

Perceptions of Turkish academics about their influence on institutional decisions and policies

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Introduction

- The level of academics' influence on institutional policies and their involvement in decision making processes has been an important discussion in higher education literature during the last few decades.
- Historically, many universities have adopted a governance system where academics are heavily involved in decision making. However, this traditional approach has been criticized for being slow to respond to the rapid changes of the 21st century (Birnbaum, 2004; Stensaker & Vabø, 2013).

Introduction

- With the increasing influence of New Public Management (NPM) in higher education sector, academic involvement into decision making processes has declined and top-down decision making has become more popular.
- Concerns have been raised about lack of academic involvement into the decision making processes since it is linked to academics' level of trust towards leadership, level of ownership and sense of belonging, level of inter-connectedness etc. (Kezar, 2004).

Introduction

- Although NPM has impacted many higher education systems around the world, legal boundaries, academic traditions, institutional and individual factors might impact the level of academics' influence on decision making and key institutional policies in different contexts.
- This study therefore investigates the academics' level of influence on key policies at different institutional levels in Turkish context, where the issue has not been investigated before.

Research questions

RQ.1: To what extent do the academics have influence on shaping key academic policies at their department, faculty and institution?

RQ.2: Which individual and institutional factors predict academics' influence on shaping key academic policies at their department, faculty and institution?

Turkish Context

- Turkey provides an important case since the governance of public higher education institutions has not changed significantly over the last 40 years and almost all institutional managers still have academic background.
- Although the higher education system in Turkey is very centralized and institutions are governed based on the rules and regulations of Council of Higher Education (CoHE), top management of institutions (Rector, Vice rectors, Deans, etc.) still has some room to shape institutional policies.

Methodology

- *Research design*: Correlational survey (Creswell, 2009)
- *Target population*: 158,098 academics employed in Turkish higher education institutions in the 2017-2018 academic year (YÖK, 2018)
- *APIKS TR Sample*: 1810 academics from diverse titles and institutions (e.g. public-foundation; established-younger, geographical region)
- *Sample for this research*: 1737 academics (after data cleaning; e.g. not applicable responses in F1, F2, F3, other titles, missing values, etc.)

Variable		Distribution of participants									
Gender	Male		Female								
	f	%	f	%							
	875	50.4	862	49.6							
Discipline	STEM		Medicine and health sciences		Non-STEM						
	f	%	f	%	f	%					
	608	35.0	387	22.3	742	42.7					
Title	Prof.		Assoc. Prof.		Assist. Prof.		Res. Assist.		Lecturer		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
	387	22.3	393	22.6	490	28.2	309	17.8	158	9.1	
University type	Public		Foundation								
	f	%	f	%							
	1,480	85.2	257	14.8							
Institution's date of establishment	pre-1992		1992-2005		Post-2005						
	f	%	f	%	f	%					
	870	50.1	491	28.3	396	21.6					

Data collection and analysis

- Data was collected online in the 2017-2018 academic year.
- Questions analyzed: F1_1, F1_2, F1_3
- *Descriptive statistics* (e.g., frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) for RQ1
- Cumulative odds ordinal regression (with both PLUM and GENLIN) for RQ2
- Assumptions of ordinal regression (e.g., multicollinearity, proportional odds) were tested and warranted before the analysis

Findings

R.Q. 1: At what level do the academics have influence on shaping key academic policies at their department, school and institution?

The mean scores demonstrated that academics' influence on helping to shape key academic policies was

at a *moderate level* at their department ($\bar{X}=2.68$)

at a *low level* in their faculty/school ($\bar{X}=2.05$)

at a *very low level* in their institution ($\bar{X}=1.64$).

Findings

R.Q. 1: At what level do the academics have influence on shaping key academic policies at their department, school and institution?

	N	Not at all		A little		Somewhat		Very		\bar{X}^*	sd
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Department level	1737	359	20.7	324	18.7	574	33.0	480	27.6	2.68	1.09
Faculty/school level	1737	666	38.3	480	27.6	435	25.0	156	9.0	2.05	1.00
Institution level	1737	1021	58.8	402	23.1	229	13.2	85	4.9	1.64	.89

* 1.00-1.74: Very low; 1.75-2.49: Low; 2.50-3.24: Moderate; 3.25-4.00: High

Findings

R.Q. 2: Which individual and institutional factors predict academics' influence on shaping key academic policies at their department, school and institution?

- all three ordinal logistic regression analyses produced a significant model ($p < .05$)
- *individual* (e.g., academic title) and *institutional* (e.g., university type, and date of establishment) variables had a predictive impact on the influence of academics' in shaping key policies at their department, faculty/school and institution.

Findings

R.Q. 2: Which individual and institutional factors predict academics' influence on shaping key academic policies at their department, school and institution?

- professors had the greatest odds ratio at all department, faculty/school and institution level, followed by associate professors and assistant professors.
- the odds ratios of public universities were significantly lower than those of public universities at all levels. Being employed in a public university had a negative effect on the level of academics' influence on shaping key policies.
- Both universities founded before 1992 and founded between 1992-2005 had a significantly lower ratio than the ratios of institutions founded after 2005. Working in established universities had a negative impact on the influence of academics on shaping key policies at their department, faculty/school and institution.

	Department Level					Faculty/School Level					Institution Level				
Predictive Variables (GENLIN)	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	OR	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	OR	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	OR
Individual															
Gender: Male	.100	.090	1.228	.268	1.105	-.004	.092	.002	.965	.996	-.074	.099	.545	.460	.929
Seniority: 30+years (Ref.)															
21-30 years	.363	.245	2.195	.138	1.438	.297	.245	1.470	.225	1.346	-.122	.244	.251	.616	.885
11-20 years	.101	.235	.183	.669	1.106	.221	.237	.869	.351	1.247	-.117	.235	.250	.617	.889
0-10 years	-.063	.242	.067	.795	.939	.042	.244	.029	.864	1.043	-.316	.244	1.672	.196	.729
Academic Title: Lecturer (Ref.)															
Prof.	1.705	.187	83.370	.000*	5.499	1.846	.195	89.607	.000*	6.333	1.574	.213	54.614	.000*	4.826
Assoc. Prof.	1.159	.173	45.073	.000*	3.186	1.193	.183	42.481	.000*	3.296	.903	.205	19.364	.000*	2.468
Assist. Prof.	.856	.166	26.941	.000*	2.355	.879	.177	24.781	.000*	2.408	.479	.202	5.630	.018*	1.614
Research Assist.	-.471	.181	6.799	.009*	.624	-.436	.201	4.696	.030*	.647	-.378	.234	2.605	.107	.685
Discipline: non-STEMM (Ref.)															
STEM	.004	.102	.002	.968	1.004	-.038	.104	.135	.714	.962	.038	.114	.113	.737	1.039
MED-HEALTH	-.007	.119	.003	.956	.994	-.101	.121	.692	.405	.904	.035	.129	.072	.788	1.035
Institutional															
University Type: Public	-.419	.137	9.337	.002*	.658	-.392	.138	8.094	.004*	.676	-.363	.146	6.174	.013*	.696
Date of establishment: 2006+ (ref.)															
1992-2005	-.282	.133	4.510	.034*	.755	-.496	.134	13.659	.000*	.609	-.517	.144	12.811	.000*	.596
Before1992	-.394	.130	9.236	.002*	.675	-.571	.131	19.031	.000*	.565	-.580	.142	16.651	.000*	.596
Model (PLUM)	-2LL	χ^2	df	p		-2LL	χ^2	df	p		-2LL	χ^2	df	p	
Final Model	1861.288	328.813	13	.000		1796.942	314.798	926	.000		1551.574	220.212	13	.000	
Test of Parallel Lines (General)	1825.110	36.178	26	.088		1766.393	30.549	26	.245		1525.079	26.496	26	.436	
Goodness of Fit (Pearson)		949.035	926	.292			991.217	926	.357			979.801	926	.107	
Goodness of Fit (Deviance)		996.352	926	.054			992.109	926	.065			886.706	926	.819	
Nagelkerke R ²	.185					.179					.135				
N	1737					1737					1737				

Discussion

- Level of influence into decisions and thus level of academic participation into decision-making is quite low. Even at the departmental level, it does not exceed the medium level of participation. This shows hierarchical (or bureaucratic) approach in the management of Turkish higher education institution (Panova, 2008).
- One of the significant indicators in academics' influence in decision-making is academic title. Professors have the most influence, followed by associate and assistant professors. This confirms the bureaucratic model existing in the system where hierarchy is very important and clearly influential. Important to note that administration consists of faculty members, not of professionals.

Discussion - continued

- In terms of university type, results indicate that public universities have stronger hierarchy compared to the foundation universities*. Governance systems of foundation universities seem to be relatively more flexible.
- In terms of establishment year of universities, old universities seem to display more hierarchical governance structures as opposed to the new ones. New universities are still small institutions where there are opportunities for collegial models (Panova, 2008) to exist.
- *HEC has total control over public universities whereas foundation universities are controlled by special laws. In addition, they have governing boards.

Conclusion

- The top-down decision-making exists in Turkish higher education. It is in the form of hierarchical and bureaucratic form. However, newly established institutions create an opportunity for collegial environments to co-exist in this centralized system. The actual reasons for this difference and the extent to which they will maintain it remains to be observed.
- Future research should include studies that focus on the reasons why faculty members display relatively low level of participation in decision-making and its effects in the system in Turkey.

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