

Examining Foundation Universities with Cluster Analysis in the Context of Academic Criteria

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

Universities have an important role in the economic, social and cultural development of a country since they train qualified workforce, conduct scientific researches and provides community service. The structure and roles of universities have changed worldwide due to globalization. Today, universities bear the most significant responsibility regarding the education of individuals with the ability to acquire and develop information.

Modern universities are associated with three main roles, which are called education-training, scientific research and community service (Altınok, 2008; Doğramacı, 2000). The education role primarily refers to train workforce by educating professional individuals. Universities supply the workforce required by the country as well as increase the number of entrepreneurs creating employment through the faculties, schools and vocational schools within their body. The research role is the most significant characteristic of universities, which distinguishes them from other institutions. This role can be briefly described as the activities toward knowledge production as these are the primary institutions producing information. Scientific research is also highly associated with national and international prestige (Altbach, 2008). Lastly, the community service role is about providing the community with the knowledge possessed by the university in order to enlighten and develop the country (Aslan, 2007). This role can be described as the relationship between the university and the community (Görason et al., 2009; Jongbloed et al., 2008).

Academic performance of a university is evaluated and ranked using several criteria throughout the world. There is not any single system in this regard as the academic performance of universities are associated with multiple dimensions (Saka and Yaman, 2012). Despite the differences of the systems, the rankings are important as they indicate universities' position both on the national and international scales, and their strengths and weaknesses. Besides, universities can benefit from such criteria and

ranking systems to improve themselves in order to provide a high-quality education-training service and achieve international prestige.

In Turkey, universities can be established only by the state and the foundations. Foundation universities have a shorter history compared to most state universities. However, these universities are increasing in number every day. Currently, there are 72 foundation universities in our country. Therefore, foundation universities have increasingly become a research subject in terms of their academic performance.

In the light of this information, the purpose of the present study is to examine 72 foundation universities in Turkey in the context of academic criteria. The examination was conducted using a cluster analysis. The academic criteria used in the present study included the number of vocational school, undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students, the number of faculties and programs, the number of postgraduate programs, the number of academicians and the number of articles-projects.

Methodology

Seventy-two foundation universities included in the present study were examined using a cluster analysis. The data on the foundation universities were collected from the Higher Education Institution's (YÖK) website that publishes statistical information (<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>). The data on the number of articles were collected from the publications on peer-reviewed and continuous journals reviewed in the international citation indexes (Science Citation Index-SCI, SCI-Expanded, Social Science Citation Index-SSCI, Arts and Humanities Citation Index-AHCI). The data on TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) projects were collected from the website TÜBİTAK-ARDEB Academic Support Statistics (http://www.tubitak.gov.tr/sites/default/files/14_web_2014.pdf).

Conclusion

The findings from the present study would contribute to foundation universities in developing a more quality higher education service. The results clearly indicate that the foundation universities have started to gain a significant place in the higher education sector in our country with their numbers of vocational school, graduate and postgraduate students as well as their numbers of academicians. Due to their brief history in Turkey, the future of the foundation universities as to whether they become essential and high-quality institutions can be evaluated only after a long time. However, given that a number of systems and criteria is used to evaluate the quality and the academic performance of a university all around the world, it would be beneficial for foundation universities to make a self-assessment from the viewpoint of such criteria and establish their future goals accordingly, which in turn would be helpful in improving the quality of the Turkish higher education service and contribute to these universities in becoming essential and preferred institutions. The findings from the present study suggest that the foundation universities concentrate also on the research role besides the education-training role in our country. Increased research activities would contribute to the national economy as well as bring international prestige. Similarly, as the higher education institutions train workforce, a more quality education service would lead to a more quality workforce. The findings of the present study may be expanded in future research by comparing state and foundation universities.