THE EHEA QUALIFICATION LEVEL IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK*

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Abstract

Today, the situation of the higher education in the state and the society has been more important. While the values of higher education have been determined by the external factors, itself has been increasing the effect power on higher education institutions as an external factor. The cause and result of this transformation has been intersection ares of universities with the dynamics of global competition. As a result in this process universities have taken care of their relationship with stakeholder to able to read the changes better. Academicians are in the first place among stakeholders without a doubt. Gaining qualifications of universities in the sense of regional and international in this environment is appearing as an important result of this process. This point has provided a platform of European Higher Education Areas theorotical reasons. Thus, both the variation process and the discussions about theories and applications of European Higher Education Area have always been the agenda.

From this point the subject of this study is researching the correlation between the changing higher education values and EHEA requirements in the axis of a conceptual model designed for the satisfaction of stakeholders and the quality level of universities. In this study first, historical and conceptual transformation of higher eduation and university has been discussed. Second, an analytical evaluation of changing values of higher education has been presented. Also the history of European Higher Education Area and its components have been searched with a critical view. Consequently the process and system suggestions have been developed for building up cooperation with stakeholders and meeting the targets of EHEA through a conceptual model.

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1. Introduction

Higher education is a description which has problem and discussion in what accepted as “higher” in higher education and used for third degree education institutions after all second degree education (high school) that awards diploma or not at the end of study (Denman, 2005: 17).

Until the 19th century, according to the dominated thought, Universities, the most fundamental higher education, is a place where universal knowledge is taught and its purpose is intellectual. In the 20th century, under pressure of commercial thoughts, education has been redefined with thought of that education should be practicable to daily living immediately and practical. According to this understanding, education is considered as a process which has been generated as a public sphere, collecting these people as nationals who have power on knowledge generation and acquisition and being generated political agents at the same time with not only knowledge (Giroux, 1996).

Today, universities have an important role to develop and advance countries. Universities, which are ranked as head actor in social transformation in itself and contributing for changing, rank on focus point of transformation based knowledge society and globalization. Generally, reflection of political, economic and social developments on higher education brings up management and quality into the agenda (Vidovich, 2002).

Influences of middle age, which is called as feudal period, generating agricultural society and after then modern period which nation states increase with industrial revolution after commercial development and post-modern period with knowledge age and globalization, are great to the history of world. In research of university history, it is shown that three periods have been based on literature.

Three mentioned periods are called as three generations as well as being transition period among these periods. Obtaining three generation as interactive with together, being principles of modern period university influences which has been accepted commonly among today’s university, show that university history is an articular and integrated structure (Wissema, 2009; Kyrö and Mattila, 2012). Three periodic university histories under Middle Age have been summarized on Figure 1.1:

![Figure 1. Universities development history](resource)

University, which has taken shape in Middle Age, has brought some qualifications into today. A name and central place, academicians, students, courses, exams and degrees which have autonomy in a certain extent, an administration, which has “faculties”, may be shown samples for extant fECTS. Besides, Bachelor of Arts, master’s degree and doctor of philosophy terms have been used for Middle Age (Kerr, 1982).
According to Humboldt who is the founder of the first sample of modern university, ideal university purpose is to be increased total human knowledge with research method. It is required to be redefined the relation between student and academician. According to this, one sided relation led to from academician to student between these give way to a relation based on interaction. Thus, true science may be generated from interaction between experience and excitement. Here, lecturer presents experience while students present excitement. Relation based on interaction, provides to reach true science. Thing to relate is to reveal the characteristic structure of model. According to this, university institution should have academic freedom. Academic freedom has two dimensions called “lehrfreiheit” and “lernfreiheit”. It is defined that Lehrfreiheit is freedom to choose the subject which lecturer will research and teach and lernfreiheit is freedom to choose thing that the student want to learn. This freedom, given to lecturer and student provides to relate priceless intellectual relations between them (Lay, 2004: 48).

Modern university is organized in various shapes in different counties from 1900s until today and relates different relations with society, state and business world. Especially, at the end of the 20th century, it is considered that university institution is not organized and arranged around only one idea with globalization, incorporating-business administration and becoming marketable in a part of countries influenced by America and America. “Market” is replaced instead of “government” on higher education policy of some countries with free market conditions. Student leads to “customer”, lecturer/assistants lead to “supplier” and learning/teaching relation lead to “a secret contract” between seller and purchaser (Peters, 2007).

For 1980s, the mentioned developments, which generate in the field of innovation policies, result to be established close relations different from past between university and industry. This tendency concretized with science parks, innovation center and autonomous brokerage establishment which has been established in order to generate the required ground for cooperation and gathering the university and industry, has been referred as rise of “entrepreneur university” system (Lazzeroni and Piccaluga, 2003: 38-39).

The other important name which contributes to development of “entrepreneur university” term is J. G. Hans Wissema. In 2009, published “Towards the Third Generation University: Managing the University in Transition” he stated that research and education activity are two fundamental components of modern university mission; pointed out that entrepreneur university mission includes knowledge sage in addition to this two activity (Wissema, 2009: 29).

According to Wissema, typical modern university deals with only research and education activity. In the end of this activity, it is not made effort to practice the produced knowledge; this field is left for other institution entrepreneur (Wissema, 2009: 39).

Increasing role of knowledge in society and university in economy, results to be analyzed with triplex of university-industry-government (Triple Helix) relations. This triplex has been generated around university, industry and government as interlocking circles with motivation of encouraging the academic research and economic development. Entrepreneur University, which is a product of constellation, goes beyond education and research functions limits which are primer academic mission. Economic development mission contributes to systematic scientific innovation development and re-establishment of knowledge base (Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 2001).

In current situation, change dynamics, which influence the higher education over the world, can be summarized as follow (Aktan, 2007):

- Globalization
- Regional cooperations
- Knowledge society and new Technologies
- Competition
- State reforms
- Increasing the higher education demand in result of population increase
- Becoming widespread of English
The changing process of higher education has driven the universities to create regional and international cooperations. The most widespread of these dynamics developed to keep up with the internationalizing tendency is the Bologna Process. Bologna Process is a structure in which the member countries have no obligation to obey any treaty among nations and put no force over them and in which they are also free to go in accordance with this process. This process, started with the participation of 29 countries – into which Turkey has become a member in 2001, initially aimed to create a European Higher Education Area, but reached to 47 member countries today with their participation outside Europe.

The most important development transforming the European higher education system after the Bologna Process is the transition to the two-three-level system. Most of the member countries in Bologna Process completed their transition to two-three-level system. However, such countries as Germany, Spain and Austria didn't complete their process yet and they have a low number of students involved in this new system (Rauhvargers et. al., 2009). For such applications as ECTS and diploma supplement, taken as a key to success in an easily comprehensible and comparative higher education system, which is another important dynamic in Bologna Process, the process has been completed thoroughly in 23 countries starting from the year 2012. The application level of this system is between 50-77% in Turkey (Eurydice, 2012).

In the framework of qualifications, it is seen that such countries as Germany, England and Portugal completed the process in terms of work load, level, learning outcomes, skills and profile description and work steps, and that Turkey has completed most of them. The area in which the countries fail in these terms is the inability to provide a systematic integration by defining the previous education system (Eurydice, 2012).

In terms of quality assurance system, 28 agencies from 13 countries got involved into the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in 2012, which was established in 2008. Such countries as Germany, Austria, Romania, Holland, Spain, Finland, Denmark, France and Ireland are involved in this list at least with a single agency (Eurydice, 2012).

The realization level of the objective to increase the mobility of students, researchers and academicians and to make European Higher Education Area (EHEA) more competitive as one of the biggest aims of Bologna Process was quite low. The rate of becoming a member of EHEA other than EHEA itself was lower than 5% (Eurydice, 2012).

2. Aim and Methodology of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the explainability of the connection between the changing values of higher education and the requirements of European Higher Education Area, which is a regional cooperation, within the transformation process in terms of historical and conceptual context of higher education as evaluated in the introduction in a conceptual model framework. By using the conceptual resolution methods via literature review and research model in the investigation, the interaction between EHEA requirements are explained within the context of changing values of higher education.

The changing values of higher education and the interaction of EHEA requirements are explained via four main elements. These elements are as follows:

- Quality Level of Higher Education
- Stakeholder Satisfaction in Higher Education
- Cooperation with Stakeholders in Higher Education
- Requirements of European Higher Education Area
While the elements of cooperation with stakeholders seen in quality management systems as a variable to affect the quality level and stakeholder satisfaction in higher education are prioritized as a primary factor in the dynamics given in Figure 2, the dynamics of EHEA objectives seen as an exit gate to internationalize the regional universities are taken as a secondary factor. While the circular and integrated interaction setup of the model makes a reference to the dynamic and complicated structure of the changes in higher education, the phenomenon of student-focus, the applications of which have increased a lot inside EHEA and American Universities, is placed in the center. As the models, in which the students are actively involved within all processes and active participation and student centered issues other than student-focus are classified as other elements under this concept, “center” is preferred instead of using the term “focus” in this model. Therefore, it is believed that the participation of both internal and external stakeholders must be involved in all processes at universities. It is agreed that the priority in stakeholder participation (because the students are both the important stakeholders of the process and direct benefactors of this service) must be directed to the student participation.
3. Conclusion

Bologna Process aims to increase the international power of competition in European higher education system, to generalize the cooperation and mobility among universities in Europe and to protect the autonomy, uniqueness and diversity of these universities. There is also another criticism, which claims that a uniform higher education system removes the diversity in Europe in spite of the positive developments on this issue. Examples of these claims are indicated as overloaded bureaucracy in ECTS, qualifications and quality assurance studies after the transit into two-three–level system (Appleton, 2009; Grove, 2012; Keim and Keim, 2010).

On the other hand, it is thought that the connection and interaction between European Higher Education Area and one of its biggest competitors in American higher education within the competitive system of European Higher Education Area. The studies in accordance with leveling structures of Europe and ECTS applications have increased the interest of America into Europe. With this new three-level structure, it is expected that higher education institutions in EHEA will be more appealing to American students just like the other countries (Ward, 2007).

Many harsh criticisms have been made upon this process in such countries as Germany in which a serious structural transformation underwent in higher education systems after the Bologna Process. The most important criticisms made are that the process has not realized most of its objectives. The scope of these criticisms involve the development of European competitiveness, inability to bring in more students outside of the EHEA, and inability to realize the objectives of student, academician and researcher mobility in higher education (Rauhvargers et al., 2009; Eurydice, 2012).

The most important criticism is that uniformization is seen as the worst feature in terms of the standards and qualifications of higher education system in relation to the Bologna Process. It is argues that learning quality is degraded by the shortening of learning durations and lessening it into three years besides compressing the curricula in higher education. In addition to this conclusion, it is also determined that early-graduated students are unable to bring in the economy (Eurobarometer, 2007).

The criticism made to EHEA is summarized under these titles:
- Standardization (Accreditation, ECTS, work load, plans and programs)
- Uniformization (ranking system and qualifications framework)
- Decrease of learning quality (reducing the learning duration)
- Quality control and commercialization of higher education by accreditation
- Starting of a paid education
- Bureaucratization
- Weakness of student mobility

In parallel to the criticisms made so far, the interrogative systematic provision of formational requirement of universities in terms of local needs in European Higher Education Area will cause the perceptions of internal and external stakeholders to be positive in relation to the European Higher Education Area. Taking the criticism into consideration about the applications basing on the systems other than Continental Europe tradition in order to increase the competition between European Higher Education Area and American Universities will contribute to the effectiveness of this process. As a result, the evaluation of this issue with a critical viewpoint on the qualifications levels of European Higher Education Area will reduce the dilemma between standardization and uniformization of European Higher Education Area.
References


