



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY: A COMPARISON OF TURKEY AND SOME EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Autonomy is defined as leaving the right of administration to the individuals or institutions. As for the university autonomy, it was studied under the four main headings such as organizational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy in European University Association Reports in 2009 and 2011. In this study, comparisons about organizational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy of universities were made among Turkey and top rated European countries such as England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland in the light of EUA's latest projects. The findings were discussed in accordance with the data obtained from European Commission Report about Bologna process in 2012 in terms of competitiveness of universities. There were significant relationships among the variables such as higher education ratio in the population, employment opportunities of graduates, number of articles published in international indexed journals and academic performance of academics in top rated countries within organizational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy of universities.

Keywords: University autonomy, Financial autonomy, Academic autonomy, Administrative autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

The autonomy can be considered both individual autonomy and institutional autonomy. Autonomy is defined as the right of an individual or institution governing himself according to law. (TDK, 2016). Individual autonomy is described as being self-governed and free to decide on his own decisions (Demirel, 2001). According to administrative law, autonomy is the right of taking decisions without restrictions and applying them freely for an institution (Erdem, 2013). Autonomy is discussed profoundly among academics under the headings of organizational, staffing, financial and academic autonomy (Clark, 2001; Erdem 2013; Estermann & Nokkala 2009; Estermann, Nokkala & Steinel, 2011; Huisman, 2007; Sporn, 2001).

University autonomy is described as universities' capability of setting their own goals, deciding on their administration, recruiting their staff and academics, having a block grant of budget, introducing new programmes freely (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009). Consequently, if ministers, politicians, non-government organizations and other stakeholders interfere in universities' administration, it will damage university autonomy (Sufean & Soaib, 2010).

Stichweh (1994) handles university autonomy in six dimensions;



(i) Universities should take their decisions for the future freely. (ii) Universities are to set their own values and make career plans accordingly (iii) Universities should select administrators according to their own principles. (iv) Universities should be free to select academics and students. (v) Universities should be able to contact with other institutions freely. (vi) Universities must account for all its decisions.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has searched the university autonomy with the sample of 52 universities in 12 OECD countries in 1980. That research aimed to find out how the universities took their decisions about 20 issues, and “an autonomy scale” was formed according to indicators obtained from quantitative results of the research. These indicators were described as follows: (i) Universities should have the right of owning real estates. (ii) Universities should be able to borrow money. (iii) Universities should be able to spend the budget for their needs. (iv) The departments should be able to introduce new programmes and decide on the courses to teach. (v) Universities should have full authority for recruiting staff. (vi) Universities should be able to set the staff salaries. (viii) Academics should be able to search whatever they want (Jadot, 1980). The indicators can be grouped under organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy headings. The researches in the literature examine the university autonomy under organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy (Erdem, 2013; Estermann & Nokkala 2009; Estermann, Nokkala & Steinel, 2011; Olsen & Maassen, 2006; Thorsten, 2007).

European Universities Association (EUA) emphasized institutional autonomy with Glasgow Declaration in 2005. European rectors urged the ministers of their countries to take necessary steps to increase the legal, organisational, and financial autonomy for universities with Glasgow Declaration (Thorsten, 2007). University rectors stated that not only the competition among USA, Asian countries and Europe but the Bologna process also forced the universities to take radical measurements for integration (Olsen & Maassen, 2006).

“University Autonomy in Europe-I Report” published by European Universities Association (EUA) in 2009 reveals that local governments still have authority on universities (University Autonomy-I Report, 2009). The report studies the university autonomy under the headings of organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy, and gives some recommendations for universities to be successful (Estermann & Steinel, 2011).

The report examines 34 European universities for organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy according to more than 30 indicators, and makes the following definitions: (i) Organisational autonomy suggests universities decide on research fields, student number and selection criteria, academic degrees and content. (ii) Financial autonomy suggests universities have their own budget, own real estates, and capability of borrowing money. (iii) Staffing autonomy suggests universities recruit academics, assign all of the personnel freely, and decide on their academic career. (iv) Academic autonomy suggests universities set academic and administrative institutions, and manage them freely (Estermann & Steinel, 2011).

The latest project of European Universities Association (EUA) “University Autonomy in Europe-II, The Scorecard” provided up-to-date data about university autonomy in 2011. This report gives detailed information about university autonomy according to some criteria. It lets us compare universities according to them. The project published a scorecard analysing countries within the framework of indicators. This study aimed to investigate the university autonomy in the light of these reports and make comparisons about institutional autonomy among universities instead of proposing a new model for universities.

Researches about University Autonomy in Europe

University autonomy has been found to be positively correlated with universities’ activities and accomplishments within European education policies. (Aghion, Dewatripont, Hoxby, Mas-Colell & Sapir, 2008; De Boer, Enders, File & Jongbloed, 2010; Olsen, & Maassen, 2006). Universities should have flexible organisations in order to compete with each other in this improving and competitive information age. The researches focused on reforms to be made about organisational and financial autonomy (Bladh, 2007; De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2007). A competitive university is defined as setting its own strategic goals, introducing new programmes, and having a block grant of budget (Sporn, 2002). The Bologna process considers the university autonomy as a precondition of competitive and attractive university. The current findings showed that it hasn’t been achieved yet (Nokkala, 2012).

Autonomy in higher education was studied as university flexibility (Volkwein & Malik, 1997), the limits of autonomy (Berdahl, 1990; Bladh 2007; Estermann & Nokkala, 2009; Estermann, Nokkala & Steinel, 2011), and the applications of autonomy in universities (Dill, 2001). Besides, university autonomy was studied as academic freedom (Romo de la Rosa, 2007) and accountability (Salmi, 2007) dimensions. University autonomy itself has different social, political, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions (Felt & Glanz, 2002; Huisman, 2007). De Boer and others (2010) stated that EU policies implied that accomplishments of universities led to social developments. European Commission reports suggested universities set up close relationships with business markets, and educate qualified personnel for markets (European Commission Report, 2011; European Commission Report 2012).

METHOD

Autonomy is defined as leaving the right of administration to the individuals or institutions. As for the university autonomy, it was studied under four main headings such as organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy in European University Association Reports in 2009 and 2011. England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland were top four countries in EUA's latest project, the "Autonomy Scorecard". Turkey was in the middle or bottom line in the list. In the European policy context, university autonomy is thought to be related to the performance of individual institutions (Estermann ve Nokkala 2009; Estermann, Nokkala ve Steinel, 2011; Olsen ve Maassen, 2006). Many countries have made governance and funding reforms in which autonomy has been a major focus because of recent changes in education (Bladh 2007; De Boer & Goedegebuure 2007; Salmi 2007). The overall adaptiveness and competitiveness of the institutions in higher education depend on the ability of these institutions to decide on their strategic goals, programme offer and the allocation and composition of their funding (Sporn 2002).

The Bologna Process discourse frames university autonomy as a precondition of competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education (Nokkala 2012). Turkey, negotiating with European Union about full membership since 2005, has been making reforms under the heading of education and culture. In this study, comparisons about organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy of universities were made among Turkey and top rated European countries such as England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland in the light of EUA's latest projects. The findings were discussed in accordance with the data obtained from European Commission Report about Bologna process in 2012 in terms of competitiveness of universities.

European University Association (EUA) describes the state of autonomy in the four dimensions of university autonomy in higher education systems in Table 1.

Table 1: University Autonomy Definitions

Organisational Autonomy	Financial Autonomy	Staffing Autonomy	Academic Autonomy
Selection procedure for the executive head	Length and type of public funding	Capacity to decide on recruitment procedures (senior academic/senior administrative staff)	Capacity to decide on overall student numbers
Selection criteria for the executive head	Ability to keep surplus	Capacity to decide on salaries (senior academic/senior administrative staff)	Capacity to select students (BA, MA)
Dismissal of the executive head	Ability to borrow money	Capacity to decide on dismissals (senior academic/senior administrative staff)	Capacity to introduce programmes (BA, MA, PhD)
Term of office of the executive head	Ability to own buildings	Capacity to decide on promotions (senior academic/	Capacity to terminate Programmes

senior administrative staff

Inclusion and selection of external members in governing bodies	Ability to charge tuition fees for national/ EU students (BA, MA, PhD)	Capacity to choose the language of instruction (BA, MA)
Capacity to decide on academic structures	Ability to charge tuition fees for non-EU students (BA, MA, PhD)	Capacity to select quality assurance mechanisms and providers
Capacity to create legal entities		Capacity to design content of degree programmes

Results and Interpretation

According to "Autonomy Scorecard" results in European University Association Report 2011, the top countries and Turkey were shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Autonomy Scorecard

Country	Organisational Autonomy	Financial Autonomy	Staffing Autonomy	Academic Autonomy
England	100	90	96	97
Estonia	82	93	100	92
Ireland	80	73	82	100
Finland	91	42	92	88
Turkey	29	44	59	51

Results revealed that England was top country for organisational autonomy (X=100), Estonia was top country for financial autonomy (X=93) and staffing autonomy (X=100), Ireland was top country for academic autonomy (X=100) in the scorecard. Turkey was at the bottom in all dimensions of university autonomy scorecard.

Organisational Autonomy

Organisational autonomy was defined as universities setting their own organisational framework and deciding on their administrative units in European Universities Association 2009 and 2011 reports. These reports revealed that universities in Europe governed their academic and administrative units, but selection and assignment of executive heads were fulfilled according to legal procedures.

The selection procedures for the rector varied from country to country. The findings about selection procedures were shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Selection Procedures for the Rector

Country	The selection of the rector may have to be validated by an external authority .	The selection of the rector doesn't have to be validated by an external authority .
England		☐
Estonia		☐
Ireland		☐
Finland		☐
Turkey	☐	

The executive heads of universities, the rectors, had to be validated in Turkey by Higher Education Council (YÖK). The president in Turkey assigned the rector. However, this is not true for all other countries.

The findings about provisions regarding the qualification requirements for rectors were shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The Qualification Requirements For Rectors

Country	Qualification requirements for the rector are specified by law.	Qualification requirements for the rector are not specified by law.
England		☒
Estonia	☒	
Ireland		☒
Finland	☒	
Turkey	☒	

In Estonia, Finland, and Turkey, qualification requirements for the rector were specified by law. England and Ireland didn't have such a law.

The findings about term of office and dismissal of the executive were shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Term of Office and Dismissal of the Executive Head

Country	The rector's term of office is stated by university.	The rector's term of office is stated in the law.
England	☒	
Estonia		☒
Ireland		☒
Finland		☒
Turkey		☒

The term of office of rectors varied from country to country. It was for 4 years in Turkey, 5 years in Estonia and Finland, 10 years in Ireland. The term of office of rectors in England was stated by university organisations. The findings about determining internal academic structures were shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Determining Internal Academic Structures.

Country	Free to determine their internal academic structures.	A higher council determines their internal academic structures.
England	☒	
Estonia	☒	
Ireland	☒	
Finland	☒	
Turkey		☒

Most European countries in the report were free to determine their internal structures while others had flexible regulations about it. However, the integral structure of universities in Turkey was determined by Higher Education Council (YÖK).

The capacity to create independent legal entities enables universities to implement their strategies in a flexible and adequate way and hence to carry out their main missions. The findings about creating independent legal entities were shown in Table 7.

Table 7: The Capacity to Create Independent Legal Entities

Country	Universities can create profit and not-for-profit legal entities	Universities can only create not-for-profit legal entities
England	☑	
Estonia	☑	
Ireland	☑	
Finland	☑	
Turkey		☑

18 countries had freedom to create profit and not-for-profit legal entities in European Universities Association (EUA) report, 2011. Other countries like Turkey could only create not-for-profit legal entities.

There are two main types of governance structures: dual and unitary. In some systems, universities had a dual structure including a board or council, which is usually limited in size, and a senate. Others only had a senate. The findings about types of governance were shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Structure of Governing Bodies

Country	Council or Senate	Only Senate
England	☑	
Estonia		☑
Ireland		☑
Finland	☑	
Turkey		☑

Universities in England and Finland were governed by dual system, whereas universities in Estonia, Ireland, and Turkey were governed by a unitary system.

The findings about inclusion of external members in governance were shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Inclusion of External Members in Governance

Country	Includes external members	Doesn't include external members
England	☑	
Estonia	☑	
Ireland	☑	
Finland	☑	
Turkey		☑

Inclusion of external members is an important issue for organisational autonomy. England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland had external members. It was prohibited for state universities in Turkey to include an external member in governance. Private universities had no restrictions in Turkey, though.

Financial Autonomy

Another dimension of university autonomy is financial autonomy. Financial autonomy is closely related to organisational autonomy, staffing autonomy, and academic autonomy. Financial autonomy includes capacity of taking strategic decisions about student tuitions, staff salaries, owning real estates and other financial issues. The findings about public funding modalities were shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Public Funding Modalities

Country	Block grant	Line-item budget
England	?	
Estonia	?	
Ireland	?	
Finland	?	
Turkey		?

In a majority of countries, universities receive their funding in the form of block grants. In some systems, line-item budgets are still used, and institutions are thus unable to shift funds between budget lines. Turkey had a line-item budget system. The universities in England, Estonia and Finland could transfer the rest of the fund used in a year to the next, but the universities in Ireland had to return it. In Turkey, universities could transfer the rest of the fund used in a year to the next with the approval of Education Ministry.

Many countries in the report could borrow money. The findings about ability to borrow money were shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Ability to Borrow Money

Country	Can borrow without restrictions	Can borrow with approval of external authority	Can only borrow up to a maximum percentage	Cannot borrow (State Universities)
England		????		
Estonia	???			
Ireland			????	
Finland	???			
Turkey				????

The findings about ability to sell university-owned real estate were shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Ability to sell university-owned real estate

Country	Universities can sell real estate without restrictions	Universities can sell real estate with some restrictions
England	????????	
Estonia		?
Ireland		?
Finland		?
Turkey		?

The ability for universities to sell university-owned real estate is closely related to institutional autonomy about setting strategic goals and implementing them. Only the universities in England could sell university-owned real estate without restrictions.

The findings about setting tuition fees were shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Setting Tuition Fees

Country	Tuition fees	No fees
England	??????	
Estonia		
Ireland		?

Finland
Turkey

☐

The issue of student contributions is related to universities' financial autonomy. If universities' had the ability to set fees and decide on their level, it would ensure their financial capacity.

The findings about tuition fees at Bachelor and Master Levels were shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Tuition Fees at Bachelor and Master Levels

Country	Universities free to set tuition fees	Cooperation universities/ external authority	Fees set by law or external authority	No fees
England				
	Bachelor			
	Master			
Estonia				
	Bachelor			
	Master			
Ireland				
	Bachelor			
	Master			
Finland				
	Bachelor			
	Master			
Turkey				
	Bachelor			
	Master			

Staffing Autonomy

Staffing autonomy includes payment and employment of staff by universities or government. According to reports, the decisions on individual salaries are still largely controlled by the government. The findings about restrictions on senior academic staff recruitment were shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Restrictions on Senior Academic Staff Recruitment

Country	Universities are essentially free to recruit their own academic staff	All senior academic staff is regulated by an external authority
England	☐	
Estonia	☐	
Ireland	☐	
Finland	☐	
Turkey		☐

In England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland, universities are essentially free to recruit their own academic staff, whereas all senior academic staff is regulated by Higher Education Council (YÖK).

The findings about staff salaries were shown in Table 16.

Tablo 16: Staff Salaries

Country	Universities set staff salaries	Staff salaries are set by university and a council	Staff salaries are set by Ministry
England		☐	
Estonia	☐		
Ireland		☐	
Finland		☐	
Turkey			☐

In most of the countries, staff salaries are set by the government. The academic staff in Finland, Ireland and Turkey are employed by the government. The universities in England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland can promote their academic staff if they approve. In Turkey, academics can be promoted if the ministry approves and opens an academic position for him.

Academic Autonomy

Academic autonomy includes introducing new programmes, deciding on the content of these degree programmes, and on the overall number of students for these programmes according to European Universities Association (EUA) reports.

The findings about capacity to decide on overall student numbers were shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Capacity to Decide on Overall Student Numbers

Country	University decides	University and a council decides	A council decides
England		☐	
Estonia	☐		
Ireland		☐	
Finland		☐	
Turkey			☐

In Turkey, Higher Education Council (YÖK) decides on the overall student numbers for each degree programme. The findings about capacity to select students were shown in Table 18.

Table 18: Capacity to Select Students

Country	University sets the admission criteria	University and a council set the admission criteria
England	☐	
Estonia	☐	
Ireland	☐	
Finland	☐	
Turkey		☐

In Turkey, there is a cooperation between universities and Higher Education Council (YÖK) about setting admission criteria for programmes. The findings about introduction of academic programmes were shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Introduction of Academic Programmes

Country	Universities can open degree programmes without prior accreditation:	New programmes must be submitted to accreditation to be introduced	A higher council approval required
England	☐		
Estonia		☐	
Ireland	☐		
Finland		☐	
Turkey			☐

In Turkey, Higher Education Council (YÖK) approval is required for introduction of new academic programmes.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the university autonomy was discussed under the headings of organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy according to European Universities Association (EUA) reports in 2009 and 2011. Turkey was compared to four top countries, England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland, in the European Universities Association latest Project, The University Autonomy Scorecard. There were significant relationships among the variables such as higher education ratio in the population, employment opportunities of graduates, number of articles published in international indexed journals and academic performance of academists between top rated countries and Turkey in terms of organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy of universities.

As for organisational autonomy, institutions are relatively free to decide on their administrative structures in the majority of countries in Europa. In terms of financial autonomy, universities receive their funding in the form of block grants. In some systems, line-item budgets are still used, and institutions are thus unable to shift funds between budget lines. In many European systems, universities can collect tuition fees or administrative charges from at least a part of the student population. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these fees reflect a significant contribution to the costs of education or an important form of income. In most cases, additional limitations are placed on the ability of universities to set fees as a means of generating income. In some countries, universities are gaining greater flexibility in dealing with staffing issues, as staff is being paid and/or employed directly by the university rather than by the government. However, the decisions on individual salaries are still to a large degree controlled by the government. In a majority of European countries, universities are essentially free to develop their academic profile, although restrictions remain in other areas of academic autonomy. The introduction of new programmes usually requires some form of approval by the relevant ministry or by another public authority and is often tied to budget negotiations, which demonstrates the interdependence of different dimensions of autonomy. Universities are generally free to close programmes independently; only in a small number of systems does this matter have to be negotiated with the pertinent ministry. (Estermann & Steinel, 2011).

University autonomy is stated as to be closely related to the university attractiveness and effectiveness in recent studies (European Commission Report, 2011; European Commission Report 2012). Employment rates are taken into consideration in these studies for comparison. Turkey has the highest rates dealing with the unemployment individuals aged between 25-34 in the reports. According to findings, individuals can find a job more easily in top rated countries in University Autonomy Scorecard index such as England, Estonia, Ireland and Finland than Turkey. The graduates from financially autonomous universities in European countries with educational quality control systems are more qualified (European Commission Report, 2011).

Universities in the world are also ranked according to some objective indicators, including the number of alumni and staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, number of highly cited researchers selected by Thomson Reuters, number of articles published in journals of Nature and Science, number of articles indexed in Science Citation Index - Expanded and Social Sciences Citation Index, and per capita performance of a



university. The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) was first published in June 2003 by the Center for World-Class Universities (CWCU), Graduate School of Education (formerly the Institute of Higher Education) of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China, and updated on an annual basis. More than 1200 universities are actually ranked by ARWU every year and the best 500 are published. According to data of 2015, England was top ranked with 37 universities in the top 500 universities worldwide. Finland with 6 and Ireland with 3 universities were also in the list. Turkey had only one university in the top 500 universities worldwide (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2015). The findings in many studies show that autonomy is a key factor for attractive, effective and successful universities.

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