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A comparison with English language and literature department programme competencies

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Abstract

The idea of establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), aiming to establish a balance between diversity and unity among higher education institutions, started with the Sorbonne Declaration, first published in 1998. The EHEA seeks to ensure that higher education systems are compatible and comparable to one another while preserving their unique differences. This study is aimed to examine the programme competencies of the Department of English Language and Literature. To represent the universe, a state university offering education in English Language and Literature from Turkey's seven regions are chosen, aimed to create a common language for writing the competencies and correct the existing programme competencies. In order to bring the programmes together on a common ground and to be recognised both nationally and internationally, it is important to ensure that the programme competencies are written in a more simplified way without creating comorbidity and classified in the right sub-categories. The study was carried out with case studies from qualitative research methods.

Keywords: European Higher Education Area, Bologna process, Bologna information system, competence.

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1. Introduction

The basic principles of the Bologna Process, which emerged with the idea of establishing a common higher education area in Europe, are based on the Sorbonne Declaration signed in May 1998 by the education ministers of Germany, Italy and England. The root of the process is based on the Magna Carta Universitatum, a document which was signed in 1288 by the leaders of the universities participating in the 900th anniversary of Bologna University, which regulates basic principles on which university-level education is based (Gorkem, 2014). The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) created by the Bologna Process aims to establish a balance between diversity and unity among higher education institutions. Bologna Process' main scopes are gathered in four main titles as Higher Education Proficiency Framework, quality assurance, recognition of degrees and graduates, student participation and social dimension. Competence in the field of higher education refers to what a person who successfully completes any tertiary level is supposed to know, do and be competent about (YOK, n.d. a). Competencies framework is a structure that organises and classifies them.

The competencies framework for EHEA was accepted by the Bergen Conference in 2005 and it was aimed to develop a framework for national competencies, which is in harmony with the approved competencies framework for EHEA. According to Unvan (2016), the national competencies framework is defined as a system in which competencies that are recognised and associated with national and international stakeholders are structured in a specific order, explaining competencies at the national level or in an educational system and their relationship to each other. Through this system, all competencies and other learning outcomes in higher education can be explained and correlated with each other in a consistent way. Today, countries that are part of the Bologna Process form their own national competencies frameworks in conformity with the contextual EHEA framework of competencies.

The first studies to create a national framework for competencies in Turkey was started in 2006 by the Higher Education Committee after the Ministerial Summit in the Bologna process, held in Bergen in 2005, which linked the creation of national competencies framework. The Competencies Framework for Turkey Higher Education (HETR) created in 2010, is defined as knowledge, skills and competencies to be gained minimally at the end of each degree of higher education (associate's, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees) mostly using the level descriptors within qualifications framework for EHEA (YOK, n.d. b). It is aimed to write competencies in the created national framework according to the knowledge, skills and competence sub-dimensions in general to the field, in particular to the relevant programme. In Competencies Framework for Turkey Higher Education, directive draft in knowledge, skills, competence is defined as follows.

1.1. Knowledge

It is the assimilation of the data through learning. It is the whole of facts, principles, theories and practices related to any field of study or research. 'Information' is defined as theoretical and/or practical in the context of Competences Framework for Turkey Higher Education.

1.2. Skill

The ability to apply knowledge, solve problems and define tasks. Skills are defined as logical, intuitive and creative thinking and/or practical (hand skills and methods, materials, tools) in the context of Competences Framework for Turkey Higher Education.

According to Gunes (2012), skill consists of three components such as information about the task or activity to be performed, practice information and tasks related to the task.

1.3. Competence

The ability to use knowledge for personal, social and/or methodological skills in work and work environments and professional and personal development. 'Competence' is defined by the concepts of competence to work independently and take responsibility, learning competence, communication and social competence, field-specific and professional competence in the context of Competences Framework for Turkey Higher Education.

According to the definition of competence by Dubois (1998), competence results in successful performance when characteristics like knowledge skills are used alone or in combination with various combinations (Secgin, 2009).

2. Method

This study was carried out with the case study which is one of the qualitative research methods. Case studies are seen as a distinctive approach used to seek answers to scientific questions. McMillan (2000) describes case studies as a method in which one or more events, the environment, the programme, the social group or other connected systems are examined in depth (Buyukozturk, Cakmak, Akgun, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2016). The main documents of the study consist of the Bologna Information System of the included universities, related thesis, papers, reports and studies.

In the scope of this study, seven state universities were investigated across Turkey and their names were coded in alphabetical order without prejudice to any official name of the university. Within the scope of this study, the following questions were sought in order to be able to examine the curriculum competencies of the English Language and Literature Department at the designated universities and to bring suggestions for the formation of competencies.

- How is the number of the competencies distributed in each university?
- What is the distribution of competencies within the total competencies in universities in terms of knowledge, skills and competence?
- How is the language in expressing competencies?
- Are the competencies consistent with the categories that they are classified?

3. Findings

In the scope of this study, seven universities' English Language and Literature Department programme competencies reached from their Bologna Information System pages were examined in terms of competencies numbers and their distribution in each sub-category, expression of competencies, writing of competencies and their classification.

3.1. How is the number of the competencies distributed in each university?

The total competences decided by examined universities for the English Language and Literature Department programme are shown in Table 1. When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that B university identifies 62 competences for the same programme, while A university identifies 12 competences. When the related page of C university is examined, no information is seen about the programme competences. It can be said that from the data available in Table 1, even for the same programme, each university displayed great differences in terms of the number of competences.

Table 1. Universities and total competencies distribution

Name of University	Total competences
University A	12
University B	62
University C	0
University D	20
University E	14
University F	24
University G	15

3.2. What is the distribution of competencies within the total competencies in universities in terms of knowledge, skills and competence?

The distributions of the total competencies determined by the universities for the English Language and Literature Department programme as knowledge, skills and competence are presented in Table 2. When the table is examined, it is seen that the distribution of the competencies' percentages is also different in three areas. In the relevant programme, while A and B universities offer competence-based programmes, university F gives more emphasis on knowledge. E university has written a total of 14 competencies with writing all competencies both in knowledge and competence levels and 12 of the same competencies in the skill level. In university G, all of the competencies are given in a single list without a classification.

Table 2. The distribution of competencies in knowledge, skill and competence

Name of University	Total competencies	Knowledge	Skill	Competence
University A	12	3	3	6
University B	62	20	12	30
University C	0	0	0	0
University D	20	7	7	6
University E	14	14	12	14
University F	24	14	6	4
University G	15	-	-	-

3.3. How is the language in expressing competencies?

When examining the competencies of seven universities included in the study, the first factor is seen as the verbal roots of the competencies expressions. While the observed A and B universities are used 'do' bare form verbal root, D and G universities are used 'do, does' present simple verbal roots. It is seen in Table 3 that the universities differ in their expressions of competencies which they have set for the English Language and Literature Department programme. University A used the concept of 'learning outcomes' while expressing competencies; on the other hand, B and F universities used the concept of 'learning outcomes'.

Table 3. Expression of competencies according to universities

Name of Universities	Competencies expressions
University A	Learning Outcomes
University B	Learning Outcomes
University C	–
University D	Programme
University E	Competencies
University F	Programme
University G	Competencies
	Learning Outcomes
	Programme outputs

3.4. Are the competencies consistent with the categories that they are classified?

The second important point in the competency statements of examined universities is the classification of competencies.

Among the competencies of C university, ‘Students may have detailed knowledge of the periods, writers and works of English literature. Students will be able to understand English literature, its history and intellectual background’. This statement consists of both knowledge and skill competencies and also the verbal root is defined wrong. In the scope of our study, this competency statement is suggested to be written in a simple way as follow: ‘To know the period, writers and works of English literature’.

As it contains theory, principles and facts about an area it should stay in its own category, theoretical information category, on the table. The second statement should also be written in a simple way like this: ‘To comprehend the historical and intellectual background of English Literature’. As to comprehend something that takes place by using the existing knowledge, this statement should be raised up as cognitive skill category according to Competencies Framework for Turkey Higher Education.

In this aspect, the competencies of all universities have been passed through and both the classification of competencies and their existing categories have been changed in the scope of this study. The number of new competencies formed in line with the changes made and the distribution of new competencies in knowledge, skills and competence are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The new distribution of competencies in knowledge, skill and competence

Name of University	Total competencies	Knowledge	Skill	Competence
University A	13	2	5	6
University B	23	9	5	9
University C	0	0	0	0
University D	21	4	11	6
University E	14	1	2	11
University F	24	14	4	6
University G	15	2	4	9

4. Conclusions and suggestions

In Turkey, with the national qualifications framework, it is aimed that competencies can be related to each other in an integrated manner and facilitates progress and transition among the levels. However, while the programme competencies of related universities are analyzed from their Bologna Information System pages, it is seen that competencies are written without a common ground and language. First of all, when the number of programme competencies determined by each university for the relevant programme is examined, it is seen that different number of competencies are given by

each university for the same programme. It is thought-provoking that this differentiation between the universities is at the extreme ends.

When examining the distributions of the programme competencies that the universities have determined for the related programme in knowledge, skills and competence sub-dimensions, it has been seen that some universities have created a skill-oriented programme while others have differentiated with giving more emphasis on knowledge. In a university, even no distribution is seen. This indicates that even though the students are trained in the same programme, they will be expected to graduate with different qualifications and will be hired with an unequal starting point. This also contradicts with the statement: 'It is planned to facilitate the transition from one country or higher education system to another, thus increasing the mobility and employment of students and instructors' in the Bologna Process information page of the Department of International Relations of the Higher Education Institution (YOK, n.d. c).

There is no agreement among universities in their main titles for competencies. The competencies are named with different titles such as 'learning outcomes', 'programme outputs', 'programme competencies'. However, on the Bologna Process web page of the Higher Education Institution, 'learning outcomes' is defined as the level of achievement of a competency measured by means of appropriate and objective methods during and after each course/module (YOK, n.d. c). Even in this context, it can be seen that there is not yet a harmony between Turkey Higher Education Institution and universities.

Programme competency is an expression that defines the knowledge, skills and competence which a student must earn up to the time he/she graduates from a programme in which he/she is trained. Field competencies are determined by taking into account the programme competencies that meet the educational objectives and the goals, objectives and learning achievements of the courses in the programme. As a result, universities should use the term 'programme competencies' for competencies titles, competencies should be explained in a simple way to express a single sub-dimension, and competencies should be distributed to sub-dimensions in a more normal way and terminated by half gauge branch in verbal roots.

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