

# Transition to Higher Education in the World and Turkey: Proposal for Transition to Higher Education

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## Abstract

Educational systems differ from country to country. Variables including society's requirements and state policies may underlie these different systems. No matter what rationale those system differences have, the main purpose of the system is to raise "qualified individuals." Institutions of higher educations are structures in which the necessary information is produced and human resources are raised for countries to develop and advance. Therefore, universities have become one of the prominent institutions that define nations' future now. This study addresses the conditions of entering the institutions of higher education, which have an important place in educational systems and, provide a general description of the transition to higher education in the world and in Turkey. A model was proposed for the transition to higher education in accordance with that description.

**Keywords:** higher education, higher education transition model in Turkey, higher education transition models in the world

## 1. Introduction

Educational systems may vary by societies' requirements, differences of the individuals within societies, state policies, helplessness and even variables as deep as geopolitical location of countries (Çelik, 2013: 5-8).

Blackburn and Lawrence (1995, *in* Gedikoğlu 2005: 73-74) argued that institutions of higher educations are structures in which the necessary information is produced and human resources are raised for countries to develop and advance. Therefore, universities have become one of the prominent institutions that define nations' future now. On the other hand, institutions of higher education have significant functions and responsibilities in the criticism of various social and economic development, the transfer of cultural values to younger generations, providing humanity with new information and protecting it. Bowen (1980) also stated that institutions of higher education ensures social change as they have an impact on students as individuals within the educational and instructional process (*in* Gedikoğlu 2005: 73-74). Higher education entrance exams are about identifying students equipped with necessary qualifications (for higher education) and placing them in related programs, because higher education programs will provide education accordingly.

Each country has their own educational policies. These policies differ by variables including country's geopolitical location, its religious, social, political and economic power, etc. In this context, it is normal that differences in educational systems stand out in terms of transition to higher education and higher education itself.

### 1.2. Higher Education Entrance and Higher Education Entrance Exams in Turkey

With the newer system implemented in 2010, ÖSS (Student Selection Exam) was discontinued by ÖSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center) and it was replaced by YGS (Transition to Higher Education Examination) and LYS (Undergraduate Placement Exam). According to Külekçi and Bulut (2011), it is obligatory to take the Transition to Higher Education Examination (YGS) and Undergraduate Placement Examination (LYS) held by ÖSYM and get the sufficient score in both exams to enroll in an institution of higher education in Turkey. This obligation is also legally regulated:

"Students enter state institutions of higher education by taking the exams of which principles are specified by the Council of Higher Education." Average graduation grades in the institution of secondary education are also added to the score obtained in the exam by with a certain coefficient when calculating the total score. Higher education transition exam is now known as ÖSS-1 which is currently applied. It is composed of four sections: Turkish language, Social Sciences, Basic Mathematics and Science. 40 questions are asked in each section, with 160 questions in total in the whole exam. Exam duration is 160 minutes. Students who passes the Transition to Higher Education Examination are entitled to take the Undergraduate Placement Examination.

LYS comprises of five stages: Mathematics-Geometry Exam (LYS 1), Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology) Exam (LYS 2), Turkish Language and Literature-Geography Exam (LYS 3), Social Sciences (History, Geography 2, Philosophy group) Exam (LYS 4), and Foreign Language Exam (LYS 5) (for detailed information, see [www.osym.org.tr](http://www.osym.org.tr) latest access date: 05.10.2015).

### 1.3. History of Higher Education Entrance in Turkey

Having the autonomy and being a public legal entity within the framework of duties and authorities granted pursuant to the Article 130 and 131 of the Constitution, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) is assigned to be the single body which oversees directing, planning, organizing, managing and supervising the higher

education in Turkey. Functions of the Council of Higher Education to plan, organize and supervise the higher education in coherence in shorter and longer periods are clarified with the Articles and 6 and 7 of the Law on Higher Education no. 2547 that specify the scope of the council, (YÖK, 2007: 7)

The Student Selection and Placement Examination which was introduced by the Council of Higher Education in 1974 was held in two sessions in the morning and the afternoon on the same day in those years and it was held in one session on one day between 1976 and 1980. It became a two-stage examination by 1981. The first stage of this two-stage system, the Student Selection Examination (ÖSS), was held in April and the second stage, the Student Placement Examination (ÖYS) was held in June.

In 1974, candidates' preferences of higher education program started to be collected and they were placed in higher education programs by YÖK in accordance with their scores and preferences. In 1982, candidates' diploma grades started to be collected from secondary education institutions and those grades were added to students' scores in the entrance and placement exams with certain weights under the name of OBP (Secondary Education Achievement Score).

In 1987, candidates who gathered their preferences of higher education programs in certain fields were provided with the opportunity to answer given tests on the related fields in the examination and not to answer the questions out of the field.

In 1999, the second stage of the two-stage system, the Student Placement Examination (ÖYS) was discontinued and the examination was transformed into a single-stage examination named ÖSS. The question contents and distribution of subjects by the program were not changed in ÖSS:

In 2010, it was decided to implement the two-stage examination system named ÖSYS (Student Selection and Placement Examination). The stages were called YGS (Transition to Higher Education Examination) and LYS (Undergraduate Placement Examination). Students who pass YGS are entitled to take LYS (for detailed information, see [www.osym.org.tr](http://www.osym.org.tr) : Latest access date 04.12.2015).

Although examinations held since 1974 have had different styles and names, it is also observed that no radical alterations have been made in the contents of questions. This situation, as supported in the studies by performed Dursunoğlu (2002), can be explained by the fact that no essential changes have been noticed in regard to the attainments/skills specified within the scope of mother tongue education courses in the Secondary Education Program of the Ministry of National Education.

Students had to succeed in ÖSS until 2010 and must take YGS and LYS since then to transit to higher education after they have received education in the schools within the framework of programs set by the Ministry of Higher Education. The questions in the examinations are underpinned by the secondary education program specified by the Ministry and the attainments within the program.

#### *1.4. Problems with the System*

It is thought that there are some setbacks in the Turkish educational system. Unequal opportunities among students are the main ones of these setbacks.

Turkey is facing a multi-dimensional situation of unequal opportunities in the field of education as it is in many other fields. It is possible to observe this inequality among several income groups, and beyond this, in terms of regional and social gender. In consideration of the depth and prevalence of the inequality, it would not be an accurate approach to associate the reasons only with the higher education even when the subject is addressed on educational terms. Starting from the preschool, each stage of the educational processes is filled with deep unequal opportunities (Şenses, 2007).

Intensive pressure of demand on higher education comes from the youngsters and their families who want better jobs and living conditions as a social demand and from employers who want more qualified labor force as an economic demand and from the political power which assumes the responsibility for meeting those social and economic demands (Tural, 2002).

As other beneficiaries of secondary education, students—and therefore their parents—perceive secondary education as a period in which “their educational lives will end or continue if they have the luck; their future will fall apart and their expectations from life are consumed if they cannot enter university” (Kılıç, 1999). Therefore, the opinion that secondary education is just a step of education that prepares students for higher education is becoming increasingly popular in the public and this opinion is being effective in regulations for secondary education (Güvenç, 1992: 4), and this causes that secondary education's another important function, preparation for vocation, to be ignored. Today, this opinion's reflection on social life comes across as a large group of youngsters who graduated from the secondary education but could not enroll in the higher education and do not have the necessary and valid vocational competences for the working life (Sezgin, 1999).

Furthermore, Sönmez (2008) argues by referring to the higher education entrance examinations that *no assessment tools could be wholly valid and reliable* either in science or social sciences. Therefore, he mentions about the drawbacks of the student acceptance in universities with one or two exams (Sönmez, 2008: 125).

### 1.5. Higher Education and Higher Education Entrance in the World with Examples

System of transition to higher education in Turkey is central. Average academic achievement of the students in previous four-year high school is also effective in this transition. When examining higher education entrance systems of various countries, there are similar or completely contrary systems.

In Russia, higher education is structured on three levels: The first one is the diploma obtained at the end of two years which is considered the start of general academic life. On the second level, students gain vocational skills in science and social science and receive an undergraduate diploma at the end of four (2+2) years. The third level aims at raising experts with a master's degree or a "special degree" in five or six years (Erdoğan, 2015: 90-91). It is obligatory to pass the Stage I and Stage II in the secondary education to enter the institutions of higher education.

Higher education is provided in six different ways in Austria:

1. Universities
2. Technical/Vocational institutes of higher education (Fachhochschulen)
3. University centers (Danube University)
4. Colleges for general and vocational teaching education
5. Colleges for high-level medical-technical vocations and nursing colleges
6. There is also a series of educational institutions on university level.

Candidates applying for higher education must possess a certification (Reife-und Diplomprüfungszeugnis, Berufsreifeprüfungszeugnis, Studienberechtigungsprüfungszeugnis) which is received from a secondary education institution or which is for a certain area of study (Balci, 2007).

According to Utanır (2000), three universities (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense) and two central universities (Roskilde, Aalborg) provide different opportunities of higher education and conduct traditional academic research in Denmark. Period of study is three years in the general universities. This period provides a bachelor's degree which is obtained at the end of a two-year education and a postgraduate exam. Institutions of higher education can be grouped under two titles:

1. Universities that provide research-based education on general academic topics
2. Institutions of higher education specific for certain vocations other than universities

With the Law on Universities renewed in 2003, all twelve universities became independent institutions. Enrollment in higher education is free of charge; however, they accept limited number of students in specific areas such as medicine and education. For transition to higher education, students must pass the exam called "gymnasium", Hf exam, HHX exam or HTX exam successfully (Hörner, et al., 2007).

According to Güçlü and Bayrakçı (2004: 51-54), there are over 3600 institutions of higher education in USA. More than 2100 of them provide four-year education while over 1500 provide two-year education. 14 million students are attending the institutions of higher education. Universities provide education on several levels including undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programs. Schooling rate is 29% in higher education. Either being public or private, all institutions of higher education are autonomous. It is obligatory to take SAT exams for higher education entrance in USA. In this two-examination system composed of SAT I and SAT II, SAT I is usually obligatory for enrollment in universities while SAT II is not obligatory for some of the universities. These obligations and conditions of university entrance are specified within the body of each university.

Universities in France accept all students with a bachelor's degree, DAEU, or "diploma for acceptance in university studies" (diplôme d'accès aux études universitaires) or an equivalent certificate of competency. In Germany, one must possess the certificates necessary for entering universities or equivalent institutions of higher education; for example, every student who received the certificate named *Zeugnis der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife* is entitled to enroll in institutions of higher education or the certificate named *Zeugnis der Fachgebundenen Hochschulreife* entitles students to enroll in a university or an equivalent institution of higher education on a specific branch. All candidates meeting the entrance conditions enroll in the courses they selected without doing anything (see Erdoğan, 2015: 131-144).

Higher education in Greece is usually provided at universities. Students are entitled to enter an institution of higher education with a score which is the combination of the score obtained in the national exam which is held at the end of the high school third grade and the achievement grade in the diploma granted by the high school (Zahariadis and Exadaktylos, 2016).

There is a binary higher education system in the Netherlands:

1. Higher education provided by universities (wetenschappelijk onderwijs= WO)
2. Professional higher education provided by HBO institutions (hoger beroepsonderwijs=HBO)

Entrance to university requires a pre-university (VWO) graduation certificate or a HBO competency or HBO propaedeutic certificate. Professional higher education, on the other hand, requires a general high school certificate (HAVO) or a specialist management certificate (MBO) or a pre-university certificate (VWO).

All institutions of higher education are autonomous in UK and each specify its own acceptance

conditions. Specific requirements are set for each branch. (see [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk) )

Higher education in South Korea is divided in to seven main classes:

- a. Graduate schools and universities,
- b. Industrial universities,
- c. Educational universities,
- d. Associate schools,
- e. Universities of press and communication,
- f. Technical graduate schools,
- g. Other multi-purpose institutions.

Period of study varies between 4 and 6 years in these institutions except under associate conditions. Higher education entrance requires a candidate to finish a high school or an equivalent school and to pass the examination held by the ministry in charge of education on the national level once a year. Where number of applications exceeds a certain number, each institution chooses students to be accepted with its own written and oral exams (see Bakioğlu, 2016: 43-75).

## 2. Purpose of the Study and Method

The purpose of this study is to examine the process of higher education and transition to higher education around the world and to propose an ideal model of transition to higher education. To this end, problems with the system, higher education and transition to higher education in Turkey and higher education and models of transition to higher education around the world were examined. The document analysis method was preferred to seek for an answer to the question “What/how are the current systems of transition to higher education?” The document analysis is a “research method used for making valid and reliable assumptions out of texts” (Krippendorff, 2004). This is a descriptive study constructed with the document analysis.

## 3. Conclusion and Discussion

Entrance without examination would lead to many unequal opportunities and a serious tendency to universities with higher educational quality would increase in Turkey or another country. The fact that students would be accepted to the higher education by the institution of higher education to be applied to would also cause a similar unequal opportunity. Because a similar case has been observed in Turkey before, and relatives of notable people of the country has studied in related departments (Sönmez, 2008: 132).

Higher education in Turkey generally takes four year except certain special areas and it is two years at graduate schools. This shows parallelism with other educational systems in the world. We can talk about three basic models for transition to higher education as for the models of transition to higher education either around the world or in Turkey.

*a. Central system:* In a central system, there is a center for the transition to higher education and this center applies one or two examinations to students for the transition. Candidates are placed in given institutions of higher education in accordance with their scores in the examinations and with their preferences.

*b. Local system:* Institutions of higher education subject candidates to one or two examinations in accordance with their own systems. In these examinations, students’ graduation grades, reference, etc. in their previous education are effective.

*c. Mixed system:* In the mixed system, students get a score in a central examination; students’ graduation grade in the previous education is added to this score and the center places students in an institution of higher education with that score and in accordance with their order of preference.

Firstly, only one or a few examinations to be held by the center would be valid for the transition to higher education would ruin model’s reliability. This also applies to the local system. Because there would be a single decision maker in both cases. Transition models that are dependent on one position would also bring about the problems both in terms of ensuring each other’s control and the reliability itself. Hence, a mixed system is needed to make sure that both system act in cooperation.

A central high council should subject candidates to an examination. Yet, this examination needs to be capable of measuring all of the basic linguistic skills, not just the reading comprehension skill unlike the examinations held in the current system in Turkey. Candidates’ integrated linguistic skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) should be assessed gradually and separately and candidate’s total score should be the scores separately obtained for the skills (especially for the writing skills and its effects, see Çelik and Çetinkaya, 2014). By adding the graduation grade in the previous step of education to candidates’ scores of these skills, they can get to the stage of preference. The preferred institution of higher education (university, graduate school, etc.) subjects candidates to an examination through its own examination system and directive. Candidate’s total score is calculated with a combination of a) score of the examination held by the preferred institution of higher education, b) score of the central examination and c) candidate’s graduation grade at certain ratios. The ratios are specified by the central high council specifically for the areas of study.

One of the most important problems with the mixed system seems to be that an examination can be held for each skill. When considering that over 2 million candidates apply for the higher education examinations in Turkey, for instance, it would be very difficult to hold the listening exam. Nevertheless, it is possible to overcome this problem; some of the foreign language exams or examinations towards foreigners in most of the Turkish language centers are being held successfully despite the numerical multitude.

Eventually, students' average grades at the end of each grade level, score of the central examination for each course and the examination(s) (of which directive and content is specified by the related department specifically for the area of study) to which they are subjected by their department of preference would prove a model of transition to higher education.

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