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Problematic Factors on Students' Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

It is quite important to know and analysis the problems and gaps in students' learning to operate quality management system in higher education. In order to determine the problematic factors in students' learning in higher education, a long-term survey was conducted among university students and they were asked an open-ended question. Content analysis was used on students' reflections about the problematic factors of their own learning.
At the end of the content analysis, twelve main problematic issues about students' learning were determined. After analysing the reflections of higher education students, it was found that there were 141 problematic statements reflected about the issues that create problems on their learning and affect them negatively. Based on these statements totally 12 main-themes and 18 sub-themes were determined. When the main themes that emerged are examined, it is seen that they can be divided into two main groups. While the first four main problematic themes are related to the institutional dimension, the remaining eight themes consist of issues arising from the individual characteristics of the students. The most important problematic factor in students' learning in higher education is related to qualifications and behaviours of lecturers.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge gives individuals a chance to develop their own life and social life in many respects. As institutions of learning, universities seek ways to improve how we use and share knowledge. The using and sharing knowledge are getting accelerated depending on the rapid development of science, technology and knowledge. For this reason, all societies try to develop their educational system, especially designing effective learning-teaching system for their citizens to maintain their own sustainable development. Thus, gaining knowledge, which means learning, is a crucial issue for not only individuals but also society. It is known that university has two main functions: the first one is related to searching for meaning of phenomenon and the second one is related to teaching students (Elton 2008; Matthew 2009; Thibodeaux, Harapnuik, & Cummings, 2009). University, as a learning institution for students, lecturers and societies, must stimulate and facilitate learning-teaching process in formal education bases. An academic staff who is working at a university is also responsible for searching the meaning of phenomenon and teaching to students. Academic staff have the main skills to carry out many research about the quality of higher education related to excellence in higher education, and they must also have competencies regarding how to teach students ways of sharing knowledge and management of learning-teaching environment. However, teachers' and students' characteristics, learning-teaching environment and management system of university can create barriers to sharing and generating knowledge in higher education and affect both the quality of higher education and students' learning.

The barriers to sharing and generating knowledge in higher education can be removed by focusing on the quality and excellence of higher education. Quality of higher educational system should be improved by analysing the views of partners from different perspectives such as teachers, students and administers who have experiences. Some systems are going to be applied in many countries in order to get feedback from partners. It is known that there are different ways of improving the quality of higher education. The most popular ways are taking the experiences and views of students into account to achieve excellence in higher education. According to McDowell et al (2010, 76), "collecting feedback from students on their experiences of teaching and learning has become one of the central pillars of the quality process." Students' reflections about their experiences related to quality of higher education system can be collected on a regular basis. In order to evaluate the learning-teaching process and performances of lecturers, some basic types of questionnaires were used to apply to students in each semester not only in Turkey but also in many countries. Students mostly would not behave seriously while reflecting their experiences by means of that questionnaire because they get familiar with this tool. And also, students believed that results of the questionnaire are not put into practice in real life in order to improve the quality of higher education system. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire could not be discussed with partners for modification or development of the system. Now, only European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) questionnaire is applied to students to evaluate and decide the total ECTS credit in Turkey and European countries. However, these evaluations are not adequate for students to reflect their views and experiences about the quality of higher education. These evaluations mostly provide feedback on teaching process of courses but not on students' learning.

A quality management system should be developed in higher education by means of free reflections of students. Reflection in learning-teaching environment has a long history with reference to the work of Dewey, Polanyi, Habermas, Kolb, Schön, Mezirow, Boud et al and Moon (Bulpitt & Peter 2005). Students' free reflections of their own experiences about learning-teaching in higher education should be improved by means of getting phenomenological views of them. Tudor et al (2010) stated

that structured questionnaire cannot give students much chance for free reflection of experiences, and it is based on the output or results of learning-teaching process. In order to operate quality management system in higher education, the reasons of problems and gaps about students' learning should be known and analysed thoroughly. Thus, in this research, the students were asked a phenomenological open-ended question. This question may provoke students to reflect their own experiences about problematic factors in their learning-teaching process in higher education. It may also provide students with the opportunity for bringing out the reasons behind their own learning problems.

The quality of higher education system can only be enhanced based on the voice of staff, teachers, students and also researchers' feedback for the system. However, the students of higher education are the disadvantaged group in giving feedback as their voice are not heard well enough in this system. Results of the research by Lin, Pan, & Ching 2015, 14) show that the common problems of higher education students are related to health, lessons and examinations, learning difficulties, interpersonal difficulties, time management, stress, career issues, self-efficacy issues and causing issues. According to the results of the research in Turkey, university students; they have many problems such as economic, academic, education, adaptation, social, psychological, cultural, economic, health, life, communication, emotional, employment and leisure time" (Donat, Bilgiç, Eskiocak, & Koşar, 2019; Erkan, Özbay, Cihangir-Çankaya & Terzi; Kacur & Atak, 2011; Korkmaz, 2000; Şahin et.al, 2009).

There is a wide variety of definitions and explanations of the concept "students' voice. However, it is very important to detect the student voice and transfer it to the system. Listening to student voices and adding these voices to the system can take many forms. In this way, the diversity of the student's voice can be transferred to the system and the systems can be improved in many ways (Carey 2013). According to McLeod (2011), student voice is a very complex and comprehensive concept. The function of the student voice in school education is to call for inclusive education, to value diversity and to create democratic practices that respond to and reflect these voices. "Student voice' (mainly about student representation, input and feedback), which is passive, to a focus on 'active student engagement' in teaching and learning, where students are partners, collaborators and change agents" (Jensen, Adams & Strickland 2014, 39). Students' voice reflects their own experiences and ideas about the problematic factors on students learning in higher education.

This study aimed at revealing problematic factors in students' learning in higher education through free reflections of students' own experiences.

METHOD

Qualitative research was conducted in order to determine the problematic factors in students' learning in higher education. Delphi method was applied in this research. Data were collected with a one-step written Delphi tour (Powell, 2003). The data of the research was acquired through an open-ended question thought seven years period from the first grade to fifth grade at the university. Content analysis was conducted on students' reflections about the problematic factors related to their own learning.

PARTICIPANTS

The survey was conducted between 2006 and 2013 in Turkey. From 28 faculties and five vocational schools at ten universities, 660 students participated in the study in total. The participants of the research consist of those studying at faculties and colleges of universities. In the research, opinions were taken students from all grade levels studying at two-year, four-year and five-year

colleges and faculties. 51% of the students participating in the research are female and 49% male. 74% of the participants consisted of students studying in various faculties and 26% in two-year colleges. Considering the distribution of students from faculties participating in the research; 34% of the students are from health sciences (medicine, nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, health sciences faculties), 32% from social sciences (law, economics, business, education, history, sociology, communication faculties) and 34% from science (science and engineering faculties) participated in the research. 28% of the students from the faculties who participated in the research were first grade, 20% second, 19% third, 21% fourth and 12% fifth grade students. Schools of health, social sciences and sciences were tried to be represented in the research sample. 44% of the students studying in two-year colleges are first-year students and 56% are second-year students.

DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of the research and the procedure of participation in the research were explained to the higher education students willing to participate. Those who wanted to participate in the research were sent to the researcher by writing their answers. Students were asked an open-ended question during the survey. The question was “What factors do you think have negative effects on your learning in higher education? Please write these factors briefly." In eight years, period between 2006 and 2013 in Turkey, the same question was answered by different students in different universities. Students write their own problematic factors about their learning based on their own learning.

Data were collected from students both face-to-face and remotely via e-mail. A form in which the open-ended question was written and a consent form were given. Before answering the open-ended question, they were asked to read the consent form stating that they participated in the research voluntarily and to mark their participation, and not to write the names of the forms and student numbers. The Consent Form showing that they voluntarily participated in the research and the form in which the student responses were written were taken together. During the data collection period a code was given for each student’s writing in order to facilitate data analysis.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data coded and themes created by the researcher were reviewed together with a different researcher who had knowledge of the subject, codes and themes were rearranged and thus validity was tried to be ensured. Afterwards, for the reliability of the analysed data, two experts other than the researcher were assisted in the analysis and coding of the data.

All of the students’ views were covered in the process of the content analysis to determine the thematic frame of the problematic factors of students’ learning in higher education. Micro-level coding keys were created by analysing a 10% sample taken from the written texts of the students by the researcher and an expert. While conducting content analysis at the macro level, the suitability of the generated codes for analysis was tested. Then, analyses were made on the basis of different programs. By discussing the results of the analysis, it was examined whether the main themes and sub-themes differ according to different programs. Macro analyses were made separately according to program types, undergraduate level and graduate programs, but it was determined that the themes emerged as a result of these analyses were gathered under similar headings. Since the themes are similar according to the programs, the results of the analysis were reviewed and it was decided to analyse under the title of higher education instead of the type and level of the program. After the macro level analyses were completed, it was decided how to analysis the micro analysis.

The micro level content analysis conducted with two experts and the researcher during the research period after the macro level analysing. The researcher and experts derived problematic factors in students’ learning by means of analysing the students’ writings. They tried to organize

themes, sub-themes and statements or definitions about problematic factors related to students' learning. All problematic factors from the students' writings were coded and written under the themes as statements. The micro level content analysis was carried out in two different stages. The first stage covered initial content analysis and the second stage included reanalysing the initial content analysis results to clarify themes that was the results of the first stage content analysis.

- In the first stage of the content analysis, students' reflections were analysed in detail. Totally 28 themes revealed after the initial content analysis process based on 141 statements. However, the results of the initial content analysis were very complex and confusing for comprehension of the thematic structures of problematic factors in students' learning in higher education. The experts and researcher decided that the initial content analysis results should be reanalysed to refine the thematic frame as problematic factors of students' learning in higher education. At the end of the first phase, 141 items and 28 themes that emerged as a result of the analysis made by the researcher and two experts were discussed. It was decided that some items under the main themes were not suitable for the main theme and that some main themes should be converted into sub-themes. After this decision taken in the first stage, it was decided to conduct a new analysis on the main and sub-themes and the items under these themes in the second stage.
- In the second stage, the thematic analysis was carried out based on the results of the initial content analysis to review and refine the thematic frame of the problematic factors in students' learning in higher education. It is clearly seen that some initial themes, which occurred in the initial content analysis, seemed to be collected under the same themes. For example, "housing", "nutrition", "living expense" and "sleeping" were determined as different themes in the initial content analysis results. However, in the second stage of the content analysis, these themes were collected under the same themes such as "living conditions of students".

After reanalysing the results of the initial content analysis, the main problematic issues about students' learning were determined in the second stage and twelve main themes revealed. The researcher and experts concluded that the twelve themes reflect the problematic factors in students' learning in higher education. The frequencies were calculated by taking into account the students' views and experiences on their learning problems. At the end of the second stage of content analysis, the intercoder reliability of the study was found as %90 among the researcher and two experts. "In Table 1" the results of the content analysis related to the thematic structures of problematic factors in students learning are presented as frequency and percentage.

FINDINGS

The main sources of problems in students' learning in higher education can be "seen in Table 1" and the twelve themes posing problems in students' learning were put in order from the most problematic theme to the least one with regard to the theme percentages. Accordingly, sub-themes of the themes were ranged from the most problematic one to the least.

Table 1. The main problematic factors on students' learning in higher educations (N=660)

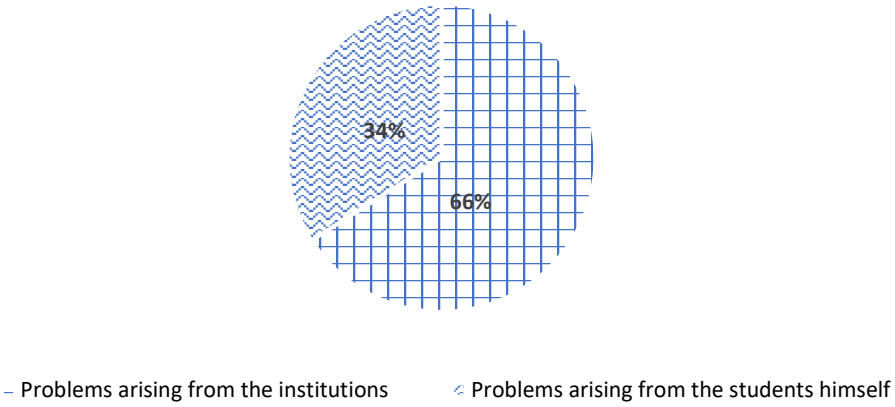
Themes and Sub-themes about Problematic Factors	f *	%	Number of Problematic Statements
Qualifications and behaviours of lecturers	5.75	22.00	30
Lack of professional qualifications of lecturers			
Autocratic behaviours of lecturers			
Insufficient classroom management			
Learning-teaching process	5.02	19.00	25
Quality of learning-teaching activities			
Learning-teaching methods and techniques			
Students' participation in learning-teaching process			
Curriculum	3.72	14.00	24
Content of courses			
Evaluation of students' performances			
Design of curriculum			
Physical environment of learning-teaching	2.992	11.00	13
Students' individualistic features	1.524	6.00	13
Emotional problems of students	1.52	6.00	8
Anxiety/panics/excitement of students			
Motivation/interest of students			
Hopelessness of students			
Living conditions of students	1.39	5.00	7
Nutrition of students			
Sleeping of students			
Sheltering of students			
Study habits of students	1.32	5.00	7
Study environment of students			
Time management of students			
Ability of learning to learn of students			
Socio-cultural backgrounds of students	1.18	4.00	5
Economic backgrounds of students	1.17	4.00	4
Relations with friends	0.58	2.00	3
Relations with family	0.46	2.00	2
Total	26.61	100,00	141

** Frequency of repetition of problematic statements in the theme*

After analysing the reflection of higher education students, it was found that there were 141 problematic statements reflected about the issues that create problems on their learning and affect them negatively. Based on these statements totally 12 main-themes and 18 sub-themes were determined. Six themes did not have sub-themes whereas each of the other six themes had three sub-themes, comprising eighteen sub-themes in total.

When the main themes that emerged are examined, it is seen that they are divided into two main groups. The first four main problematic themes constitute the institutional dimension. The remaining eight themes constitutes student dimension as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Sources of higher education students' learning problems*



As seen in Figure 1, twelve main themes are separated into institution and student-related Problems.

"Table 2" are related to the institutional dimension. This dimension includes four main themes such as "*Qualifications and behaviors of lecturers, Curriculum, Learning-teaching process, Physical environment of learning-teaching*" which are stated as problems in student learning process and can be "seen in the Table 2" below.

Table 2. *Student views on problematic factors under main and sub-themes related to intuitional dimension (N=660)*

Problematic factors related to intuitional dimension	%
Qualifications and behaviours of lecturers	
Lecturers were not democratic	81.00
Lecturers had communication problems in any learning-teaching situation	76.30
Lecturers didn't have comprehensive knowledge of the subject they taught	66.20
Lecturers had aggressive and threatening attitudes during the lectures	64.00
Lecturers criticized students negatively and injuriously	51.20
Learning-teaching process	
Lectures were given based on completely theoretical knowledge	74.32
Learning-teaching process wasn't entertaining and interesting	70.20
Lectures were based on memorizing the topics	69.20
Mentioned that lectures were given through slide projection	63.00
Appropriate teaching methods and techniques weren't applied in the learning-teaching process	59.00
Curriculum	
The number of applied courses was insufficient	78.00
Course content included superficial field knowledge and didn't develop any skills	48.00
Exams were based on memorization	45.00
Student performances weren't measured by means of applied projects and homework assignments	44.00
Course hours were excessive	40.00
Physical environment of learning-teaching	
Classrooms were very crowded	81.00
Physical environment of classroom wasn't appropriate for courses and exams	67.00
Laboratories were insufficient	60.30
Technology infrastructures were insufficient	52.20
Course materials were insufficient	38.00

The students reflected 30 different problematic statements in the first theme in total. In the first theme, the first five mostly repeated problematic situations affecting students' learning negatively are

as follows: 81 % of the students stated that “lecturers were not democratic”,76.30 % stated that “lecturers had communication problems in any learning-teaching situation”, 66.20 % claimed that “lecturers didn’t have comprehensive knowledge of the subject they taught”, 64.00 % mentioned that “lecturers had aggressive and threatening attitudes during the lectures” and 51.20% expressed that “lecturers criticized students negatively and injuriously.” More than 50.00% of the students stated that behaviours of the instructors affect their learning in a negative way.

The students reflected totally 25 different problematic statements in the second theme which is related to “learning-teaching process” and has three sub-themes. The first five mostly repeated problematic situations affecting students’ learning negatively are as follows: 74.32 % of the students stated that “lectures were given based on completely theoretical knowledge”, 70.20 % claimed that “learning-teaching process wasn’t entertaining and interesting”, 69.20 % pointed out that “lectures were based on memorizing the topics”, 63.00 % mentioned that “lectures were given through slide projection” and 59.00 % asserted that “appropriate teaching methods and techniques weren’t applied in the learning-teaching process.” The students pointed out that these affected their learning negatively. More than 59.00% of the students stated that they have problems in their learning due to the problems arising from the learning-teaching process.

In the third theme, which is about curriculum, 24 different problematic statements were reflected by students in total. With regard to this theme, the first five mostly repeated views of students are very important. 78.00 % of the students maintained that “the number of courses including implementations was insufficient”, 48.00 % claimed that “course content included superficial field knowledge and didn’t develop any skills”, 45.00 % stated that “exams were based on memorization”, 44.00 % indicated that “student performances weren’t measured by means of projects and homework assignments that require active participation of students and 40.00 % complained that “course hours were excessive” and it affects their learning negatively. At least 40.00% of the students stated that they had difficulties due to the problems arising from the curriculum. That higher education institutions should be aware of and sensitive to the changes in the content of the school curriculum (William 1994, 36).

Thirteen different problematic statements about students’ learning were reflected by students in total in the fourth theme. The first mostly repeated problematic statements in students’ learning were mentioned 81.00 % and these students stated that “classrooms were very crowded”, 67.00 % asserted that “physical environment of classroom wasn’t appropriate for courses and exams”, 60.30 % claimed that “laboratories were insufficient, 55.20 % expressed that “technology infrastructures were insufficient” and 38.00 % maintained that “course materials were insufficient”, and students stated that these affected their learning negatively. At least 38.00 % of the students stated that they had difficulties due to the problems arising from the physical environment of learning-teaching.

The remaining eight main themes consisting of problematic factors related to the students themselves are “given in Table 3”.

Table 3. *Student views on problematic factors under main and sub-themes related to main dimension of students (N=660)*

Problematic factors related to individual dimension of the students	**% ***
Students' personal characteristics	
Inability to focus on and school studies due to their daily problems	73.00
Inability to follow lessons carefully	49.20
Their laziness about school studies	45.50
Inability to reading habit of them	30.30
Students' resistance about their own learning	25.80
Emotional problems of students	
Anxiety of inability to understand lessons	38.20
Hopelessness about future	30.50
Ineffective counselling services for students	27.30
Stress of exams and homework	25.30
They were reluctant to lessons because of the attitudes of lecturers	23.30
Living conditions of students	
Inappropriate sheltering	65.20
Unhealthy nutrition	54.20
Sleep-wake lessness	54.20
Insufficient lunches provided by school	32.00
They had to have lunch outside school	12.50
Study habits of students	
Studying for the aim of passing courses rather than learning	60.00
Inappropriate living environment for studying	39.20
Insufficient study habits	46.30
Insufficient knowledge of learning	42.00
Ineffective time management	17.00
Socio-cultural backgrounds of students	
They don't like the city which their universities are in	41.30
They weren't able to adapt to cities which their universities are in	40.00
Insufficient cultural activities at universities	32.00
Insufficient cultural activities in the city that the university is in	28.30
Insufficient social activities	25.30
Economic backgrounds of students	
Financial difficulties and problems	77.00
Expenses of homework assignments and projects were very high	50.30
Economic problems with acquiring the course-related materials	35.00
Have to work at any job to earn some money	32.30
Lecturers had communication problems in any learning-teaching situation	76.30
Relations with Friends	
Problems with friends	45.00
Emotional problems with girl/boyfriends	37.00
Their loneliness/friendlessness	15.30
Relations with family	
Longing for family members	58.30
Family problems	19.00

**Frequency of repetition of Student views on problematic factors related to individual dimension of the students*

The fifth theme is about "students' individualistic features" and it does not have any sub-themes. Totally eight different problematic statements were reflected by students in this theme. 73 % of the students mentioned that "inability to focus on and school studies due to their daily problems", 49.20 % mentioned "inability to follow lessons carefully", 45.50 % pointed out "their laziness about school studies", 30.30 % expressed "insufficient reading abilities" as the fourth factor and 25.80 % maintained that "students' resistance about their own learning" affected their learning negatively. At least 38% of the students stated that they had difficulties due to the problems arising from the "students' individualistic features"

The sixth theme is related to “emotional problems of students” and it has three sub-themes. Totally sixteen different problematic statements were reflected by students. 38,20 % of the students put forward that “anxiety of inability to understand lessons”, 30.50 % addressed “hopelessness about future” affected their learning in a negative way. 27.30 % claimed that “an effective counselling service for students wasn’t provided”, 25. 30 % pointed out “stress of exams and homework” and 23.30 % explained that “they were reluctant to lessons because of the attitudes of lecturers” and this affected their learning negatively. At least 38.00 % of the students stated that they had difficulties due to the problems arising from the “emotional problems of students”.

The seventh theme is related to “living conditions of students”, and it has three sub-themes. Seven different problematic statements in total were reflected by students. The most important problematic factor in students’ learning related to living conditions of students is “nutrition of students.” They mentioned that the nutrition of the students and the breakfast, lunch and evening meals were insufficient both in terms of nutritional values and quantity. In addition, it can be summarized as going to school hungry in the morning, since they do not have the opportunity to have breakfast. The second important problematic factor is “sleeping patterns of students” and the third one is related to “sheltering of students.” Three of these statements were related to nutrition of students, four of them were related to sleeping of students and one of them was related to sheltering of students. With respect to the seventh theme, the first mostly repeated view stated by 65.20 % was “inappropriate sheltering”. Both “unhealthy nutrition” and “lack of sleep” were mentioned 54.20 %. 32.00 % of the students claimed that “school lunches were insufficient” whereas 12.50 % maintained that “they had to have lunch outside school” and these affected their learning negatively. They stated that eating outside of school is very expensive and causes a waste of time, which has a negative influence on their learning.

The eighth theme is about “study habits of students”, and it has three sub-themes. Totally seven different problematic statements were reflected by students. In the scope of the eighth theme, the first mostly repeated view stated by 60.00 % was “studying for the aim of passing courses rather than learning”. Another problematic situation affecting students’ learning negatively was “inappropriate living environment for studying” and it was put forward by 39.20 %. In addition, “insufficient study habit” was stated by 46.30 %, “insufficient knowledge of learning” was mentioned by 42.00 %, and “ineffective use of time” was expressed by17.00 % of the students to explain problematic factors on their learning. The ninth theme is related to “socio-cultural backgrounds of students” and it does not have any sub-themes. Totally seven different problematic statements were reflected by students with regard to the ninth theme. The first five mostly repeated views of the students are very interesting. 41,30 % of the students stated that “they didn’t like the city which their universities were in”. According to the students, the fact that the rents of the houses in the city are very high, the dormitory facilities do not appeal to the students in terms of quality and price, the lack of trust in the students, the inability to find a part-time job, the low wages of part-time jobs and the long working hours, even if there is a job, are the reasons why they don't like the city they live in. 40.00 % of the students claimed that “they weren’t able to adapt to cities which their universities were in”. 32.00 % put forward that “cultural activities at universities were insufficient”, 28.30 % asserted that “cultural activities in the cities they lived were insufficient”. Students mention that cultural activities such as theatre, cinema, concerts, panels, talks, recitals and exhibitions are insufficient as well. 25.30 % pointed out that “social activities were not sufficient” and these affected students’ own learning negatively. Students stated that social activities such as arts, sports, scientific or professional trips or observations, club activities, competitions, projects or scientific festivals, which are carried out through students' interactions with students or teachers or other people, are insufficient.

The tenth theme is related to "economic backgrounds of students" and has no sub-themes. Totally four different problematic statements were reflected by students. Regarding the tenth theme, the first four mostly repeated views of students are very interesting. 77.00 % of the students mentioned "financial difficulty and problems". 50.30 % stated that "expenses of homework assignments and projects were very high", 35.00 % declared that "they had economic problems with acquiring the course-related materials", 32.30 % expressed that "they were working at any job to earn some money due to economic problems so they couldn't make time for studying" and these affected students' own learning negatively.

The eleventh theme is related to "relations of friends" and three different problematic statements were reflected by students in this theme. In terms of the eleventh theme, the first mostly repeated view of the students was "problems with friends", and it was mentioned by 45.00 % of the students. 37.00 % stated "emotional problems with girlfriends or boyfriends" while 15.30 % reflected "their loneliness/friendlessness" as problematic. The twelfth and the last theme is about "relations of family". Totally two different problematic factors were reflected by students under this theme. With respect to the twelfth theme, the first mostly repeated view is "longing for family members" with 58.30 %. "Family problems" is another view mentioned by 19.00 % affecting students' own learning negatively.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of research manifest that there are many problems in higher education concerning about students' learning. These problematic factors can be thematized in twelve themes "as seen in Table 1 and Figure 1". It is clearly seen that the first four themes are connected with operation and management of learning-teaching process in higher education. These themes are out of students' control but they affect students' learning directly. And also, the first group may affect the second group problems of student learning.

The problematic factors in the eight main themes in the second group are different from the themes in the first group. The second group theme is related to students' own features, emotional, economic, social and physical environments. It means the first group of themes of problematic factors is out of students' control and it is related to institutional dimension of learning. When the results of this study are reviewed, it can be seen that 66 % of the problems affecting students' learning are related to learning-teaching environment whereas 34 % of the problems result from students' characteristics, behaviours and their own physical and social-cultural environments. When the themes are analysed, institutional bases of learning problems are almost twice as much as the problems related to the students. This result indicated that learning problems mostly derived from institutional dimension of education.

The first group themes composed of "*Qualifications and behaviours of lecturers, learning-teaching process, curriculum, physical environment of learning-teaching*" is the most important of problematic factor of students' learning in higher education. When the four themes in the first group are examined (66 %), it is seen that these themes fall into institutional dimension. However, all of problematic factors related to institutional dimension also related to the characteristics and competencies of lecturers. As the problematic situation with respect to "learning-teaching process" is examined, these situations to a great extent seem to be connected with lecturer qualifications. It is known that teaching staff is responsible for operating the learning-teaching process in the school. Thus, excellence in higher education is mainly connected with professional qualifications of teaching staff. Behaviours, attitudes, knowledge, qualifications and experiences of academic staff should affect

students' learning, personality and also students' future. Students clearly stated that their learning is affected by the qualification and behaviours of lecturers. They have many responsibilities that their responsibility not only communicates the scientific message or shares subject-matter context but also helps transforming youth into adults (Iorga 2010) in higher education. For example, the problematic factor about "curriculum" related to institution dimension, but it is very difficult issues related to lecturer' qualifications. Because curriculum is mostly designed, applied and developed by lecturers in tertiary level. "Curriculum '...is dynamic and in flux and is also the site of contested interpretations. A curriculum is fluid and is not - cannot - be caught in any schema or template" (Bovill & Woolme 2019, 412). Curriculum studies in higher education is very confuse and hard topic for the students and teacher. It is very technical study even for curriculum developers. Fraser and Bosanquet's research pointed out that "some academic staff reported finding it difficult to talk about curriculum with colleagues where there existed ingrained understandings of what curriculum is" (Bovill & Woolme 2019, 419). For this reason, issue about higher education curriculum should discuss intensively by expert and lecturer. Effectiveness of students' learning requires high level student engagement in learning-teaching process. Effectiveness of learning-teaching process must improve by means of reflection of learners that lecturers need to search about. Students' reflections of their learning experience can help to detect problems in the learning-teaching environment. Determining the gaps in learning-teaching environment can clarify the reasons of the gaps and also provide evidence for the reasons and solutions of the problems. Students' reflections comprise the ways that may detect students' learning problems and "educators should concern themselves more with the development of a reflective environment" (Bulpitt & Peter 2005, 215). It can be said that designing reflective environment is needed through getting students' and staffs' reflections to get feedback from them.

"*Qualifications and behaviours of lecturers, Curriculum, Learning-teaching process, Physical environment of learning-teaching*" seems to related to institutional dimension but, it is related to qualifications of lecturers. This result shows that to improve learning-teaching process by making the process more effective, to develop and design curriculum and learning-teaching environments in the school so that higher education will be more qualified. In order to do all these, the qualifications of the lecturers must be sufficient.

Students attending two-year programs clearly reflected those characteristics and professional qualifications of lecturers become dominant factors in students' learning in higher education. It is known that lecturers have the most important roles in the operation of the learning-teaching process. The result shows that most of the problems about students' learning are related to teaching staff's inadequacies about management of learning-teaching process. Pedagogical and discipline knowledge of teachers emphasize mentoring the process of learning-teaching. These types of knowledge also become vehicles for professional development and scholarship of teachers (Trask et al, 2009). Lecturers need to improve their own scholarship. Khandelwal stated that college teachers' behavioral profile of teaching differentiate excellences and poor performances of lecturers from the perspective of students, and excellent behaviors can be explained in various behavioral dimensions, such as "rapport with students, course preparation and delivery, spending time with students, and providing encouragement are not very difficult to perform, and the poor behaviors such as treating students unfairly are equally simple to avoid" 2009, 306). It is clearly seen that communication of the lecturers is the main problematic area for students' learning in higher education. According to Iorga (2010, 142) "communication is among the methods through which a teacher becomes a mentor for his students." It means that communication is the main problem related to "qualifications and behaviours of teachers" and "teaching-learning methods and techniques."

The results of this research show that teachers' negative behaviours such as "negative and injurious criticisms of teachers", "authoritarian behaviours of teachers" and "teachers' behaviours about insulting students" cause many problems related to students' learning in higher education. Rotgans and Schmidt's (2011) research results about student perception show knowledgeable teachers can positively affect student achievement and also if students feel that the teacher lacks knowledge, they cannot take a learning task seriously and are not willing to engage in learning in the active-learning classroom.

Competencies, qualifications and behaviours is very hard topics for schools and universities. Selvi (2010, 167) stated that teachers' competencies composed of nine different dimensions such as "*field competencies, research competencies, curriculum competencies, lifelong learning competencies, social-cultural competencies, emotional competencies, communication competencies, information and communication technologies competencies (ICT) and environmental competencies*". These competencies, which are defined as teacher competencies, actually include instructor competencies. These competencies draw the framework of the professional competencies of the instructors working in pre-school education institutions from the university. Competencies, qualifications and behaviours of teacher or academic staff and his/her operation of learning-teaching process comprise the most problematic situations in students' learning and take the first line among the other problematic factors of students' learning. It is very interesting that the behaviours and qualifications of the instructors are the main factors for students to learn in higher education. "Teachers' competencies affect their values, behaviours, communication, aims and practices in school and also they support professional development and curricular studies" (2010, 167). This result about students' learning in higher education is very remarkable because higher education students might follow their own learning aims and apply self-direct learning process without being affected by the behaviours of teaching staff. Barnett (1997) stated that "students are being given more responsibility for their own learning and are able to feel immediately involved in and committed to their own ideas …" in higher education. According to Wingate (2007, p. 393) "… traditional students who enter university from secondary school are not any more adequately prepared for the demands of studying at university.". It is clearly seen that higher education students need to improve their own learning to learn skills and self-direct learning skills and lecturers must also improve their own teaching skills to support their students' learning as mentors. Perry (1994) stated that the numbers of those participating in the higher education system increase, and as that increase is inevitably unmatched by an equal increasing unit funding, the quality and versatility of teaching will become ever more important.

The second group problematic factors compose of "*Emotional problems of students, Students' individualistic features, Living conditions of students, Study habits of students, Socio-cultural background of students, Economical background of students, Relations with friends, Relations with family*" relation with students' individualistic dimension and these are divided into two sub-groups. The first sub-group is composed of problems about the individual's *features* and the second sub-group includes problems arising from the individual's environment.

According to Murray (1991) there are many factors associated with students' learning that lie outside the control of the individual academic or department. For example, `the main factor determining student learning (cited in Harvey & Knight, 1996, 148) such as students' living conditions may not be bound up with academic environment but they affect students' learning negatively. In the research, students' individualistic features, emotional problems of students, living conditions of students, study habits of students, socio-cultural background of students, economical background of

students, relations with friends and relations with family are outside the control of higher educational system.

Teaching profession requires moral, emotional and motivational bases to fulfil the qualifications of learning-teaching process. The moral, emotional and motivational bases can be undertaken by both teachers and students while studying together. However, teachers or lecturers become dominant to establish and process the moral, emotional and motivational bases into learning-teaching process. In the planning process, what to teach and how to teach in the classroom are determined by lecturers. The design of a new learning-teaching process is based on teachers' roles and most students reflected that tutor were stimulating their learning. The moral bases in learning-teaching process are very important to students' learning. The research result shows that unethical behaviours of lecturers can decrease students' learning. For example, "lecturers' threatening attitudes during the lectures" and "lecturers criticizing students negatively and injuriously" are related to moral foundations of students' learning. They are also related to emotional and motivational bases of students' learning.

Emotional problems of students are mostly connected with lecturer's communication with students. If a lecturer's communication ways are not favourable for students to share feelings and thoughts, this causes some problems about students' learning. In higher education, motivation of students is an extremely important issue and lecturers may affect students' motivation for learning. Tudor et al (2010) stated that 'when the lecturer 'does enough' and that working through only some of the tutorial problems the lecturer sets is enough, the need to develop self-motivation is removed in some way" (p. 88). Maclellan stated that "motivation is a complex construct which is regulated by students as well as being influenced by tutors" (2005, 203). Lectures must give every student a chance to improve their own motivation for learning by means of reflecting on their own problematic factors about learning. Lecturers must take the diversity among students in the course into account because students have different motivations and different levels of knowledge about title (McGuire, 2008). Students' reflections about their own learning environment, that is their positive and negative experiences, will support learning environment and improve students' motivation for learning. And also, Devlin & Samarawickrema (2010, 113) stated that "teachers should motivate students through displaying their own enthusiasm, encouraging students and providing interesting, enjoyable and active classes".

The results of this research can provide four important feedbacks about learning-teaching in higher education from the students' perspectives. The first result is related to teachers' teaching performance, the second result is related to students' learning strategies and styles. The students stated that they did not have knowledge about their learning and they did not have enough knowledge especially about how they learned. They stated that they had learning problems especially because they did not have information about their own learning styles and the learning strategies they should apply. The third result is connected with students' individualistic features and learning-teaching environment of higher education. The fourth result is related to students' need for more tutorial support from their teachers and teachers' inability to give this support during the learning-teaching process. This leads to a contradictory situation for the students and teachers in higher education. This contradictory situation may create many gaps and problems in the learning-teaching environment. It is concluded that if students have lifelong learning skills, they organize their own learning, apply Self-Directed Learning and do not need teachers who teach them directly. In this case, students only need tutorial support from teachers in order to improve their own learning in higher education. Higher education institutions must organize some courses for students to improve their studying habits. They

also must provide some subsistence such as accommodation, economical and nutritional support and sheltering for students to support their learning in higher education.

There are two duties for the lecturers and transferability between the two career routes need to be built at the university (Matthew 2009). One of these duties is researching and the other is related to teaching. A high-quality system of researching and teaching at universities might come out of the recent development of the scholarship of learning and teaching (Elton 2008, 197). Boyer and Schulman discussed the concept of the scholarship. They stated that research and teaching should not be seen as separate entities in an academic's working life (cited in Stein & Walker 2010) because lecturers must design teaching based on research results and the developments in their subject matter area. Teaching, as an action by itself, becomes a research issue for lecturer in order to develop learning-teaching activities and process in higher education. Lecturers must have responsibility for enhancing their students' learning, but they have several limitations.

In this research, which will be described as the voice of students, it is very important that the results, which are based on students' opinions, are made in terms of teachers. Because student and instructor evaluations and demands contribute to the resolution of problems affecting learning in higher education. Hernández stated that "continuous assessment has the potential to support student learning through feedback and to increase students' motivation for learning" (2012, 500 "Learner voice positively influenced learning and the learning environment. When learners are given choice and the ability to develop their voice as a manifestation of these choices, learners become vested in the experience and take ownership of the learning" (Thibodeaux, Harapnuik & Cummings, 2019, 57).

The control of the individualistic factors that make up the second group is not under the control of the student alone. Therefore, the problems in the second group are not only problems that students will solve. Institutional support provided by the university is needed to solve the problems in the second group. For example, if the university can provide scholarships to support the solution of the student's economic problems, provide free or very low-paid food support or accommodation, it can contribute to the solution of most of these problems.

According to Jensen, Adams & Strickland (2014) the effectiveness of teaching staff in higher education has been identified as a dimension of quality and this issue remains a priority in the higher education agenda. If we discussed of the quality of the whole education system, we should consider the quality of an institution and the quality of the individual course (William 1994,36). If universities can focus on solving students' learning problems, they can create solutions to many problems related to student learning. Universities and lecturers have a great influence on the creation of these solutions. For this reason, universities should take an active role in solving students' learning problems. The roles and functions of universities, which should be learning centers, are changing day by day. Being a learning center; it means making efforts to ensure effective learning, and effective resource and time management in order to import new practices and developments to the system. For example, universities should change the current understanding of being a knowledge center. If they can assume functions as centers that will facilitate access to information, many problems stated by the students will be solved.

In order to reduce the problems arising from the teaching qualities of the students in higher education, it is necessary to move away from the teacher-centered approach. There is a need for different perspectives to ensure that the learner participates in the learning-teaching process much more actively. The inclusion of new approaches in higher education that will enable students and learning management systems to participate more effectively in the learning-teaching process will reduce the effect of the teacher-centered approach. If the student has Self-Directed Learning Skills, it will be very effective in providing this transformation. Self-Directed Learning "an individual sets their

own learning goals and then attempts to actively monitor, control, and regulate their cognition, motivation, and behaviours in order to achieve those goals" (Nordmann et al, 2019, 1081). A student who benefits from the learning support provided by learning management systems (LMS) can effectively continue his/her Self-Directed Learning. When the results of this research are examined, it is seen that there are many problems that prevent students from learning in the current higher education system. It is clear that most of these problems arise from the university's own structure, operating processes and components. These results reveal that there is a need for a serious paradigm shift in the concepts of student learning in higher education. New studies on education and innovations should be integrated into the university system rapidly, especially considering technology-based learning and e-learning. In order to transfer this change to the system, instructor competencies, roles and responsibilities should be developed and adapted to the new system. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the results of two studies on the qualifications of university teaching staff are related to this research. In a study conducted by Durmuşçelebi (2017) on the subject of teacher competencies in Turkish universities, qualified teacher behaviours were determined by applying a scale. According to the students' opinions, while the qualified teaching behaviours of the instructors were not at the expected level, the faculty members found themselves sufficient. According to these results, the students show that the instructors "sometimes" exhibit qualified teaching behaviours and the level of these behaviours is not sufficient. It is seen that there is a difference between the views of the instructors and the students in the context of the qualified teaching behaviours of the instructors. In the second study, Alimbekov, Yeşil, Yılmaz, Yılmaz, Boobekova, Borkoyev & Mamırova, 2021) examined the teaching competencies of university lecturers working at Turkish Manas University. In the research, it was aimed to determine the views of the faculty members on the problems of university teaching staff regarding their teaching competencies. In the learning-teaching process, the instructors stated that they had few problems in terms of "effectively benefiting from teaching methods and principles, guiding students and communicating". However, this is only about the self-evaluation of the instructor and the student's opinion was not taken. In Turkish universities, it is necessary to take measures to eliminate the learning problems of students by conducting comprehensive and in-depth research on the dimension of students and instructors on the subject of instructor competencies. It is envisaged that such a renewal would form part of an ongoing endeavours to ensure that future developments, trends, understandings, government directions, stakeholder expectations and student needs are continually considered and incorporated into the collective understanding of effective teaching. The notion of effective teaching in higher education can then continue to have resonance and meaning within a changed and changing context (Devlin & Samarawickrema 2010, 122).

It can be said in relation with the research that the results emerged are quite interesting. The problematic factors that hinder student learning revealed in this research overlap to a large extent with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG*), which has made great efforts to be implemented by universities. It is known that European Union (EU) set a lot of internal and external Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education. Standards for internal quality assurance Such as "*quality policy for quality assurance, Design and approval of programmes, Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, Student admission, progression, recognition and certification, Teaching staff, Learning resources and student support, Information management, Public information, On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes and Cyclical external quality assurance* (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015). With the implementation of a total of ten basic items in the Standards for internal quality assurance, it can be said that the factors related to

the learning problems of the students identified in the research will be eliminated to a great extent. For this reason, the universities in Tur key, taking these standards into account and making new arrangements to realize these standards in universities, will help to solve many problems that constitute the sources of students' learning problems and to make higher education institutions more qualified.

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