

# Academicians in Turkey: An Evaluation of Current Status of Academic Staff in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The history of Turkish higher education dates back to Turkish nations of 1000 years ago. The beginning of higher education institutions are accepted as madrasahs that continue its existence during the Ottoman period. After the foundation of the Turkish republic, rapid changes and developments have been observed in the higher education like in all fields. Since this period of time, Turkish higher education institutions have been grouped in two categories, which are universities producing information-knowledge and vocational schools training people oriented with employment. Considering the both types of these institutions, the aim of Turkish higher education system is to sustain manpower considering the needs of the nation and the public; provide education and training facilities based on the secondary education; maintain the quality and quantity of scientific researches under the control of universities. In this context, the purpose of this study is to present the certain dimensions of Turkish higher education system, which are academicianship, current facts related to academicianship, the stages in academic career, achievements in academy and the status of women academicians in Turkey. Related documents have been analyzed and the current status of Turkish higher education system has been discussed by concluding the results.

**Keywords:** Turkish higher education, academicians in Turkey, being academician in Turkey, status of Turkish academy

## 1. Introduction

The word “academics” derives from the Greek “Akademia”, the small olive grove in Athens where Plato taught his students. Plato’s school for higher education was called “Akademos.” Here, Plato and his students discussed various subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, and the best civil order. While he was teaching at Akademos, Plato wrote his famous *Republic*, which was the written quest for the best civil order. In addition to Plato’s (428-347 B.C.E) school Akademos (387 B.C.E), Aristotle’s (384-322 B.C.E) school Lyceum (or Gymnasium) [334 B.C.E] and Alexander the Great’s (356-323 B.C.E) school Museum (330 B.C.E) in Alexandria were the examples of higher education institutions in the ancient world (Erdem, 2006; Balon et al., 2010).

Universities are knowledge-producing institutions. Universities do not only produce knowledge but they also teach, present, and distribute it. These four functions are the reasons for the existence of universities. Universities produce knowledge by means of research and development activities, teach by means of educational activities, present knowledge by means of consultancy, and distribute it by means publications (Balon et al., 2010). In the light of this information, we can define the word academician as a professional title for people who teach at universities, do research, produce and distribute knowledge.

## 2. Methodology

The situation of academicians in Turkish universities is examined by literature review. The scope of the study is the universities in Turkey. This study seeks to explain who an academician is and what the characteristics of academicians are. Using the necessity of academic freedom to pursue research as point of departure, the study focuses on certain concepts such as academic autonomy and freedom and explores the practices that prompt people to an academic career. Finally, this study tackles the problems experienced by academicians in Turkey, especially by women.

### 3. Academicianism, Related Concepts and the Current Status in Turkey

There are two prevailing and opposing views about academicianism. While the first view accepts academicianism as a profession, the second one refuses this classification. The former suggests that academicians share some common values, some of which are academic liberty, individual autonomy, professional collaboration, and orientation towards searching for facts. The latter advocates that academicianism is composed of various professional sub-branches, each having their distinct characteristics. Therefore, academicianism cannot be treated with a holistic view (Celep & Tülubaş, 2005).

Dill (1982) maintains the first view. He believes academicianism is a profession which contains teaching, research, and service. Academicians interact with various sectors in their academic activities. Dill (1982) demonstrates elements of academicianism in the following figure for a better explanation of the academic activities and interactions.

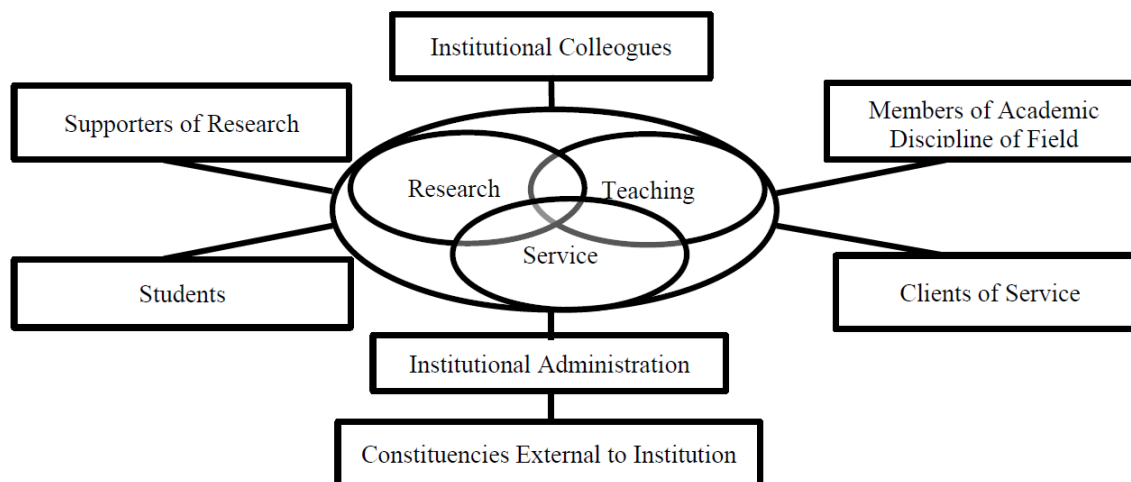


Figure 1. The Elements of Academic Profession

Source: Dill, 1982

Bilgili (2016) defines academic autonomy - a concept highly relevant to academic profession - as “having liberty to do research in accordance with scientific, legal, and ethical rules.” As long as the responsibilities of scientists are identified by ethical codes; scientists can claim any special rights beyond other citizens’ rights (Edsall, 1975).

According to Bilgili (2016), the following conditions must be present before we can thoroughly discuss scientific autonomy: (1) freedom to choose research topic and methods, (2) absence of restrictive impositions such as guardianship, hierarchy, command and instructions inflicted by local and national administrators, (3) freedom to express ideas without violating the rules and regulations, (4) access to funding for research and development activities.

Universities must encourage free debate and critical thinking. For that to happen, universities must have academic autonomy on an institutional level. Academic autonomy enhances academic freedom; this, in turn, leads to freedom in scientific studies, self-sufficiency in designing curricula and exam schedules, scientific discipline, self-audit and auto-control at universities. However, a number of external pressure mechanisms in academy such as accountability, massification, administrative audit, and decrease in resources are now being used more and more frequently all over the world (Mok & Jiang, 2016). Academic freedom is under attack in many countries. Academicians are even being arrested in some countries because of their studies. Seen in this light, it is hard to say that freedom to produce academic studies is guaranteed globally (Altbach, 2000a). In addition to being damaged by external pressure, academic autonomy is also influenced by institutional structure and academic conflicts (Aktan, 2003).

In Turkey, the ways academicians get under external pressure might be slightly different from those in other countries. This is caused by the influence of politics on universities. This political influence starts with the choice of the location of a university. Also, the selection of administrative staff and academicians might be under the same influence. A number of external and institutional sanctions are imposed upon universities during the process decision-making (Arap, 2010).

Turkish language poses the problem of ambiguous connotations of academic freedom. Generally academic freedom, academic autonomy, and scientific autonomy are used interchangeably (Seggie & Gökbel, 2015). Özipek (2001) states that academic freedom concept can be discussed in terms of individual freedom and academic freedom. Özipek also maintains that academic freedom can be obtained when control over research is reduced to minimum. Therefore, academic freedom in institutional sense is the protection of academicians against any interference from lawmakers and politicians.

As one of the most important developments about academic freedom, Lima Declaration was published on September 6, 1988 (the 40th anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights) by World University Service with the full title The Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education.

In Lima Declaration (1988) academic freedom is defined as “the freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission of knowledge.” In Article 3, academic freedom is described as “an essential precondition” for education, research, publication, and service functions of higher education institutions. All members of the academic community are entitled to the right to function without fear of repression from governments or other sources.

In Turkey academic freedom is usually addressed within the context of university autonomy because it is assumed that university autonomy can lead to academic freedom. Another reason for this association is the fact that universities have been a major part of political conflicts in Turkey. Also, the Council of Higher Education has evolved into a centralized structure and thus confirmed that university autonomy connotes academic freedom (Seggie & Gökbel, 2015).

Turkish Higher Education Law No. 2547 does not protect academic freedom completely. Although there have been recent changes in this law, academic freedom still needs to be legally protected in a more comprehensive way. On the other hand, it takes much more than laws to guarantee academic freedom. The society clearly needs a change of mindset on a cultural level for academic freedom to be maintained (Özipek, 2001). Similarly, Kayrooz et al. (2001) state that academic freedom can be achieved with a strong social structure.

It is evident that YÖK (Council of Higher Education), which was established in 1981 with the Law No. 2547, cannot administer rapidly-growing higher education institutions efficiently. Thus, it needs to go through a reconstruction for executive and financial autonomy at universities. Academicians must be protected from all kinds of external pressure by means of financial autonomy and academic freedom (Akyol & Arslan, 2014).

### 3.1 Facts and Figures about the Academicians in Turkey

As societies go through changes in arts, health, economy, and culture; education has been drastically affected by these changes. Higher education institutions, with their mission of producing brainpower, hold a central position in this process (Odabaşı et al., 2010).

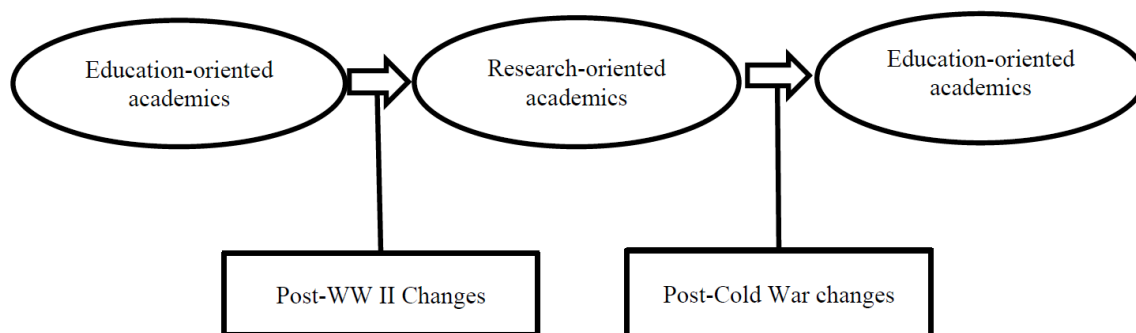


Figure 2. Two Cycles of Changes in The History of Higher Education

Source: Odabaşı et al., 2010

As shown in Figure 2, two post-war periods caused changes in higher education. Higher education first evolved from being education-oriented to being research-oriented. Then it gravitated back to education-oriented tradition (Cuban 1999). The concepts of academicianship and academic freedom are still evolving, especially due to recent technological developments, the influence of capital on universities, and emergence of new university models (Odabaşı et al., 2010).

In the academic year 1930-1931, 2.167 students were studying in İstanbul Darülfunun (renamed as İstanbul University in 1933). The number of university students increased to 11.000 by 1943. In 1950, there were three universities in Turkey. By 1973, there were twelve. The number of university students was 322.320 in 1984. In 2011, there were 3.817.086 university students in Turkey (Günay & Günay, 2011; Sargın, 2007).

By 2018, the number of university students had risen to 7.560.371 (Table 1). The rapid increase in the number of student enrollment to universities is thought to be caused by new universities, distance education programs, and open education faculties.

Table 1. The Number of Students Enrolled in Higher Education, 2017-2018

	State University	Private University	Total
Male	3.740.669	306.633	4.047.302
Female	3.223.234	289.835	3.513.069
Total	6.963.903	596.468	7.560.371

Source: YÖK, 2018a

The number of universities increase rapidly as well. During the period between 2008 and 2009, 46 new universities were founded, hence the number of universities rose to 139 by 2009 (Akyol & Arslan, 2014). This number once again rose to 186 in 2018 (YÖK, 2018a).

This upward movement in the number of students and universities is accompanied by an increase in the number of academicians. From the academic year 1923-1924 to 1999-2000, the number of academicians increased from 307 to 63.866 (Baskan, 2001). The number was 158.098 by the academic year 2017-2018. The number of academicians, along with their titles and institutions, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Numbers of Academic Positions, 2017-2018

	Professor	Associate professor	Assistant professor	Instructor	Research assistant	Total
Total	24640	14.456	37.520	35.484	45.998	158.098
State University	20.879	12.728	30.274	28.114	42.694	134.689
Private University	3.756	1.725	7.215	7.087	3.304	23.087
Private Vocational School	5	3	31	283	-	322

Source: YÖK, 2018a

### 3.2 Academic Career Stages and the Current Status in Turkey

Graduate education is programmed education which trains scientists and researchers; and provides high-grade human resources. Similar to master-apprentice relationship, graduate education requires selection of favorable students by faculty members (Bülbul, 2003). Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2004) agree with master-apprenticeship simile and state that compatibility between graduate or PhD students and their supervisors during their research makes a bigger contribution to science.

Universities, with their growing numbers and potentials, need more academicians. However, Turkey differs from developed countries in terms of the number of students who continue their higher education at PhD level. One of the reasons for this difference is the insufficient number of master and doctorate programs or insufficient placement. Another reason is the risk of unemployment after PhD education (Mercan, 2016).

Selection of candidates for master and doctorate programs is based on a number of criteria, as there are few vacancies in these programs. Candidates who meet the prespecified conditions are interviewed. Bülbul (2003) shows in a study, which investigates the opinions of academicians at Ankara University on student selection process, that almost all participants in this study state there might be some influences on the objectivity of the jury during the interviews. The major influence could be the priority given to particular students who are familiar with the jury since their undergraduate education.

Table 3. Numbers of Master's and PhD Students, 2017-2018

Number of master's students			Number of PhD students		
Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
178.892	275.781	454.673	40.487	54.613	95.100

Source: YÖK, 2018

Table 3 shows that master's students outnumber PhD students. It can be deduced that the reasons for leaving the graduate education are insufficient student placement, insufficient student funding, risk of unemployment after PhD, and possibility of bias during the interviews. Nevertheless, the number of higher education institutions in Turkey is rising rapidly. This leads to a growing need for academicians. The primary solution is to develop training programs for academic candidates (YÖK, 2007; 2017).

Finding scholarship during graduate education is of utmost importance, since there is no job guarantee for students during and after their education. Turkish government, as well as a number of organizations, finance graduate studies of unemployed students. However, these scholarships remain insufficient. Few students can be entitled to receive funding based on particular criteria (Mercan, 2016).

The primary institution which sends students abroad for master's and PhD education is the Ministry of National Education. The ministry sent 1755 students abroad between 1994 and 2005, in accordance with the Law No. 1416. The efficiency of this program remained at the rate of 52% which is quite low. The determining factor for this low rate is thought to be the inadequacy of foreign language skills of the participants (YÖK, 2007).

Another program, which was developed by YÖK for training academicians in accordance with the Law No. 2547 Article 33, sent 3745 research assistants between 1987 and 2004 to 29 countries. About 50% of the participants visited the USA, 38% visited the UK, and 12% were sent to other countries. The success rates based on the completion of the doctorate programs and the number of students receiving PhD scholarships in a foreign country are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. International PhD Scholarships

Institution	Legal Basis	Term	Number of Scholars	Completed	Continuing	Success %
Ministry of National Education	1416	1994-2005	1755	357 PhD 340 Master's	362	60,34
Council of Higher Education	2547	1987-2004	3745	2132	714	70,26
TÜBİTAK	NATO-A.1	1986-2005	384	227	28	66,40
	Integrated	1995-2005	238	178	58	99,16
TÜBA	Integrated	1995-2005	157	116	24	89,17

Source: TÜBA (Turkish Academy of Sciences), 2006

A third method of training academicians is to commission research assistants to visit developed universities for their graduate education. In accordance with Law No. 2547 Article 35, research assistants from developing universities have been commissioned in developed universities. 3340 assistants are being trained through this program. Yet, these programs are still insufficient to meet the academic needs in Turkey (TÜBA, 2006).

### 3.3 Achievements in Academy and the Current Status in Turkey

Academic profession is based on constant self-improvement, hence its difficulty. Academy in Turkey has been under pressure recently, so two major elements of academy - academic freedom and academic autonomy - are being threatened (Yıldız, 2014). The difficulty of this profession is a source of anxiety for academicians and the pressure from various sources increases the level of anxiety.

Before 1980, academic career would appeal to successful university students. Today, academic professions offer particular status, but fail at providing enough income (Table 5). As a result, the profession is losing its appeal and successful students are turning towards different professions. When these circumstances are considered, it is highly likely that there will be many vacancies in academic professions (Tomruk, 2014).

As prospective academicians start their career as research assistants, they usually have to consent to teach without any payment, prepare exam questions, grade papers, and complete endless tasks in order to secure a seat at universities and receive letters of recommendations from professors. Meanwhile, they fail at doing research and publish original studies (Tomruk, 2014). Young research assistants have to deal with high levels anxiety right at the beginning of their career.

The anxiety levels continue to increase when research assistants become faculty members. In a study conducted by Yıldız (2014), faculty members at Mersin University paint a bleak picture about the current status of universities and academicians. Emphasizing the inadequacy of academy in terms of quality, the participants express concern over uncertainty and complexity in academic structures. The participants further state that research, as the main goal of universities, is replaced by teaching which has been lacking in quality and serving different purposes (profit seeking, political views etc.). They observe that interpersonal communication and

relationships are characterized by conflict of interests or mutual benefits.

It is necessary to bring forward the issue of job satisfaction in academy. It is possible to claim that academicians cannot attain job satisfaction unless their physical, spiritual, mental, and social needs are met. Academicians who cannot attain job satisfaction start exhibit negative behaviours such as aggression, accusation, absenteeism, consent, inefficiency, and lack of enthusiasm (Tomruk, 2014). These factors increase the anxiety levels of academicians.

Meeting the needs of academicians for job satisfaction revives the issue of salaries which are still quite low despite an improvement in 2015. Table 5 shows the base salaries of faculty members between 1983 and 2017. The net salaries may vary with each university. Considering the expenses of participating in international events, the salaries are still unsatisfactory.

Table 5. Base Salaries of Faculty Members between 1983 and 2017

Years	Base Salaries (US Dollar) *			
	Professor (1/4)	Associate Professor (2/1)	Assistant Professor	Research Assistant
1983	384	294	198	162
1990	1110	740	581	383
1995	579	443	357	328
2000	898	678	579	431
2001	745	496	452	326
2006	1708	1119	908	629
2013	2170	1513	1437	1250
2017**	2157	1346	1304	1207

Source: YÖK, 2007; 2013

\*US Dollar is calculated through the daily rate.

\*\* 2017 data is calculated by The Law on Higher Education (Law no 2547); Higher Education Personnel Law (Law no 2914); Social Security and General Health Insurance Law (Law no 5510); Civil Servants Law (Law no 657).

Salaries were increased after the Cabinet Decree in 2015 which provided academic incentive (Regulation on Academic Incentive Payments, 2015). The new regulation allowed for supplementary payment for international events and thus encouraged academicians to participate in new scientific activities. It is still necessary to evaluate scientific activities and studies more thoroughly for scientific properties and quality as academic incentive may result in studies high in number but poor in quality.

### 3.4 Women in Academy and the Current Status in Turkey

Science, which helps us understand the universe and serves people, is not monopolized by men. Yet, using the words “science” and “women” in the same sentence has been odd since beginning of the history of science. No seats were available for women in the classes taught by famous ancient philosophers. Only after centuries of struggle could women enter male-dominated world of science (Hasan, 2013).

The most striking example of women’s struggle in the history of science is that of Hypatia of Alexandria, daughter of the famous mathematician Theon. Curator of Alexandria Library, a worthy mathematician, astronomer, and Neo-Platonist scientist, Hypatia was killed, dismembered, and burned brutally. During this murder, valuable works at Alexandria Library were also set to fire. This murder and destruction was one of the most shameful crimes against humanity. It will be condemned until the end of history (Uluğbay, 2015; Viney, 2013). As a result of centuries-long struggle, women have gained equal rights to education and research around the world, especially at the beginning of the 21st century. Inequality and accompanying problems continue to exist in underdeveloped countries (Narmansoy, 2010).

One of the tangible results of women’s struggle was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which started to materialize during the World Conference of the International Women's Year held in Mexico City in 1975 and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. In 1981, after twenty member states ratified the convention, it entered into force. The main aim of the convention has been to implement comprehensive legal standards for women, secure gender equality in every sphere of life, call for the abolition of all forms of customs and exercises that maintain discrimination against women, and challenge prejudices and stereotypes based on traditional gender roles. This convention is the only internationally binding legal document against gender-based discrimination. Turkey ratified CEDAW in 1985. The number of state parties by 2016 is 189 (KSGM, 2018).

Since the early days of Turkish republic and as a result of encouragement of women to participate in social and economic life primarily by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and by governments, women's involvement in academy has been increasing. On 31 May 1933, Law on the Abolition of Darülfunun and Establishment of a New University by the Ministry of National Education was enacted and women's enrolment at every department was encouraged. The number of women academicians was zero during the first year of the republic. This number increased consistently and the rate of women academicians reached 41% by 2009. The most striking part of this picture is the fact that the increase in the number of women in academy peaked between 1933 and 1944, after the University Reform of 1933, whereas the rate climbed from 0% to 7.14% during the first ten years of the republic (Özkanlı, 2007). As shown in Table 6, the rate reached 44.42% in 2018.

Table 6. Figures Showing Women Academicians in Turkey (2018, private universities included)

Academic Title	Women	Men	Total	The ratio of women to total number (%)
Professor	7.696	16.944	24.640	31.23
Associate professor	5.611	8.845	14.456	38.81
Assistant professor	15.932	21.588	37.520	42.46
Instructor	17.806	17.678	35.484	50.18
Research assistant	23.190	22.808	45.998	50.41
Total	70.235	87.863	158.098	44.42

Source: YÖK, 2018a

After women's involvement in academy, the number women scientists who are building reputation with their studies has been on the rise. It is observed that most women in academy who made remarkable contributions to science studied at universities on scholarship. All these developments became reality thanks to Atatürk's perspective on science and women (Narmansoy, 2010).

The rate of women in academy is remarkable compared to other countries. However, women's tendency towards pursuing career in "womanly" areas is worrying. Two main areas dominated by women are health and education. The improvement of women's conditions in academy depends on a change in gender-based clustering in professions (Özkanlı, 2007).

Although the general appearance of numbers seems pleasing, Table 6 reveals that the rates of women under the titles of professor and associate professor fall behind those of men. This is caused by the complexity of women's roles imposed upon them by society (Tanrısevdi, 2015). For this problem, White and Özkanlı (2008) offer the solution of establishing a democratic family environment. According to them, the family must run by democracy and the chores must be shared equally. Only then could women be freed from impositions. White and Özkanlı also remind the importance of providing housekeeping and childcare assistance for women academicians.

As the general picture of women's employment in academic professions is examined critically, it is possible to see that the positions held by women are characterized by sexual division of labor. The fact women are involved in academic professions more than other professions, does not lead to higher rates of representation in administrative positions. The higher the stage of academic hierarchy, the lower the rates of women administrators. This proves that women have to face the glass ceiling obstacle in academy (Şentürk, 2015).

#### 4. Conclusion

University education which produces quality manpower can be considered a key point of progress due to the relationship between progress and education. In the 21st century, the humanity evolved from industrial societies to information societies (Thurow, 1999). Therefore, muscle power is replaced by brainpower. Universities are being reformed in order to produce sufficient brainpower. Universities are focusing more on research-based activities while they are hiring part-time instructors for teaching. This leads to an increase in research and development activities. In other words, academicians can focus on their actual work, i.e. scientific studies (Altbach, 2000b).

Academicians are supposed to be individuals who are able ask questions, do research, and solve problems. Against this expectation, according to İnam (1999), academicians are becoming vain individuals who lack self-criticism due to their narrow point of view, waver between businesses and public service, do homework, and mistake their field of study for the major problems in science.

The number of universities in Turkey is increasing consistently. Therefore, the need for academicians is growing. The rates of training academicians, especially at PhD level, remain insufficient due to inadequate scholarship

opportunities. Another problem is the increasing amount of teaching per capita. The load of lessons give a teaching-oriented character to academy. In accordance with the transitioning to research-based universities all around the world, YÖK and the Ministry of Law have been establishing research universities with the help of “Mission Differentiation and Specialization Based on Regional Development” project since 2015 (YÖK, 2018b). These works still need to be implemented more rapidly and efficiently.

Today, universities in Turkey have to go under reconstruction in terms of location and function. Not only universities but also academicians and scientists need reconstruction or a quintessential type of humanism. The following conditions should be met before we can talk about a radical reformation at universities (Karaçay & Mihçı, 1999):

- More self-reliance on the part of scientists and academicians
- Courage to recognize and solve existing problems
- Cooperation among colleagues and with younger generations
- Adherence to the effort of defining universe and humanity, rather than to unconditional faith.

These steps will definitely help remove at least some of the obstacles in higher education system of Turkey.

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