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EVALUATION OF OPEN HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

In the development of open and distance education, the formation of open universities constitutes an important milestone. What is expected from those institutions called “mega universities”, with their large scale economies as a result of their high number of students, is that they provide this large mass of students with low-cost and high-quality higher education. This role can be undertaken by an open university in every country. However, besides Anadolu University, which used to be the only institution in Turkey in this field for many years, Istanbul University and Atatürk University also have been active in open education since 2011. The motivation of this study is to evaluate the development processes of these universities that have more than one hundred thousand students. For this purpose, the following are evaluated and interpreted: The place of undergraduate and graduate programs offered in these three universities in all university programs; their different practices in associate degree and undergraduate programs; quota restrictions and enrollment numbers in programs; and program diversities. In the scope of this study, relevant data from the last ten years of higher education manuals were collected, and the university web pages were examined. Findings in the study show that sufficient program diversity has not been achieved, and high quota

restrictions decreased the student numbers of these universities. The ways of achieving program diversity and overcoming quota constraints by considering "quality" and "requirements" are the subjects of more detailed further researches.

Keywords

Open Education Programs, Open Education in Turkey, Program Diversity in Open Education, Quotas in Open Education

1. Introduction

Daniel argues that despite the impressive efforts of universities that offered distance learning programs, in the rest of higher education, distance programs were often considered as the second best after classroom courses. It was the establishment of open universities dedicated solely to this approach deploying new information and communication technologies, that made distance education mainstream. After the success of distance education became obvious, many campus universities began to adopt it for some of their programmes, and the term ‘dual-mode provision’ emerged (Daniel, 2012). Lentell states that defining dual-mode universities is somewhat confusing and pointless; accepting pragmatically that most universities have moved into off-campus provision from different starting points and with different approaches (Lentell, 2012). King describes dual-mode universities as conventional institutions that commit to delivering programs to students who cannot, or prefer not to, attend the course in campus. Typically, procedures and systems that acknowledge the different logistics of dealing with the needs of these students are implemented. Dual-mode institutions are not all of one kind, in that the patterns of arrangements they employ can vary considerably: All functions may be managed by one distance education unit, including teaching and assessment; or a highly integrated approach might be employed to minimise the distinctions and arrangements among categories of students (King, 2012). At this point, as Buttar said, traditional forms of teaching and learning have increasingly been converted to online and virtual environments recently (Buttar, 2015). This is an incentive for universities to enter the field of distance education. Education is thus transformed from face-to-face learning methods to online-learning (Mutawa, 2017). Whilst many governments in developing countries stepped up opportunities for access to higher education through non-traditional form such as distance education or e-learning, many of these new courses were undermined because of their poor quality. This resulted in high levels of dropout and/or failure to achieve broad participation (which is one of the primary goals of a program) (Liyanagunawardena, Adams, Rassool, Williams, 2014). In Turkey approximately two million students in open and distance learning programs, and all the

universities that offer open and distance learning are employing the dual-mode. In this sense, it is important to examine and evaluate both the existing practices and the development of the new programs.

Although the practices of open education in Turkey can be traced back, the practices at the level of diploma programs in higher education started with the establishment of the Open Education Faculty in Anadolu University in 1982. Depending on the high demand for higher education, the number of students in the faculty has increased steadily to over one million, and the university has been ranked among the mega universities in the world. After the legal legislation in 2000, despite many shortcomings, some other universities have started to offer associate degree and undergraduate diploma programs. However, universities except Anadolu University were not allowed to offer open education: They were allowed to open programs only under the name "distance education". This made "open education" and "distance education" two different forms of teaching in terms of higher education institutions. Distance learning is based on synchronous lectures, where the number of students that can be registered in classes and programs are limited (quota application). In distance learning, information and communication technologies are used intensively and educational practices are formed accordingly. Open education, on the other hand, focuses more on mass education, and it is a field where higher quotas are recognized in programs despite restrictions. A limited number of institutions can offer programs in open education.

Open education has been carried out for many years only by the Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University. Recently, Erzurum Atatürk University and Istanbul University also started their open education with the permissions they received. They started their programs with open education method by establishing their own open education faculties in 2011, and their number of students increased in a short time. In the present study, quantitative development of open education programs, their program diversities, quota applications and organizational structures from 2011 on will be examined and interpreted on the basis of associate degree and undergraduate programs.

In the text, the first calendar year of the related academic year is given. For example, the academic year 2011-2012 is written as 2011.

2. Method

This paper is a descriptive study. The data were collected through one of the qualitative data collection techniques, i.e. document review. For this purpose, the following sources between the year 2000 and 2016 were scanned: All the publications and web sites of

the Council of Higher Education; Higher Education Programs guides; the Center of Measurement, Selection and Placement quotas; the web pages of higher education institutions, higher education institutions, programs, teaching units to which the programs belong, quotas and records. The collected data are presented and interpreted in tables.

3. Literature

Among the reasons that encourage institutions to open distance education programs, Moore and Kearsley (2012) list the following factors: “increasing access to learning and training as a matter of equity”, “improving the cost effectiveness of educational resources”, “improving the quality of existing educational structures”, “enhancing the capacity of the educational system”, “adding an institutional dimension to the educational experience” and “expanding the capacity for education in new subject areas”. Although this list may be extended, the motives listed above are enough to explain the growing interest of institutions in distance education. Moreover, this interest will continue to increase.

In addition to the interest of higher education institutions, there are both internal and external factors the decision to start and have success in distance education. Among internal factors, Keegan (1996) indicates the changes in the traditional educational structure, such as "industrialization of teaching practice", "privatization of institutional learning", "change of administrative structure", "different equipment and buildings" and "change of cost structures". It is important to establish the best organizational structure within the higher education institution in order to succeed in these changes. Gustavo and Moller (2001), who were concerned about "just happening" management and oversight of distance education, strongly recommended the institutions to have a clear vision of performance goals, plans for making the vision a reality, and *structures and systems* to manage performance.

National education policies and their related aspects on open and distance education affect the development of programs. Among the elements that characterize open and distance learning, Van Den and Schlusmans (1989) enlists the following: “making education less expensive”, “relieving the overcrowded traditional universities”, and “enabling more people to study while working”. These can be seen as promotions of distance education, but it is so important for institutions’ decisions to make a detailed evaluation of development, current practices and decisions taken by decision-makers.

Open universities are an important milestones in the development and success of open and distance education. They benefit from scale economies, enable many students to enroll programs at low cost, and contribute significantly to the expansion of higher teaching input and

social equality with high quality teaching. Guri-Rosenblit (2014) defines this as a golden triangle. These universities demonstrate that wider penetration, higher quality and lower costs can be combined. In Turkey, this golden triangle has been achieved successfully by Anadolu University which used to be the only distance education institution for many years. Afterwards, two other universities started open education in the same quality. It is important to study and evaluate their resource plannings, student numbers, quality, and so on.

4. Open Education Practices

Before the formation of the current higher education system in Turkey, various higher education institutions and official institutions attempted for open education practices. Although some practices were highly demanded, none of them could have been implemented for a long time. In 1982, with the formation of a new higher education system, Anadolu University was commissioned to start open education. Anadolu University has been presenting open education programs in national and international context since. The university is a dual-mode university which applies both conventional and open education. With its one and a half million students, it is among the mega open universities in the world. Ataturk University and Istanbul University established their own open education faculties after they received the related legislative permits, and they started their open education programs in 2011. The development of open education in the post-2011 period, especially after the latter two started offering programs, is examined below.

4.1. Development of Open Education Associate Degree Programs

The number of associate degree programs offered by Anadolu University has not changed much for many years, although some programs were closed in some years and some others were opened. 15 associate degree programs were offered in open education until 2009, and in 2009, 15 new open education programs were launched, and the number of programs increased to 30. Then, Ataturk University and Istanbul University started to offer associate degree programs in 2011 and in 2014 respectively.

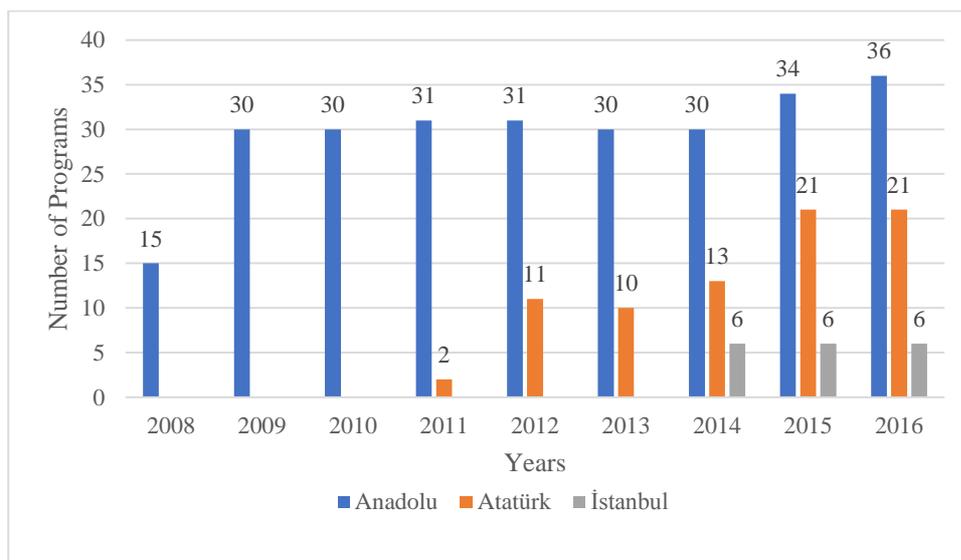


Figure 1: *The Development of the Number of Associate Degree Programs*

Source: *Compiled from the Measurement, Selection and Placement System Guidelines for Higher Education Programs and Quotas 1996-2016.*

Ataturk University, which offered 2 programs in 2011, achieved to start 11 programs in 2012, and 21 in 2015. Istanbul University has six associate degree programs since 2014. In 2016, the total number of programs in these three universities was 63.

The diversity of programs offered by these universities can be examined from two perspectives: Their program diversity within the general university system, and their program diversity among themselves. There are 42 different associate degree programs in three universities. In Turkey, 219 associate degree programs are offered within the whole university system. In this respect, although it is claimed that a wide program diversity was achieved by these universities, there are many programs that still can be opened in various fields.

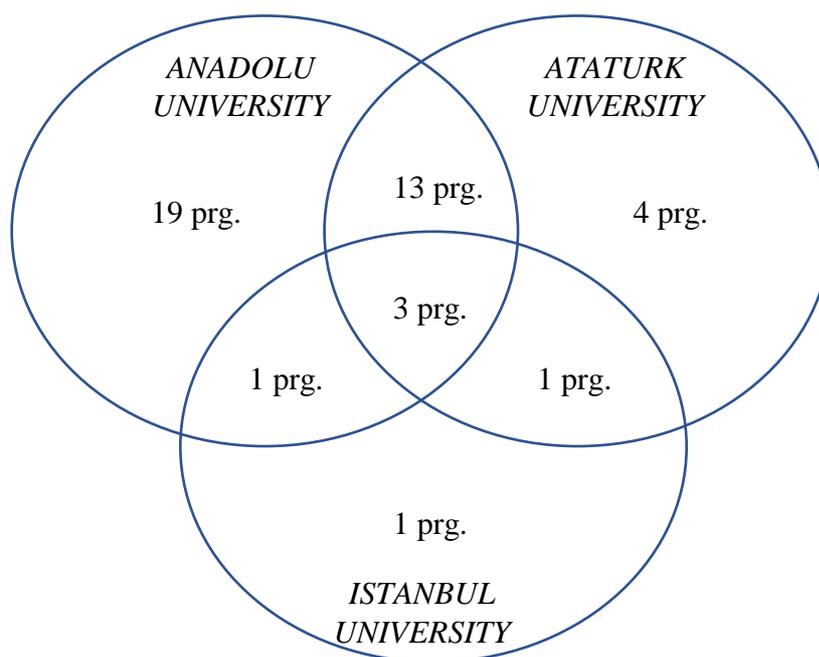


Figure 2: Associate Degree Programs Offered by Universities and their Intersection Numbers

Source: Compiled from the Measurement, Selection and Placement System Guidelines for Higher Education Programs and Quotas 1996-2016.

Figure 2 shows the number of associate degree programs in three universities, and the intersection sets of existing programs in each. As shown in Figure 2, While 19 of the 42 programs are offered by Anadolu University, Atatürk University offers 4 programs and Istanbul University offers 1 program. It is striking that 13 programs exist in both Anadolu University and Atatürk University. Three programs are offered at all three universities. This shows that the diversity of programs is not achieved among the universities, and that the universities are following each other in opening the programs.

The quota restriction was not applied to open education associate degree programs until recently. It was introduced in 2011 for several associate degree programs of Anadolu University. In 2012, only one of the 11 associate degree programs of Atatürk University was limited, and in 2014, quota restrictions were applied to all programs, hence it became impossible to register unlimited number of students. The development of quota numbers in the following three years was as follows:

Table 1: *The Development of Number of Quotas to Open Education Associate Degree Programs*

Name of the University	2014	2015	2016
Anadolu University	116.175	104.300	81.000
Atatürk University	9.300	22.950	23.000
İstanbul University	11.000	10.500	8.400
Total	136.475	137.750	112.400

Source: *Compiled from the Measurement, Selection and Placement System Guidelines for Higher Education Programs and Quotas 1996-2016.*

The quota restriction was applied to several associate degree programs in 2011, and by 2014, quota restrictions were extended to all programs. However, the indication that the restrictions will continue to increase is the gradually reduction of quotas in the next two years. Although there appears to be a small increase in quota rates in 2015, it is the increase in the number of programs in 2015 compared to 2014. Anadolu University opened four new associate degree programs in 2015, and Atatürk University opened eight new associate degree programs in 2015. Thus the number of programs increased by 12 (see Figure 1). Despite this, the increase in quota rates was low; and even in 2016 when two new programs were opened, the quota decreased nearly by 20%.

Another issue explored in the development of open education programs is the provision of program diversity and organizational structures within higher education institutions. In Turkey, there were 219 different associate degree programs in the university system offered in conventional education in 2016. In the open education method, 42 different programs were offered in three universities. As shown in Figure 2, these 42 programs are common in three universities. Clearly, it can be said that sufficient program diversity is not achieved.

All the three universities offer their programs within the framework of the open education faculties. This organizational structure ensures that all programs are integrated under one roof for efficient management.

4.2. Development of Open Education Undergraduate Programs

Delivering of the undergraduate program in Turkey with the open education method started in 1982. The Open Education Faculty established in Anadolu University started teaching with two undergraduate programs and continued to implement it as a single delivering institution for many years. In 2011, Ataturk and Istanbul Universities started to offer their undergraduate degree programs, thus, undergraduate education at three universities began to be

offered. The number of associate degree programs offered by Anadolu, Atatürk and Istanbul universities in 2011 and beyond with open education method developed as follows

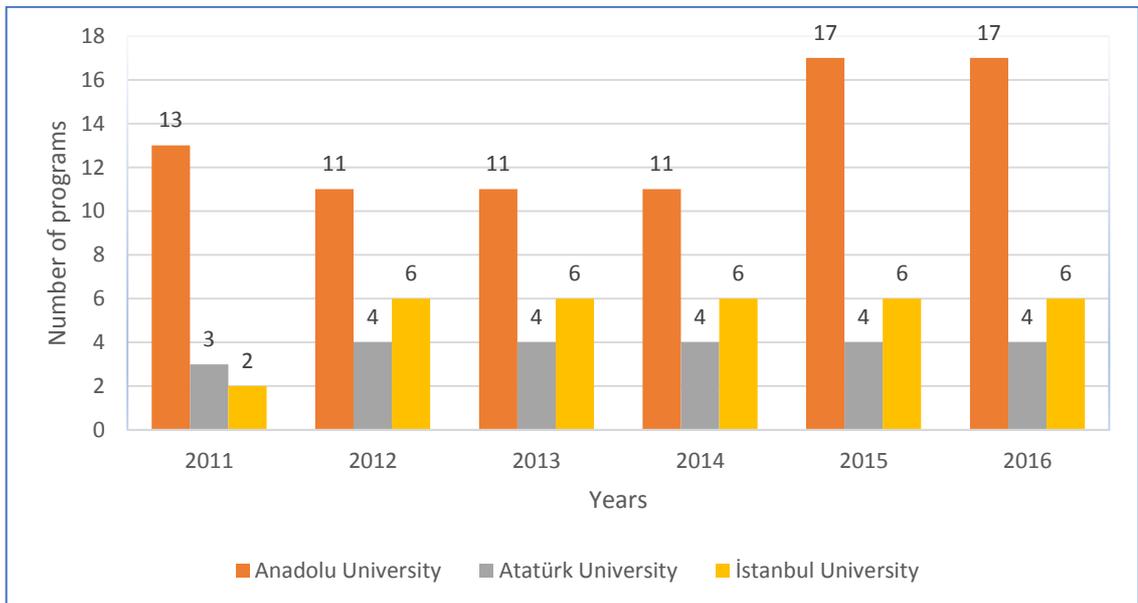


Figure 3. Numerical Development of Undergraduate Programs

Source: Compiled from the Measurement, Selection and Placement System Guidelines for Higher Education Programs and Quotas 1996-2016.

There are more than 400 programs in the traditional university system in Turkey, and three universities offered a total of 27 open education undergraduate programs in 2016, and 19 of which have different content.

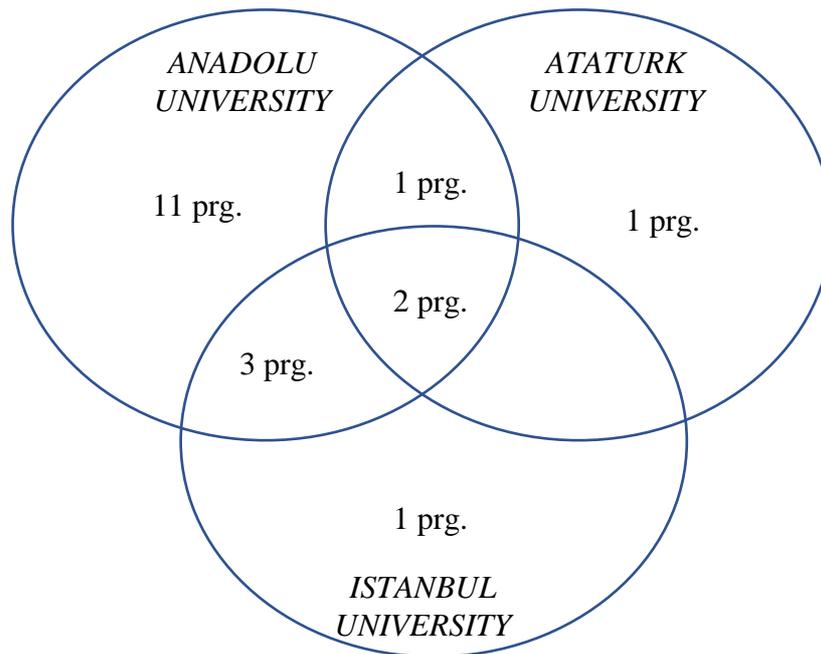


Figure 4: Undergraduate Programs Offered by Universities and their Intersection Numbers

Source: Compiled from the Measurement, Selection and Placement System Guidelines for Higher Education Programs and Quotas 1996-2016.

As can be seen in Figure 4, while Anadolu University offers 11 different programs on its own, Istanbul University and Atatürk University offer one each. There are three common programs in Anadolu University and Istanbul University, two common programs in Anadolu University and Atatürk University, and two common programs in all three universities. This can be regarded as a demonstration of lack of program diversity among universities. In addition, the development of quota rates is another important indicator in the development of undergraduate degree programs.

Table 2: *The Development of Number of Quotas to Open Education Undergraduate Degree Programs*

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Anadolu University	89.000	56.000	38.250	48.750	42.500
Atatürk University	22.000	4.500	5.500	7.000	5.900
Istanbul University	37.000	8.500	8.000	9.500	6.500
Total	148.000	69.000	51.750	65.250	54.900

Source: *Compiled from the Measurement, Selection and Placement System Guidelines for Higher Education Programs and Quotas 1996-2016.*

After 2011, the year when Ataturk University and Istanbul University started to offer their undergraduate programs through open education method, the student quotas of all the programs in three universities were limited. In 2011, most of the programs in Anadolu University accepted students without any quota restrictions. However, after 2012, when restrictions on all programs were introduced, the quota restriction was increasingly applied. In 2014, the number of students registered to programs was nearly one-third of that in 2012. In 2015, the increase in the number of quotas was due to six new undergraduate programs, and in the following year this increase was immediately reversed.

The undergraduate programs offered by the open education method in the three universities are gathered under a single faculty framework, as they are in the associate degree programs. In all three universities, all programs are opened and offered in open education faculties.

5. Conclusion

Open education at the diploma level in higher education in Turkey started in 1982. Since 2011, Atatürk University and Istanbul University started to establish open education faculties and started associate degree and undergraduate programs; and the number of universities offering open education has been three since then. It is important to evaluate the development of associate degree and undergraduate programs offered by the method of open education at all three universities after this year.

In this evaluation, it is seen that the number of programs naturally increases. In fact, Anadolu University has increased the number of its undergraduate and graduate programs significantly in the last ten years. It used to have 15 associate degree and seven undergraduate programs offered by open education method in 2008, and reached 36 associate and 17 undergraduate programs in the year 2016.

Atatürk University, which began with two associate degree and three undergraduate programs in 2011, reached 21 associate degree and 4 undergraduate programs in 2016. Istanbul University started open education with two undergraduate programs, and reached to six associate degree and six undergraduate programs in 2016. Considering the quantitative improvement in the programs, there has been a significant increase in the number of associate degree and undergraduate programs in the last decade.

The increase in the number of programs in the last decade, however, cannot be seen in the diversity of the programs, and in the student numbers in the three universities. Although three universities offer a total of 63 associate and 27 undergraduate programs in 2016, only 42 of the associate and 19 of the undergraduate programs were different from each other. In other words, 21 of the associate degree programs are offered in at least two or three universities, and eight of the undergraduate programs are offered in at least two or three universities. This suggests that the three large, mass open education providers do not have sufficient program diversity.

Considering the improvements in quotas, it seems that quota restrictions are gradually increasing over the years. In 2012, quota restrictions were applied to the entire undergraduate programs. The total quota of 148,000 students granted to undergraduate programs in three universities in 2012 decreased to 54,900 in 2016 despite the increase in the number of programs. Since 2014, quota restrictions have covered all the associate degree programs, just as in the undergraduate programs. Again, in spite of the increase in the number of programs, the quota restriction for open education associate degree programs, which was 136.475 in 2014, was 112.400 in 2016.

Despite quota restrictions, universities continue to introduce new programs. These three universities are expected to focus on different programs, increase their program diversity and teaching quality. Despite the fact that all three universities employ both conventional and open education methods, it is positive that they have positioned open education structures within their organizations and continue to grow within this structure. Seraji's study (2017) can be referred for various educational structures employed by mega universities, such as hybrid and blended learning.

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