

The analysis of the credit system at universities in Türkiye: Graduation in three years¹

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the applicability of the course credit system at the undergraduate level in Turkish universities in terms of efficiency. It proposes offering the university credit system to successful students not on a class-based model, as in high school, but on a credit-based system that grants greater rights and flexibility. They should be offered the option of completing their undergraduate education in 3 years or 6 semesters. In some European countries, it is possible to obtain an integrated master's degree in 3 years and a master's degree in 5 years. In our country, this has been possible before in some fields, such as veterinary medicine and dentistry. The data obtained by examining some universities' current undergraduate education regulations and the structures of their undergraduate programs will be examined within the spirit of the national credit system and the European Union credit transfer (ECTS) system. It is suggested that each undergraduate program be exempted from the compulsory courses of "History of Revolution," "Turkish Language," "English" (independent of the preparatory class), "Computer," and other "regional" based courses through exams or similar facilities. The undergraduate programs will be compared with the undergraduate education programs of some European Union countries, and their efficiency will be discussed. It will be examined whether the programs have sufficient flexibility to allow the dropping of a course that the student has taken and wants to drop or has failed. Instead of a university-focused program, the benefits of implementing a more flexible, student-focused system will be expressed, and it does not make the student dependent on a single course or academic.

KEYWORDS

University credit system, national credit system, undergraduate programs.

Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde kredili sistemin incelenmesi: Üç yılda lisans mezuniyeti

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde lisans seviyesinde, ders kredisi sisteminin uygulanabilirliğini verimlilik açısından incelemektedir. Üniversite kredi sisteminin lise eğitiminde olduğu gibi sınıf bazında değil, öğrenciye daha fazla haklar ve esneklik sağlayan kredi bazında, başarılı öğrencilere, 3 yıl yani 6 semestirlik sürede lisans eğitiminin tamamlayabilme seçeneği sunulmasını önermektedir. Bazı Avrupa ülkelerinde 3 yıl içinde lisans 5 yıl içinde yüksek lisans eğitimi de kapsayacak şekilde bütünleşik olarak yüksek lisans diploması almak mümkündür. Ülkemizde veterinerlik, diş hekimliği gibi bazı alanlarda bu daha önce mümkün olmuştur. Bazı üniversitelerin güncel lisans eğitim yönetmelikleri ile lisans programlarındaki yapıları incelenerek elde edilen veriler, ulusal kredi sistemi ruhu ve Avrupa birliği kredi transfer (akts) sistemi çerçevesinde incelenecektir. Her lisans programının zorunlu dersleri olan "inkılap tarihi," "Türk dili," "İngilizce" (hazırlık sınıfından bağımsız olarak), "bilgisayar" ve diğer "yöresel" bazlı derslerden sınav ile muafiyet gibi kolaylıklar ya da benzerleri önerilmektedir. Lisans programları bazı Avrupa birliği ülkelerinin lisans eğitimi programları ile kıyaslanıp verimliliği tartışılacaktır. Programların özellikle öğrenci tarafından alınmış ve bırakılmak istenen veya başarısız olunan bir dersin bırakılabilmesinin sağlanması açısından detergi esnekliğe sahip olup olmadığına bakılacaktır. Üniversite odaklı bir program yerine, öğrenci odaklı, öğrenciyi tek derse veya tek akademisyene bağımlı kılmayan daha esnek bir sistem uygulamasının yararları dile getirilecektir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELEER:

Üniversite kredi sistemi, ulusal kredi sistemi, lisans programları.

Introduction

In some European countries, it is possible to obtain a master's degree in 5 years and within three years for a bachelor's degree. In some fields, such as veterinary medicine and dentistry in Türkiye, this has already been possible. The data obtained by examining the structure of some universities in the current undergraduate education regulations and undergraduate programs are analyzed within the framework of the national credit system and the European Union credit transfer system. For each compulsory course in the undergraduate program, such as "Turkish History of Revolution," "Turkish Language," "English" (independent of prep class), "Computer" and other "local" courses, there should be exams to give the student the right to be exempt from these. The undergraduate programs are compared with some European Union countries' undergraduate education programs, and their efficiency is discussed in the next part.

Many universities in Europe and Türkiye are trying to integrate the "Bologna Process," based on the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Türkiye is not an official EU member. Under these circumstances, it looks like it will not. However, some educational and economic partnership agreements are beneficial for both sides. Partnerships, such as Erasmus+ programs, include Türkiye. Turkish universities also apply the Bologna Process to their curriculum and university systems. That means most bachelor's degrees are compatible with the EU, equal to 180–240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), and for a master's degree, this is 90–120 ECTS credits.

Such programs, which apply the Bologna Process, are based on the "Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks" (2005). Those devices provide more precision and accuracy and facilitate transparency and comparison. Without these common approaches, full recognition, real transparency, and thus the creation of an effective EHEA would be more challenging to achieve (Seagles, Ferrer-Balas, Svanstrom, Lundqvist, & Mulder, 2009).

The Bologna Process is also beneficial for Turkish universities. In addition to the problems of some basic educational policies, Turkish universities also have their own national credit transfer system. Now, most of them use the European and national credit transfer system at the same time. These two are not equal. That is one of the main problems in this article: some university courses in Türkiye are not equivalent to the courses around the EU. For example, a course that is very important and has 7 national credits could have fewer ECTS credits, like 2 or 1.

Literature

The European Union (EU) has the target of maintaining collaboration and integration among the members of the union within the framework of common cultural values. Türkiye's adaptation process to these policies is important. Education policy within the EU is a critical component for Türkiye to advance its candidacy and enhance its global competitiveness (Cansever, 2009).

The article emphasizes the importance of student-centered education, identifying teaching staff as the key stakeholders in its implementation. Teaching staff can get rid of current approaches to adopt the change of mindset towards a student-centered learning environment, and implementation is the most crucial step (Elmas, 2012). He also mentions that the students and academic staff do not adopt the Bologna Process very well.

Although the issue of quality in education and training is a topic that is on the agenda, and the importance of the subject is understood, there has not been a systematic structuring in this area. In our higher education system, this kind of deficiency is felt, and we do not have a well-

established, long-term quality system that has been adopted by official authorities (Sungu & Bayrakci, 2010).

According to Humboldt, the university should approach scientific knowledge scientifically, students should be free to choose their curricula, and all professors should be free to choose their fields without being bound by the statements of the university administration and the words of classical writers (Antalyali, 2007). The article also mentioned that Humboldt, who separates the university from pre-university education, has set up the university as an institution where the teacher is not a central element. The student is not seen as a person tied to the education program. German idealists want some of the obligatory courses to be included in the university, but this is indirect (Reed, 2004; cited from Antalyali's, 2007). The article also said that until this period, the universities, responsible for the service of the nation state, its administration, the people, and the individuals, have begun to present a supranational structure together with the new era. Thus, this mission, which can be called a service to national unity or a service to the entire world, will become widespread over time.

Why Should Universities Give a Chance to Talented Students to Finish Earlier: I am currently working at a university as an academic, so I have firsthand field experience. When I talk to elderly professors about the 3-year graduation idea in university, they react by saying that students must have a 'maturation' process, so it must be at least four years. It would have been the same thing in history if somebody had told young Albert Einstein that he needed to wait until he became 30 years old to have a PhD degree. When we look at countries (which attach high importance to information and technology), such as the USA or some European countries, we often see that they are incredibly good at discovering scholars and talented people. They even transfer talented and successful people from other countries by offering jobs or citizenship, which is called 'brain drain.' On the other hand, when we look at Middle Eastern, African, Asian, or 'developing countries,' which will not be classified as 'developed' by Western countries, such approaches as nepotism, favoritism, and bribery are pretty common. In Western countries, people work in line with their skills and education, while in Eastern cultures, those with specialized education can even remain unemployed. Therefore, when it comes to education or education culture, the education system or culture in Western countries encourages young people to be creative and individual, discover young talents, and give them opportunities. However, Eastern countries encourage talents to be more silent and obedient. Therefore, the first requisite to becoming a better country is to use young brains and give them a chance earlier. Also, it should continue just after the topic.

Anadolu University. In the past, education was based on the academic year, and the assessment used to require a passing grade. In other words, the credits given to courses were not considered. In addition, there were no elective courses, and the students did not have the option to select the courses they wanted to take (Cekerol, 2012). Anadolu University is called Mega University because almost half of the students in Türkiye are enrolled in it, thanks to the Open University system and distance learning programs, where you do not need to follow courses in classes but with other materials, including videos, books, and online courses.

With an enormous number of students, it can be said that it is a mega university; in the 2011-2012 academic year, the numbers of students registered in the programs and departments are as follows for each faculty: Open Education Faculty 77.222; Faculty of Economics 74.410; and Faculty of Business Administration 157.429. The current total numbers of enrolled students at these faculties are as follows for each faculty: "Open Education Faculty" 303.094; "Faculty of Economics" 391.376; and "Faculty of Business Administration" 599.098. (Cekerol, 2012). During the Bologna Process, they transformed almost 500 courses into ECTS, with new course numbers almost reaching 1000 courses in the program. With all areas of the Bologna Process, such as degree system, quality assurance, recognition, and lifelong learning, it is a huge success and a good example for other universities in Türkiye.

Hacettepe University. According to the University Ranking by Academic Performance report by the Middle East Technical University (data from Clarivate Analytics/InCites), Hacettepe University is number one in Türkiye. They also have 50.000 students, 3600 academicians, a huge hospital, and a medical school.

Kirsehir Ahi Evran University. It is a small city university founded in 2006 and has a total fewer than 1000 academicians with 20k students in 2018.

Methodology

The article employed a meta-analysis or document analysis approach as a research methodology. This research examined three universities' official undergraduate education regulations in Türkiye. It compared them with EHEA universities. The lack of a student-oriented credit system, the non-compliance of the credit system with Europe, the chance to graduate in 3 years, and the necessity of all mandatory freshmen classes in Turkish university departments are discussed. We will be looking at the Bologna Processes, which help the higher education system better, but the question is, is that really applied well and effectively used? The chosen universities are H. University, where the most articles are published in 2018; K.A.E. University, where the number of academicians is in total less than one thousand, and the last one is E. University, where the number of graduates a year is the highest according to the statistics.

Findings

Academic Years. In most university programs, the standard duration of undergraduate education is four years. If we consider one year of English preparatory class, this goes up to 5 years. Students may also fail and be required to repeat the preparatory year. However, students may be exempted from the preparatory school through an exemption exam. A duration of four to five years for a degree program may be considered extensive. If we look at the required credits to graduate in those three universities, in Anadolu University.

Article 24 - (1) At least 120 ECTS in associate degree program; At least 240 ECTS in 4-year undergraduate program; In the 5-year undergraduate program, at least 300 ECTS credits are completed. Anadolu University also says in Article 10 (2) that the student can register for a maximum of 45 ECTS in the fall and spring semesters and 20 ECTS credits in the summer school, provided that the student receives the approval of his/her supervisor for each registered program. Students who graduate by the end of the summer school can enroll in a maximum of 25 ECTS credits in the summer school. These credits also include courses from past years/courses from other higher education institutions.

In Hacettepe University, (2) Including common compulsory courses for graduation; 300 ECTS credits in five-year education programs, 240 ECTS in four-year education programs and 120 ECTS in vocational school programs. In addition to the common compulsory courses for graduation for national credit, at least 160 five-year education programs must cover at least 128 and four-year programs at least 64 credit courses.

In Kirsehir Ahi Evran University, Article 11 - (1) The sum of the minimum ECTS for the courses of a year; in each semester there are 60 and 60. The two-year associate degree program consists of 120, and the four-year undergraduate diploma program consists of 240 ECTS.

The Mandatory Classes in the First Year. At Turkish universities, every student has to take common courses. These can be "Turkish Language and Literature," "Turkish Revolution History," "English," "Computer Technologies," and sometimes region-specific courses, such as "Ahi Evran University" (in Kirsehir), and sometimes more classes have to be taken. All these courses are usually taken not only for 1 semester but also for one year. These courses are very low in numerical value when we look at the ECTS equivalents.

University autonomy has been a persistent issue throughout the Republican era. The 1961 Constitution is important because it represents the first instance when universities were considered constitutional organs and granted constitutional guarantees for autonomy. (Cosar, & Ergul, 2015). Such ideas are the result of neoliberal policies and the reflection of authority of the Council of Higher Education (YOK). Cosar (2015) also says, "all these assets can be observed in the current state discourse on higher education; thus, the re-politicization of the university. However, as we said before, university students are individuals, and other courses must be given in high schools or earlier if needed, because it takes too much time from the student who needs to specialize in their field. I must also mention that democratic values are very important and must be applied and used in the university.

We have seen that these common courses are only mentioned in the Hacettepe University regulation document.

(5) Common compulsory courses: Atatürk's Principles and Revolutionary History as defined in Article 5 of Law No. 2547, Turkish Language, Foreign Language courses in programs without foreign language preparatory classes, Basic Information and Communication Technologies Use, Introduction to University Life, and Occupational Health and Related Sections Safety course.

The necessity of these courses can be discussed. With basic logic, if any Turkish citizen is required to take those courses, they must take them at the high school level because not every citizen has a chance to go to the university. There must be a specialized education at the university. Thus, the duration of university undergraduate education can easily be completed in 3 years. We are not even talking about successful students taking courses from the following years or taking more credits.

For example, while teaching the Atatürk Principles and Revolution History Course in a university, there are many problems faced. Teaching Staff, Teaching Method and Teaching Materials, Repetition of the Lessons in Different Education Steps, Students' Beliefs in the Necessity of the Course, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideas cannot be transmitted clearly (Akbaba, 2008). Those are some of the reasons. Some similar problems exist for other mandatory classes.

There is also a problem again when the student is punished by the university. The time of study is limited, but when they get suspended, those times will be considered inside the limited study period of students. For example, in the Hacettepe University regulations document:

Article 17 - (1) The duration of study is five years in the associate degree program, except for a one-year preparatory class, two years in an undergraduate program, and four years in the undergraduate program and the graduate programs. Students who are suspended from the university for some time are considered to be punished for the duration of their studies. Students continue to pay tuition/tuition fees within these periods.

In Kirsehir Ahi Evran University regulations, (3) these periods of students who are suspended from the university for a period of suspension are counted from the period of study.

Currently, what is expected from modern education systems is to be structured in a model that allows lifelong learning. Independent learning and 'learning to learn' have gained more importance than anything else. The individual is supposed to achieve self-improvement and conduct innovative and cooperative tasks (Cansever, 2009). In some state universities, it is seen that 25% of the total ECTS, which is a requirement of the Bologna Process, does not comply with the principle of elective courses (Terzi, Sen, & Solak, 2013).

There are courses and elective courses that must be taken in the departments. However, even elective courses (such as the number of courses opened and the shortage of faculty members) are mandatory. It is almost impossible for the student to drop the course taken, with some rules and regulations.

Kirsehir Ahi Evran University regulation says: (5) The student, except for the courses he/she has to take, may drop the registered course or add new courses provided that he/she receives the approval of his/her advisor within the periods specified in the academic calendar. But these specific dates are very limited.

This contradicts the education policies of the European Union, the Bologna Process, student mobility, and most, importantly, freedom of education. Students should be able to drop the course they have taken. They should be able to take courses freely from other departments or even from other universities.

In Hacettepe University, Article 16 - (1) Education is organized on a semester basis. However, some programs may include yearly courses. (2) The student may repeat the elective course in which he/she is unsuccessful in any semester in which the course is offered. The student who does not want to take this elective course has the right to drop the course. An elective course that was dropped cannot be added but continues to appear in its transcript. Students can drop three elective courses in this way during their education. Graduated students who have an elective course that they have failed can take another elective course instead of an elective course where they failed. Students can benefit from this right once.

Graduate students; Article 16 - (4) Students who fail an elective course must repeat this course in the first semester. If this course is not offered in the following semester at the latest, another elective course may be taken by the advisor and academic department/institute branch and approved by the institute board until the add-drop week. The failed course is not deleted from the transcript. (26 November 2016 Saturday Official Gazette No: 29900 Regulation from Hacettepe University: Hacettepe University Graduate Education-Examination Regulations and Student Status)

In Anadolu University, Article 10 (3) states that Students may change a course, leave a course, or register for a new course(s) within the add/drop week of the semester. (4) The student may withdraw from only one of the courses taken for the first time by the approval of their advisor within 3 weeks after the week of add/drop, according to the principles determined by the Senate.

It could be seen in the regulations of Anadolu University that leaving a course is almost impossible. Students can leave only during specific time periods (the first weeks of courses) and with the approval of the advisor. Any other way is not allowed. Another problem is that even when students manage to drop the course, it will appear in their transcript as unsuccessful, whatever the reason he/she left the course.

'Independent learning' and 'learning to learn' have gained more importance than anything else has. The individual is supposed to achieve self-improvement and conduct innovative and cooperative tasks. As a candidate of the EU, Türkiye has internalized the educational reforms stated in the Lisbon Strategy and aimed at applying them (Cansever, 2009).

Results and discussion

This results in negative outcomes, such as students enrolling in courses to fulfill elective requirements rather than aligning with their interests and needs. Students emphasize the limited number of elective courses as a weak aspect of the Bologna Process, suggesting that they experience problems in their universities (Altinkaynak, et al. 2017).

The European University Association also admitted that 75% of all European universities use the new system, but that the wrong or superficial use of ECTS is still widespread (Hoell, Lentsch, Litta, 2015; as cited in Altinkaynak et al., 2017).

A study on the Bologna Process at Hacettepe University reported that the students could not find enough elective courses, and a limited number of elective courses could be chosen as a

race among the students. Students do not have enough knowledge about the Bologna Process and cannot find someone to ask questions (Altinkaynak et al., 2017).

There is also another problem that arises: the credits of the same courses are not equal in different universities. Some universities may reduce course credits to open more courses or vice versa.

It looks like shortly, the mission of the university, which can be called a service to national unity or a service to the whole world, will become widespread over time (Antalyalı,2007). Here are some suggestions regarding this purposeanalysis analyses.

- The number of elective courses should be increased, and the number of elective courses must be at least 25%.
- It is required to allow elective courses from different universities.
- It is recommended that if they want to leave the course, it is necessary to provide convenience and flexibility.
- It is recommended that students who have been suspended should continue where they left off when they come back to school. Suspension time should not be included in their bachelor's years. Thus, the rights of the student are not destroyed.
- It will be appropriate to reduce time-consuming courses, to take exemption exams, or to remove them altogether. Students should be treated as adults and need to be trained to be more specialized.
- It is suggested that especially bright and successful students should be able to get more credits, and it would be advisable to allow 4-year training programs to be completed in 3 or 3 and a half years.
- More studies about the process of Bologna and its application in universities must be suggested for the quality of higher education in Türkiye.
- With these steps, the university can improve the quality of education of its people by becoming more suitable to the spirit of universalism and a more harmonious place to the European and Bologna Process.

Conflict of interest statement

There is no financial conflict of interest with any institution, organization, or person related to our article named "The Analysis of the Credit System at Universities in Türkiye: Graduation in Three Years."

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