key Words

Strategic Planning, Vision, Mission, Universities, Mission and Vision Statements.

Universities have been around for a long time as educational institutions that conduct scientific research, provide solutions for problems countries face, train qualified work force in required fields, and play a leading role in the development of democratic principles and free thinking. In this sense, universities are considered to be institutions that lead efforts for social transformation. As they transform the society, universities themselves are at the center of change, for they need to be the initiators of change.

The development of the institution of university throughout history is best told as a narrative of

the emergence of three different structures of university and their transformation into one another. These three stages are represented by the Church-Centered University of the Middle Ages, the university of the nation-states (Humboldt University), and the University of the Information Society (Multiversity, Entrepreneurial University) (Tekeli, 2003; Türel, 2004).

The change observed in university models throughout history has diversified the functions universities are expected to play, and transformed some of the existing functions. From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, universities started to provide, besides their main function of education, social functions such as applied research, counseling, and adult education (Kavak, 1990). Sönmez (2003) lists the main functions universities are expected to play as conducting scientific research, developing solutions for national and universal problems, training the labor force the country needs, spreading the knowledge, skills, and insights it has gained to other people, publishing, and setting an example in all fields. According to Karakütük (2006), universities' functions include producing knowledge via research, teaching on the basis of this knowledge,

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publishing to spread the knowledge, training a highly qualified work force for the development of the society, contributing to the creation of education policies, being a center of criticism, providing counseling to various institutions, and serving the society. Gasset (1998) emphasizes the somewhat latent cultural function of the universities besides scientific research and professional education.

Universities' contemporary functions can be classified under the four categories of education, basic scientific research, community service, and training a qualified work force (Gürüz, Şuhubi, Şengör, Türker, & Yurtsever, 1994). Universities can also be classified on the basis of the functions they provide, as "research universities" and "mass education universities" (Gürüz et al., 1994).

An examination of the literature shows that functions universities are expected to provide the education of a qualified work force that a country needs, provision of education-training services, design, production and dissemination of basic scientific research, and providing community services. Functions of universities expected to provide are subject to change together with the expectations of various social groups from higher education. Concepts that are prominent in this process of change and transformation include globalization, privatization, university autonomy, accountability, quality assurance, accreditation, and management/governance (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu [YÖK], 2007).

International organizations such as the European Union, United Nations, OECD and World Bank conduct studies on change in higher education and related concepts. As a result of their efforts, "quality assurance principles and standards" started to be applied in higher education, and each country started to evaluate its own higher education system. Paralleling these developments, Turkish higher education institutions also make an effort to create quality standards and to achieve international compliance.

Management of universities in the manner businesses are managed resulted in the utilization of business instruments such as strategic planning and total quality management in many public universities. As a result of these developments, strategic planning, which is a part of "strategic management" approach, came to be commonly used in Turkish universities. Many private sector organizations engage in strategic planning, and its implementation in the public sector was recommended in World Bank's Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (PEIR-2001).

Strategic management is a management technique that helps all organizations active in the private sector, public sector, and the third sector set future goals and objectives and it identifies the actions required to reach these goals. (Aktan, 2003). Balcı (1995) defines strategic management as the development and application of the total strategy of the organization as a whole, by the stakeholders in line with current and future needs of the organization.

The concept of strategic planning, on the other hand, is defined as an instrument that allows making long-term plans in consideration of the risks and opportunities faced by the organization, and improving efficiency by acting in line with these plans (Yüksel, 2002). According to Erdoğan (2002), strategic planning is a process that starts with identifying the current situation of the organization by taking external factors into consideration, and proceeds with setting the strategies to take the organization into the future, implementing these strategies, and finally evaluating performance

Strategic planning requires the identification of the aims and objectives of an organization, and the methods to reach these aims and objectives. It has a long-term and future-oriented approach. It guides the efforts for the preparation of organizational budget in line with the aims and objectives set forth in the strategic plan, identifying priorities in resource allocation, and strengthening accountability (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı [DPT], 2006).

Strategic planning consists of the four components of vision, mission, strategy, and action (Aktan, 2003). One of the most important steps in strategic planning is the formulation of mission and vision statements. The success of strategic planning depends on the correct identification and formulation of vision and mission statements. Mission and vision statements also contribute to the institutional identity of an organization (DPT, 2006).

Strategic management and strategic planning aim to create a permanent loyalty to the mission and vision of the organization, and to nurture a culture that defines and supports mission and vision statements (Durna & Eren, 2002). Mission and vision statements guide all activities of organizations and businesses. Thus, these decisions need to be made after careful consideration so that they can contribute to the planning and implementation of other activities of the organization (Akgeçici, 2007).

The function of mission statements is to guide the whole process of strategic planning. Mission states what the organization wants to be and whom it

serves. Mission statements express the *raison d'être* of an organization, and aim to bring together various components of the organization around a common cause, to provide a strategic orientation for the organization, and to make sure resources are used within this framework (David, 2001 cited in Erkan, 2008). DPT's (State Planning Organization) (2006) "Guide for Preparing a Strategic Plan" emphasizes that mission statements need to include the reason for being of an organization, whom the organization serves, the field it operates in, the needs it addresses, and the legal duties of the organization (DPT, 2006).

Mission is the reason for being of an organization. When an organization prepares strategies of makes choices between different alternatives, mission statement guides the strategies. A well-prepared mission statement needs to identify the specific purpose of the organization and its field of activity in terms of products and markets, and thus differentiate the organization from others (Ülgen & Mirze, 2004). Mission statement is a set of goals that help the organization reach its aims and that express its strategic objectives (Tutar, 2004). According to Dinçer (2004), mission is a long-term goal, a shared value and belief, is unique to the organization and special, and is about quality not quantity.

Mission statements should be clear, concise, and intense. They should define the purpose of the organization, identify the people and organizations served, state the field of activity of the organization, mention the needs served by the organization, and express the legal duties of the organization (DPT, 2006; Erçetin, 2000).

Vision statements are another important element of strategic planning. Vision is defined as "a look towards the unknown to define the future, which combines current facts, hopes, dreams, threats and opportunities." In business management, vision statement refers to the long-term objectives of the business. Vision shapes and guides future business practices (Zel, 1997). Vision also defines what the organization wants to become in the future and which position it desires to acquire (Efil, 2004), and is the expression of a dream concerning a future desired state.

When businesses have a strong vision, it helps them predict future events, be prepared for changes and innovations, have courage to face the future, predict changes in customer demands, and improve employee efficiency (Yalçın, 2005).

A good vision statement should emphasize a unique characteristic of the organization that differentiates it from others, and take all future activities planned for the internal and external environment of the organization into consideration. The vision must be understood and shared by all stakeholders of the organization. Vision should help the public have an idea of the culture of the organization (Eren, 2005). Vision statement should be formulated to strengthen the culture of the organization and unity and loyalty among members, and to increase employee motivation. In this sense, vision statements should reflect the organizational culture (Doğan, 2007).

Most of the studies in the literature focus on mission and vision statements of businesses. Yurtseven (2003) conducted a survey among senior managers of 50 five-star hotels, and examined their mission statements. He found that 52% of the hotels emphasized product and service promotion and 48% emphasized the philosophy of the organization in the dimension of strategy; 64% emphasized customers and 36% emphasized shareholders-employees-suppliers in the dimension of stakeholders; and 44% emphasized environmental-social responsibility and 56% emphasized high quality and innovation in the dimension of strategic success.

Karabulut (2007) examined the contents of the mission statements of 39 industrial enterprises operating in the field of food, beverages and tobacco, on the basis of their products, the technologies they used, the markets they are active in, the stakeholders emphasized, business philosophy and basic values. The findings of this study showed that mission statements were mostly prepared by the upper management and they were not updated periodically.

Erkan's (2007) study titled "Factors affecting the Success of Strategic Planning in Public Sector Institutions" ("*Kamu Kuruluşlarında Stratejik Planlamanın Başarısını Etkileyen Faktörler*") found that managers of public sector institutions tend to think and act with short-term considerations, fail to differentiate their organization from others, and overall, have difficulties in strategic planning and developing mission and vision statements.

The literature on educational sciences includes some recent studies on strategic planning. Velcoff and Ferrari (2006) asked 35 senior university managers about the fit between the mission statement and activities of their universities. They found that mission statements and activities of the universities were positively related. Boerema (2006) exam-

ined mission and vision statements of six groups of private schools using content analysis. The mission and vision statements were analyzed using five main content categories created by the author: unique characteristics of the schools, their goals and objectives, services they offer, the environment they are placed in, and parent participation. It was found that, of the five main categories, there were intra-group and inter-group differences between the private schools with regards to the dimension of goals and objectives.

Morphew and Hartley (2006) examined the mission statements of close to 300 public and private colleges and universities. They found that public and private colleges and universities differed in terms of the phrases most frequently used in their mission statements. Davis, Ruhe, Lee and Rajadhyaksha (2007) conducted a study with the participation of 762 university students from 16 different universities. It was found that students of universities which placed a stronger emphasis on ethical values in their mission statements had stronger ethical values compared to students of universities which placed a weaker emphasis on ethical values in their mission statements.

Abelman and Dalessandro (2008) found that 20 of the 30 public colleges, and only 4 of the 30 private colleges examined had vision statements that were in line with the national vision statement. James and Huisman (2009) examined the degree to which mission statements of higher education institutions in Wales complied with regional policies and market expectations. The findings of the study showed that mission statements of the higher education institutions did not comply with regional policies and did not meet market expectations.

Firmin and Gilson (2010) examined the mission statements of 107 colleges and universities. They found that mission statements of universities mostly emphasized the subjects of education, religion (Christianity), society, life and academia, and that mission statements expressed the reason for being of these universities and colleges.

Erdem's (2005) study titled "The Reason for Being of a University (Mission of a University)" ("*Üniversitenin Var Oluş Nedeni (Üniversitenin Misyonu)*") found that internal and external stakeholders who participated in the study emphasized the notions of "education, service, research and leadership" as the duties of Pamukkale University.

Participants in Çalık's (2003) study titled "Strategic Planning in Education and a Qualitative Assess-

ment of Strategic Planning in Schools" ("*Eğitimde Stratejik Planlama ve Okulların Stratejik Planlama Açısından Nitel Değerlendirilmesi*") clearly expressed that mission and vision statements on schools' strategic plans were copied from one another.

In their study titled "The Fit Between Turkey's Strategic Plan for Higher Education (YÖK) and Universities' Individual Strategic Plans" ("*Türkiye'nin Yükseköğretim Stratejik Planı (YÖK) ile Üniversitelerin Stratejik Planlarının Uyumluluğu*") Toprakçı, İğçi, Tokat and Yücel (2007) found that YÖK's strategic plan and universities' individual strategic plans were compatible overall, and that 27 universities emphasized education in their vision statements.

In their study titled "An Analysis of the Mission and Vision Statements and Values of Elementary and Secondary Schools" ("*İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretim Okullarının Vizyon, Misyon Ve Değerleri İle İlgili Bir Çözümleme*") Altunkurt and Yılmaz (2011) found that public schools emphasized being "a model school and a school of choice" in their vision statements, and "Ataturk's principles and reforms" in their mission statements.

Various studies have been conducted in Turkey on strategic planning, mission and vision statements and strategic management. Most of these studies, however, were on businesses, and studies in educational sciences mostly focused on primary and secondary schools. A review of the literature showed that the number of studies on strategic management and strategic planning in universities was limited. The formulation and the content of vision and mission statements are important for the effectiveness of the strategic plan. Because the effectiveness of universities' strategic plans depends on the content of their mission and vision statements, this study analyzes the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of universities.

## Aims

This study aims to examine the frequency and the format of mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of universities. With this purpose, answers were sought to the following research questions:

1. What are the format and the frequency of mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of universities?
2. What are the format and the frequency of mis-

sion and vision statements on the strategic plans of Group I universities?

3. What are the format and the frequency of mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of Group II universities?
4. What are the format and the frequency of mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of Group III universities?

## Method

### Model

This study uses a survey design.

### Sample

The sample of the study consisted of all public universities in Turkey that have prepared strategic plans and shared these plans with the public. A total of 72 public universities were included in the sample following a survey conducted between January-April 2010. Of these, 53 had their strategic plans approved by the State Planning Organization and published on the web site of the State Planning Organization, and 19 published their strategic plans on their own web sites.

Universities were divided into three groups on the basis of their year of foundation. Group I consisted of 19 universities founded between the proclamation of the Republic and the foundation of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), Group II consisted of 29 universities founded between the foundation of YÖK and 2006, and Group III consisted of the 24 universities founded in the new period since 2006.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected (between January-April 2010) from the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of a total of 72 public universities, 53 of which had these plans published on the website of the State Planning Organization, and 19 of which published them on their own websites.

Semantic analysis was used to analyze the contents of the statements. Semantic content analysis is the process of creating themes (categories) that identify the main subjects and dimensions in the material under study, and the specific sub-fields under these subjects and dimensions (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). To analyze the mission and vision

statements on the strategic plans of the universities, first, the strategic plans of the universities were accessed over the internet and mission and vision statements were extracted. Then, these mission and vision statements were analyzed via content analysis using four main themes that were identified on the basis of the expectations expressed in the literature concerning universities' functions. These four themes based on the literature and revised after expert opinion concerned the function of training and education, the function of research, the function of community service, and the function of educating a qualified work force.

Following the identification of the themes, sentences in the mission and vision statements were identified and grouped under these themes. Numbers of sentences under each sub-theme were counted and frequency and percentage values were calculated. Mission and vision sentences most frequently used in the sub-themes were presented using frequencies and percentages. Thus, most common themes in mission and vision statements were identified.

To identify the themes contained in mission and vision statements and to increase the reliability of the study, another expert assisted the author. Both the author and the expert independently coded mission and vision statements within the framework of the themes previously identified, to increase coding reliability (Başfıncı, 2008; Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). Reliability figure was calculated using the following formula: "Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100" (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Results

This section on findings will first present the findings on mission statements in strategic plans, followed findings on vision statements. Mission and vision statements were examined on the basis of the sub-themes found in the definitions.

A total of 354 different messages were given in the mission statements on the strategic plans of 72 public universities. Among the sub-themes, the most frequently used was the "Providing Services for the Education of a Qualified Work Force", with a 59.9% share (f=212). The least frequently used sub-theme in the mission statements on the strategic plans of the universities was "Training and Education Services", with a 7.3% share (f=26).

An examination of the distribution of sub-themes found in mission sentences by university groups

showed that the 26 mission sentences grouped under the sub-theme of “Training and Education Services” were most frequently used in the strategic plans of Group III universities ( $f=11$ , 42.3%), and least frequently in the strategic plans of Group II universities ( $f=7$ , 26.9%). There were a total of 48 mission sentences under the theme “Services Concerning the Research Function”, which were used most frequently by Group I universities ( $f=21$ , 43.7%), and least frequently by Group III universities ( $f=11$ , 23.0%). A total of 68 mission sentences were grouped under the theme “Community Service Function”, which were used most frequently by Group III universities ( $f=31$ , 45.6%), and least frequently by Group I universities ( $f=18$ , 26.5%).

Of the vision sentences on the strategic plans of universities, 67 were grouped under the theme “Research” (33.4%), 33 were grouped under the theme “Community Service” (17.7%) and 24 were grouped under the theme “Educating a Qualified Work Force” (12.9%). Overall, sentences concerning the functions of “research” and “training and education” were the most frequently emphasized in the vision statements of the universities.

An analysis of the distribution of vision sentences by universities showed that Group I and Group II universities emphasized the function of research the most, and Group III universities emphasized the function of training and education the most. The least frequently emphasized functions were services concerning the education of a qualified work force in Group I and Group II universities, and training and education and community service in Group III universities.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

This study aimed to analyze the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of universities. Findings of the study showed that the theme of “Providing Services for the Education of a Qualified Work Force” was the most frequently used in mission statements, and the theme of “Services Concerning the Research Function” was the most frequently used in vision statements.

More than half of all universities examined included the theme “Providing Services for the Education for a Qualified Work Force” in their mission statements. Mission statements express the reason for being of an organization, and its sense of duty centered on the aims and objects identified (Dinçer, 2004). This finding indicates that universities give priority to their function of educating a qualified

work force required for the development of the country.

Vision statements express the aims and objectives the organization wants to reach in the long term, and reflect the future mental image of the organization (Dinçer, 2004; Tutar, 2004). The most frequently used sub-theme in the vision statements of the universities was “Services Concerning the Research Function”. This finding shows that universities might have a stronger emphasis on the function of research in the future. Füzuran’s (2009) study titled “Strategic Planning and Balanced Scorecard Practices in Higher Education Institutions: A Model for Turkey” presents examples from the strategic plans of universities in various countries, which shows that most vision statements express a desire to become a research university in the future. The findings of the present study support the findings of Füzuran’s (2009) study. Participants in Erdem and Tanrıöğren’s (2002) study titled “An Important Key in the Success of Universities: University Vision (The Case of Pamukkale University)”, who were stakeholders of the university, stated that they would like the vision of Pamukkale University to include the aim of “becoming a regional university distinguished by its focus on a culture of research and science”.

The success of the strategic plan depends on the correct formulation of mission and vision statements, and wide participation in their formulation. Mission and vision statements also contribute to the creation of the institutional identity of an organization. Mission statement introduces the organization to the public and distinguishes it from other organizations by emphasizing its unique characteristics. The examination of the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of public universities in Turkey showed that universities with different histories and sizes (in terms of human and material resources) used similar mission and vision statements. Universities should identify their unique characteristics and emphasize these in their mission and vision statements. It is worthy of note that universities founded in different regions and under different conditions all have similar mission and vision statements.

The following suggestions can be made on the basis of the findings of this study:

- Mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of the universities should be revised on the basis of basic criteria such as originality, providing motivation, credibility, and being easy to remember.

- Mission and vision statements should not be treated as cool sentences to adorn the web sites and brochures of the universities, they should be put into action.
- Regular studies on the level of implementation of mission and vision statements and their contribution to organizational performance should be designed and conducted.
- In the formulation of mission and vision statements of the universities, variables such as the reason for being of the university, the environment within which it is located, its human resources, aims and objectives, target audience, field of service, and the needs the university aims to address should be taken into consideration.
- Universities with different sizes and structures should avoid using similar mission and vision statements.
- Vision statements of some of the universities consist of sentences aiming to improve the current situation. These vision statements should be revised to predict future changes.
- This study was limited to an analysis of the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of public universities only. Future studies should aim to cover foundation universities as well.

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