

FACULTY SUPPORT FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN CAPPADOCIA REGION

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Abstract: In this presentation, we would like to discuss the findings of a research project (NEUBAP13S20) about the faculty support for quality enhancement activities at nine universities around Cappadocia region. 233 questionnaires were gathered from faculty members who are employed at four year faculties. The question form included three seven-point Likert style sub-scales which were used to measure the expected institutional and individual benefits of the quality enhancement activities (12 items), opinions about the establishment and employment of quality and performance indicators (13 items), and the existence of an internal/external assessment culture (11 items). Group comparison tests show that support for quality enhancement activities are significantly different among faculty members according to academic titles, disciplinary differences, gender, and administrative roles. We believe these findings should be considered in efforts to strengthen organizational support for quality enhancement policies.

Key words: Quality enhancement, faculty support, Cappadocia

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1970s and 1980s, higher education institutions have had to meet the challenges of adapting to the changing environment on a global scale. The multi-faceted challenges brought about by massification, democratization, and decreasing public funding were to be solved by diversifying income sources and efficiency on the one hand, while on the other hand being responsive to the demands of stakeholders including the economic institutions, the students, and the governments of the countries concerned (Altbach et al., 2009; Trow, 1996). All of the stakeholders had their own agendas besides the commonly shared desire for quality. Governments aimed to assert greater control, employers demanded more qualified and skilled employees, national and international institutions such as UNESCO, WTO, WB, IMF, EU and OECD were encouraging global competitiveness, the students wanted to be equipped with the necessary skills to have a chance in an increasingly tough labour market, and the invisible hand of supply side economics demanded further marketization of higher education (ie. Barkholt, 2004; Gayle et al., 2003; OECD, 1999; Johnstone et al., 1998).

The reforms which took place as a response to the above mentioned challenges, to varying degrees, created spaces outside the traditional exchanges between states and universities (as well as between governments and public administration) which had previously not existed in the Humboltian university model. However, the background rhetoric posed problems of accountability, auditability, transparency, quality assurance, efficiency, and governance, all flourishing within this unexplored area, and constructed differently in various higher education systems depending on the power relations both between and within the political, economic, and social structures (Power, 1996; Rose, 1991; Braun, 1999). The outcomes of this interplay among actors were manifested in new higher education laws, new governmental and nongovernmental buffer bodies (Huisman & Currie, 2004), new organizational structures, bylaws, funding mechanisms, guidelines of quality assurance and standardization and not the least, local resistances (Marginson & Considine, 2000: 64; Hansen & Borum, 1999). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, almost all OECD countries reformed their higher education systems in order to include external actors in university governance, while also strengthening the managerial capacities of leaders.

Some of the Turkish higher education institutions also responded to external pressures by introducing quality assurance systems in early 1990s (Gürüz, 1999). The first significant attempt at establishing a quality system

emerged among the engineering faculties, which was based on external assessment and accreditation of the American ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). During 1994-2004, 33 Engineering programs at three universities have been accredited by this institution. Some medical faculties soon established their own accreditation council and between 2002 and 2014, 33 universities applied for external evaluation within the frame of EUA’s Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA, 2014). Since 1990s, there have also been efforts to establish quality assurance systems on departmental or faculty level, mainly within the frame of industrial models (e.g. ISO standards, EFQM).

The second important initiative was an attempt to import the British model of higher education in 1997. A pilot project was carried out in 13 departments from 8 universities in collaboration with the British Council with the aim of establishing a national external quality assessment mechanism. The project was funded by a loan from the World Bank, and the emphasis was on ensuring quality in teaching and research in relation to increased accountability. The aim of the project was ‘to raise academic standards in the universities, and to establish a system based on departmental self-evaluations for teaching and submission in agreed formats to expert panels for research’. Furthermore, there were plans to link this system to a ‘demand-driven formula-funding mechanism for higher education’. It was planned to implement the main project, which was to be improved with the help of the results of the pilot, with the help of another loan from the World Bank (Billing & Thomas, 2000). However, this did not happen.

After five years, in 2002, a bylaw prepared by the CHE for Academic Evaluation and Quality Control at Institutions of Higher Education, was put into force. However, these regulations were based on self-evaluation only, and the universities were left to decide their own evaluation procedures. There were no signs of external assessment or peer review. Although there was a super-commission elected by the Inter University Board (IUB) to set minimum requirements, the consequences of negative reports were almost negligible, and were even not mentioned in the section on quality assurance in the draft report of CHE 2006. The bylaw was much weaker than one would anticipate considering the experiences of accreditation and the 1997 project.

Finally, in 2005, the ‘Academic Assessment and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education Institutions’ regulation was enacted, envisioning a quality assurance system required by the Bologna Process by 2007. The Guide Book of the Commission of Academic Assessment and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education Institutions (abbr. CAAQDHE) illustrates the “strategic quality management” scheme which was to be built. According to afore mentioned regulation, the universities have to prepare their strategic plans within the frame of the strategic plan of the Council of Higher Education (abbr. CHE), which in turn should be in line with higher level governmental policy documents. Strategic plans of higher education institutions blend strategies, quality enhancement processes, performance monitoring, and finally budget allocations (CAAQDHE, 2007). These connections can be seen on Figure 1 which shows the main frame of strategic planning and quality enhancement activities at the higher education institutions (CAAQDHE, 2007).

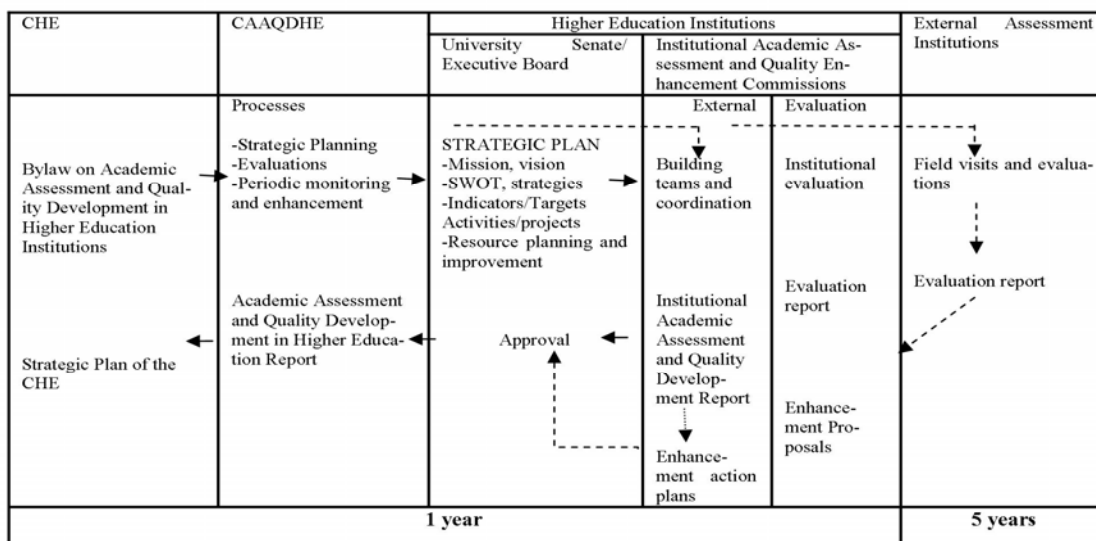


Figure 1 Road Map of Academic Assessment and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education Institutions

The implications of this top-down “strategic quality management” approach remain to be seen, and there seem to be uncertainties and reluctance among the universities about how to establish a quality assurance system which is tightly interwoven in strategic plans. There are also uncertainties at higher levels of higher education system. After our survey was finished, CHE decided to abolish CAAQDHE and to establish a new commission within the CHE called the Qualifications, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Commission. According to the chairman of the CHE, there is need to establish an administrative and functional structure within CHE to summon all activities about quality under a single umbrella (www.aa.com.tr, 2014). This commission is now preparing another bylaw in line with the EU Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Whether the above presented road map will still be effective is not clear yet.

Although legal and institutional design of quality enhancement and assurance is still in the making in Turkey, there is also need to pay attention to other dimensions of establishing a quality culture in higher education institutions. Among other big problems of organizational change, one of the most important problems about embedding a quality assurance system at higher education institutions may be considered as the possible lack of institutional and individual support for quality enhancement/assurance activities.

An overview of literature about quality enhancement and assessment provides clues about institutional and individual resistances against introduction and implementation of quality related processes. In case of Turkey, one can also add country specific problems about establishing a quality assurance system. For instance, David Billing and Harold Thomas (2000), members of the UK consultant group for the project, provided an overview of the main challenges facing the application of a foreign quality system in a very different national setting. They categorized three main groups of practical difficulties. The first group consisted of cultural differences which included, among others, the lack of prior quality culture, and the nature of the relationships among academics. They noted that academics were not used to peer assessment and, in some cases, this was seen as an erosion of academic autonomy. Another cultural restraint was that personal acquaintance played an important role in the processes of assessments and expert panels. Thus critical objectivity was hard to achieve. The second group of problems included structural and political issues. The strict line-item budgeting and non-participatory decision making caused reluctance to internalize quality measures or to put efforts on a staff level and the role of the CHE in the process was met with some degree of resistance. The authors have called the third group technical issues. But the cited problems are more than purely technical, including the suspicions against the CHE, the establishment of a quality system, the definition of standardised objectives which would allow national comparison and restrict diversity, or dependence on performance indicators. In a later study, Tonbul (2008:656) stated that the faculty members were critical of the role of CHE, IUB, and purely administrative boards in determining quality assessment and planning activities.

This paper deals with the faculty members’ support for quality enhancement activities at higher education institutions. We believe there is lack of empirical findings in the literature about the institutional support for quality related activities on faculty level in Turkey, and we hope our study may provide a small contribution to fill this gap. In the following sections we explain the methodology of our study and present the key findings of the analysis.

Methodology

In this paper, we would like to discuss the findings of a research project (NEUBAP13S20) about the faculty support for quality enhancement activities in nine universities around Cappadocia region. Within the frame of this project, 233 questionnaires (out of 1638 faculty members) were gathered from faculty members who are employed at four year faculties around Cappadocia Region. The questionnaire included a Support for Quality Enhancement Activities scale which was developed by the authors. The scale included three seven-point Likert style sub-scales which were used to measure the expected institutional and individual benefits of the quality enhancement activities (12 items), opinions about the establishment and employment of quality and performance indicators (13 items), and the existence of an internal/external assessment culture (11 items). The scale items were derived from the literature about the resistances against quality assurance/enhancement activities, and the findings of the prior studies about quality assurance activities at the Turkish higher education institutions. Data were weighted according to academic titles to better reflect the population. Weighted descriptive statistics of the scales are presented in Table 1, the descriptive statistics of the scale items are provided in Table 3.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha Values of the Scales

	Items	Mean	SD	α
Support for quality enhancement activities (Total)	36	4,86	,70491	,910
Expected institutional and individual benefits of the quality enhancement activities	12	5,29	,91486	,880
Opinions about establishment and employment of quality and performance indicators	13	4,68	,76255	,788
Existence of an internal/external assessment culture	11	4,62	,78282	,737

Mean age of the respondents is 43. Average duration of service in academy is 17 years, while average service length in the affiliated institution is approximately 10 years. Information about the respondents can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Properties of the Respondents

GENDER	Frequency	Percent	Weighted Percent
Female	40	17,2	21,9
Male	193	82,8	78,1
TITLE			
Professor	69	29,6	15,4
Assoc. Prof.	69	29,6	16,7
Assist. Prof.	95	40,8	67,9
ADMINISTRATOR			
Yes	108	46,4	42,5
No	125	53,6	57,5
ACTIVE ROLE IN QUALITY ENHANCEMENT			
Yes	51	22,1	19,8
No	180	77,9	80,2

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and frequency statistics of scale items are provided in Table 3. The findings are discussed in the discussion section. (1=Totally disagree, 2= Disagree to a great extend, 3=Disagree, 4=Neither disagree or disagree, 5=Agree, 6=Agree to a great extend, 7=Totally agree)

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of the Scale Items

Expected Benefits	Mean	SD	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	6(%)	7(%)
Quality enhancement activities increase the motivation of the faculty to develop themselves.	5,1013	1,60015	3,1	4,4	10,1	11,5	27,3	19,8	23,8
Faculty works more productively with the quality enhancement activities.	5,1542	1,43534	1,3	3,1	9,3	15,4	28,2	21,6	21,1
Quality enhancement activities produce positive results for the students.	5,4159	1,39029	2,2	1,8	4,4	12,8	26,5	27,0	25,2
These activities only increase the faculty's administrative work load.	3,7920	1,75528	13,3	12,4	17,3	20,8	18,6	10,6	7,1
Quality enhancement activities develop international relations of my institution.	5,3839	1,24379	,4	1,3	5,4	15,6	27,7	28,6	21,0
Quality enhancement activities increase international student mobility at my institution.	5,4071	1,29366	,9	3,1	4,0	11,5	27,9	32,3	20,4
Quality enhancement activities develop relations with the external share holders.	5,4185	1,29540	1,3	1,3	5,3	12,8	26,4	31,3	21,6

Quality enhancement activities nourish social bonds among the faculty members.	5,2301	1,34996	1,8	2,2	5,3	17,3	26,5	29,2	17,7
The efforts about quality enhancement activities are not worth of the possible benefits.	2,8546	1,80486	31,7	18,9	18,5	9,3	10,1	7,5	4,0
Quality enhancement activities provide important contributions in the long term.	5,6933	1,21347	,4	1,3	3,6	8,4	26,7	28,4	31,1
Quality enhancement activities increase the competitiveness of my institution.	5,4444	1,52882	2,2	2,2	8,4	9,8	24,0	20,0	33,3
These activities cause conflict among faculty members.	3,1013	1,78076	26,9	14,5	19,4	15,4	11,9	8,4	3,5
Indicators			1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	6(%)	7(%)
Faculty must be evaluated with quality assessment and performance indicators.	4,9912	1,58883	4,0	4,4	7,5	18,1	23,5	23,5	19,0
Faculty should feel responsibility to achieve quality and performance targets.	5,3894	1,39481	,9	3,5	6,2	11,5	25,7	27,4	24,8
It is difficult to develop quality and performance indicators in my discipline.	4,0356	1,73426	7,6	16,4	13,8	20,0	20,4	12,9	8,9
I do not think that quality and performance indicators are fair.	4,3214	1,51355	6,7	4,9	12,5	30,4	23,2	15,6	6,7
Quality and performance indicators guide the studies of the faculty.	5,2054	1,29945	2,7	1,3	4,5	15,2	29,5	34,4	12,5
Quality and performance indicators help to institutional development.	5,3857	1,26426	,4	1,8	6,7	12,6	26,5	32,3	19,7
The administrators arrange activities to explain quality and performance aims to the faculty.	4,4711	1,50899	5,3	5,8	11,6	22,7	31,6	14,7	8,4
The students would not be objective when evaluating education activities.	3,9367	1,50622	8,6	9,0	14,5	33,5	22,2	6,8	5,4
A consensus is sought to develop quality and performance indicators.	4,3991	1,46349	6,7	4,0	9,9	28,3	29,6	16,1	5,4
Faculty members adopt the employment of quality and performance indicators for assessment.	4,4664	1,43868	5,4	4,9	10,8	23,8	31,4	19,3	4,5
It is fair to use quality and performance indicators to distribute resources.	4,4622	1,48494	5,8	4,4	11,6	24,9	29,8	16,4	7,1
I develop proposals in developing quality and performance indicators.	4,6771	1,46852	4,0	4,0	11,7	18,8	33,6	17,5	10,3
Quality and performance indicators may be used to keep the faculty under control.	3,6009	1,76997	16,1	15,2	13,9	22,9	17,0	8,5	6,3
Internal and External Assessment Culture			1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	6(%)	7(%)
Monitoring faculty members may provide positive results.	4,8705	1,57224	4,0	4,5	8,9	20,1	24,6	21,4	16,5
Internal and external assessments damages academic autonomy.	3,1429	1,61193	21,4	13,8	24,6	21,0	10,3	6,3	2,7
The faculties in my institutions are used to being evaluated.	3,7768	1,58304	10,3	12,9	16,1	28,6	17,4	11,2	3,6
Quality assurance activities harm the privacy between the faculty and the students.	3,1467	1,63685	21,3	15,6	20,4	26,2	6,2	6,7	3,6
Evaluation of the faculty members by external agents is important to provide objectiveness.	4,8978	1,44952	1,8	5,3	8,0	21,8	27,1	21,3	14,7
I would not like being assessed by a colleague.	3,8259	1,80459	15,6	8,5	16,5	24,1	16,5	9,8	8,9
I would not be bothered to have my activities evaluated.	5,2800	1,61101	2,7	3,6	9,3	13,3	19,6	21,8	29,8
Uncertainties about how the results of internal and external assessments are wide spread.	4,4711	1,45783	2,7	8,0	8,4	36,0	20,4	14,2	10,2
Academic profession is not suitable for constant monitoring.	3,5893	1,68376	13,4	16,5	17,0	22,8	16,1	9,8	4,5
It is natural that the activities of the faculty to be monitored.	5,0578	1,41776	1,3	3,1	10,7	16,0	28,4	23,1	17,3
Evaluation by international agencies is not appropriate.	3,5938	1,62109	17,4	7,6	14,7	33,5	14,7	9,4	2,7

In the second step of analysis, the data acquired from the questionnaires were analyzed with independent t tests and ANOVA tests to identify significant differences among respondent groups. Tests results are presented in the following sub-sections.

Academic Titles

The findings of the one way ANOVA test which was used to examine differences among respondents based on academic titles suggest that there is significant effect of academic title on support for quality enhancement activities [F (2,1695)= 16.65, p=.00]. Dunnett T3 test was used for post hoc comparison of support for quality assurance activities. It was found that the assistant professors (M=4.87, SD=0.63) supported quality assurance activities more than professors (M=4.68, SD=0.70) and associate professors (M=4.66, SD=0.73).

Disciplinary Differences

Differences among academics who worked at different faculties were also examined with one way ANOVA test. Six types of faculties were included in this analysis: faculty of economics and administrative sciences, faculty of education, faculty of science and letters, faculty of architecture and engineering, medical sciences (medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry were combined), and faculty of theology. Medicine faculty of Erciyes University was excluded due to administrative reasons. Approximately 90% of the respondents were employed at these faculties. Results showed that the type of faculty has a significant effect on the responses of the faculty members about support for quality enhancement activities [F (5, 1520)= 22.87, p=.00]. Results revealed that the academics who were employed at the medical sciences faculties (M=5, SD=0.62) supported quality assurance activities more than those at the other faculties while the members of theology faculties (M=4.26, SD=0.59) had the lowest scores in support for quality assurance activities.

Gender

Independent samples t-test results showed that there were significant differences between female and male respondents about support for quality assurance activities. Females (M=4.73, SD= 0.50) reported lower level of support for quality assurance activities than males (M=4.82, SD= 0.70); t (1697)= -2.30, p= .022.

Administrators versus non-administrators

The independent samples t-tests which aimed to compare the answers of the administrators and non-administrators showed that the administrators differed significantly from non-administrator faculty members. They had more support for quality assurance activities (M=4.92, SD= 0.68) than non-administrators (M=4.72, SD= 0.64).

Active Role in Determining Quality Enhancement Policies

The test result revealed that those who play an active role in determining quality enhancement policies differed significantly from those who do not. Their support is higher (M=5,07, SD=0,80) than faculty members who are not part of quality enhancement activities (M=4,73, SD=0,61).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that faculty members have positive views about quality enhancement activities at their institutions. This is most evident in the responds about expected individual and institutional benefits. For example 86% of the respondents agreed with the expression “Quality enhancement activities provide important contributions in the long term”. Almost 81% of the respondents thought that quality enhancement activities may increase international student mobility, while 79% agreed that these activities may improve relations with external shareholders. In addition to students and the institution, the respondents also believed that quality enhancement activities may support individual development. 71% of the respondents agreed that quality enhancement activities may increase motivation and productivity. However, it should also be emphasized that, when neutral responses are included, 57% on the respondents also believe that these activities only increase administrative workload.

The responses to the items on the scale about development and employment of quality and/or performance indicators require closer attention. Actually, a great number of the faculty members agree that the faculty should feel responsibility to achieve quality and performance targets (78%). They also think that the quality/performance indicators may act as a guide for academic studies (76%), and may contribute institutional development (78%). However, there seem to be problems associated with development and employment of quality and/or performance indicators. 42% of the respondents think that it is difficult to develop these indicators in their own discipline. When combined with neutral answers, this percentage increases to 62%. More importantly, there seem to be largely shared concern about the fairness of indicators. 45% of the respondents did not think that indicators are fair, while this percentage is 76% when combined with neutral answers. Student evaluations also seem to lack confidence. When combined with neutral answers 66% does not agree that the students may be objective in evaluating faculty members.

An examination of the sub-scale on internal and external assessment culture reveals important issues. The items on this scale produced higher numbers of neutral answers than the other two sub-scale items. On the hand the majority of the respondents (71%) do not feel uncomfortable about being evaluated, and they think it is natural to have their activities be monitored (69%). 62% of the respondents also agreed that monitoring faculty members activities may provide positive outcomes. External evaluation agents are considered beneficial in providing objective assessments (63%), although international agencies seem to suffer a lower degree of acceptance with 40% of the respondents. These findings suggest that the faculty members are not hostile about internal / external assessments. But there also seem to be widespread uncertainties about how the results of internal and external assessments will be used. 45% of the respondents agreed that there are uncertainties about the employment of assessment, while this percentage increases to 81% with neutral answers. It seems there is need to better communicate with the faculty members on quality enhancement activities. With neutral answers included, 45% does not feel they are well informed about quality and performance targets, while 49% of the respondents do not agree that quality enhancement activities were based on mutual consensus.

The statistical analysis of the data revealed significant differences based on academic titles, disciplinary differences, gender, role in determining quality enhancement policies, and administrative role among the faculty members. According to the test results, it could be claimed that the assistant professors support quality enhancement activities more than their senior colleagues. We believe that this is an important finding, since assistant professors make up almost %65 of the study's population. One could argue that the attitudes of assistant professors may facilitate quality enhancement activities. But, it should be reminded that senior faculty members, and especially the professors, are more powerful and influential in administrative and academic boards of higher education institutions. From this perspective, we believe that it is important to involve senior faculty members in identifying quality enhancement policies.

Disciplinary differences should also be considered in building institutional support for quality enhancement activities. The findings of this study indicate that faculties of medical sciences, architecture and engineering are more supportive about quality enhancement activities. It could be recommended to introduce new or revised quality enhancement activities at these faculties first.

The differences between the administrators and non-administrators are significant. It is evident that the faculty members who have administrative roles have more positive views about their institutions. This could simply be the result of the bias of the administrators who believe it is a part of their role to support quality assurance activities. Although one could argue that the high ratio of administrators (46%) may be considered as favorable for building institutional support, the discrepancy between the administrators and non-administrators may also indicate an adverse effect of the top-down approach. This top-down approach is also evident in the ratio of those who have active roles (22%) in determining quality enhancement policies.

Although the findings of this study provide clues which could be beneficial in determining institutional strategies to foster support for quality enhancement activities, it must be reminded that this study was limited to nine universities and only included professors, associate professors, and assistant professors who are employed at four year faculties. Higher education institutions in Turkey vary to a great extent with older and younger universities which have different priorities, budget sizes, number of students, legal status, and numbers of academic and administrative staff. So, there is need to increase the number of empirical studies about the factors effecting the attitudes of the faculty members to achieve informed progress in building institutional support for quality enhancement activities.

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