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Faculty perceptions of communication education

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of faculty in the communication field on the communication education, competencies, the relationship between related areas and the future of communication education in order for evaluating the concept of communication education. In order to gather data from faculty, interviewing technique was used. Hence, the researchers firstly decided on the faculty names for interviews. Then, date of meeting was appointed by telephone. In determining the views, the faculty who has enough experience and different background were interviewed using semi-structured interview technique. Totally eight faculty members were interviewed that is appropriate to purposeful sampling method. Sample 8 faculty were from different communication faculties throughout Turkey which were Anadolu University (2), Ankara University (2), Gazi University (1), Bilkent University (1), Beykent University (1), and Bahçeşehir University (1). Average of the interviews' duration was one hour. Digital voice recorder was used during the interviews. The researchers also took notes during the interview. To analyze the interviews the following procedures were conducted respectively: Voice records were transcribed word by word. Analysis themes were specified using interview questions and research purposes. Then interview coding form was prepared. Analysis of the faculty perceptions were completed according to the interview coding form. The data were organized and presented under the research themes. The findings of this study are presented under topics such as communication education, communication field competencies, departments of communication faculties, existing issues and future discussions, curriculum, lessons and instructional activities.

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1. Introduction

Communication education have been existed in Turkey for more than fifty years. [0]Since the first journalism program started teaching at Turkish universities in 1950, this year is accepted as the beginning of the communication education (Tokgöz, 2003). Currently, there are state and foundation universities offering various degree programs in communication.

This variety exists in departments of these institutions more than the institutions which have communication education (Uzun, 2007). Radio Television and Cinema, Public Relations and Introduction, Journalism, Public Relations, Journalism and Online Publishing, Press and Information, Public Relations and Advertising, Cinema and

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Television are the common programs at these universities. The most basic programs, however, are Journalism, Public Relations and Introduction/Advertising and Radio, Television and Cinema especially at state universities.

Approximately 30% of Turkish universities offer degree programs in communication according to the guide book of OSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center for higher education) (Uzun, 2007). Besides state universities, these programs have become one of the most popular programs at private and foundation universities.

After 1990, both the number of institutions and their students quotas have been increased in parallel to the demand for communication programs.

Each year thousands of students have their education at the communication programs. The enormous growth in communication sector and media, technological developments in communication devices have a direct effect on the popularity of these programs and this popularity was realized by foundation universities. According to Gezgin (<http://www.konrad.org.tr/Medya%20tr/10suat.pdf>) the new developments in media are the main reason for this popularity but now the demand is over the supply.

The numbers show that in 2007, 7599 students were placed in communication programs in Turkish Republic and Northern Cyprus (2007 Yükseköğretim Öğrenci Kontenjanları). In the year 2008, ÖSYM set 7173 quota for communication departments (2008 Öğrenci Seçme ve Yerleřtirme Sistemi Yükseköğretim Programları ve Kontenjanları Kılavuzu). State universities, foundation universities and private education institutions were all included in this quota. Some questions can be asked in this situation.

The quality and functionality of existing communication education institutions is supposed to be argued as much as their quantity and necessity. Some components should be taken into consideration for this evaluation. These components are: students, faculty, graduates, sector, field literature and the administrations. All of these components comprise quality of the communication education. While analyzing the existing structure of communication education, [0]assessment or receiving insights of these components are critical.

The main aim of this research is to assess the existing structure of communication education from the point of view of faculty. In order to discuss the existing situation and visions regarding communication education, it is an imperative to receive the ideas of faculty who have active roles in communication education.

The basic selection criteria of faculty for this research is their proficiency in the other components of communication education. This issue will be discussed in method section in more detail. It is important to say that the participant academics have been served in communication education for many years. In this point of view one can say that the collected information embrace other components.

2. Method

2.1. Research design

The method of this research is to overlap the academics experiences and perceptions on communication education with phenomenological approach. The main aim of a phenomenological work is to reveal one's personal perceptions and views on a specific subject. Interview as a technique provides the opportunity to focus on the subjects which participant does not have deep comprehension on (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). This research aimed to focus on different experiences of academics on communication education. The academics having experience on the subjects of the research were selected as participants and information resources.

2.2. Participants

During this research, first, participants were determined according to the given criteria and then the questions to be asked were determined. In the selection process, the list of faculties from all communication schools in Turkey was acquired using internet. Recommendations of the faculty members of Anadolu University College of Communication Sciences were taken into consideration during the selection of participants from this list.

Academics to be interviewed were chosen by purposive sample method. Selection of sample was performed based on the variety of perceptions to be received rather than the ability of representation of the universe. As a result, eight participants from Anadolu University, two participants from Ankara University and one participant from Gazi University, Bilkent University, Beykent University and Bahçeşehir University were selected.

Some characteristics of the participants can be summarized as:

1. One academic is female and seven academics are male.
2. All the academics have taken in administrative positions as dean, department chair. All the academics have publications.
3. All the academics have contribution to communication education and media as a translator, writer and editor.
4. Some of the academics made consultancy in public and private sector.

2.3. Data Collection

The questions were prepared based on the expert advices. These experts, including researchers, are academics from different departments of Anadolu University. The data were collected by semi-structured interviews. During these semi-structured interviews open-ended questions were asked to the academics about the topic in question. Interviews were lasted around an hour. The voices were recorded during interviews.

Interview technique used while collecting information. The perception of participants was taken by semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were made by the researchers.

Time and place of meetings were arranged by making appointments with the participants. Face-to-face interview mode was used for all participants except the two. Those two candidates were interviewed through phone and internet by the researchers. In each face to face interview, at least three of the four researchers in the research committee were present.

3. Results

3.1. Communication Education

Faculty members evaluated the communication education in regard to its present situation and problems. Their evaluations differed among each other from some certain respects. Some pointed out that the present departments and the education processes in communication schools are fair enough while some others said that the present educational procedures have problems and need to be overcome by some change processes. Almost all of the academics evaluate the present situation in communication education as inadequate. Concerns about this inadequacy focuses on the issues such as the exceeding number of the schools, same educational perspectives of different schools, and not being able to educate proficient communication graduates.

Majority of the evaluations made points out that the number of the schools are too many and need to be reduced. Those in favor of this view believe that this communication issue is an attractive field and a popular topic that it attracts a great deal of attention from people and organizations, so they open up many new schools to with insufficient facilities in order to supply this demand. This results in a poor quality education and unqualified graduates. Believers of this view support the idea that the number of the communication schools should be reduced to have only a couple of schools overall in the country.

Another view on this issue was the belief that the communication education is very related to its surrounding factors and it should be fostered by those very factors. Instead of similar departments and same procedures in different communication schools, it should be carefully planned that the schools will interact with their surroundings and according to this interaction they will shape their students in accordance with the community and sector needs. People with this view also said that communication field has its own conditions and so the length of the education might vary comparing to other subject matters and schools. According to them the reason why the length of the schools are four years is not so clear but the communication schools are only following a tradition without any solid reason.

Should communication schools produce well educated communication specialists or human power for the related sectors was another area of discussion with the academics. Some defends the idea that the university education is not to produce necessary human power for the sector but is to give social sciences education to the students. On the other hand, some others believe that the schools should produce qualified human power for the related sectors. Moreover, supporters of this idea said that the schools should get help and advice from the surrounding sectors

while educating their learners so that they will be well prepared for the needs of organizations when they graduate. Another idea about the school programs was that the common courses should be extended to more semesters along the academic years and during the senior years students should be given the competencies related to their departments. Also, the other general subject matters should be given after being adapted to the communication field of study.

One of the major problematic areas in the field of communication according to the academics is that the teaching staff problem that is the faculty. Some insisted that the field of education should be handled from now on as a whole discipline itself rather than being seen as an inter-disciplinary field. Thus, supporters of this view believe that faculties coming from other disciplines are not giving enough importance to the field and so they do not contribute as much as they should.

Perhaps the most remarkable finding related to the communication education was that the belief that the communication education should be a graduate level of education rather than being a four year university level education. Supporters of this view stated that the present educational processes are so shallow in terms of acquired competencies so the graduates are more like technicians other than being communication specialists. Rather, graduates from different field of studies can have a graduate level of education in the communication field upon their own competency bases and continue to get deep insights of the field by this way.

3.2. Competencies

Interviewed academics stated different point of views regarding what competencies a communication student should have. Those views can be summarized as he followings: Mastery of the mother language, effective writing, effective speaking, message design, following the trends and innovations in the field, literature, philosophy, knowledge of the history of thought, popular culture, sociology, culture, history of culture, foreign languages, scientific research methods, knowledge of the history of Europe, technology literacy.

Common idea was that the competencies for a communication specialist should not be given with a single specific departments' curriculum but rather it should be more comprehensive and include an inter-departmental point of view. Almost all the faculty interviewed stated this issue in terms of this framework but there is one that they were all clear and same to emphasize that is the language skills. Language skills include both the mother language and the foreign language skills. What is stressed out here is that those who have more than one language competencies are effective and good communication specialists naturally.

3.3. Departments

Faculty members evaluated the present departments found in communication schools from different perspectives. Some defended that he presents department structure is good and effective while some others believe that they are not functional or at least another connective department is needed.

Those who believe that the present situation is good enough mentioned that each new department added to the system will bring new burden and problems to the present structure. Among those who have this point of view the common idea that the communication education should be evaluated in the framework of the present situation is more dominant.

Another point of view is that the three present departments (Cinema/Television, public relations, and press and publication/journalism) have difficulties in the formation of communicational perspective for the learners and another fourth department to deliver this formation is needed. Some of them stated that this is the function of a fundamental communication department. Another idea related to this issue was the belief that the field should serve as a graduate degree rather than being a four year degree.

An academician explained his views on the idea that a fourth department is needed like the following: "...Yes, there is a gap and this gap is filled with Communication in America. Graduates of this department mostly take roles in academic life or work in organizations as communication specialists. I mean this is the fundamental deficiency in our system." Hence, the gap that other three departments cannot fill may be filled by this department and "...this departmentalization is the most suitable one in Turkey."

3.4. Present and prospective trends/areas in communication education

Interviewees stated their beliefs on the most preferred subject areas taking into consideration the present situation and the future of communication field. Views of the faculty major on some certain points.

Some academics stated that “visual communication design” and electronic networks” gained much importance. On the other hand, the rapid globalization of the media and communication systems has put the communication discipline in an international perspective. So, it can be said that the global communication and related systems are gaining a good deal of importance nowadays.

Internet and digital media technologies are another hot topic in these days according to some interviewees. From this point of view web design and related subject areas may be seen important. Another trend seen as important by the academics was the virtual networks and virtual communication systems.

The need for organizational communication of the companies will necessitate the need for the specialists who will solve communicational problems and organize communicational activities in organizations according to some interviewees.

3.5. New courses

Followings are the list of new courses that can be added to the curriculum in communication education according to the academics. When examined it can be seen from the list that there are many general information related courses in the program as well as there are communication based courses. Some other suggested courses are like language skills and research, project design and development, and application based courses.

Communication:

Communication in teams, interpersonal communication, persuasion, speech disorders, effective speaking, communication disorders, effective listening, communication theories, history of communication, principles of communication.

General information:

Philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, history of civilization, history of art, history of politics, history of political thoughts, mythology, history of science, history of thought, Turkish history (last 200 years), Geography (world), psychology, social psychology, sociology of cinema, freedom of man’s mind, common problems of our day.

Language:

Turkish, foreign language, literature, language and science.

Other:

Project development and design courses (applied), information management, research methodology, economy (micro and macro), and intellectual rights.

3.6. Extracurricular activities

Besides the specific courses, academics also stated the importance of some extracurricular activities in communication education. Activities that relate to the application of theoretical knowledge and collaboration with other sectors, and activities that relate to increasing general information and skills can be said to be drawing more attention. It will be right to say here that the activities stated here are the ones that help learners gain the skills expected from a communication graduate by the academics. Those extracurricular activities are grouped as followings:

- Creating virtual environments like the work life (activities like virtual projects, modeling, setting up an agency and running it, activities relate to solving the problems of a virtual company, teaching ethics via virtual activities).
- Cultural and arts related activities (music, playing an instrument, painting, literature, hand-crafts, dancing, theatre activities).
- Activities to develop reading skills

- Field trips to different parts of the country
- Student exchange programs both national and international scale
- University and sectors collaboration (joint projects and giving responsibility to students during these activities, collaboration with other organizations in local scale, working together on problems with the local administrations).
- Having professionals from different sectors in the courses as instructors
- Giving students responsibilities in some certain projects (Tubitak, European Union).

3.7. *New department and its content*

Interviewees suggested some names for the new department that will unite and complement other departments in the communication schools. But researchers could not get any deep insight as for the content and program of this new department from the interviewed academics. Some believe that this department should function as a service point to other departments in terms of theoretical communication basis. As you will remember some others pointed out that this department should serve as a graduate level department. Although there was not any consensus on the content and program of the suggested department, interviewees mentioned some common names for it such as; Communication, Communication Studies, and Fundamental Communication Sciences.

4. Conclusion

One major problem from faculty members' point of views about the communication education in Turkey is that it is uniform and there are so many schools offering this very same content. One reason for the large number of the communication schools is the "attractiveness" of the term "communication". Especially communication schools in private universities have departments with rather "rare" and "fancy" names and this attracts more attention even though people do not know about their scopes. Some examples of such department names are; visual communication design, photography and video, communication design, media design and communication, media and communication systems, culture management, art management, and television broadcasting and programming.

Another reason for the belief that communication schools can easily be set up is that they don't have difficulties in finding teaching staff since they usually solve the problem by hiring people from the professional life. The fact that communication schools overall are in need of qualified academics for teaching the related communication courses have resulted in poor quality teaching and learning experiences. On the other hand, some subject areas like sociology of communication, communication psychology, media psychology, and media sociology cannot be taught in many of the schools because there are not enough qualified academics in the field.

One major question that the interviewees ask in common is that "whether communication schools should train people for the business world around or educate pure communication specialists for the field." Academics see the solution as setting a balance between the two. As a matter of fact competencies suggested by communication specialists for those taking communication education falls into the categories of general information and field specific application knowledge and skills. On the other hand, our experiences have shown so far that problems such as unqualified teaching staff and technological incompetency prevent schools from delivering such knowledge and skill bases to the students in the schools.

Some of the academics believe that present situation in the schools in terms of department numbers and names are fair and good enough and any new formation will bring about some other new problems to the system. But some others do not agree to this idea and suggest that the present form of the schools are not adequate and a new department (they even name it as –communication department–) is needed to unite others and provide theoretical background for students and fill the gaps left by other departments. Supporters of this view say that new developments and innovations in the field should directly effect the curriculum in schools and new courses should be offered accordingly. As an example of such courses they mentioned "global communication", "electronic networks", Internet and web design". The most rational thing according to these academics is that each school will focus on a specific area of interest in the field and be specialized in it rather than trying to cover everything related to communication in its curriculum.

Lastly, some suggested that the courses in schools should be categorized under some certain titles such as field specific", "general knowledge", and "application". Some especially emphasized the importance of extracurricular

activities for the attainment of specific field related course objectives. According to these interviewees; fine-arts related environments and university-sector collaboration opportunities, students-faculty exchange programs and real life project work chances should be made available to students so that they will become competent and effective communication specialists. Any of these opportunities should be a part of the curriculum and be planned and designed in a way that each student will have a chance to go for it.

In this study, the present situation of the communication education was examined in the light of the views of the academics in the field. We, as the researchers, believe that these views and comments from the academics are very important. For the further studies, we believe that point of views of administrators, students, graduates, and sector representatives besides the academics interviewed will also be of great importance for the field of communication and its education. It can be said that a clearer picture of the communication education will not be taken unless such studies are completed.

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