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Looking Inside the Strategic Plans: Strengths and Weaknesses of Turkish Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

As strengths and weaknesses are regarded as internal features of an organization, the present study focused on strengths and weaknesses of Turkish public universities by analyzing the SWOTs (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of twenty higher education institutions. By applying qualitative content analytical tools, we tried to make some comparisons, twenty universities, ten ranked at the top and ten at the bottom of the URAP list, were chosen to analyze the strengths and weaknesses. Findings show that all universities top or bottom ones have internal strengths and weaknesses on their own. The strengths of universities differ according to their size, field of service, structure, history and geographical locations. Top universities which are in big size, have a deeply rooted history and situated in a better geographical location can enjoy the strengths as qualified faculty members, organizational culture, internationalization process, infrastructure and good alumni relations. On the other hand, bottom universities which have not got those advantages deal with other strengths such as young faculty members, organizational support and internal communication. As for the weaknesses, top universities need more budget and acceptable rate of faculty member and student. Bottom ones need more qualified faculty members, students and staff. As they are located in disadvantageous regions, they are in need of some promotions to attract faculties, staff, national and international students. In addition, they also should be aware of the contributions of good alumni relations.

Keywords: university, SWOT analysis, strengths, weaknesses, Turkey

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Mirando Dentro de los Planes Estratégicos: Fortalezas y Debilidades de las Instituciones de Educación Superior Turcas

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Resumen

El presente estudio se centró canalizar las fortalezas y debilidades de las universidades públicas turcas mediante el análisis de los DAFO (debilidades, amenazas, fortalezas, oportunidades) de veinte instituciones de educación superior. Al aplicar herramientas analíticas de contenido cualitativo, tratamos de hacer algunas comparaciones. Veinte universidades, diez clasificadas en la parte superior y diez en la parte inferior de la lista URAP, fueron elegidas para analizar las fortalezas y debilidades. Los resultados muestran que todas las universidades superiores o inferiores tienen sus propias fortalezas y debilidades internas. Las fortalezas de las universidades difieren según su tamaño, campo de servicio, estructura, historia y ubicaciones geográficas. Las mejores universidades disfrutan de las fortalezas como miembros calificados de la facultad, cultura organizacional, proceso de internacionalización, infraestructura y buenas relaciones con ex alumnos. Por otro lado, las universidades inferiores que no tienen esas ventajas se ocupan de otras fortalezas, como los jóvenes docentes, el apoyo organizacional y la comunicación interna. En cuanto a las debilidades, las mejores universidades necesitan más presupuesto y una tasa aceptable de profesores y estudiantes. Los de abajo necesitan miembros de la facultad, estudiantes y personal más cualificado. Como se encuentran en regiones desfavorecidas, necesitan algunas promociones para atraer a facultades, personal, estudiantes nacionales e internacionales. Además, también deben ser conscientes de las contribuciones de las buenas relaciones con los antiguos alumnos.

Palabras clave: universidad, análisis DAFO, Fortalezas, Debilidades, Turquía.

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Just think about a modern organization which has no strategy or strategic plan. We often talk about aims, visions, missions or future plans of an organization. But who knows or cares the future aims of an organization without any written and visible strategic document? From this perspective, strategic planning helps organizations look into the future and identify main trends in their working areas. This is a longstanding process that covers aims, missions, visions, strengths, weaknesses etc. of an organization. Strategic planning is an output of strategic management which has its roots from Total Quality Management (TQM) accepted as contemporary scientific management nowadays (English, 1994). As in scientific management, prediction and control are the two most important elements of strategic management processes. Therefore, sectors such as industry, health care, education and defense started to use strategic planning to make some predictions and also to control some variables in their organizations. By predicting and controlling variables with strategic planning, organizations can understand the strengths, weaknesses, trends and problems and the beneficiaries who are in need of or determine the most effective and efficient way to reach their aims (United Nations [UN], 2015).

Many studies suggest that strategic planning is an important tool in strategy development process because it helps modern organizations define their major problems, set reasonable objectives, prepare a, b and c plans, and choose the best or the better strategy for sustainable goals (Jarzabkowski, & Kaplan, 2015; Pirtea, Nicolescu & Botoc, 2009; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2011; Milanya, 2014). It is also seen as a prominent integration, adaptation and coordination tool for organizational decision-making processes (Amason, Thompson, Hochwarter, & Harrison, 1995; Grant, 2003; Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Feldman, 2012) and plays a key role in determining innovation processes of organizations (Batra, Sharma, Dixit, &Vohra, 2015). Thus, we can easily claim that strategic planning is a necessary management tool for every organization in all sectors.

On the other hand, there are also many doubts that strategic planning processes can be harmful for organization's efficiency and affectivity. This happens by creating too much bureaucracy with strict rules and protocols and relying too much on raw data which has no or little relation with major problems (Mintzberg, 1994; Evans, 2007). That process, as Mintzberg (1994) suggested, can produce automated approaches that has little or no usage for the issues of organizations. These automated approaches also prevent them

from thinking strategically and limit the scope of organization's ability and creativity to respond unplanned and spontaneous actions (Taylor & de Lourdes Machado, 2006). Since the prediction, detachment and formalization (Mintzberg, 1994) or predictability, objectivity and structure (Evans, 2007) are the main assumptions of strategic management, those assumptions may lead organizations to fall short of reality, choose a wrong direction or ignore human beings.

By considering those benefits and doubts about strategic management, we see the reality that it has widely been used in most of modern organizations today. How did this process start? After cold war, everything has changed dramatically in the world. So, the scientific management phenomena have evolved into TQM and strategic management (English, 1994). Those changes happened because the efficiency and affectivity of organizations were being questioned at that time. In 1950s, America first made budget exercises with the logic of strategic planning and these initiatives spread rapidly all over the world. Since that time, strategic planning has been used in many forms, in many organizations and in many countries (Mintzberg, 1994).

Strategic Management in Turkish Public Universities

Turkey met with strategic management process in the context of national planning concept for public sector in 2000s. For private sectors this date is of course earlier. First of all, legal structure was regulated to help public institutions adopt this new process. In 2005, public financial and control canon (Law no: 5018) brought strategic planning as a legal obligation for public institutions such as schools, hospitals and universities. There certainly are some reasons why strategic planning is an obligation for public institutions considering the dramatic changes happened all around the world. If we talk about higher education, the main scope of this study, we can easily say that some variables such as exploding demands for higher education, changing demography of students, internationalization, marketing efforts (OECD, 2014) and funding have brought about the emergence of strategic planning in higher education in the 1970s and 1980s. During that period, managing sources efficiently, performance-based assessments, budgeting and the rapid improvements confronted with ICTs lead the way to strategic planning as the best expedient for a proactive policy in the environment of increasing demands and limited resources (Hinton, 2012) As the "sustainable

development" discourse have also become on the agenda of national and international arena, higher education institutions have been in a critical place to achieve sustainable development goals (Nasir, 2012). Thus, in recent years higher education institutions, public or for-profit ones, all over the world have a great motivation to come up with these changes. That means, universities started to look for the ways to be different from others. In his study Ozdem (2011) focused on the mission and vision statements of the universities and found that a qualified work force, having universal, sufficient, and competent knowledge" and "Becoming a well-known, leading, and respected research university both nationally and internationally" was among the most commonly underlined messages. As emphasized in the statements every university has been trying to be different from the others. The question was; What makes this university different from any other? (McConkey, 1981). This is the same concrete case for Turkish public universities since 2005, too. In Turkey, universities prepare periodical strategic plans which help them decide priorities of organization, distribute resources, recognize themselves by doing SWOT analysis and move forward.

SWOT in Focus

This study focuses on strategic plans of Turkish public universities and aims to find out the strengths and weaknesses of them by analyzing their strategic plans. There is a variety of strategic planning models. Most well-known and used ones have their roots in the Harvard policy model developed at the Harvard Business School. In fact, most strategic planning models composed of similar approaches with little differences (Bryson, 2018). Yet as Paris (2003) suggested the systematic analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is a primary strength of the Harvard model and it is an important step in the strategic planning model. By identifying these four fields, strengths and weaknesses internally and opportunities and threats externally, universities can recognize their main competencies for decision-making, make realistic plans and develop sustainable strategies (Phadermrod, 2016).The present study focused on strengths and weaknesses of universities because these dimensions of SWOT are regarded as internal features of an organization (UN, 2015). Thus, we paid more attention to internal strengths and weaknesses of universities by analyzing their

statements in strategic plans. Below the Figure 1 can help readers to conceptualize the SWOT analysis process.

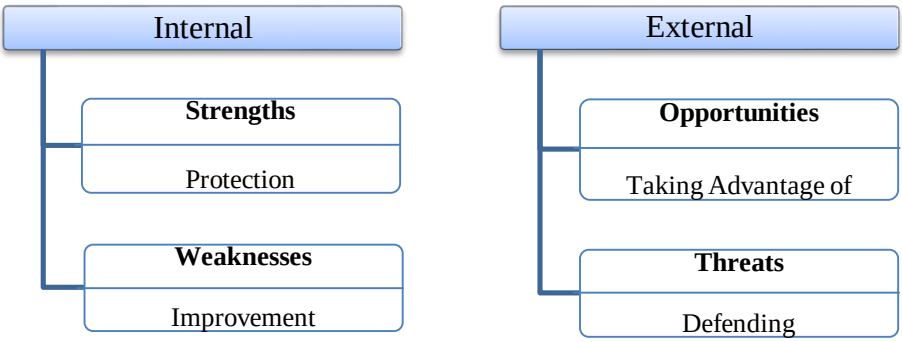

Figure 1. Internal and external dimensions of SWOT (adapted by the researcher) (UN, 2015).

As seen in Figure 1, internal dimension of SWOT composes of two sub dimensions as strengths and weaknesses. Strengths of an organization are about human resources, leadership, accountability and transparency and strategic plans emphasizes these features to be protected by all stakeholders. Internal weaknesses are about scarcity of human resources, being lack of good communication and budget deficiency etc. These problems display an organization's failures and then improvement processes come to the agenda. Another dimension of SWOT is external factors that affect an organization externally. Similar to internal ones, this dimension has got two sub themes called as opportunities and threats. Opportunities mean potentials for organizations to take advantage of. For example, having a dynamic environment or good community engagement are important attributions for an organization to take advantage of. External threats for an organization can be helpful to be dynamic and on alert. These threats are to be defended and strategic plans are prepared to come up with this process more easily and effectively. To sum up, this study seeks answers for these questions; (a) What are the strengths and weaknesses of top universities? (b) What are the strengths and weaknesses of universities at the bottom? (c) Is there any concordance with strengths and weaknesses of universities?

With advantages and disadvantages of strategic planning and importance of SWOT in mind, it is high time to describe the data sets and the methodological procedures followed in analysis.

Data Collection and Methodology

This qualitative study uses two sets of data, based on (University Ranking by Academic Performance) URAP ranking system. URAP research laboratory, established in 2009 in Middle East Technical University, founded to develop a ranking system mainly for Turkish and world universities. URAP releases a ranking report for Turkish universities every year (URAP, 2018). The sample of this study was taken from 2017 report which ranked 95 public universities according to some indicators such as citations, total number of documents and number of PhD students. To make some comparisons, twenty universities, ten ranked at the top and ten at the bottom of the list, were chosen to analyze the strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it is possible to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of top and bottom universities and see what those universities really in need of. Below the Table 1 shows some descriptive information for top universities.

Table 1
Top universities and their strategic plans analyzed

Rank	Code	Name	Planning Period	Length of SP in pages	Length of SWOT in Words
1	METU	Middle East Technical U.	2018-2022	102	474
2	HU	Hacettepe University	2018-2022	113	128
3	IU	Istanbul University	2014-2018	108	558
4	AU	Ankara University	2014-2018	152	157
5	GTU	Gebze Technical U.	2017-2021	68	295
6	GU	Gazi University	2014-2018	121	61
7	ITU	Istanbul Technical U.	2017-2021	36	232
8	EGU	Ege University	2014-2018	108	99
9	ATU	Ataturk University	2014-2018	79	3073
10	ERU	Erciyes University	2017-2021	49	411
Total				***936***	***5488***

Top universities are state funded public universities. Most of them were founded in 1950s. They are located in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Kayseri and

Erzurum which are the biggest cities in Turkey. The strategic planning period cover four years and the length of strategic plans consist of 93 pages on average. The analyzed texts contain 5488 words in total.

Table 2
Universities at the bottom and their strategic plans analyzed.

Rank	Code	Name	Planning Period	Length of SP in pages	Length of SWOT in Words
86	MSFA	Mimar Sinan Fine Arts U.	2016-2020	84	533
87	KU	Kilis University	2018-2022	148	173
88	ARU	Artvin University	2018-2022	107	427
89	KIU	Kırklareli University	2013-2017	114	158
90	IGU	Igdır University	2016-2020	78	550
91	ARDU	Ardahan University	2014-2018	65	270
92	HAKU	Hakkari University	2013-2017	97	322
93	BSEU	Bilecik Seyh Edebali University	2017-2021	63	221
94	MAU	Mardin Artuklu University	2013-2017	114	285
95	AICU	Agrı İbrahim Cecen University	2013-2017	96	149
Total				***966***	***3088***

Bottom universities are state funded public universities, too. Most of them were founded in 2006. They are located in various small cities in Turkey. The strategic planning period cover four years and the length of strategic plans consist of 96 pages on average. The analyzed texts contain 3088 words in total.

Data Analysis

An important principle of qualitative study method is that data analysis should be conducted parallel to data collection procedure (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). We used two data sets derived from university strategic documents to analyze the internal features of top and bottom higher educations. Hence, qualitative content analysis is our main method for data analysis process. As Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined qualitative content analysis is a research method based on the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes for the subjective interpretation of the text content. Words and phrases share similar meaning within this classification process of themes and categories (Cavanagh, 1997).

Both quantitative and qualitative content analyzes are practical methods according to the purpose of the study (Maxwell, 2005). As a flexible way for text analysis (Cavanagh 1997), qualitative content analysis is convenient when trying to find the patterns in a text such as strategic plans or mission statements of an organization. It can also be very useful for a better understanding of the concepts (Stemler & Bebell, 1999) making good connections between categories (Maxwell, 2005), and representing the data as results. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) categorized current applications of qualitative content analysis into three approaches; (a) conventional, (b) directed and (c) summative content analysis and latent content analysis additionally. These approaches can also be divided into two categories as deductive and inductive content analysis (Mayring, 2014). In this study, Hsieh and Shannon's categories were described briefly and taken into consideration in data analysis process.

The first approach of Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) categorization is conventional qualitative content analysis, in which key notions of the text are underlined by the researcher through coding process. This approach can be more useful for studies to develop a grounded theory. The second approach is directed content analysis. This approach can be used when a researcher has

a theory or some research findings related to his/her research as guidance for initial codes. The researcher follows a more structured process and tries to validate a theoretical framework or theory. The last approach, which is also adopted in this study, is summative content analysis. It starts with quantification and comparison of keywords or content for the interpretation process of words and content then latent content analysis is followed by the researcher to identify the underlying context. Quantification process includes identifying keywords manually or computer-based data analysis tools. To sum up about data analysis techniques, all analysis processes have a purpose of reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and refinement of data. This is the same case for summative content analysis which look for the crucial aspects of a text and consider the importance of the text as a whole and its impact on readers within reduction and refinement process (Rapport, 2010).

The process of data analysis in this study started with identifying relevant sections of the material and gathering frequency counts of words by using AntConc corpus analysis toolkit which is a freeware for concordance and text analysis (Anthony, 2018). Two datasets, a total of twenty SWOTs ten of top universities and the other ten of bottom ones, were brought together. All Turkish letters were transformed into Latin ones (such as ş to s, ç to c, etc.) since AntConc accepts only Latin letters. SWOT texts, first dataset of top universities, were consisted of 5.488 words. And for the second data set, SWOT texts were in a corpus of 3.088 words. After counting the number of words, concordances were generated. The concordance hits showed the instances that are relevant to the strengths and weaknesses of study group. Then we found the key words by examining the instances manually for the two datasets respectively. As a second step, latent content analysis was followed to identify the underlying context and the emerging themes in the datasets.

Results

Strengths of Top and Bottom Universities

As explained above, in data analysis process, we identified most used words with AntConc program and manually checked the surroundings of those words to categorize the strengths of top and bottom universities. Table 3 shows the result of this process.

Table 3
Strengths of top and bottom universities

Top	Conc. hits	Bottom	Conc. hits
Academic human resource	18	Young faculty members	14
Organizational Culture	16	Organizational Support	11
Internationalization	11	Internal Communication	7
Infrastructure	9		
Alumni	6		

As seen in Table 3, strengths of top universities can be categorized into five themes. First theme is academic human resource that is about cooperation and collaboration with faculty members, qualified human resources and academic freedom. In their strategic plans, top universities emphasized qualified academic human resource as the first and most important strength. This theme contains cooperation and collaboration with faculty members, better standards for academic freedom and productivity.

For example, GTU stated that

> We have a strong academic human resource qualified at projects, scientific publications, entrepreneurship and cooperation. Our human resource can work multidisciplinary and collaboratively.

Another example may be that

> Having internationally experienced faculty members is our one of the most important strength. Their potential scientific production helps us to be a leading institution in Turkey and all around the world. This also makes us a well-recognized university in international arena (HU).

The second theme is organizational culture which is about institutionalization, organizational support, socialization process of faculty and administrative staff and having a deeply rooted tradition. Having a long and deeply rooted tradition is a common feature of top universities because those universities have a history about 60 years. So, all of them emphasized this feature as a strength in their SWOTs. ATU stated that strength as

> We have 55 years history and we have a great organizational culture. In our culture, change is the key word. We always keen on changes in every platform. With a deeply rooted tradition, we completed our institutionalization process and always looking forward to be in a better position than yesterday.

IU put similar statements to its SWOT as

> We are the first university in Turkey and we have a deeply rooted culture. In our supportive culture, we always cooperate and collaborate with our faculty and administrative staff. This is our tradition and also our greatest strength.

For the third theme named as internationalization is mostly stated strength of top universities. This is because of the faculty members who had their degrees abroad and came back to their universities with lots of international relations. This process made universities more open, interactional and international for academic collaborations with some programs such as ERASMUS and Joint Degree Programs.

As METU stated

> Our faculty members had their degrees from abroad and they had lots of connections with other international colleagues. Thanks to those relations we have a lot of international projects and good collaboration practices.

Another example for that theme may be the statement of ERU as

> We have improved our international collaboration practices with some programs such as Erasmus and Mevlana (an exchange program for Turkish faculty members and students with all universities

> around the world). We have a great potential for exchange programs and we take this advantage in every possible condition.

The fourth theme of top universities' strength is about academic and physical infrastructure that is important for making effective research. This theme contains every infrastructure issue such as award and incentive mechanisms for faculty members, technological supplies, library and social activities for staff.

EGU stated that strength as

> We have a well-designed physical and technological infrastructure for our academics. This strength makes our facilities more transparent and accountable. We have also great opportunities for staff in our campuses.

In another SWOT, ITU emphasized its strength as

> Our laboratories are preferred by our industry partners and this is a great opportunity for increasing our income. Historical and physical structure of our campuses offers living and training opportunities in international standards. And also we are trying hard to provide a 24 hour study opportunity for our academics and students by improving our infrastructure.

The last theme of strengths of top universities is about alumni. Top universities consider their alumni as strength. In some SWOTs of top universities, alumni were addressed for their qualifications, job recruitment and commitment to their universities. For example, GU stated that

> We have qualified alumni. Our alumni show great success in exams made by public or private sectors. With our alumni tracking system, we saw that our alumni are also good at their work life and can easily find job. That is an important strength for our university.

As for the strengths of bottom universities according to the URAP ranking, we identified three categories: (a) young faculty members, (b) organizational support and (c) communication as seen in Table 3. First strength of bottom universities is having young faculty members. This

strength was emphasized nearly all of the universities. Bottom universities, MSFA as an exception, are generally the ones which founded in the last 15 years. So, they generally have young faculty members in their institutions. Those universities consider their young faculty members as an important strength. For example, ARU stated in its SWOT

> We have young, dynamic, ambitious and open-minded faculty members. They are very eager to cooperate and collaborate with their colleagues. They also have close relations with students.

Another university KU mentioned the same issue as

> We have young faculty. They are really eager to work hard. We also have experienced faculty members from other universities. This is an opportunity for our faculty members and for our university.

The second theme of the strengths of bottom universities is organizational support which is very important in every step of academic life. Within this theme, top managements of universities tend to support and empower faculties for their initiatives such as research, projects or collaboration practices. Those universities also value the contributions of faculties and care about their wellbeing by offering housing or social activities for their staff. For example, IGU stated that

> We support academic activities for our faculty members and offer lots of social activities for them and their families. We also have housing opportunity for our staff. We try to value every activity of our staff and encourage them for national and international cooperation.

MAU emphasized its strength for this theme as

> We support academic freedom and sharing and we have an accessible top management. We also have a positive organizational culture which is democratic and value every initiative and contribution of academics. Housing is another important asset of our institution.

The last theme of strengths of bottom universities is being good at internal communication with every stakeholder. This may be because of those universities have a short history and they have smaller number of faculty and student than top ones. So it is more likely to have a good internal communication.

HAKU stated in its SWOT as

> There is an open and honest communication between management, administrative staff and faculty members. This helps our institution work effectively. Another point is that there is a good communication and interaction between social stakeholders such as public, public and private institution institutions.

AICU emphasized internal communication and cooperation

> In our university all branches and faculties have an intense communication and cooperation. There is also an active communication between faculty members and students. This is really an important asset because in many universities faculty members complain about having lots of students and for not having plenty of time to take care about them.

As identified in Table 3 and statements of universities, top universities emphasized their human resources, culture and cooperation competences as the main strengths. This may be an expected situation because most of the top universities share similar geographical advantage, a long history, many faculty members who had degrees abroad and a better institutionalization. On the other hand, newly established bottom universities have young scholars and the top managements of those universities are eager to improve their institutions by supporting their staff with an open communication process.

Weaknesses of Top and Bottom Universities

As for the weaknesses of top and bottom universities, below the Table 4 shows the categorization of the data.

Table 4
Weaknesses of top and bottom universities

Top	Conc. hits	Bottom	Conc. hits
Budget deficiency	13	Insufficient number of faculty and staff	14
Excessive number of students	9	Infrastructure	10
Insufficient number of faculty	7	Lack of internationalization	8
		Insufficient number of students	7
		Alumni Relations	7

As seen in Table 4, weaknesses of top universities can be categorized into four themes. First theme is about budget deficiency faced with many top universities. In their strategic plans, top universities emphasized budget deficiency problems as the first and most important weakness of their institutions. Because of this deficiency, they think they are unable to make what they really want to do. For example, IU stated that weakness as

> We are in short of financial sources and have no balanced budgeting system. So our hands are tied up when to make new projects for social activities, campus facilities or research activities. We need a better planning process to use budget effectively and efficiently." Another university which faced budget deficiency stated that "Because of budget deficiency we have some problems in the process of inclusive schooling program. We are in need of some restoration, repairment and maintenance (METU).

The second and third themes of weaknesses are about excessive number of students and insufficient number of faculty members. That means

student/faculty member ratio is unbalanced in most of top universities. ERU stated that weakness as

> Our student/ faculty member ratio is unbalanced especially for some programs. While we have more students in a program, we are in need of students in another program. That causes some problems to reach a better educational standard.

ATU faces the same problem and stated that

> We have more students in some programs. The number of faculty member is insufficient. So we are having some difficulties for a student centered education policy. We also have a geographical disadvantage so students who get with high marks in national exams do not prefer to study in our university.

Another university suffering from unbalanced values is METU. It emphasized international norms of student/faculty member ratio.

> We have an unbalanced number of student / faculty. As we are on top of many international ranking systems, many students prefer to study in our university. So we have more students and we sometimes can't respond the needs of our students. In sum, our student faculty member ratio is over the international standards.

Now it is time to talk about the weaknesses of bottom universities. As seen in Table 4, bottom universities have more weaknesses than top ones. This is an expected situation for higher education institutions. Because there are lots of variables such as foundation year, geographical position and financial resources that effect SWOT analysis of universities greatly. Bottom universities are suffering from insufficient number of faculty, staff and student, poor infrastructure, lack of internationalization and also poor alumni relations as identified in Table 4. Insufficient number of faculty is one of the most stated weaknesses of bottom universities. For example, Kilis University (KU), founded in 2006, stated that

> We are short of faculty members especially in some branches. This is a big problem for us. We also haven't got plenty of associate

> professor and professor doctor. So we are having great difficulties in organizing any graduate and post graduate programs. In some undergraduate programs, this is the same case.

ARU and AICU suffer the same problem and stated that

> We are newly founded higher education institutions. We have a geographical disadvantage, too. So we need time to be well recognized and a brand mark. For that reason, we are having difficulties in finding academicians, administrative staff and organizing master and doctoral programs. We also have problems in organizational commitment levels of our faculty members and administrative staff.

Generally, most bottom universities dealt with this weakness and those quotes can be taken from every SWOT of them.

Another point of weaknesses is about infrastructure which most of universities stated in their SWOTs. This theme includes the weaknesses of documentary, library, labs and being lack of enough space for faculty members and students. AICU stated that weakness as

> University was founded in 2007 so we haven't completed institutionalization process yet. We are short of some technical equipment such as computers and databases and our library does not have enough documents for students and faculties, too. We also need more building for training facilities and administrative offices. We want to provide housing for our faculties but it seems impossible for now.

IGU pointed out the same issue as

> We are in need of a fully equipped library and fully equipped laboratories. Our faculty members need national and international databases to conduct research. And also our students have difficulties to find some necessary references for their studies.

The third theme of weaknesses is about being lack of internationalization. In recent years, internationalization has become an important issue for higher education institutions. Universities are trying hard to integrate that process.

But the integration process is difficult to overcome because some competences, such as using a second language as a medium of instruction, collaborating international partners and internationalizing campus, are needed to tackle with this issue. For newly established universities these competences may take time. HAKU established in the very east of Turkey, mentions that issue as

> We are pretty far behind on internationalization process. The number of exchange students is really low. And we also need faculty members who can use a second language as a medium of instruction. We do not have plenty of international partners to cooperate in every field.

IGU stated the same problem as

> Participation rate in international exchange programs is very low. There are a few international students in our school. We are on the way to internationalize our campus by increasing the number of international students, organizing international activities and improving the usage of English with all stakeholders.

Apart from those weaknesses, bottom universities suffer from insufficient number of students, too. The fourth theme contains statements about that issue. They complain about it because in some departments they don't even have one student. KIU and ARDU dealt with that problem as

> We are short of student especially in some departments. The occupancy rate is very low at some departments. So, we face with affectivity and efficiency problem. Because we have buildings, labs and libraries but haven't got enough students.

Poor alumni relation is another weakness of bottom universities. Many of them stated that problem in their SWOT analysis as a weakness. Alumni relation is important in the process of improving institutionalization, organizational commitment and institutional reputation. By tracking alumni, universities can have feed backs about their facilities and be aware of their weaknesses. MFSA as an older university than others, stated that weakness as

> We don't have any relation with our alumni. We don't have any idea about what they are doing, where they are working or how they are? We don't have an alumni tracking system. So, we are unaware of our alumni.

Another university BSEU emphasized the same problem as

> We are in need of an alumni tracking system. We can't get any feedback from our alumni to improve our facilities. Communicating with our alumni will help us to make improvements in every field.

Discussion

In the above section, we focused on the strengths and weaknesses of top and bottom universities by identifying major themes from the data. In data analysis process, we saw that some variables, such as size, history and geographical location of a university, are the most distinctive features of strengths and weaknesses. The themes were mostly categorized by those variables. With the analyzed SWOTs of each study group, we found that the strongest theme for the strengths of top and bottom universities mainly concerns with academic human resources. That means most universities in the study group see their academic human resource as the first and most important strength. Human resource, as the most valued assets of an organization, composes of people who work individually or collectively to make contributions to the achievement of the business (Armstrong, 2006). From that perspective, faculty members can be seen as the most valued assets of universities because they work individually and collectively to reach the aims of a university. Another point is that with a quality workforce, organizations believe that human resource help them be competitive and have an optimum performance (Essays, 2013; Aponte, 2011). Therefore, human resource as an internal capability of top and bottom universities is the mostly dealt strength. If we have a close look on the statements, we see that the top universities want to stand in the forefront by emphasizing their qualified academic human resources. Bottom ones are most likely to draw attention to the dynamism of their human resource by emphasizing young faculty members. Considering the geographical location and history of top

universities, having qualified academic human resource is an expected finding. Another expected finding may be for bottom ones because they have a short history and mostly situated in geographically disadvantaged locations. Studies investigating the strengths of universities showed that young, efficient, motivated and skilled professors are the most important strength stated in SWOTs (Sharifi, 2012; Batyari, Bahramzadeh, Ghorbani, & Dorostkar, 2013). To sum up, all universities put their human resource at forefront in the strengths section because they are aware that human resource is the most valued assets of their organizations.

The second strength of top universities is organizational culture. Generally, organizational culture is defined as having shared perceptions or a system of common meaning of values, beliefs, behaviours and norms which are accepted by the members of an organization to achieve the main goals (Kilmann, 1985; Robbins, Judge, & Breward, 2003). Historical and symbolic forms of organizations are the main elements of cultural composition process and the culture is grounded in the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization (Tierney, 1990). It is also considered as an integral part of the general functioning of an organization (Coman & Bonciu, 2016). In this study, top universities have a long history and get some forms of symbols which are accepted and adopted by the actors in that long period. So that is emphasized by top universities as a great strength. For bottom universities, because of having a short history and newly cultural composition process, organizational support is seen as the second strength. Actually, the two concepts, organizational culture and support, are close to each other in meanings but composition of the culture takes a long time so it is more likely to be the strength of top universities. On the other hand, organizational support which is about supporting employee welfare with various services, benefits, and facilities to foster their working conditions and career development (Giorgi, Dubin, & Perez, 2017). Top managements of bottom universities do that by supporting faculty members for their research initiatives, valuing their contributions and also care about their wellbeing by offering housing or various social activities. With those facilities, bottom universities are in the process of cultural composition and after some time organizational culture will likely exist.

As globalization process in higher education institutions has been improving rapidly, internationalization has become a distinctive feature for universities. Knight (2003) defined internationalization “the process of

integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education." In their SWOTs, top universities emphasized internationalization practices as the third strength. That is important because with neo liberal policies, universities tend to internationalize to be in a better place in global higher education arena. Another point is that those universities have qualified faculty members who had their degrees abroad and have international relations to make contacts for projects, research or other collaborations.

This finding shows us that the first strength of top universities, having qualified human resource, support the third one by helping universities internationalize more easily. As for the bottom universities, the third strength is having a good internal communication. This is an important strength too, but for today's universities having a good international communication is a more desirable one.

There are two more strengths emphasized by some of top universities; academic - physical infrastructure and alumni relations. Academic and physical infrastructure in higher education institutions are the assets and facilities that contribute teaching and learning process and give educational institutions their appropriate shape and academic atmosphere for teaching and learning (Musa, & Ahmad, 2012). Those assets also help universities be more competitive in global higher education arena (Cooke, 2008; Muresan, & Gogu, 2012). Some top universities stated in their SWOTs that their academic and physical infrastructure is a great strength because they have qualified faculty members, technological supplies, libraries, social activities and adequate facilities for staff and students. Another strength stated by some top universities is alumni relations which is an important aspect of higher education in developing connection with former graduates (Etzelmueller, 2014). In recent years, universities have noticed the importance of alumni relations because the alumni, as outputs of universities, have the potential to advertise, promote and enhance the reputation of them. So many universities have started to make activities, meetings and facilities with their alumni to raise the commitment levels of them. But more is needed to be done by universities according to the report of Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). CASE (2016) suggested that universities need to have sufficient staff and budget to put on more events to engage the constituents regularly and to get in contact via mail, e-newsletters, magazines to increase the number of volunteers and donors. If we look at SWOTs of top ones in

detail, universities are more likely to address their alumni qualifications and job recruitment rates. Just a few of them has an alumni relation program. So, this may be a weakness of top universities about alumni relations.

Now it is time to discuss about weaknesses of top and bottom universities. Table 4 indicates that top universities have fewer weaknesses than the bottom ones according to their SWOTs analyzed. The first weakness which is a chronic problem for many top universities is budget deficiency. In Turkey public universities are funded by the state. The funding of Turkish Higher Education service is provided by the shares from the budget which is made up of general taxes. When compared with the number of students of universities, the way of funding seems insufficient (Erdem, 2010) as stated in SWOTs of top universities. Comparing the budget and higher education statistics also support the idea that the rate of the higher education budget in the budget of total education was 35.2 % in 2006 and it decreased to 30.1% in 2017 (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2017) whereas the number of university students increased from 2.407.330 in 2006 to 7.198.897 in 2017 (Council of Higher Education, [CoHE], 2017). Another fact that top universities have a higher number of students in their campuses than other ones, while the number is going up year by year, budget rate stays stable or goes up very slowly and unequally. That shows us some inequities in resource allocation process of higher education. For bottom universities, this is not the case for now because they are in smaller sizes in terms of number of student and staff. In the future, when the number of students and staff increase, they are likely to have the same problems with top ones.

In relation with budget deficiency, top universities are also suffering from unbalanced number of student and faculty members. Most of them emphasized that problem as a weakness because they think the quality of teaching and training activities depends greatly on qualified faculty members and balanced number of faculty and students. As the relationships with faculty members are stronger predictors of learning (Lundberg, & Schreiner, 2004), it is important to have plenty of students to make good relationships and enhance learning and teaching processes. In addition, students' decisions to attend or leave the college depend greatly on their academic and social integration within the school (Tinto, 1993). A great part this integration process can be achieved with favorable daily interactions between faculty and students and positive school culture. Some studies found that the more the faculty members use active and collaborative blended approaches to

learning, promote students to participate in activities, interact with students, enhance faculty student collaboration, challenge students academically, and value educational experiences, the higher levels of engagement and learning students report (Umbach, & Wawrzynski, 2005; Vaughan, 2014; Miller, 2011). Those favorable interactions may, to a great extent, occur with an acceptable ratio of student-faculty.

As for the weaknesses of bottom universities we can talk about insufficient number of faculty, staff and student, lack of internationalization and poor alumni relations. With the mass expansion of higher education nationally and internationally in recent decades, highly qualified faculty members are needed all around the world to train fully equipped alumni. (Kubler, & DeLuca, 2006). Those universities are newly founded ones so they have difficulties in finding qualified faculty, administrative staff and plenty of students. When we consider some variables such as size, history, field of service and geographical location of bottom universities, we can easily find some answers for those weaknesses. Since they are newly founded, small size and geographically located in disadvantageous regions, students, faculty and staff members may not prefer to work or study in those universities as stated in their SWOTs. Studies focused on university preferences found that students prefer universities that are closer to their homes or easily accessible ones and offer many non-academic student services (Drewes & Michael, 2006; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, Ellis, & Fray, 2015). And the quality of teaching and research depends greatly on qualified human resources, brand value of university, budget, buildings, infrastructure, national and international networks to attract students (Coman & Bonciu, 2016). Other weaknesses infrastructure, lack of internationalization and poor alumni relations are related indirectly with variables mentioned above. The infrastructure in higher education involves provision of buildings, classrooms, hostels, staff quarters, workshops, laboratories, ICT centers, libraries, health centers and sports facilities. Newly founded universities need physical assets and facilities to ensure their quality and maintain global standards but this is a long process which cost a lot money, effort and hard work (Musa & Ahmad, 2012). So, bottom universities need some time to achieve those goals. Another weakness lack of internationalization, as the studies focused on the preferences of international students and faculties showed, is also related with qualified faculties (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010), geographical location

of university (Soo & Elliott, 2010; Bodycott, 2009), the city, job prospects for alumni (Hilden, 2011; Kamal Basha, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2016) and the number of facilities in campus (Jon, 2013; Glass, 2012; Yusoff, 2012). Meeting those criteria to be preferred by international students may seem very hard for bottom universities for now but in the future, it is not impossible to achieve those goals. The last emphasized weakness by bottom universities is poor alumni relations. Universities tend to keep their alumni connected to make them feel good about their school, contribute back through financial donations, spend time for the school's facilities or participate the activities which take place to improve the commitment levels of students (Vanderbout, 2010). But keeping alumni connected to their university has a high cost. As CASE (2016) suggested that universities need to have sufficient staff and budget, intense communication via mail, e-newsletters and magazines. The datasets of this study contain public universities which have limited budgets and human resources. On the other hand, as today's students will be the alumni of tomorrow, universities should put up with those difficulties to improve institutionalization, organizational commitment of their alumni and institutional reputation.

Conclusion

To sum up all those findings, our analysis shows that all universities top or bottom ones have internal strengths and weaknesses on their own. The strengths of universities differ according to their size, field of service, structure, history and geographical locations. Top universities which are in big size, have a deeply rooted history and situated in a better geographical location can enjoy the strengths as qualified faculty members, organizational culture, internationalization process, infrastructure and good alumni relations. On the other hand, bottom universities which have not got those advantages deal with other strengths such as young faculty members, organizational support and internal communication. As for the weaknesses of universities, we can conclude that top universities need more budget and acceptable rate of faculty member and student. Bottom ones need more qualified faculty members, students and staff. As they are located in disadvantageous regions, they are in need of some promotions to attract faculties, staff, national and international students. In addition, they also should be aware of the contributions of good alumni relations.

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