



## Necessity for Reforming Turkish Higher Education System and Possibility of Governance of State Universities by the Board of Trustees \*

Türker Kurt <sup>1</sup>, Bekir S. Gür <sup>2</sup>, Zafer Çelik <sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

Based on the views of the senior administrators, the aim of this study is to present the challenges of the higher education system in Turkey and to analyze the possibility of governance of state universities by the board of trustees. Using in-depth interview technique, this qualitative study was carried out with the participation of twelve administrators, including three members from Executive Committee of the Turkish Board of Higher Education (BHE) as well as nine current/past rectors or vice-rectors at state universities. Results of the study show that structures such as academic senate and university executive boards do not sufficiently fulfill their function, rectors are quite powerful at universities, audits are not effective at universities, universities are not accountable to the public, and the election of rectors by the faculty should be abolished due to the serious problems it causes. As for the possibility of governing state universities by establishing the board of trustees, the majority of participants are of the view that it would be successful at state universities with check and balances in place, nonetheless the others stated that it would bring new problems at the state universities due to cultural and political concerns.

### Keywords

Governance of higher education  
Board of trustees  
Autonomy  
Higher education reform  
Comparative and international education

### Article Info

Received: 01.27.2016

Accepted: 12.07.2016

Online Published: 02.21.2017

DOI: 10.15390/EB.2017.6253

### Introduction

The governance of higher education has been a matter of discussion for a long time all around the world and Turkey, and it has been frequently stated that the higher education systems in many countries need to be reformed (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Doğan, 2015; Ergüder, Şahin, Terzioğlu, & Vardar, 2009; Fielden, 2008; Küçükcan & Gür, 2009). The reason of increasing debates on reforming higher education is the growing expectations of the economic and social structure of contemporary world from the higher education (Miller, 1999; Pusser & Ordorika, 2001). In addition to the increasing expectations from the higher education, the rapid increase in the number of students studying at universities, the establishment of new universities, and the evolving of higher education from elite to universal system emerge as a crucial problem of Turkish higher education system in order to meet the

\* This article was presented at the 1st International Conference on Higher Education Studies held at Boğaziçi University between 14-16 October 2015.

<sup>1</sup> Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, Turkey, [turker@gazi.edu.tr](mailto:turker@gazi.edu.tr)

<sup>2</sup> Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Computer Engineering Department, Turkey, [bsgur@ybu.edu.tr](mailto:bsgur@ybu.edu.tr)

<sup>3</sup> Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sociology Department, Turkey, [zcelik@ybu.edu.tr](mailto:zcelik@ybu.edu.tr)

societal demand and ensure the quality (Celep & Tülübaş, 2015; Çetinsaya, 2014; Özoğlu, Gür, & Gümüş, 2016). The new trends in public administration; the increase in international competition; the redefinition of the relations among higher education institutions, the state, business world and society; the increasing importance attributed to the quality assurance impose a reform in higher education systems (Çelik & Gür, 2014). In accordance with all these trends, as the institutions of further education and research, the universities are expected to have a fundamental and relevant role at the development of knowledge economy, to use the public resources -which they are still heavily dependent on- more efficiently, more productive and transparently, and to be accountable (Bargh, Scott, & Smith, 1996; Saint, 2009). All of these have brought about a change at the administration, organization, and finance of higher education; and thus the higher education system has begun to be evolved from “republic of scholars” to “stakeholder university” (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). While the academicians had a considerable impact at the university administration and decision-making process in the past, the recent decision-making process considers increasing the benefits of society and stakeholders as its fundamental duty. Accordingly, universities are expected to be more sensitive to the social demands and to recognize the changes taking place (Greenwood & Levin, 2003). It has been stressed by many that moving away from collegial university model has led to many important changes at the university administration. In collegial university model, the traditional structures such as senate and the executive committee of the university are significant to govern the university in a participative way and to respond the demands of the internal stakeholders. This traditional model has combined the high participation of academic staff to the administration with a high-level of professional autonomy. Most of the universities had been structured in accordance with the collegial university model until 1970s (Farnham, 1999; Saint, 2009). Farnham (1999) stated that this period was frequently defined as a “golden age” for the universities, and he also stressed that it was possible for the universities to get relatively higher allowances from the public finance in that period. However, many have emphasized that this model began to be inefficient following the current changes and thus it has been heavily criticized. This model has been criticized for not being flexible enough to meet with external demands, being adaptive slowly to changing demands of the stakeholders, and not being clear enough in taking responsibility in decision making (Benjamin, 2004; Ergüder, 2015; Farnham, 1999; Tekeli, 2004, 2010). Furthermore, the universities administered in this way have been criticised for not using the public resources accountable (Saint, 2009). In the collegial university administration model, the committees in the university are constituted with the participation of the administrators and academic staff within the university’s itself, yet no one or representatives of any institution outside from the university take place in these committees. This situation has caused the universities, in time, to fail to respond effectively the societal needs, to be reluctant to change, and to be introvert (Ergüder, 2015; Kurt, 2015; Küçükcan & Gür, 2009). It is stressed that, to solve this problem, the exterior stakeholders must have a voice at university administration, and thus the universities must have more accountable structures (Fielden, 2008; OECD, 2003).

Greenwood and Levin (2003) have implied that it is not possible for the universities with their traditional structure to meet the new conditions of the world and this creates serious problems to be solved by the universities for their existence. Unless the universities have made some core changes, they will quite likely continue to lose its financial basis, and more than this, they may lose their public support. Nevertheless, most of the universities have not adjusted themselves to these challenges. According to Greenwood and Levin, the reason why the universities do not make these changes is that their professional or administrative structures are not sufficient to cope with such problems. This situation requires re-organizing the working life in the university and thus it needs to evolve the universities into pluralist organizations that efficiently meet the demands of the various groups in the society.

These discussions about the universities are reflected to the internal administration of the university in two ways. First, it increases the power of administrators in the university; second, it enables people outside from the university to participate in the higher structures that govern or supervise the university. In this sense, the increased pressure on the university to be accountable, to get

in touch with various societal groups, and to raise the exterior funding for the university necessitate that the leaders in the university must be more than distinguished academics (OECD, 2003). Increasing the power of the exterior participants, representatives, constituencies, and stakeholders at university governance contribute to exterior demands' gaining more importance at university governance and to empower the authority of the administrators; conversely, it relatively lowers the power of the academic staff (EURYDICE, 2000). However, while such a representation structure is comparatively apt to lessen the power of the academic interests, it does not necessitate the dominance of the exterior interests. A possible result of this tendency is to lead the university by a governing board (OECD, 2003).

In many countries, the governance of universities by "board of trustees" is increasingly seen crucial for higher education to meet with social demands, to have strong bonds with society and economy, and to be accountable to the society. The board of trustees is a body which mostly consists of external members, and has roles such as making the university's strategic planning, its educational and research policies, and ensuring the financial sustainability of the university. Such boards play intermediary/tampon roles by balancing the social demands and the needs of university (Küçükcan & Gür, 2009). The administration carried by the board of trustees is regarded as the most powerful tool of administration of modern university (Education Encyclopedia, 2012). Thanks to the board of trustees, the universities are given autonomy to create a free environment for the scientific research and knowledge production. The existence of external members at university governance strengthens the university's ties between economy and society, makes a contribution to social development and gaining more resources for the university (EURYDICE, 2000). Thereby, the external partners join the governance of university and social demands gets involved in university decision making processes more actively.

In many countries, structures similar to the board of trustees are responsible for supervision and monitoring of the universities in the name of society (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGB], 2010; Felt & Glanz, 2003; Martorana, 1963). The board of trustees, board of governors, governing board, or board of regents form the governing body of universities and are responsible to the society for the actions of the universities. In this framework, the detailed authority of the boards is described in accordance with the universities' own regulations and the laws of each country (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). The board of trustees are responsible for deciding the fundamental policies and strategies of universities. Yet, such boards usually do not deal with executive and academic processes directly. The existence of external members in the board of trustees does not mean that external demand comes into power and academic concerns are ignored. In other words, academic senates are still responsible for management of academic processes (OECD, 2003). The major responsibilities of the boards of trustees include ensuring proper conduct of public businesses, representing the institution, appointing presidents, assessment of the president, monitoring institutional performance and effectiveness, revising and approving the strategic plans, ensuring fiscal sustainability, managing estates, maintaining institutional autonomy, assessing the performance of the board, supporting student unions, providing health and security services (Committee of University Chairmen [CUC], 2004; Ingram, 1980).

When one looks at the common practices in higher education governance around the world, she can see that both state and private universities often have organizational organs such as board of trustees, academic senate, executive body of the university, and rector/president. Board of trustees or governing boards that have similar functions are the most common organizational structure at the university governance in the countries such as the USA, England, Canada and Australia which have reputable higher education systems (Doğramacı, 2007; Fielden, 2008). In addition, in the countries like Germany, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Indonesia and New Zealand, there are governing boards which have exterior members (Fielden, 2008). Yet, the structure and responsibilities of the board of trustees may differ among the countries or even between the universities in the same country. However, the common element among the different practices is the tradition of overseeing the universities by a board in the name of the society, public, or the founders (AGB, 2010; Martorana, 1963). The most important responsibilities of the board of trustees can be classified as

follows: to appoint the president or vice-chancellor (in the US, UK, and Canada), to approve the long-term plans of the university and to control whether the university is run according to this plan (in the US, Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands), to approve the university budget (in Canada, the Netherlands, and Spain), to ensure the financial sustainability of the university (in Australia, Canada, and the US) (Fielden, 2008; Kurt, 2015). By their definition, the board of trustees constitute the higher administrative structure of the universities and they are responsible to the society and the founders for their actions. In this main framework, the detailed authority of the boards are described by the regulations and standing rules of the universities in accordance with the laws of each country (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). The board of trustees (or board of governors, board of regents, board of overseers) is the highest decision making body in public and private higher education institutions in the US (Gür, 2016). The university senate is rather a decision making body on academic issues; it is also an advisory body to the board of trustees and the administration on academic issues. The president and her administrative team are the executive bodies which apply the decisions taken by the board of trustees and academic senate. The board of trustees transfer some of its authority to the committees or the president. In principle, any direct involvement of the board of trustees to the execution/practice of the academic issues is often not acceptable (AGB, 2010; Fielden, 2008).

The board of trustees' system which has been common around the world has found limited practise in Turkey so far. In Turkey, it is still only practised in foundation (non-profit private) universities. In the University Act, law no. 4936, enacted in 1946, it was stated that universities are autonomous public establishments and legal identities, and the rector is to be successively elected from one another college in each term and with absolute majority among the salaried professors for two years at the meeting held by Colleges' Professors Committees (Article 12). In the Act, the Minister of National Education has been described as the head of the universities and the president of the interuniversity board (Üniversiteler Kanunu, 1946). The Constitution of 1961 described the university as an autonomous and independent body and limited the Minister of National Education's authority over the universities. Article no. 120 in the Constitution of 1961, therefore, stated: "Universities are the public entities having the administrative and scientific autonomy. Universities are administered and controlled by the bodies constituted by authorized academic members elected by universities itself" (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, 1961). The Constitution of 1961 accordingly gave all the rights such as administering, inspecting, controlling the university, and authority on the staff to the bodies in the university (Küçükcan & Gür, 2009). The renewed University Act, Article no. 1750 in 1973 continued to state that universities are autonomous and public entities. This Act also continued to state that universities elect their own rectors. The Act of Higher Education, Article no. 2547 enacted in 1981, however, brought two core changes to the governance of the higher education system in Turkey. First, Board of Higher Education (BHE, also called the Council of Higher Education) has been established to regulate and coordinate the higher education system. Second, rectors would be appointed, but not elected by the faculty. According to the Act, the rector is appointed by the approval of the President of Turkey with recommendation of three candidates by the BHE. In 1992, with a change made in the Act of Higher Education, electing the rector candidates by the academic members was once again introduced; now, the rector would be appointed by the President among the candidates elected first by the faculty and then shortlisted by the BHE (Doğramacı, 2007; Gür & Çelik, 2011).

The board of trustees had first been practised by Middle East Technical University (METU) in Turkey. With the Middle East Technical University Act enacted in 1959, METU was described as a university having a special status and legal entity, and it was stated that METU would be governed by the board of trustees consisting of nine members. The Act prescribed that the members of the board of trustees would be elected for six years with the approval of the President of Turkey, and the members expiring their period of duty were given an opportunity to be appointed again (Doğramacı, 2007). The Act also indicated that the members of the board of trustees would be external participants and would have no other duties at the university except for their position in the board of trustees of METU. According to the Act, the board of trustees appoints the rector and he could be outside from the university. When the structure, member composition, duties and responsibilities of METU board of



trustees were analysed, one can clearly see the similarities with the boards mentioned above in many countries including the US. The board of trustees at METU had an end after the military coup of September 12, 1980, and the practise of the board of trustees at administrating the state universities officially ended by the Higher Education Act of 1981. Yet, the board of trustees' system has been adopted at foundation universities.

According to the Higher Education Act, the board of trustees at foundations universities are the highest decision-making body at the university and legal entity representing the university. The Act stated that the board would have at least seven members elected for five years (this duration was limited to four years in 1999). Any members of university except for the rector cannot be members of the board. The duties and responsibilities of the board are indicated as to sign contracts with the administrators, instructors, and other staff who would work for the institution, to approve their appointments and removals, to approve the budget of the institution, and to execute the other responsibilities according to the provisions of the regulations prepared by the foundation. The board can also transfer its authority to the administrators of the higher education institution. According to the Act, the board of trustees submits its rector candidate to the BHE for approval. Apart from determining the candidate for the rector position and representing the university legally, the board of trustees also has the authority to appoint all of administrators such as deans of colleges and heads of graduate schools (Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2007a).

Bilkent University, the first foundation university established based on the board of trustees' system after the establishment of BHE, was founded in 1984. Bilkent University has had positive contributions to the introduction of the board system in Turkish higher education system (Doğramacı, 2007). It is seen that the model of Bilkent University has taken as an example by the foundation universities—the number of which increased sharply after 1993. Therefore, the board of trustees' system has become more familiar in Turkish higher education system with the establishment of foundation universities. Though the dramatic increase in the number of the foundation universities has brought some challenges such as assuring quality, by reaching to a certain number and development, the board of trustees' system has become more institutionalised in terms of governance (YÖK, 2007a).

Though governing boards at public universities have not been provided by the Higher Education Act, Article no. 2547, it has been argued that BHE has been a national board of trustees and is similar to the "board of governors" or "governing boards" found in the various states in the US (Doğramacı, 2007; Gürüz, 2003). Yet, it is not possible to say that the BHE acts as an effective board of trustees due to the fact that the rectors are appointed by the President of Turkey and the higher education system has expanded dramatically in time. Moreover, when one analyses the member composition of the BHE, she can see that the members of the BHE is not chosen among the citizens to represent the society. The BHE is not similar to a board of governors or a board of trustees which are seen in the US as a result of *lay governance* paradigm, but it is rather a "board of experts" to represent the bureaucracy and universities (Gür, 2016). After the abolishment of board of trustees' system at METU, there has been some efforts at various times to establish a governing board at state universities. The first one of these is the effort to transform five state universities into universities designated with special status and to establish "higher administrative boards" at these universities with a change in the Higher Education Act in 1991 (Ergüder et al., 2009; Ergüder, 2015). The article of this Act allowing to establish the universities with special statuses was rescinded by the Constitutional Court in 1992 (Yavuz, 2012). One another work on the subject of establishing a governing board at state universities is the draft law on higher education which was sent to Ministry of National Education (MNE) by the BHE in January 2013 (YÖK, 2012, 2013). According to the draft, a university council would be established at the universities having the required qualifications. It was designed in both of the drafts that some of the members of the council would be the faculty members. Only few members would be outside from the universities. Due to this fact, the structures aimed with these attempts of governing the universities in Turkey with councils/boards are different from the structures of the board of trustees found in OECD countries, especially in the US (Gür, 2016; Kurt, 2015).

The higher education system in Turkey had an outstanding expansion in the recent years with the establishment of new universities and Turkey became one of the fastest-growing higher education systems in the world. Following this quantitative expansion, today's efforts and pursuits are aimed to improve quality of the higher education (Çetinsaya, 2014). Accordingly, there have been wide-ranging discussions on the roles, functions, and responsibilities of BHE; the governing structure of higher education institutions; the relations between the BHE and the higher education institutions. The current structure and functioning of higher education system has been considered as over-centralized and therefore many have stated that the autonomy of higher education institutions has been limited. Within this framework, many from diverse backgrounds and expertise have called for increasing the autonomy of the universities, diminishing BHE's authority, and transform BHE into a board responsible only for planning and coordination (Çelik & Gür, 2014; Ergüder et al., 2009; Gür & Çelik, 2011; Turkish Industry and Business Association [TÜSİAD], 2003; World Bank, 2007; YÖK, 2007b). In Turkey, reforming higher education system is still hotly debated topic. Lastly, reforming higher education system has long been on the agenda of the government as well as the opposition parties. Yet, there has still been no concrete progress for a comprehensive reform in higher education system. As reforming higher education system is still a current topic of discussion, it is important to understand how the administrators having important roles in governance of Turkish higher education describe the problems related to higher education system, offer solutions to overcome these problems, and follow the trends in the governance of higher education systems around the world. In this context, this research uncovers the views of administrators who are working or have worked in the governance of the higher education system. Thus, this research contributes the discussions on a likely higher education reform by presenting the views and experiences of the administrators in Turkish higher education system.

### *Research Objective*

The purpose of this research is to present how the senior administrators having important roles in governance of higher education such as rectors and members of the BHE describe the problems related to Turkish higher education system, offer solutions to overcome these problems, and assess the governance of state universities by the board of trustees—which are common in various higher education systems around the world.

## **Method**

### *Research Model*

This research is a descriptive study using in-depth interviews in qualitative research methods. In this research, how the people serving in various administrative levels of the higher education system evaluate the current higher education system and the problems being faced at the university level, what they suggest to solve these problems, how they assess the governance of the universities by the board of trustees are examined on the basis of in-depth interviews.

### *Participants*

The main objective in a qualitative research is to reach as many participants as possible to provide extensive information about the subject of study. Therefore, the researcher gather data most efficiently with the selection of non-random purposeful and goal-oriented sample (Creswell, 2014; Marvasti, 2004). The samples who best reflect the characteristics of the group, who will provide the most effective and efficient data to the researcher are selected in a qualitative research. In this research, criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling methods were used together. In this context, working as a senior administrator at the central administration of higher education system or at a university level was considered as a criterion in the selection of the participants. Thereafter, the people who have worked/are working as senior administrators at the BHE or universities were included as participants in the research.

This study has been conducted with the participation of 12 senior administrators who worked or are still working either at the BHE or state universities. The details of the participants has been given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Details of the Participants

<b>Task type</b>	<b>Participants Info</b>
Member of Executive Committee of the BHE	P1, P2
Former Member of Executive Committee of the BHE	P3
Rector (State University)	P4, P5
Former Rector (State University)	P6, P7
Vice-Rector (State University)	P8, P9, P10
Former Vice-Rector (State University)	P11, P12

### *Data Collection Tool*

The researchers prepared a semi-structured interview form consisting of five questions to gather data. Questions like how the participants describe the core problems of the higher education system and what kind of solutions they offer; how the board of trustees may affect the governance of state universities have been asked. For example, two questions in the interview form are as follows:

1. What do you think about the need for reforming higher education system/administration?
2. What are the most important problems of the higher education system for you? What can be done to solve these problems?

To develop the data collection tool, a draft interview form based on the literature review has been prepared. The draft interview form consisting of eight questions has been reviewed by two experts in the field of educational sciences, one expert in the field of social sciences, and an experienced expert of qualitative research. As a result of this review, the number of questions has been lowered to five and some changes have been done in the way the questions asked. Lastly, a pilot of the draft interview form has been conducted by the participation of a professor. Within this pilot phase, no change in the number of questions has been done, but the way questions are asked has been partially changed.

### *Data Collection*

Possible participants have been asked for an appointment and 15 participants have accepted the requests for interview. However, some difficulties have occurred as the participants are senior administrators, and three of the participants could not participate the interview due to their workload and unexpected changes in their schedules. As a result, the interview has been conducted with 12 senior administrators on a voluntary basis.

The participants were informed about the study and were asked for permission to record audio before the interviews. Audio were not recorded for a participant who preferred not to make a voice recording, and for two participants who made telephone interviews; instead notes were kept. The interviews have lasted between 35 minutes to 70 minutes. Having the interviews completed, all voice recordings were transcribed.

### *Analysis of Data*

Within the scope of the research, the data obtained by using the in-depth interviews were analyzed by content analysis technique. The interview transcripts were read; themes and codes were defined. In this regard, three main themes and thirteen codes were defined. As part of the defined themes and codes, the findings are analyzed. Codes were used to define the participants' ideas expressed in the findings. This coding was done according to the sequence numbers of the participants. For instance, the first participant was coded as P1, and fifth participant as P5.

Expert review has been chosen for the validation study of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Accordingly, expert opinion has been used to prepare the question form used in this study and to create the themes and codes. Via expert opinion, whether the themes and codes created in the research questions and analysis process are goal oriented and whether they are suitable for the scope of research are assessed. Another means to improve validity of the research is direct quotation (Patton, 1987).

Within this framework, participants' opinions are directly quoted and are the source of the themes and codes. Abbreviations which do not cause any change in the meanings of what the participants said have been done while quoting directly.

Inter-coder reliability has been checked to increase consistency of the study. Inter-coder reliability aims to determine whether the same passage is coded with the same or a similar name by the different coders (Creswell, 2014, p. 203). In this context, two different expert opinions have been applied to determine whether the codes and the sub-codes under these themes represent the cognitive category which they are included. The themes and the codes constituting these themes determined by the experts have been compared with the themes and codes created by the experts and a high consistency has been found.

## Findings

The research findings are discussed under three heading representing the crux of research questions. Accordingly, the problems about the central administration of higher education were taken up first, then the problems encountered in the administration of university were discussed, and finally, the opinions regarding the board of trustees system were presented.

### *A. The Need for a Higher Education Reform*

In the light of the views held by the participants, we examined under the theme of the need for higher education such sub-themes as (i) necessity and the re-organization of the central body, (ii) the need for an accountable and auditing body, (iii) and a need for a cultural transformation. The findings concerning these sub-themes were elaborated on in the remaining section.

#### *i. The Necessity of A Centralized Body and Its Restructuring*

All participants, unanimously, have stressed that the higher education reform is inevitable. They stated that because of the existence of relatively a few universities at the time BHE was established and Higher Education act put in effect, and of further dramatic increase in the number of universities as of today, the underlying conditions has radically changed. A participant who is still a rector described this situation as follows:

*The Act of 1982 does not solve the problems of the higher education even if it was revised many times. The BHE was founded when there were 26 universities but today there are approximately 200 universities. The structure of the BHE is insufficient to solve the current problems of the system. We should solve the problems of both the organization and the regulations. The BHE is not able to solve its own problems in the current situation... On the other hand, the problems of the centre and the periphery are different than each other. The regulation is Ankara-based, it does not know the needs of the provinces. Each university in Turkey has its own unique problems. For this reason, framework law should be formed, and each university must be allowed to make its own functionary laws. The BHE should not deal with detailed issues. (P5)*

The participants underlined that the BHE or a similar body is required when reforming the higher education system. The participants emphasized that highly centralized public administration system in Turkey and need for coordination are main reason for the existence of BHE or a similar body. Thus, it is stated that, a centralized body at higher education is inevitable and required. A participant expressed this matter as:

*There is of course a need for a centralized organization at higher education in such a country where the public administration is centralized. A planning body is required in any case. However, which functions this planning and organization body will perform must be questioned. The BHE is an intermediary institution. It may be thought as an intermediary between the government and the universities. ... its functions may change in the long run. But there is a need for such a body. (P8)*



Another motive for the need for a regulatory body for higher education system is the worry of the localization. According to a participant: *"We have had worry and fear of localization for all along. This is not groundless, I think. (P2)"*.

A variety of the participants have stressed that the functions of this "central body" which is defined as an intermediary institution between the government and the universities should be differentiated from those of the current BHE. Many participants have argued that the responsibility of this body should be confined to the planning and coordination (for example P1). It has been also stressed that the level of specialisation of BHE should be increased in order to carry out the planning and coordination task effectively:

*There (at BHE), is no team of specialists. How the budget for higher education is planned, how the higher education program is designed, how the education at higher education in Turkey is planned, how a program for higher education is made, how the students' affairs system is organized, how the student facilities are designed? There is no guide to inform the system at those issues. (P8)*

It has been remarked that many problems would bring about planning and coordination when there was no specialization. It was even stated that the main problems of the system by means of planning and organization have been brought about because of the lack of specialization:

*When I look at the issue of how a central administration of higher education should be; I believe that it must lay down the main principles, fundamentals for higher education programs, the central BHE administration must know what a planning is and how it is to be implemented. I mean, when a central administration say, The Ministry of Finance, makes detailed planning. There are institutions with high efficiency on the base of using technical analysis. [The Ministry of] National Education, in the future, tries to make a good planning at least. The central bodies should redress themselves in terms of their authority and should increase their competency with regard to their specialists. Otherwise, they can attain nothing. (P8)*

In brevity, all the participant share the idea that there is a need for a centralised body that have a role at the administration of higher education system in Turkey. It is insistedly stated that a central body is inevitable for the reasons of (1) the public administration in Turkey is overcentralised, (2) widespread fears and worries of the decentralization, (3) the need for a coordination between the state and the universities for fulfilling the functions such as policy determination, planning, and coordination. It is stressed that the current situation of BHE is insufficient to meet the requirements of these duties, and thus this central body must be restructured and this body must be a specialized one.

#### ***ii. The Need for An Auditing and Accounting Body***

Another significant finding of the study is that according to the participants, BHE must do both financial audits and academic supervisions so as to create a more accountable and transparent higher education system. However, it has been expressed that the BHE does not fulfil these duties. Also universities consider themselves institutions as free from being subject to accountability due to their actions. A participant pointed this situation as:

*Although the BHE is an institution responsible for planning, organizing, and supervising the higher education, it is impossible to say that it fulfils its legal responsibilities because of the current law... I think that a mechanism to call the universities to account for their actions is a must. I believe that the supervision mechanism should function more effectively. That is, the BHE mostly does financial audit at universities. There is no mechanism to call the universities to account for their academic activities. At that point, we must render our institutions to have more transparent and more accountable understanding. (P2)*

According to a participant who stressed that the current financial audits of universities are carried out by the Ministry of Finance or the Chamber of Accounts, these audits are done as a mere formality, and the expediency audit of expenses is neglected (P8). However, the reason of the current

audit system's lack of calling the universities to account for their actions is that the supervisions are done on paper and reduced to whether the procedures are followed. A participant view on this issue is that:

*It cannot be mentioned that there is a mechanism for university to give account of fulfilling its duties and responsibilities, and to supervise if the university use the public resources efficient and productive. There is a system run by the Chamber of Accounts against the irregularity or corruption of the public resources. Nevertheless, we cannot say that there exists a responsibility of the expediency audit regarding the efficiency of the use of these resources and the conformability of the strategic objectives. It is clear that the auditing and monitoring done simply on reporting techniques and accounting cannot and will not realize university's responsibility to give account of its actions. (P1)*

It has been stressed that audits done by the BHE at higher education is to control whether the procedures are followed, yet there is no monitoring and evaluation system to improve the quality of higher education.

*In fact, the BHE work as an accreditation institution but having no criteria. If there are three faculty members, and a sufficient library, it is ok. Do they come and count what the library has? This criteria were determined during 1980s. Should you have six faculty members, open up a doctoral program. There is no monitoring. How many students this doctoral program have graduated, what are the graduates doing now? Thus, there is no accountability with respect to the research either. What did you research? What did you find? Why is its level high or low? How much did you spend? Where did the expenditures go? There is no mechanism to assess this in Turkey. (P8)*

To sum up, the participants have stressed that the BHE has not been able to necessarily fulfil its auditing responsibility, in addition, the audits has only focused on the conformability of using the budget, and monitoring and evaluating performance were stressed as inadequate by the participants.

### **iii. The Need for A Cultural Transformation**

According to the participants, main problems of the higher education system are, in addition to the regulations, the existence of an inadequate academic culture and the problem of institutionalization of the universities. One participant remarked this situation as:

*I think that the most important problem at universities or higher education institutions is the weakness concerning the tradition of higher education and the administrative capacity. There is no established tradition in the field of higher education... In our country, the universities don't have a well-established institutional culture with a common tradition. One of the main problems of the universities is that they have not established institutional traditions, settled practices, system of values yet. (P1)*

It has been expected that the problems of academic culture and traditions would be solved by the regulations. As one participant has remarked: "it is not possible to solve each and every problem by law. The number of the laws, regulations you have made does not matter, it turns into a regulation junk." (P2) It may be argued that these findings create a paradoxical situation. Some problems emerged due to the absence of academic culture at universities have been tried to solve by legal regulations. Yet, the problems have not been solved while the number of legal regulations has increased. However, the aforementioned problems cannot be solved with legal regulations. The regulatory compliance of the decisions taken has become more important than the academic conformability. Besides, one of the reasons of why the academic culture is not strong enough is thought that some of the universities has been recently established. It is stated that there are few universities having settled culture which may lead those recently established universities. (P2) The participants have stated that a quantitative improvement has been done with the establishment of new universities, and from now on, an approach to increase the quality of the universities should be aimed (P7 and P8).

The participants have stated that the institutional and administrative capacity of the universities is insufficient and they are dependent on the BHE due to this weakness. More clearly, according to the participants, universities do not use their authority at the decision-making process and they bring up even the little problems to the agenda of the BHE so as to get rid of their own responsibility. A participant put forward as:

*University councils and senates have a right to take decision at such issues. Yet, our universities have such a tradition. They ask the permission of BHE even at a simple matter so as not to take a risk. That is, our institutions, unfortunately, run away from taking initiative. They have a fear at that point. They ask permission of BHE for enrolling a student taking evening education to daytime education. Take student's consent and apply it by the decision of the senate. There is no need to ask such a simple task to the BHE. Or, at some situations, administrators feel the need to ask BHE's permission to declare that "BHE ordered this" and so as not to take a risk. They may think as "let BHE give the decision, why should I take that decision and become the unwanted man at the end?" (P2)*

It has been put forward that the former BHE's applying a pressure authority upon the universities may be the reason of this timid attitudes of universities (K8).

### **B. The Administrative Problems of the Universities**

The administrative problems the universities encounter under this theme will be discussed in accordance with the opinions of the participants under the following titles (i) the universities are not administered well, (ii) the rectors have excessive authority, (iii) the problems brought about by the election of the rectors, (iv) the misunderstand of autonomy. The findings of this theme and sub-themes are presented below.

#### **i. Universities Are Not Administered Well**

The participants stated that there are problems at universities' management (P1, P7). According to the participants, there may have some negative effects of rector's being elected among faculty and he is not a professional administrator. If the administrative capacity of a university is weak, then it may face serious problems. Especially the universities running hospitals may have financial losses (P11). Some participants argued that academics cannot be suitable administrators at the universities. A participant shared his opinions as follow.

*They are not professional; they are all civil servants. They have no specification upon administration. The faculty secretary is a crucial professional, if the faculty secretary is unqualified and the dean is not experienced, then the faculty is bound to be in a mess. Consider a physician. He is an academic; how can he be an expert of regulations? There is no possibility of his knowing the regulations well. Because the one you call administrator must know the regulations, rules, organization ... He must produce ideas upon them. However, an academic is an expert in a field, he cannot produce ideas on the other fields easily. Unless he has a special effort, he cannot generate the required ideas. (P8)*

The mismanagement has been stated by many, and the root cause of this problem is considered to be related with the election of the rectors among academics and with that rectors are not professional administrators. Some suggested that a more professional administrative model should be adopted to overcome this problem. Some participants have argued against this idea and have proposed that, instead of a professional rector, one of the vice-rectors should be appointed as an administrator responsible for the financial affairs (P3). Another participant has claimed that many professional administrators (secretary-general, head of administrative units, etc.) take part at university administration, and has remarked that he/she is against the assertion that "professors cannot be good administrators" (P10).

### *ii. The Rectors Have Excessive Authority*

The higher education system in Turkey allows the rectors to be quite powerful. The rector is the head of both the academic senate and the administration (the Higher Education Act, Article No. 13). However, the executive and advisory committees are not effective and thus the views of the faculty members are not being represented enough. One participant has stated this situation as follows:

*There is an executive committee of the university, a university senate, executive committees of colleges, academic committees of colleges. In fact, in order to ensure participative management, we have created sufficient number of committees. But, the important thing is, of course, to make them useful, functional... The rector is both the head of the senate and the administration. In fact, these two must be independent from each other's.... The executive committee of the university is an administrative, an executive body. The other one is a panel whose advice is received in academic issues. Yet, in the end, the rector is the ultimate decision maker. Everything is shaped according the rector's demands. (P2)*

As it can be understood from the opinions above, the main reason of the dysfunctionality of the committees is that they are under the rector's influence. It is seen that this situation creates a very hierarchical and rector-centered structure. Yet, it may also be argued that the inefficiency of the cooperation and solidarity (collegial tradition) among the faculty members is another reason of this problem. As a participant has stated:

*Despite the fact that the university administration system has not adopted a collegial administration (or peer administration) model, it seems a vertical administrative perception based upon strict hierarchical norms is preferred to a horizontal relation by means of administration... While sharing the duties and responsibilities should be the guiding principle and practice at administration, centralization of authority is commonly seen. For example, an administrator holds more than one academic-administrative positions. (P11)*

The reason why the committees are not functional and there is no democratic administrative body at universities is stated by a participant as: "While the academic administrative body is supposed to be inclined to adopt shared-administration; on the contrary, a bossy language and administrative culture is adopted." (P11). A participant who is a rector describes the running of administrative committees as:

*If a thirty-forty articulated agenda of executive committees is over in fifteen minutes –which often happens at universities– it is impossible to mention that there is effective committees or democracy at universities. The only matter is to implement the conditions in the law. This situation is seen not only at university's executive committee but also at colleges' executive bodies and committees. (P6)*

Most of the participants have linked the dominance of the rector with the dysfunctionality of the executive committees of the universities. Yet, a participant has connected this situation to the academics' attitudes: "The academics do not unfortunately express their ideas not at the university committees, except for outside." (P1). According to this, academics censor themselves and avoid speaking out their ideas at the related committees. As mentioned above, rectors are dominant figures in Turkish higher education. As a participant stated, "The rector's rights are quite strong and this leads a one-man-based administration. Other administrative bodies are symbolic. (P8). Another participant has stated this situation as follows:

*It is certain that the rectors at most of the universities have a decisive and pivotal role in the decision-making process. By means of the regulations or administrative process, many issues appear at the agenda at the committees in the decision-making process, but it is commonly said that a dialogic language and attitude is rarely seen. (P11)*

As many participants have stressed, while the rectors have excessive authority, the bigger problem is that they use their authority arbitrarily (P12, P8, P2, and P11). For instance, the rector arbitrarily uses his authority at determining the number of new appointments to the departments. In addition to this, hiring academic staff and deciding on various investments are subjectively done by the rector instead of following a strategic plan (P2). In short, the participants defined the excessiveness of the rector's authority as a problem and stated that the rector's being the "one-man" should be prevented with the transfer of some of rector's authority to various academic committees.

### *iii. The Problems Related to the Election of the Rectors by the Faculty*

Most of the participants have argued that the rector election causes various problems at universities and thus the election of rectors by the faculty should be terminated. The participants have defined the problem as follows:

*The rector candidates criticize the other candidates; they even slander the others. Afterwards, only one of them is elected and all the candidates still work at the same university. This creates the winners and losers. This situation is brought about from 6 months to a year prior to and after the elections. When we consider the fact that the elections are held once in every four years, then it is clear that about two of every four years is spent with the discussions and lobbying about who will be the next rector instead of doing scientific research. (P4)*

*The current rector election and appointment system is harmful to the academic structure of the universities. The promises given before the rector election put the administrative rationality in a tight spot after winning the election and being appointed as a rector. Besides, some administrative pathologies about the personal appointments emerge after the election. Because of the advocacy and favoritism which are seen during the election period, subjective criteria are preferred to appoint people instead of the merit and expertise of the appointee. (P11)*

As the rector is appointed based on an election, the other appointments by the rector to the other units and administrative levels are done in line with the election results but not with the rational justifications. As one participant has stressed, a certain time before election is spent for the political battle rather than for scientific research. In brief, "Clientelism, favoritism, and tribalism which are shaped by the choice of a candidate is seen as a general trend." (P11). "Because we all see and know that these elections cause some fractures, separations, and unintended consequences within the academic community." (P2). A participant who was a rector for two terms has described the election as "weirdness" (P6). Another participant has stated that there is no example in the world proving that the election system is the best administrative model, and he has suggested that the rector should be appointed but not elected:

*Because, [the elections] divided the universities and caused polarizations. Elections at any level –no matter whether it is for rector or for dean (as some universities do)- created polarization when there had been no logical reason. Because of this division, the rectors are necessarily inclined to be in favor of their voters. (P8)*

On the other hand, it has been stated that the elections of the rector do not imply the democratic governance of the university. It has been argued that the rector being elected by the faculty does not provide a democratic governance and by this way, even those having no administrative capacity can be elected as the rector. It has been put forward that the universities are institutions which should be governed by professional administrators and such professionals are not possible to be decided by elections. As a participant has stated:

*Democracy is identified with elections in Turkey. However, the matter here is not related with democracy or elections. The matter here is the governance of an organization, a matter of professional administration. Which company, institution, bank does choose its manager by election? Which company manager does ask his workers about whom to choose as a director general or a CEO? You have a task at this organization, I am looking for the one who will run the organization best and use the allocated resources. Whether I look for this via advertisement or not, or look for in the country or abroad, it is all okay. (P8)*



As aforementioned, the election system does not guarantee whether the right administrator will be the rector of the university. The situation of not being a qualified administrator is also linked with the failure of appointing professional administrators. A participant (P6) who defines the election system as “*the main problem of the uneasiness at universities*” has stated why the rector election system is not able to elect a qualified administrator as:

*It is okay to debate whether to give the faculty members the right to elect the rector. But, this situation creates tribalism as the culture for a fair election have not been settled. This tribalism causes discrimination among the faculty members who votes for and against the rector. However, universities should not involve in such a discrimination and focus on their own duties. (P6)*

In summary, most of the participants have stated that the current rector election system causes many problems, negatively affects the quality and development of universities, and the election system is not democratic. They have suggested the appointment system instead of the current one. Those who opposed to changing the current system also accepted that the current rector election system causes problems; yet, they argued that the election system is a more democratic than the direct appointment of the rectors (P10 and P3).

#### ***iv. The Misunderstanding of Autonomy***

The participants’ views reveal that their perceptions of autonomy are problematical. While only a small number of participants stated that universities have a sufficient level of autonomy, many participants argued that the universities misuse the concept of autonomy. As one participant has stated “*some state universities are governed sluggish and arbitrarily rather than autonomously*” (P7). Autonomy is given different meanings and interpreted as being unaccountable and behaving arbitrarily. A participant has stated that:

*Autonomy is not irresponsibility. Autonomy gains importance and true meaning with responsibility. However, we take only some aspects of such terms. We dislike the terms like responsibility, burden, and accountability. We do not like playing games by the rules, we would rather to have no rules... (P8)*

Some participants have stated that the government which finance the state universities should have authority at university administration. Thus, they argue that limiting the autonomy of the universities is normal. Besides, some participants’ ideas make it clear that the concepts of autonomy and accountability are falsely considered as mutually exclusive (P2, P1, P3). A member of BHE has stated that:

*I think, if we talk especially about the state universities, we cannot talk about a complete administrative autonomy of state universities in most countries. All state universities receive funding from the state. They therefore are bound to be accountable to the state. Unfortunately, these notions are misunderstood... You will get human resources and receive funds from the state, and you will use these sources arbitrarily and give no account of it. No, this is unreasonable. There is also “accountability” which is universally valid. (P2)*

In summary, the participants have stressed that autonomy is misunderstood in Turkey, it is understood as not being accountable. Additionally, most of the participants have stressed that the BHE does not make sufficient assessment of the universities and the universities are not accountable:

*We actually do not have a mechanism for supervision. Even though we say that the universities are governed with a centralized board, i.e., the BHE, the board actually does not supervise the universities. Nobody is asked to be accountable. Universities have the autonomy of using the resources they have. In Turkey, the universities have more freedom and autonomy compared to their peers in the world. They are not being asked to be accountable. (P2)*

In short, the universities are considered as not accountable enough in term of their actions (P1). The necessary steps to create an accountable system should be taken during reforming higher education (P7).

### ***C. The Board of Trustees***

The topic of the board of trustees has been determined as one main theme and four sub-themes in accordance with the views of the participants. These are (i) improving the university administration by the board of trustees, (ii) the importance of the member composition of the board of trustees, (iii) the board may increase political polarization, (iv) the board system may not be functional.

#### ***i. Improving the University Administration by the Board of Trustees***

Many participants have described the board system as a way to solve various problems of university administration (P7, P8, P11, P4, and P2). For instance, two participants have mentioned the result of university administration by the board of trustees as follows:

*The board of trustees at state universities, providing that the performance of members of the board is assessed and evaluated, can increase the productivity and efficiency of the universities' relations between the stakeholders, local governments, BHE, and the state. (P7)*

*When the university is governed by a board of trustees, the deficits of the one-man system –such as not being transparent and accountable- can be solved to some degree. (P11)*

Some of the participants have argued that when the universities are governed by the boards of trustees, a pilot scheme should be applied first (P7, P8). A participant has remarked as follows:

*The board system can be first applied at ten universities which aim to be among the top one hundred universities in the world and specially supported for this aim. Then, the best performance of the board of trustees at these ten universities can be defined as the performance criteria. (P7)*

#### ***ii. The Importance of The Composition of The Board Members***

Participants' views on who should be the members of the board of trustees vary. While some participants pay attention to the personality of the members of the board of the trustees, others have mentioned that the members of the board should be chosen among the important figures of business world and community. Some other participants maintain the idea that the members of the board must be among those who financially support the university. For example, a participant has stated that the members of the board should be among those who are trustable, devoted, and respected by the society (P2). Another participant has suggested that the members of the board should be among the representatives of the industry and other sectors as this will strengthen the cooperation between the university and those sectors (P7). Besides, it has been stated that the involvement of senior administrators of the university in the board of trustees may cause some problems (such as conflict of interest) (P2). It has been suggested that the members of the board of trustees, rather than those who are "very qualified scientists", should be those who believe in "democracy and multivocality" and who embrace "the autonomy of the university" (P6).

### **iii. The Board May Increase Political Polarization**

Although most of the participants support the governance by the board of trustees, some are concerned that this governance may lead to further political polarization at the universities. A participant who is currently a rector stated this concern with the following statement:

*There is a fear that political influence deeply penetrates the university. Within the current structure, the university is not in direct relationship with the political institution. If there is a structure like a board of trustees, there is a fear that universities are designed by politicians. (P4)*

From these statements, it is understood that there is widespread concern that the political authority will be decisive on universities. However, most of the participants found it reasonable that the state had an influence on universities that are fully funded by the public. One participant expressed the relationship between financing and management in the following way:

*As it is known, state universities are completely financed by the public, while foundation universities are financed by the foundation that establishes the foundation higher education institution. It would be expected for organizations financing these higher education institutions to have some degree of authority over the administration and decisions of the university. (P1)*

According to the participants, the crucial point about the functioning of the board system is the relationship between political authority and university autonomy. In this framework, it is important that the autonomous structure of the board is protected and the members to be elected are loyal to the public and the university, not politicians. One participant expressed a solution for political worries:

*... [everything] should be followed up transparently within the framework of a written business plan. Should universities continue to be an instrument of power, they will fail to fulfill their primary duties in better quality. (K7)*

It is stated that the intervention of politics to the university is a risk in terms of university autonomy and this situation will adversely affect the functioning of the board effectively. For a more autonomous board and university, it is important to establish a more transparent structure and disseminate the culture of democracy. Participants found selecting the board members among people having political influence risky. One participant illustrated this by giving examples from other institutions in Turkey:

*Let members are appointed by the political power. Well, who will they appoint? In this case, "there is a former ministry who is not a MP anymore, let us find him a place..." There are state economic enterprises, look at their governing boards. It always consists of old politicians. (K6)*

### **iv. The Board of Trustees May Not Be Functional**

The negative views on the governing of the state universities by the boards of trustees can be sorted out under three sub-themes: (1) the problems of the private universities that are governed by the boards of trustees, (2) the board of trustees may not be capable of establishing a connection between the university and the society, (3) the prejudices about the board system due to the lack of sufficient knowledge.

Considering the problems at private universities caused by the board system, the participants have argued that the board system may create similar troubles at state universities. *"This system does not work even at private universities. There is no place for the board system at state universities. Reforming the BHE will solve this problem. 'Who' will appoint 'whom' to the board of trustees is a crucial problem."* (P3) The participant who stated this, by pointing out the problems encountered due to the board of trustees in the foundation universities, has defended the idea that the board system is not practical for the state

universities. The views of another participant commenting on the problems of the board system in the foundation universities has stated as follows:

*The board of trustees has a great impact at the university administration of private universities in the country. However, we can say that, rather than the common sense of the board's itself, the president of the board of trustees has excessive impact [on the board's decisions]. ... In fact, not the board's itself but the president decides by himself. (P1)*

Some participants have stated that the board of trustees would not be capable of establishing a connection between the university and the society (P10, P3). As one participant has stated "A connection between the university and the society cannot be established via the board of trustees. There are deeper and cultural reasons of why the connection between the university and the society is weak." (P10). Another participant expressing a similar idea has remarked as: "There is a mentality problem, this is not a unilateral problem. The society also should be open to the inputs from the university. Not a legal act, but a collective learning is needed for this." (P3). Another participant has mentioned that the university administrators remain under pressure even at current situation; and if a local body like the board of trustees is formed, this board may be exposed to a bigger pressure or put the university under a pressure (P5).

Another significant problem found in the study is that the governance of the universities by the board of trustees is not well known. For example, as some participants have remarked, the points such as "the rector's being weak against the board of trustees" (P2), "Members of the board of trustees should have clear job description and how they assist the rector and how their performance will be evaluated should be specified." (P7) conflict with the nature of the governance by the board of trustees. Because, within this context, the board is responsible of the governance of the university in the name of society. The rector, on the other hand, is responsible to the board. The board of trustees should assist the rector. Yet, the board should not be considered as a body under the rector. The suggestions that the members of the board should be elected among those who aid the university financially (P10) and that local chambers of industry and trade should send representatives to the board (P7, P4) show that some senior administrators in Turkey do not sufficiently know the common practices related to the board of trustees which is practiced in the US and some other counties (see Conclusions and Discussion).

### Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study which is based on the opinions of the current/former senior administrators corroborate the ideas that the higher education system in Turkey is over-centralized and needs a comprehensive reform (e.g. World Bank, 2007; YÖK, 2007b). Although the participants whose views have been analyzed in this study are administrators who have worked or are working either at the headquarter of higher education system or universities, they have heavily criticized the current state of the higher education system. According to the participants, the main reason for calling a comprehensive reform of higher education system is that the current Higher Education Act and its structure are inefficient and insufficient to meet the needs of the higher education system which has been ever-expanding and thus becoming more complicated. The current act does not offer a workable and flexible structure for the different needs of various universities. University administrators' looking for the loopholes in the law to solve their problems and trying to manage the university with the solutions they produced by this way is a clear indicator of the insufficiency and inefficiency of the current act. Nevertheless, according to the participants, the absence of an academic culture at universities and the inadequacy of the institutional capacity of the universities create an expectation that the problems are to be solved by the central body and thus precludes taking initiative. BHE's attempt to control the universities is assessed as an obstacle for the universities to improve their self-governance capacity. In this respect, it is remarkable that many participants emphasized that the authority of the rector is too much; on the other side, the power of academic boards (e.g. senate) is quite weak.

Although the Higher Education Act (Article No. 2547) stipulates that the administrative bodies of the universities consist of the rector, the executive committee of the university, and the senate; these committees and the senate are not decision-making bodies, but an advisory body to help the rector in the decision-making process. Some articles of the Act 2547 (e.g. Article 13) position the rector to a position superior to both the executive committee and the senate. Consequently, the committees and the senate at the universities are incapable of supervising the rector and thus balancing his power. Thus, it may be claimed that the rectors in Turkey are more authoritative compared to their peers in the world. Because, when the examples of the USA, the UK, France or Germany are considered, one can see that the authority of the rector is balanced or limited by the governing boards or senates. In general terms, while the governing boards are the decision-making bodies and the rector is the executive body of the university, the rectors in Turkey have both the decision-making and executive powers (Küçükcan & Gür, 2009; Kurt, 2015; Yavuz, 2012). Therefore, the universities are neither accountable to the public, nor democratically governed within. Because, the current structure allows the rector to feel free at taking the faculty members' ideas into consideration or ignoring them. As the participants have mentioned, it is understood that the committees or senates at universities do not have a mood allowing the faculty members to freely express their opinions and to debate with diverse ideas. It is not quite possible to solve such problems only with legal changes or other changes in the regulations (Seggie & Gökbil, 2014).

The findings of this study suggest that the elections of the rectors by the faculty cause many problems at universities (e.g. putting pressure on the faculty members, increasing polarization at the universities, the rectors' attitudes such as ignoring the meritocracy) are consistent with the prior studies (Günay & Kılıç, 2011; Üçışık, 2011). It is argued by the participants that the pre- and post-election terms of the current system have caused many problems among the members of faculty such as factionalism, intimidation, and favoritism. For this reason, most of the participants (including the current rectors who become rectors after the election by the faculty) are of the opinion that the rectors of the state universities should be appointed.<sup>1</sup>

This study found that there is no body which directly is responsible from supervising universities at the current structure of the higher education system, moreover the current intermediary boards including the BHE are away from fulfilling this need. Participants emphasized that the current supervising mechanisms fail to oversee and audit the universities whose number has been continuously increasing in the recent years. They also stressed that the central body's supervision is limited with controlling the procedural processes; thus conformability of university's actions and expenses with the public interests is ignored. Another remarkable issue stated by almost all the participants is that the supervision of the universities is not properly conducted and the accountability of the universities is not ensured. As Günay (2011) stated, in Turkish higher education institutions, there is "a common statement in force implying that the fiscal resources and staff requirements of the higher education institutions should be met, but no intervention including asking higher education institutions to give account of their actions to be done so as to avoid weakening the university's autonomy (p. 116). Governing the universities by a board of trustees thus emerges as an alternative to transform the unaccountable structure of higher education institutions (Kurt, 2015).

Most of the participants have stated that governing by the boards of trustees, on the condition that certain conditions are met, is applicable at state universities, and such boards may solve many problems at the administration of universities and the higher education system. It has been argued that the board of trustees may have positive impacts such as supervising the rector and balancing his authority. By including exterior members at the board, the board of trustees may enable a more participative administration of the university and a close relationship between the society and the university. Participants expressed that a possible board of trustees' system should be planned as being accountable. They also stated that the members of the board must be dedicated and trustworthy.

<sup>1</sup> While this paper was under review, a new law enacted on October 29, 2016 ended the election of the rector candidates by the faculty and stipulated that rectors are to be appointed by the President of Turkey, based on the three candidates suggested by the BHE.



Although the participants are positive toward the idea of governing universities by boards of trustees, they are also uneasy about it since it may cause universities to be more open to political interventions and influences. They implied that the political influence at the board of trustees must be limited, or else the board may not be functional and this may cause unexpected negative consequences. Considering the fact that the boards of trustees often have problems and are under the control of the business world or politics even in the countries such as the US where the boards of trustees' system is practiced at its best (Gür, 2016), it is natural that the participants have hesitations about the possible use of the boards of trustees' system in Turkey. These hesitations reveal the need for a system with check and balances in place and a well-structured application of a possible board of trustees' system for the benefit of the university and the society.

We would like to note that there is a misconception about the boards of trustees since common practices around the world are not known well by some participants. For example, one participant's statement that the members of the board should be elected among those who support the university financially show that there is a lack of knowledge about how the members of the board of trustees in the state universities in the US and European countries are determined. Because, though it is relatively common for the private universities in the US that those who can aid the university financially are elected as a member of the board of trustees, public interest and the capability of representing the public come first while the members of the boards of trustees are appointed to the state universities (Martorana, 1963). Albeit, the matters mentioned by some participants such as the local chamber of industry and trade should send representatives to the board is not fully coherent with the examples of the US public universities. In other words, there are people from business world in the boards of trustees in the US state universities, but they are not assigned there as the representatives of the relevant chamber of industry and trade (AGB, 2010; Gür, 2016). Rather, the governors appoint some people to the boards of trustees to represent the public statewide. While some participants perceive the board of trustees as an advisory body for the rector, some others consider this system as the same one which has been practiced at the private universities in Turkey. The BHE has received the feedbacks from people from various levels of society about the new draft law on higher education between 2011 and 2013 (YÖK, 2012, 2013). When one looks at the online archive of the feedbacks received, one can see that many people consider businessman's direct membership at the boards of trustees as a threat to the academic autonomy.

We should remind here the fact that the boards of trustees for state universities are supposed to build a bridge between the university and the society and allow the society to participate in the governance of the university. Thus, the suggestion that the universities should be governed not only by the bodies composed of the faculty members but also by the external members should be considered. In today's world, the discussion is not whether the external members should have a say at the university governance but how they can more efficiently participate in university governance (Fielden, 2008; Kezar, 2006; Minor, 2008). Moreover, when administrative committees and senates of the universities consist of the interior members, it is difficult for the universities to meet with the demands such as transparency, accountability, and sensitivity toward social needs (Çelik & Gür, 2014; Kurt, 2015). Consequently, not only the number of the external members at university governing boards is increasing, but also the external members dominate the boards. In fact, the board of trustees are entirely constituted by the external members and the president is the only interior member as it is in the US (AGB, 2010; Martorana, 1963).

All in all, the findings show that the board of trustees may have good results in terms of strengthening relationships between higher education and society, enabling differentiations among the higher education institutions, and providing a more transparent and accountable governance for the universities. On the other hand, it is also stated that the political influences at the university administration may increase by such a system, and thus such boards may become dysfunctional. It is remarked that the boards of trustees may be dysfunctional in some regions of Turkey or especially at some recently established universities and such boards may serve for other purposes rather than the benefits of the university. As this study has revealed, the negative attitudes of senior administrators of higher education institutions against the boards of trustees arise from being unfamiliar with the boards of trustees and related to the political concerns. It is difficult to say that these problems have a direct relation with the board of trustees' system's itself which is a successful higher education governance model around the world. Accordingly, the most important implication here is to introduce and explain the board of trustees' system to all the stakeholders. How the members of the board of trustees can serve for the university and for the public interest arise as an important issue for discussion. It is hoped that this study will be a step in this context, and draw attention to the need of knowing the boards of trustees much better by the related stakeholders. Besides, considering that there is a gap in literature on the boards of trustees and that the relevant stakeholders –as this study reveals– have lack of comprehensive knowledge on the practices of the boards of trustees in the world, the need for more studies about the boards of trustees and the current problems of the higher education become more prominent. Furthermore, -as the findings of the study suggest– both the senior administrators at the system level and administrators at the university level admit that there are serious problems in the current higher education system. Thus, in order to build a more effective and successful higher education system, the discussion on reforming the system should be continued and the practices and trends in higher education around the world should be followed with a comparative and international perspective.

## References

- Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. (2010). *Policies, practices, and composition of governing boards of public colleges, universities, and systems*. Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. TIAA, CREFF Insititute.
- Bargh, C., Scott, P., & Smith, D. (1996). *Governing universities: Changing the culture*. Bristol: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Benjamin, H. E. (2004). *Boards of trustees in higher education: A research program*. Retrieved October 9, 2012, from [http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/conferences/upload/2002/chericonf2002\\_01.pdf](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/conferences/upload/2002/chericonf2002_01.pdf)
- Bleiklie, I., & Kogan, M. (2007). Organization and governance of universities. *Higher Education Policy*, 20, 477-493.
- Celep, C., & Tülübaş, T. (2015). *Yükseköğretimin yönetimi*. Ankara: Nobel Yayıncılık.
- Committee of University Chairmen. (2004). *Guide for members of higher education governing bodies in the UK*. Committee of University Chairmen, November 2004/40a.
- Council of Higher Education. (2007a). *Vakıf Üniversiteleri Raporu*. Ankara: Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı.
- Council of Higher Education. (2007b). *Türkiye'nin yükseköğretim stratejisi*. Ankara: T. C. Yükseköğretim Kurulu Yayınları.
- Council of Higher Education. (2012). Yükseköğretim Kanunu Taslağı. Retrieved from <https://yeniya.yok.gov.tr/files/b494b17ff7566b86ef17f23893baa909..pdf>
- Council of Higher Education. (2013). Yükseköğretim Kanunu Taslağı. Retrieved from <https://yeniya.yok.gov.tr/files/deaed4775cb01c29786a7dda47c57672..pdf>
- Creswell, R. J. (2014). *Araştırma deseni* (S. B. Demir, Trans.). Ankara: Eğiten Kitap.
- Çelik, Z., & Gür, B. S. (2014). Yükseköğretim sistemlerinin yönetimi ve üniversite özerkliği: Küresel eğilimler ve Türkiye örneği. *Yükseköğretim ve Bilim Dergisi*, 4(1), 18-27.
- Çetinsaya, G. (2014). *Büyüme, kalite ve uluslararasılaşma: Türkiye yükseköğretimi için bir yol haritası*. Ankara: Yükseköğretim Kurulu.
- Doğan, D. (2015). Yükseköğretim kurumlarında hesap verebilirlik. A. Aypay (Ed.). *Türkiye'de Yükseköğretim*. Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayıncılık.
- Doğramacı, İ. (2007). *Türkiye'de ve dünyada yükseköğretim yönetimi*. Ankara: Meteksan.
- Education Encycylopedia. (2012). Colleges and organizational structure of universities - governing boards, the president, faculty, administration and staff, students, future prospects. Retrieved October 9, 2012, from <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1859/Colleges-Universities-Organizational-Structure.html>
- Ergüder, Ü. (2015). *Yükseköğretimin fırtınalı sularında*. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap.
- Ergüder, Ü., Şahin, M., Terzioğlu, T., & Vardar, Ö. (2009). *Neden bir yükseköğretim vizyonu*. İstanbul: İstanbul Politikalar Merkezi.
- EURYDICE. (2000). *Two decades of the Reform in higher Education in Europe: 1980 Onwards*, Brussels: Eurydice The Information Network on Education in Europe.
- Farnham, D. (1999). *Managing academic staff in changing university systems*. Buckingham: SRHE & OU Press .
- Felt, U., & Glanz, M. (2003). *University autonomy in Europe: Changing paradigms in higher education policy: Special case studies: Decision-making structures and human resources management in Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom*, University of Vienna. Retrieved from [http://sciencestudies.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dep\\_sciencestudies/pdf\\_files/pdfs\\_abgeschlossene\\_projekte/University\\_Autonomy\\_I.pdf](http://sciencestudies.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/dep_sciencestudies/pdf_files/pdfs_abgeschlossene_projekte/University_Autonomy_I.pdf)

- Fielden, J. (2008). *Global trends in university governance*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Greenwood, D. J. ve Levin, M. (2003). Üniversite-toplum ilişkilerinin yeniden yaratılması: Eylem-araştırma/akademik Taylorizm. In O. N. Babüroğlu (Ed.), *Eğitimin Geleceği Üniversitelerin ve eğitimin değişen paradigması* (Z. Dicleli, Trans.) (pp. 75-89). İstanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Günay, D. (2011). Türk yükseköğretiminin yeniden yapılandırılması bağlamında sorunlar, eğilimler, ilkeler ve öneriler-I. *Yükseköğretim ve Bilim Dergisi*, 1(3), 113-121.
- Günay, D., & Kılıç, M. (2011). Cumhuriyet dönemi Türk yükseköğretiminde rektör seçimi ve atamaları. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 1(1), 34-44.
- Gür, B. S. (2016). *Egemen üniversite: Amerika'da yükseköğretim sistemi ve Türkiye için reform önerileri*. İstanbul: EDAM.
- Gür, B. S., & Çelik, Z. (2011). *YÖK'ün 30 yılı*. (Report No. 4). Ankara: SETA.
- Gürüz, K. (2003). *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de yükseköğretim*. Ankara: ÖSYM Yayınları.
- Ingram, R. T. (1980). *Handbook of the college and university trusteeship*. San Francisco Washington London: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Kezar, A. J. (2006). Rethinking higher education governing boards performance: Results of a national study of governing boards in United States. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(6), 968-1008.
- Kurt, T. (2015). *Yükseköğretimin yönetiminde mütevelli heyetleri*. Ankara: SETA.
- Küçükcan, T., & Gür, B. S. (2009). *Türkiye'de yükseköğretimde: Karşılaştırmalı bir analiz*. Ankara: SETA.
- Martorana, S. V. (1963). *College boards of trustees*. Washington, DC: The Center for Applied Research in Education.
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in sociology: An introduction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Miller, H. D. R. (1999). *The management of change in university management*. Bristol: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Minor, J. T. (2008). The relationship between selection processes of public trustees and state higher education performance. *Educational Policy*, 22(6), 830-853.
- OECD. (2003). *Changing patterns of governance in higher education. Education policy analysis*. Paris: OECD.
- Özoğlu, M., Gür, B. S., & Gümüş, S. (2016). Rapid expansion of higher education in Turkey: The challenges of recently established public universities (2006–2013). *Higher Education Policy*, 29(1), 21-39. doi:10.1057/hep.2015.7
- Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. California: Sage Publications.
- Pusser, B., & Ordorika, I. (2001). Bringing political theory to university governance: The University of California and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México, *Higher Education, Handbook of Theory And Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.ses.unam.mx/integrantes/uploadfile/iordorika/ordorika%20y%20pusser%20Handbook.pdf>
- Saint, W. (2009). *Guiding universities: University governance and management around the globe*. Washington DC: Human Development Network World Bank.
- Seggie, F. N., & Gökbel, V. (2014). *Geçmişten günümüze Türkiye'de akademik özgürlük* (Analysis No. 98). Ankara: SETA.
- Tekeli, İ. (2010). *Tarihsel bağlamı içinde Türkiye'de yükseköğretimin ve YÖK'ün tarihi*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları.
- Tekeli, İ. (2004). *Eğitim üzerine düşünmek*. Ankara: Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi.
- Turkish Industry and Business Association. (2003). *Yükseköğretimin yeniden yapılandırılması: temel ilkeler*. İstanbul: Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği Yayınları.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası. (1961). Retrieved from <https://yenianayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1961/1961-ilkhali/1961-ilkhali.pdf>

- Üçışık, F. (2011). *Yükseköğretimde sorunlar ve çözüm önerileri*. Ankara: Ötüken Neşriyat.
- Üniversiteler Kanunu. (1946). Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey (No: 6389). Retrieved from <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/6336.pdf>
- World Bank. (2007). *Turkey: Higher education policy study, Volume 1. Strategic directions for higher education in Turkey* (Report No. 39674). Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Yavuz, M. (2012). *Yükseköğretimin yönetiminde dönüşüm ve Türkiye için alternatif yönetim modeli önerisi*. Ankara: Kalkınma Bakanlığı.
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2011). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayınevi.