

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS: THE CASE OF EDUCATION FACULTIES IN TURKEY*

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ABSTRACT

The faculty development of research assistants who are at the first step of their academic careers are significant for the employment of faculty members of future and realizing the responsibilities of higher education institutions as to contribute to science and technology. However, there is little research on the features of faculty development programs for research assistants in literature. The aim of this research is to determine the organization of the faculty development programs for research assistants. This study was improved by using descriptive research method. The population of the research consisted of 1095 research assistants who work in 54 Education Faculties of 44 state universities of Turkey between 2003 and 2004. The research data were collected by means of the survey. At the end of the study, it has been determined that the Research Assistants in Education Faculties in Turkey are highly in need of faculty development in view of; professional development, institutional development, instructional development and personal development respectively. It has also been determined with the study that the organization of the faculty development programs that research assistant suggest should be organized by the experts in education period as a workshop, and as activities continuing 2-3 hours in a week in a faculty development center.

Keyword: Faculty Development, faculty development area, faculty development program, research assistant.

INTRODUCTION

Faculty members are the human sources that will help higher education institutions to have the pioneering role in development and change, to meet the educational needs of the society and to contribute to the science and technology. They require faculty development for the purpose of carrying out these roles and responsibilities, adapting new technologies, coping with changing work conditions and increasing their ability towards research and teaching skills.

It is quite significant for the future of higher education institutions that research assistants as the faculty members in higher education institutions should be trained as to be the future academic staff. Research assistants are at the beginning of their academic carriers and in the class of future faculty (Odabaşı, 2005). For these reasons, one of the areas where faculty development has started to gain importance is the faculty development of research assistants who are at the beginning of their academic carriers as the teaching assistants in higher education institutions (Odabaşı, 2003).

According to the statistics of the Higher Education Committee (HEC), the number of total research assistants in Turkey is 27.205 (HEC, 2003). Research assistants have the highest proportion among all other instructors such as faculty members, instructors and lecturers (54.823) with a rate of 49%. Hence, the faculty development of research assistants – both as instructors and researchers from the very beginning of the process - is of primary importance for the higher education system to carry out its goals.

It is seen in literature that much of the research on faculty development cover all of the faculty members. Research on the faculty development of research assistants in literature is generally related to the needs analysis. On the other hand, it is also seen that little research has been carried out on the features that faculty development programs for research assistants should have.

Definition and Importance of Faculty Development

When the definitions in literature are taken into consideration, faculty development can be defined as “all of such activities as seminars, conferences and individual counseling carried out in a certain discipline in instructional, personal and institutional areas and fields by an higher education institution for the instructor to do

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his duties” (Brawer, 1990; Odabaşı, 2003; Steinert, 2000; Moeini, 2003). Considered in this respect, the aim in the activities for faculty development held by higher education institutions is to increase the development and effectiveness of the faculty members in the areas of education and research with the help of faculty members and thus to increase the quality of such responsibilities of higher education institutions as contributing to science and technology through scientific studies and educational activities.

In early 1970s, studies on faculty development included teaching skills and field specialization in basically developing the educational effectiveness of faculty members. With later approaches, faculty development focused on raising the faculty members’ awareness of and on improving their comprehension of newer information about the complexity of the teaching-learning process. In 1980s, the faculty development centers, in other words excellence centers for teaching, which would help to increase faculty members’ experience in class applications were established. This point of view also continued in 1990s. In late 1990s, the problems encountered in higher education started to become different and show diversity. In recent years, there is tendency towards both an individual and institutional approach indicating that faculty members should develop and renew themselves for their faculty development (Lawler, 2003).

Different classifications of faculty development are found in literature. According to these classifications, faculty development generally falls into four groups as instructional, professional, personal and institutional development areas. *Instructional development area* covers activities related to the development of such educational identities of faculty members as the systematical design, development, application and evaluation of the educational programs or of lessons, courses and teaching materials. *Professional development area* is made up of activities related to the development of their researcher-identities such as getting information about research techniques and statistical research methods, use of research funds and research grants and preparation and publication of scientific studies. Another development area, *personal development* includes activities related to increasing the productivity of faculty members and supporting and encouraging their academic development related to their individual development in and out of their academic environment. As for the *institutional development* area, it consists of activities that help to inform instructors about the institutional operation, to adopt themselves to the institutional culture and to see themselves as a part of the institution they work for (Babcock, 1989; McKenzie, 1991; Jarvis, 1992; Lee, 1996; Borko, Ellibot & Uchiyama, 2002; Grant & Keim, 2002; Moeini, 2003).

Faculty members have different carrier stages and needs with respect to their professional development area, because they show diversity in terms of variables that create individual differences such as experience, years of working and age on the way from being a research assistant to becoming a professor, (DiLorenzo & Heppener, 1994). For this reason, the needs of research assistants for faculty development differ from those of faculty and other faculty members.

Faculty Development Programs for Research Assistants

Faculty development programs for research assistants are the ones that basically depend on adult education, because the participants are adults. For this reason, the principles of adult education should be taken into consideration for the establishment and application of productive and effective faculty development programs appropriate to the goals for research assistants (McKenzie, 1991; Borko, Ellibot & Uchiyama, 2002; Grant & Keim, 2002; Richardson, 2003).

A study was carried out by Jarvis (1992a) for the purpose of determining the features of faculty development programs for newly employed faculty members and research assistants. According to the research findings of 117 faculty members working at 9 different universities in USA, the faculty members participating in the study stated that it would be the best model to organize a faculty development program including group activities such as workshops and seminars. Furthermore, it was also revealed that faculty members were of the opinion that the faculty development program to carry out in small groups mentored by senior faculty members would be the most effective program. In another study carried out by Mu (1997) on 209 faculty members in Education Faculty at the University of Tennessee in USA, it was determined that the most-preferred faculty development activity to meet the faculty development needs was the one that included workshops organized in small groups or one-on-one.

In the study carried out by Odabaşı (2003), with 427 faculty at Anadolu University, revealed that among the factors which would affect the participation of the faculty members in the faculty development program, the specialization of the educators that would take part in the activity was the most effective factor, yet the award system was not effective. Moreover, it was found out in the study that the faculty preferred the activities which were as workshops for the presentation of faculty development activities and as their first preferences related to

the timing of the faculty development activities, the faculty members wanted these activities to be carried out within the education period. As for the other findings of the study, the faculty indicated that subject expert faculty from their university was their first choice. The educators that would carry out the faculty development activities should be the faculty members from their own universities specialized in the field of the activity to be done.

In another study carried out to evaluate the “Interactive Instructional Media” module, - through the views of its participants - a faculty development program prepared by the Educational Communication and Technology Research Unit at Anadolu University, it was concluded that delivering the faculty development programs on the internet is one of the most-preferred types of presentation and that the faculty members were in need of faculty development programs for the use information technologies (Kabakçı & Odabaşı, 2004).

The Educational Communication and Technology Research Unit was established at Anadolu University in 2003 to support the faculty development. This unit executes an institutional orientation program as well as academic development programs. The goal of the institutional orientation program called “Program Orientation to Anadolu” is to inform the newly employed faculty members about the management of the university, its organizational structure and about the legal rights and responsibilities. Another faculty development program executed by the unit is the Academic Development Program. In the scope of this program, in-service courses that help faculty members increase their information and improve their skills related to the areas of teaching and research are organized in certain periods. Although the faculty development programs executed by this unit are addressed to all the faculty members, most of the participants in the academic years of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 were strikingly research assistants (Odabasi & Kabakci, 2004).

The necessary features of faculty development programs for research assistants are as follows (Jarvis, 1992a):

1. The managers of each department in higher education institutions should hold interviews with research assistants for the purpose of evaluation and planning of the faculty developments of research assistants in certain periods. In this way, the needs of research assistants should primarily be identified.
2. The awarding criteria should be determined by the managers of higher education institutions in order to support the faculty development of research assistants.
3. A variety of programs should be organized for each professional development area as the instructional, professional, personal and institutional areas for research assistants.
4. The programs to meet the faculty development needs of research assistants should be current and be supported by as many tools of educational technology as possible.
5. The faculty development programs for research assistants should be executed by such faculty development centers as Educational Technology Centers or Research-Development Centers which will be established in higher education institutions.
6. The necessary technological tools that will enable research assistants to benefit from faculty development programs should be available for use.

A study carried out interviews with faculty members over a hundred in USA and reviews of the general fields of personnel and faculty development was determined to several characteristics for an effective planning of faculty development programs. According to these characteristics, it should be considered administrative support, good management, good communication, orientation toward the future, collegiality for an effective faculty development programs. In addition, tactics for developing professional development area of faculty development include mentoring, group projects, research centers, travel money to interact with the large community of scholars, a reasonable amount of research time in short blocks, research support programs and good facilities, equipment and maintenance (Jarvis, 1992b). The views of research assistants about the organization of the program and the principles of adult education and the effective planning principles of faculty development programs should be taken into consideration together with the faculty development areas.

In order to assure the productivity and efficiency expected from the program for the faculty development of the research assistants, it is very important to identify the needs of the participants as well as to consider the views about the necessary features and the structure of the programs to be offered. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to identify the necessary features of a faculty development programs for research assistants.

METHOD

It was used the descriptive research method in the study. Among the 53 state universities in Turkey, 44 of them had education faculties according to 2003-2004 statistics of the Higher Education Committee (HEC). However, since there were more than one Education Faculty in some universities, there were 54 Education Faculties in

total. The research population of this study consisted of 1095 research assistants in 54 Education Faculties of the 44 universities.

“The Survey for Identifying the Point of Views of Research Assistants on Faculty Development” was used as the data collection tool in the study. For the validity of the questionnaire, the views of 9 field specialists (4 professors, 2 associated professors, 1 assistant professor and 2 instructors) were taken. Following the validity of the questionnaire, the pilot application of the questionnaire was executed on 14 research assistants who were not included in the research population - 5 were research assistants at Anadolu University, 5 at Osmangazi University and 4 were research assistants at Erciyes University. After the validity study and the pilot application, the final form of the data collection tool was ready. Among the questionnaires sent to 1081 research assistants, 573 of the questionnaires from the research population of totally 1095 research assistants – the 14 research assistants who had participated in the pilot study were not sent a questionnaire - were returned. Therefore, the return-rate achieved in this study was 53%. For the analysis of the data obtained in the study, “numbers and percentages” were used.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Preferences of the Research Assistants about Faculty Development Areas

In table 1, the distribution of the preferences of the research assistants on faculty development areas is shown as their first, second, third and fourth preferences.

According to Table 1, it was found out that 40,7% of the research assistants at education faculties need the instructional development area as their second preference, 34,9% as their third preference, 13,8% as their first preference and 7,0% as their fourth preference; 46,9% need faculty development as their first preference, 31,6% as their second preference, 16,6% as their third preference and 3,0% as their fourth preference; 29,8% need personal development as their third preference, 26,9% as their first preference, 23,2% as their fourth preference and 16,4% as their second preference; and 62,8% need institutional development as their fourth preference, 14,7% as their third preference, 11,7% as their first preference and 7,5% as their second preference.

Table 1. Preferences of the Research Assistants on Faculty Development Areas

Faculty Development Areas	First Preference		Second Preference		Third Preference		Fourth Preference		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	Instructional Area	79	13.8	233	40.7	200	34.9	40	
Professional Area	269	46.9	181	31.6	95	16.6	17	3.0	562
Personal Area	154	26.9	94	16.4	171	29.8	133	23.2	552
Institutional Area	67	11.7	43	7.5	84	14.7	360	62.8	554

According to the findings obtained from the preferences of research assistants about the faculty development areas, it was found out that they preferred faculty development activities in the first place, instructional development activities in the second place, personal development in the third and institutional development activities in the fourth place.

The Delivery Forms of Faculty Development Programs

Table 2 shows the distribution of the preferences of the research assistants related to the presentation forms of faculty development programs as their first, second, third and fourth

Table 2. Delivery Forms of Faculty Development Programs

Delivery Forms	First Preference		Second Preference		Third Preference		Fourth Preference		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	Conference	87	15.8	78	14.2	237	43.0	137	
Seminar	81	14.7	265	48.1	149	27.0	42	7.6	537
Workshops	332	60.3	88	16.0	87	15.8	35	6.4	542
Via the internet	47	8.5	107	19.4	63	11.4	321	58.3	538

According to table 2, 43.0% of the research assistants at education faculties preferred the faculty development programs to be presented in the form of a conference as their third preference, 24.9% as their fourth preference, 15.8% as their first preference, 14.2% as their second preference; 48,1% in the form of a seminar as their second preference, 27.0% as their third preference, 14.7% as their first preference, 7.6% as their fourth preference; 60,3% in the form of a workshop as their first preference, 16.0% as their second preference, 15.8% as their third preference, 6.4% as their fourth preference; and 58,3% preferred the programs to be presented via the internet as their fourth preference, 19.4% as their second preference, 11.4% as their third preference, 8.5% as their first preference. In the light of this finding, the order of the preferences of the research assistants about the delivery forms of the faculty development programs was found to be as follows: presentation in the form of workshops as their first preference, in the form of seminars as their second preference, in the form of conferences as their third preference and presentation via the internet as their fourth preference.

This finding is similar to the findings of Jarvis (1992a) and of Mu (1997) that organizing faculty development programs for faculty members in the form of such group activities as workshops and seminars will be the most appropriate presentation form. Furthermore, this finding is in line with the finding of Odabaşı (2003) that “for the presentation of academic staff development activities, faculty prefer the activities in the form of a workshop as their first preference, those in the form a seminar as their second preference and those in the form of a conference as their third preference”. In other words, the preferences of the research assistants about the presentation forms of faculty development programs are similar to those of faculty.

The Features of Educators Working in Faculty Development Programs

Table 3 shows the distribution of the preferences of the research assistants about the features of educators working in faculty development programs as their first, second, third and fourth.

Table 3. Preferences about the Features of Educators Working in Faculty Development Programs

Features of Educators	First Preference		Second Preference		Third Preference		Fourth Preference		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	By Faculty at Education Faculty	82	14.9	97	17.6	136	24.7	185	
By specialists in an education center to be established for this purpose at the university	245	44.5	150	27.2	102	18.5	18	3.3	515
In a private education center out of the university and by its specialists	115	20.9	110	20.0	92	16.7	184	33.4	501
By experienced faculty members of the several departments of the university	107	19.4	131	23.8	159	28.9	102	18.5	499

According to Table 3, it was found out that 33,6% of the research assistants prefer faculty development programs to be executed “by the faculty members at Education Faculty” as their fourth preference, 24.7% as their third preference, 17.6% as their second preference and 14.9% as their first preference; 44.5% “by specialists at an education center to be established for this purpose at the university” as their first preference, 27.2% as their second preference, 18.5% as their third preference and 3.3% as their fourth preference; 33.4% “in a private education center out of the university and by its specialists” as their fourth preference, 20.9% as their first preference, 20.0% as their second preference and 18.5% as their third preference; and 28.9% “by experienced faculty members of departments at some departments of the university” as their third preference, 23.8% as their second preference, 19.4% as their first preference and 18.5% as their fourth preference.

Depending on these findings, the order of the preferences of the research assistants about the features of educators that will execute faculty development programs is as follows: “by specialists at an education center to be established for this purpose at the university” is their first and second preferences, “by experienced faculty of departments at some departments of the university” is their third preference, and their fourth one is “by the faculty at Education Faculty” and “in a private education center out of the university and by its specialists.”

This finding of the study is consistent with the finding of Odabaşı (2003) that “faculty prefer the faculty who are specialized in the area of the activities that will be organized and who are from their own universities as their first preference related to the academic backgrounds of educators that will carry out faculty development activities.” In other words, while faculty prefer specialized faculty primarily from their own universities to execute faculty development programs, research assistants prefer the programs to be executed by specialists in an education center to be established for this purpose.

Factors Affecting Participation of Research Assistants to Faculty Development Programs

Factors affecting participation of research assistants in faculty development programs are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Factors That Affect Participation of Research Assistants in Faculty Development Programs

Participation Factors in Faculty Development Programs	Not Effective		Little Effective		Partly Effective		Quite effective		Very effective		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Information exchange with colleagues	12	2.1	28	4.9	85	14.8	283	49.4	162	28.3	570
Developing of teaching skills	7	1.2	30	5.2	92	16.1	255	44.5	186	32.5	570	100.0
Developing research skills	4	.7	14	2.4	64	11.2	212	37.0	276	48.2	570	100.0
Monetary awarding of participation in the program	125	21.8	103	18.0	142	24.8	102	17.8	99	17.3	570	100.0
Awarding of participation in the program with a chance to participate in a field-related activity abroad	20	3.5	30	5.2	76	13.3	157	27.4	288	50.3	571	100.0
Specialization levels of the educators that will manage the activities	2	.3	13	2.3	37	6.5	165	28.8	354	61.8	571	100.0
Giving An achievement certificate at the end of the program	53	9.2	81	14.1	155	27.1	152	26.5	130	22.7	571	100.0

When the values in Table 4 are examined, 61,8% of the research assistants find such factors “very effective” as “the specialization levels of the educators who will manage the activities”, 50,3% as “awarding of participation in a program with a chance to participate in an activity abroad related to the field”, and 48,2% as “development of research skills”; and 49.4% find the factor “quite effective” which is “information exchange with colleagues”. Depending on this finding, it was found out that the factor most effective on the participation of the research assistants in faculty development programs was the one “participation levels of educators who will manage the activities”, and the least effective factor was the one “monetary awarding of participation in the program”.

This research finding is similar to the finding of Odabaşı (2003) that “among the factors that will affect the development of academic staff, faculty find the factor very effective that an educator to take part in an activity should be an expert, yet they regard monetary awarding ineffective.”

The Preferred Time Period of Faculty Development Programs for Research Assistant

Table 5 shows the data related to the time period that education faculty research assistants will devote to faculty development programs.

Table 5. The Time Period of Faculty Development Programs for Research Assistant

The Time Period To Be Devoted	N	%
2-3 hours during the term	25	4.4
2-3 hours a month	143	25.0
2-3 hours a week	356	62.1
Other	45	7.9
Total	569	100.0

When the values in Table 5 are examined, 62,1% of the research assistants are observed to devote their “2-3 hours a week”, 25,0% “2-3 hours a month” and 4,40% “2-3 hours during a term” to the faculty development program that will be organized. According to this finding, more than half of the research assistants are found out to devote 2-3 hours in a week to a faculty development program.

Table 6 shows the numbers and percentages related to the time periods that the research assistants prefer for the execution of the faculty development program as their first preference, second, and third preference.

Table 6. Preferences of Research Assistants about the Period for the Execution of Faculty Development Programs

The Time Preferred	First Preference		Second Preference		Third Preference		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	In the education period	313	56.8	76	13.8	142	25.8
On summer holiday	141	25.6	78	14.2	290	52.6	509
On semester holiday	94	17.1	344	62.4	65	11.8	503

When the values in Table 6 are examined, it is found out that 56,8% of the research assistants prefer the faculty development program to be executed “in the education period” as their first preference, 25,8% as their second preference and 13,8% as their third preference; 52,6% “on summer holiday” as their third preference, 25,6% as their first preference and 14,2% as their second preference; 62,4% “on semester holiday” as their second preference, 17,1% as their first preference and 11,8% as their second preference. According to this finding, the order of the preferences of the research assistants related to the period in which the faculty development program will be executed is as follows: “in the education period” is the first preference, “on semester holiday” is the second and “on summer holiday” is the third preference.

This research finding is similar to the finding of Odabaşı (2003) that “the preferences of faculty about the timing of academic staff development activities are respectively in the education period, on semester holiday and in summer”.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the findings obtained from the study, it is concluded that the faculty development area which research assistants need most includes the faculty development activities. Among the presentation forms of faculty development programs, the research assistants at most preferred the faculty development programs executed in the form of workshops. According to another finding, the research assistants stated that faculty development programs should be executed by specialists in an education center to be established for this purpose at the university. One more conclusion is that the factor most effective on the participation of research assistants in faculty development programs is the fact that faculty development programs for research assistants should be supported by education faculty members and specialists in the field. The factor least effective on the participation in the faculty development program is the monetary awarding of participation in the program. According to another finding obtained in the study, it is concluded that research assistants prefer a faculty development program more which will be organized in the education period as to be 2-3 hours in a week.

In faculty development programs for research assistants, faculty development activities should be considered in the first place such as following the developments in the related scientific field, being aware of the projects and having information about scientific research methods to publish a scientific study. If the faculty development program is structurally presented in the form workshops such as small group activities, it will be more effective on meeting the faculty development needs of research assistants. Moreover, it will be better to support it with faculty development activities in the form of seminars, conferences or via the internet. Faculty development programs for research assistants should be executed by specialists that will serve this purpose. In addition, for the execution of faculty development programs for this purpose in centers, the support of specialists in the related field, education designers, specialists on education technology and that of faculty members specialized in the related field at education faculties should be taken. The faculty development programs for research assistants should be executed in the education period as to be 2-3 hours in a week. The participation of research assistants

in faculty development programs is very important for the expected productivity of the program. The participation of research assistants in faculty development programs should be on voluntary basis, and awarding criteria such as research grants and points for academic achievements should be determined in order to have research assistants participate in the programs and to support their success.

The results obtained in this study can be supported by research on the identification of the problems that research assistants meet in their first-year working, qualitative and quantitative research on the views of managers (such as the dean and the head of the department) and experimental research on the effectiveness of faculty development programs in terms of product and process.

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