The Status of the Female Academicians in Turkish Universities During the Process of EU Admission

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to reveal the status of the female academicians in Turkish universities during the process of EU admission. In this process, the geographical position and the importance of Turkey’s strategic position for various countries in the world and, especially for EU, the status of female academicians in several developed countries and the historical development of the female academicians in Turkish universities have been analysed. In addition, the distribution of the female academicians in basic fields in Turkey and in several other developed countries has been compared. The study showed that the number of the female academicians and professors in Turkey has been increasing rapidly and that they have achieved not only considerable progress in every echelon, but also a high rate of representation in certain scientific fields. Among the other important finding of the study is that Turkish women possess more career opportunities in higher education institutions in Turkey than in other developed countries although they reflect a lower level of higher education achievements and suffer economical difficulties at times due to sexual discrimination in public however relative it may seem.

Key words: Female academicians Turkey, EU, Turkish Universities, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Seeing that women have become more educationally successful than ever before, but these gains have yet to be reflected in their level of representation in the most powerful positions in society. Indeed, in the academy (Francis, 1998), scholars have been investigating how the participation of women in the study of science can be increased and how women can develop careers in scientific fields (Donovan et al., 2005). Thus, Studies on women appeared in the late 1960s at some major universities in the US and in Europe as an academic field and afterwards, especially with the help of equality legislation in the 1970s regarding women’s position in academia (West, 1995) spread rapidly to England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Holland (especially to Scandinavian countries). However, the actual spread to the other developed countries in the world was prompted by the UN’s declaration of 1975-1985 as the decade of the women (Ozgos, 1998). Today, we are faced with academic environment composed of curriculum that has been integrated with the academic education programs at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels in most of the prestigious universities; research centres that have been established for this purpose; societies, groups and communication networks that have been organised at an international level so as to gather the academicians of this field; special archives and libraries. These improvements have also found its way into Turkey. Today, the number of the Centres of Research and Application in Women’s Problems has increased up to 14 (Ozel, 2007).

Before the analysis of the characteristics of female academicians, the geographic location and strategic status of Turkey will be presented.

Turkey is located in the northern hemisphere between the 36-42° northern parallel and the 26-45° eastern meridian. Therefore, it is closer to Ecuador than the polar region and thus has a temperate climate. Besides, it is situated on where the Old World lands meet (Fig. 1).

Indeed, Turkey has such a climate that is the most suitable for its people to live, work, develop and advance due to its special position (Tanoğlu, 1963).

Nightly seven percent of its area is in Asia, while 3% in Europe. Anatolia (Asia Minor) seems like a peninsula of Asia bulging into Europe with about 1000 km length (Izbrak, 1996).

Thanks to its geographical position, Turkey has vital advantages in the Middle East which provide Turkey a special place in the Middle East policy and indirectly in the world policy. Turkey is therefore included in the Middle East policies of the western countries. However, with respect to culture and the sources of civilization, Turkey can neither be totally western nor eastern, for
Turkey has been a bridge, a station, which enabled the Turkish culture—with roots dating back to Central Asia—and the Western cultures to have got blended for centuries. With technical and technological developments, following the western lead vigorously, especially after the establishment of the new republic in 1923, Turkey has also retained and developed its own culture and civilization that has its roots in the depths of history. It doesn’t really matter whether it is accepted as in Europe or in Asia geographically. What matters is that Turkey has managed to embrace the western technology and civilization which really started to attract it with the administrative reforms (Tanzimat) in 1839 and intensified its effect in the republican period (Doganay, 1994). Among the key parts of the world are the Bosporus and the Dardanelles within Turkey’s borders, which connect the Black Sea ports (Odessa, Batum, etc.) and thus Russia, to the world. On the other hand, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt are connected with Europe via the railroads across Turkey.

Moreover, Turkey is one of the three countries (the others being Russia and Egypt) with lands on two continents. It is also a bridge between the continents Asia and Europe; the countries of Europe and the Middle East; countries of Western and Eastern blocks; Muslim and Christian countries; industrial and oil, farming countries; Eastern and Western cultures; countries of free economy and state economy (Doganay and Sahin, 2003).

As a result, Turkey has always been important and its significance is now greater than ever. The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991, recent crises in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo), the Gulf War of 1991 and the recent Iraq invasion, for instance, have increased Turkey’s importance as an ally for the EU and the US. Moreover, Turkey’s long-standing relationship with the Arab world, much of which used to be ruled by the Ottoman Empire and Turkey’s Muslim religious affiliation may enable it to play an important role in negotiating the crisis in Iraq. Also, Turkey’s democratic government may serve as a model for Iraq and other neighboring states such as Syria and Iran (Tas, 2005).

As the geographic location of Turkey being stated above, the next part of the study will present the portfolio of the female academicians of Turkey, which started full membership negotiations with EU on 3rd October 2005 and analyse its place in Europe and in the world during this process.

The purpose of this study is to find out the status of female academicians of Turkey at the door of EU. The uniqueness of Turkey between East and West makes it subject important to study. The need of study is also due to Turkey’s long standing struggle of educating females especially Eastern part of the country. It is expected that the study may prove vital finding on gender education of rapidly developing and changing Turkey. Moreover it is thought that the findings about the case in Turkey to be presented in this study will yield some benefit on studies on women in Turkey and also all over the world.
THE STATUS OF FEMALE ACADEMICIANS IN SOME DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

With the development of bourgeoisie in the 19th century, the acquisition of educational titles became important and the major way to enter the elite class and to reach for the power would be via education system. Yet, across all levels, education was gendered (Julia, 2000) such that the learning experiences of girls and women were different from those of boys and men in terms of access to formal education, exclusion from various types of scholastic participation, bias in the curriculum and instruction (Hayes, 2000b). Also, the culture of higher education was often actively hostile to women (Kezar, 2005) in that access to higher education was restricted exclusively to men and faculties at the universities were completely dominated by men. Therefore, for a long time women described the development of universities and the situation of women in higher education as a history of discrimination and conscious exclusion of women by men (Anina, 2001). Nevertheless, women struggled to take their place among them, but at times confronted with harsh resistance in their desire to enter these higher education institutions and academic careers because man rule prevailed in these societies for thousands of years not only in education but also in all aspects of life. This entire struggle varied from one society to another depending on the intensity of the men’s resistance. For instance, there were some women having education at colleges in the USA. While the universities opened their doors to women in Sweden in 1865, in England in 1869 and in France in 1890, the effects of fascism prevented it in Germany until 1909 (Costas, 1996). Compared to other countries, the women’s movements developed under freer conditions in England and the USA-where women’s magazines and publications were not subject to censorship, feminists took part in political activities freely and expressed their ideas in every medium.

Again in America, for example, a female teacher, Mary Lyon, founded Mount Holyoke College, which aimed to train women for other fields than teaching; that is, for natural sciences. Mount Holyoke College became a pioneer in rising the women’s education to an equal level with men’s and gave way to the establishment of Vassar in (1865), Smith and Wellesley in (1875), Harvard Annex in (1879) and Bryn Mawr College in (1885). As a result, at the start of 19th century, there were over 20,000 female students in the 80% of 464 colleges and universities in the USA (Costas, 1996).

According to a survey over the subject, the distribution of percentage of female professors in Turkey and in some other countries is as such:

At the end of the 1980s, the percentage of the female professors in some countries were 3% in Germany and in Austria, 5% in Greece, 8% in the USSR, 10% in Finland, 11% in Bulgaria, 13% in Yugoslavia and 20% in Turkey (Stolte-Heiskanen, 1991). On the other hand, the female percentage in the full time lecturers at universities in the USA was 39.4% in 2003 (Digest of Educational Statistics, 2003), while the number being 37.9% at the same year in Turkey (Table 1). According to 2003 statistics, 23.7% of the professors in the USA were female (Digest of Educational Statistics, 2003), while the number being 25% in Turkey at the same year.

In England, where studies on women are quite advanced, the situation is the same. According to geographer Valentine (1995), geography is a man rule field because only 10% of all geography lecturers are female. As for the situation in England, women make up 31% of all the lecturers and the female professors are 7.6% of the whole (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2002).

In her speech at a symposium where Turkish and German female academicians were compared, one of the Turkish professors of studies on women, Arat (1996) stated:

During the two days in the symposium, we have seen that the female scientists in two different countries have both similar and different problems. The major problems of our German colleagues are the obstacles they come against during the process of being female lecturers at various departments of the universities, coupled with lack of their representation in university administrations and scientific institutions. Therefore, they adopt measures-like setting up women committees responsible for the women academicians and forming reinforcement programs-to strengthen their existence in the scientific circle. On the other hand, in Turkey, we see a shocking ease. The number of the female lecturers is far more than that of Germany. Moreover, these female scientists can both advance in every echelon and have a higher representation rate in certain scientific branches. For example, while the percentage of female professors in Germany is 51, 32% of Turkish lecturers are female (while the number has not changed in Germany, it is 39.7% in Turkey in recent years; Table 2). Whereas the female academicians in Germany do not have the same rights as the male and thus achieve a higher status much later, their colleagues in Turkey not only have equal rights with the male but also acquire a steady rise in their career. In Turkey, the female academicians, contrary to their colleagues in Germany, have a high percentage in those
fields called unconventional or masculine (natural science 33%, medicine 35%, engineering 24%) (These numbers increased in 2006, Table 3).

In addition, women undertake stronger academic programs than men in high school and receive higher average grades than men in both high school and college, but have not been able to translate that success into equitable money and power (Rosser, 2005). In the same vein, the literature suggests that there are some income inequalities between female and male academicians. For example, male professors earned 9.2% more than female professors in 1975. This difference became 12.5% greater in 1998 in USA (Oleck and McNatt, 1999; as cited in Hill et al., 2005). Similarly, even in Hungary, which has just accepted for UE membership, men earn more money than women with the same qualifications (Hubos, 1994). Moreover, while a male professor’s average annual income was $91,290 in America during 2004-05 academic year, a female would get $79,160 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2005). Of course, this gap affects the admission of women to academic life. But, on the other hand, female academicians in Turkey, contrary to many other countries, get equal pay for equal workload.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND FEMALE ACADEMICIANS AT TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

The formation period of higher education in Turkey is between 1930 and 1950, during which three new higher education institutions were set up in two major cities—Ankara and Istanbul—and first female academicians started their career in 1932-1933 education year (Köker, 1988). Since then, their numbers have increased steadily.

From the 1950s to 1973, Turkish higher education spread to the other major cities of Turkey. During this
period, the number of the universities rose to 8 and the number of female academicians exceeded that of the female students. Meanwhile, as the country developed rapidly, the need for qualified staff increased proportionally, which, thus, enabled the higher educational institutions to advance as rapidly.

In order to close the educational level gap between the developing eastern and the developed western regions of the country, the Turkish Republic started to build new universities in the east and this trend continued until 1980s. According to the statistics of Republic of Turkey Higher Education Council Student Selection and Placement Center while the rate of female academicians was about 25%, that of female students rose up to 26%, that is, the number of female academicians remained almost the same since the new universities in the east were not attractive for women.

Turkey entered the 1980s with a military coup and a new law on higher education. By this law, most of the authorization of higher education was handed over to a sub-office called The Council of Higher Education (YÖK). During this period, many college and academy was turned into universities and thus many new universities were established. The capacity of higher education was widened in this way and the gap between the east and the west was tried to be balanced.

In the 1990s, the process of expansion and balancing continued and the number of universities went up to 51 with 22 new universities set up in a very short time. While new universities were being established, medium-sized towns in the east were given priority and thus the rate of female students rose up to 35% and that of female students up to 33% (Table 1).

Since late 1990s, when private universities started to be established, the number of universities has risen rapidly. The last figures in 2006 were 53 state universities and 25 private ones (Yok, 2006). The rate of female students in these universities was 42.8% (Table 2) and that of female academicians was 38.8% in 2006 (Table 1).

When we analyze Table 1, it can be seen that in half a century, the rate of female academicians has risen more than twice and the number of female professors has increased more than seven times from 3 to 26%. As the rate of female academicians has reached 40%, it is estimated that the rate of female professors will exceed 30% soon. For short, as time goes by, women participation in every branch and level of academic system increases steadily. This shows that the place of women in the scientific arena in Turkey isn’t coincidental or temporary. On the contrary, their place has become more secure and institutionalized over the years.

FEMALE ACADEMICINS IN TODAY’S HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY

As the rate of access to education varies by sex, race/ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status (SES) (Perma, 2005), the opportunities of women to have higher education and to pursue a scientific career in a country also depend on various political, historical, social, cultural and economic factors. In this respect, academic education of women and their access to academic career is considered as an important indicator of the level of freedom in the education system and the share of women in the social values in a country. An example of this could be seen in the past when there was some discrimination against women. For example, female students who entered undergraduate work with hopes of becoming a physician used to settle for medical technician and those who wanted to become scientists had to be satisfied with teaching high school science instead, because their professors told them that these were not suitable fields for women (Sandler, 1972).

In Turkey, also, it has always been a matter of complaint that the rate of women working in scientific circles is lower than that of the men. However, it is a striking fact that the number of female academicians in Turkish universities is higher than in many developed countries and this is a contradiction to the prejudice against Turkish women abroad. In Turkey, as in many areas, women also participate in scientific circles less than men do, yet this has been changing over the years.

All in all, in a country- where the rate of women with higher education degrees is so low, discrimination against women is relatively high and economic difficulties prevail at times- the fact that highly qualified women have more career opportunities at higher education institutions when compared with those in other developed countries must be studied more, extensively.

According to Table 2, women are represented more in lower academic levels. The number of female research assistants has almost reached that of the male. The most two important reasons for this might be as follows: The first one is that men prefer other professions due to the low income levels at academic careers and the gap has been filled with women and the second is that women advance in the career ladder much slower.

It is expected that the rate of female professors will be over 30% soon because academicians can achieve professor level easier after they have achieved associate professor title.

As for the female students, the rate of the newly-registered (44.5%) is more than that of the female students in total (42.8%). In other words, the rate of female students
at higher education has been increasing over the years, which shows that the rate of female academicians will go on its rise.

We can explain the reasons why the rate and number of female academicians in Turkey are higher than those in many other countries as follows:

- Those who have had the most benefit from the reforms Atatürk achieved as he established the Republic in 1923 have been the working women. Atatürk carried out enormous revolutions over women’s rights and secularism. After the establishment of the republic in 1923, equal education rights were provided for girls and equal opportunities were given to them in admission to education institutions and in getting their diploma without considering whether they are in urban or rural areas. Today, the share of women among university students has become 42%.

- Throughout Turkish history, in every modernisation period, women’s rights and their education have been one of the priorities that can be seen clearly especially both during the administrative reforms (Tanzimat) between 1839-1876 at the end of the Ottoman Empire and during the Atatürk period between 1923-1938 after the establishment of the Republic. Women have been granted political support and historical opportunities in their admission to and advancement in educational and scientific systems for a very long time.

- Until 1980s, Turkish university system served the process of educating the elite. Only a fraction of the population could have higher education and it was supposed to be a privilege. This kind of a system would even yield more advantages to the daughters of the upper class than the sons of the lower class. That is, discrimination in education in Turkey wasn’t based on sex but on social axis (Önci, 1978). Admission of the women of the elite class to academic circles was due to the lack of a central exam and this inequity still continues. There is a similar situation in Germany. While in Germany, in 1931, 47% of the higher education students were children of civil servants, (Contrary to the case in Turkey, being a civil servant in Germany means the upper class.) this number was 3% of the children of wage-earners. Similarly, only 2.7% of the female students at higher education was from the lower social class in 1931. At the end of the 1980s, on the other hand, female students of the wage-earner families constituted about 10% of all the higher education students. According to a study carried out upon the data from 1950-1982, 39.5% of the fathers of the male Ph.D students possessed academic education, whereas this number was 51.1% for the female Ph.D students (Schüller, 1996).

- The whole higher education system has been struggling with enormous economic difficulties. Academicians have such low salaries that many of them have to do a second job to support themselves. Since the man is supposed to be the breadwinner in the family, academic career has been losing its attraction for men.

- Finally, as Neusel et al. (1996) expressed in Turkey, there hasn’t been any significant resistance—especially from the state—against the admission of women to higher education as students or lecturers. This lack of male dominance at higher education enabled equal and steady admission for women.

The distribution of women in Turkey according to the main fields: The choices of women with respect to education are quite different from those of men, since certain professions are still heavily male-dominated; however, women are making rapid progress among the younger age-groups (Ourlia, 1988). Still, gender barriers are especially acute within science and technology higher education careers (Donovan et al., 2005). In general, for a long time women have preferred social sciences and pedagogy to natural sciences and engineering. For example, primary teaching is a feminized occupation (Chan, 2004). Even in countries where women are represented more widely at higher levels, the situation is almost the same. For instance, whereas Sweden has a parliament in which 40% of its members are women, the average percentage of women lecturers in physics faculties is about half of that. In addition, in Sweden, women professors of physics (both appointed and promoted) typically represent 10% or less of the current total professorial staff (Viegers et al., 2006).

On the other hand, the obligation for women to maintain a balance between their domestic and business life, due to their social role, has caused them to be more inclined to occupations like teaching, nursing and secretaryship all of which seem like extensions of their role of being a mother or a wife. For instance, even in two countries like Austria and Saudi Arabia with many different characteristics in many aspects, 100% of the kindergarten teachers can be women (Özgüç, 1998). Owing to these kinds of preferences, professions ended up in two categories: Feminine and masculine (Aytac, 1999).

However, when we look at the distribution of women in main fields in Turkey, we can see that the case is quite
different from other countries; there is no accumulation or concentration in certain fields. Women can be seen almost all fields. In other words, besides not focusing on certain fields, women are not excluded from any field. Even in natural sciences in which women have great difficulty, the rate of female academicians is 35% and the rate of female professors is 23.8%. In technical sciences, in which women in many other countries have little participation, the rate of female academicians in Turkey is 30.1% and the rate of female professors is 18.3%. For example, in Japan, one of the most developed in the world-only 2.3% of the women go for engineering (Tokol, 1999). Female academicians in Turkey have reached their climax in arts (47.5%) where the rate of representation is almost the same as the men. The second is the health sciences where the rate of female academicians is 43% and the rate of female professors is 33.7%. Language and literature have the highest rate of female professors with 39% and this is the only field where the rate of female professors exceeds that of female academicians, which shows that Turkish female academicians have diverged from the traditional expectations and pursued different fields of study. Hence, there is a possibility that the rate of female professors in this field might decrease contrary to the other fields in the near future.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1923, with the declaration of the republic, the rate and number of female academicians increased due to thanks to the rights given to women. It is predicted that this rate will increase rapidly since their current number in lower academic levels is considerably high.

In Turkey, female scientists can not only advance in every academic level but also have a very high representation rate in certain branches. Moreover, they both have equal rights and salary as men do and advance in their career regularly.

As can be seen in female distribution in main fields in Turkey, the case is quite different from many other countries. For instance, contrary to many other countries, there is no accumulation or concentration in certain fields in Turkey. Moreover, the existence of women is prevalent in almost all fields.

This study shows us that the place of women in the science world is by no means coincidental or due to temporary reasons. Rather, it has been firmer and more institutionalized day by day.

Furthermore, they are in better condition than their colleagues in many other developed countries in Europe and in the world, thus achieving the EU criteria.

Consequently, there is no sex discrimination at higher education in Turkey, yet, as in many other countries in the world, also in Turkey, their duties in the traditional family life, planning of the domestic chores, the maintenance and education of the children are undertaken by women, which has an adverse effect on the academic efficiency and potential of female academicians. In other words, they are supposed to carry out their priorities as a mother and a wife first and their academic success and career are considered to be a second priority. Therefore, female academicians either don’t get married or cannot carry on with their marriages.

Even if they can, they have to put a lot more effort than their male colleagues and also have to carry out double duty at once. In short, there are many obstacles they encounter on the road to the top.

Among the several motives for encouraging women into science careers are the need to increase the science base of a national economy and the promotion of equality of opportunity (Donovan et al., 2005). In this respect, in order to equalize the women’s status with the men’s both in Turkey and in other countries at scientific fields, it will be most helpful if we can;

• Allocate a quota for women in scientific fields until their share reaches 50%,
• Grant mother academicians with little children longer durations for academic advancement,
• Improve studies and researches on women in the whole higher education system,
• Rid the assumed roles of men and women of stereotyped notions and prejudices, starting with the family and at preschool levels, develop a habit of sharing the chores and childcare between the spouses and finally open baby nurseries and day-care centres at universities.

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