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How thick is the glass ceiling in Turkish academia?

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Abstract

Women generally face more difficulties in their careers, receiving lower wages and facing gender-based discrimination. Women are underrepresented in academia, especially in managerial positions, including program directors, deans, and university presidencies. In this study, presidents of 195 Turkish universities (127 public and 68 nonprofit foundation universities) were examined regarding their sociodemographic characteristics. The gender distribution of the higher position administrators was analyzed to gain an understanding of the glass ceiling problem in contemporary Turkish academia. Data were collected through a content analysis method reviewing the official websites of the Turkish universities. Our results suggest that overcoming gender imbalances in leadership positions is challenging; having women leaders in high positions would not eliminate gender biases.

Keywords: Glass ceiling, Turkish Higher Education, Glass ceiling in Turkish academia.

1. Introduction

Women's entry into academia as a career choice has been increasing over the past few decades (Kloot, 2004; Roberta et al., 2020). However, gender inequality has been a major issue in universities (Brown et al., 2020). Thus, gender-related discrimination and inequality practices have become popular, particularly with special reference to the glass-ceiling effect (Smith et al., 2012; Pingleton et al., 2016) and the "glass cliff" (Peterson, 2016) concept. Another metaphor used to emphasize how obstacles may reappear after having been overcome are "glass obstacles" (De Welde and Laursen, 2011). They are similar concepts explaining gender-based career problems and we preferred to use glass ceiling as the concept is widely used in the literature (Maume, 1999; Williams, 2005; Sanders et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Mun & Jung, 2018; Bertrand et al., 2019).

Women in organizations experience invisible obstacles despite their successful performance, and they are underrepresented in managerial positions. Hence invisible obstacles resemble a glass ceiling (Wirth, 2001).

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This systematic discrimination becomes a syndrome for women employees and slows down their career development by ignoring their achievements and talents (Cotter et al., 2001). The glass ceiling concept has been used as a "glass escalator" metaphor to stress the advantages men have compared to women for climbing their career ladders faster (Maume, 1999).

Personal, social, organizational, and cultural barriers form the glass ceiling effect lead to the formation of a specific syndrome mostly experienced by women in the work life (Lemons, 2003; Öztürk & Şimşek, 2019). In some organizations, male managers are preferred creating gender-based inequalities. Male-dominated organizational culture represents a major barrier to women's careers (Cotter et al., 2001; Pingleton et al., 2016). Social barriers may be related to occupational discrimination and traditional gender stereotyping as men are seen as more rational, strong, emotionally stable, and competent, and on the other hand, women are considered to have weak personal qualities (Dawley et al., 2004; Mert & Levent, 2020).

The glass ceiling syndrome has been a global issue, including in European countries and Turkey. The European Gender Equality Institute (EIGE) reveals data every year to show whether or not European countries improved their gender equality scores. According to the EIGE report (2020), the average score of the EU is 67.9 out of 100 points, revealing that the EU has a long way to go to ensure gender equality in the member countries. The situation in Turkey is even worse. According to a TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) labor force report released in 2018, only 38.3% of women in the 15-64 age group participate in the labor force. Women face discrimination and inequalities in terms of promotion to top management positions.

Although there have been many studies in terms of gender-based discrimination problems in different sectors and also in the Turkish higher education system (e.g., Ozbilgin & Healy, 2004; Gunluk-Senesen, 2009; Bulbul, 2021), the qualifications and gender-based analysis of university presidents have been neglected. This study aims to analyze gender-based discrimination practices of Turkish universities from the glass ceiling perspective to fill this gap in the literature.

The findings of this study give a general overview of Turkish academia regarding the thickness of the glass ceiling by investigating the current state of gender issues in higher education institutions in Turkey. This paper starts with the conceptualization of glass ceiling syndrome, gives an account of the Turkish Higher Education system, and finalizes glass ceiling issues in Turkish academia

2. Literature review

2.1 Glass ceiling and gender-related career problems

While women have increased their participation rate in economic life in recent years. They still also gender-based discrimination problems in general (Bulbul, 2021). Women encounter in their career advancement trajectories invisible barriers that entrench minority groups. Barriers that disadvantage and hold back women are defined metaphorically as "glass ceiling" (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Wirth, 2001). Women face more challenges than men in upper positions in organizations.

Williams (1992) proposed that some organizations promoted men more than women in female-dominated occupations, and she called this situation a "glass escalator." These gender-based discrimination type obstacles serve men as a stepping stone to upper-level managerial status (Maume, 1999). Women are type casted through stereotypes as not having the essential qualifications to be leaders (Koenig et al., 2011). Glass ceiling implies the obstacles to access to higher and managerial positions and more prestige and revenue for women. Concomitantly, fewer women can reach top management positions (Acker, 2009). The metaphor of "breaking the glass ceiling" asserts that positive outcomes for discriminated female leaders will develop once

a woman has broken the glass ceiling (Sanders, 2009; Wells & Fleshman, 2020). There is a plethora of literature highlighting women's under-representation and obstacles to the advancement of their careers, narrating different theories of the "glass ceiling" (Pingleton et al., 2016; O'Connor, 2018; Ó Náraigh, 2019; Roberta et al., 2020) and the "glass cliff" (Peterson, 2016).

The concept of glass ceiling encompasses all the obstacles women encounter to their career advancements (Öztürk & Şimşek, 2019), regardless of their competencies and performance. The glass ceiling effect is related to role conflict, stereotyping, lack of communication, lack of guidance, and other career obstacles (Bertrand et al., 2018). In male-dominated organizations, women are denied opportunities to prove themselves. Sometimes, a glass ceiling syndrome is accompanied by other career problems such as the queen bee syndrome (a situation where powerful and managing women treat other women who work as subordinates more harshly than their male counterparts) and women imitating men's behavior or lack of self-confidence, as well as work and family conflict, motherhood, and others impediments (Jackson and Callaghan, 2009).

Top-level managerial roles and leadership are associated with masculine terms and dominated heavily by men (Koenig et al., 2011). The gender-based wage gap is another dimension of the glass ceiling and women's underrepresentation in higher managerial positions. Implications of the glass ceiling and breaking or shattering the glass ceiling is so powerful that some public policies such as affirmative action and gender quotas are proposed (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). However, such initiatives create the wrong assumption that anti-discrimination policies are unnecessary.

Many studies investigating gender discrimination frequently identify barriers hindering women's promotion and advancement in academia as labelled "glass ceiling" (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Almansour and Kempnerb, 2016; Pingleton et al., 2016; Ó Náraigh, 2019). A barrier created out of "glass" illustrates that impediments are not visible yet hard and real for women who encounter them (Gunluk-Senesen, 2009; Ince Yenilmez, 2016).

2.2 Turkish higher education system

Turkish higher education system has been transforming since Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, initiated reforms in 1933. Originating from the Ottoman system of higher education, Turkish education started to evolve towards European standards for a long time. After the 1981 Law on Higher Education, Turkish higher education was restructured to become centralized and standardized (Kondakci & Zayim-Kurtay, 2019). The number of public (state) and foundation (private) universities in Turkey increased after the 1990s. Public universities scattered all over Turkey are all state-funded however vary in terms of quality. Foundation universities are normally founded by nonprofit organizations and financed by their parent foundation and tuition fees (Karadag, 2020).

The centralization of the university system in Turkey limited universities' autonomy financially and academically (Mizikaci, 2011). Thus academic freedom is limited by the central authority. Rectors (vice-chancellors) are expected to protect academics' academic freedom and rights in their universities as academic freedom is closely linked to universities' research productivity (Karran, 2009). The change in the appointment of the rectors in Turkey constitutes a threat to academic freedom (Karadag, 2020). In the past, rectors in Turkish higher education institutes were internally selected by the academic staff as candidates and were then sent to the central authority and the President for approval. The central authority, the Council of Higher Education (YOK), has been closely dependent upon the government policies (Firat & Akkuzu, 2015). However, a presidential decree issued in 2016 gave the President full authority to appoint university presidents/rectors without institutional elections (Presidential Decrees, 2016).

In the Turkish higher education system, rectors are the highest administrators and universities' legal entities. They have significant authority, responsibility, and duties. The highest authority in a university should have certain experience, knowledge, and skills in academic and administrative activities (Erdoğan and Esen, 2014). Nevertheless, there are no criteria required for being appointed as a rector but only having the academic title of professor. European and American higher education models propose different appointing or electing rectors or university presidents (Capano and Regini 2014).

As the higher education sector expanded and new universities opened in the 2000s, especially foundation universities, they borrowed mostly from the existing universities' human resources. However, the quality and quantity of academics in the higher education sector have not been adequate (Inanc & Ozcan, 2016). Although the opening of new universities allowed women to enter universities and academic careers, the central administration implemented gender-based discrimination and a thick glass ceiling.

2.3 The Glass ceiling problem in Turkish Academia

The "glass ceiling" issue has been well documented in academia (Williams, 2005) as an invisible barrier to the advancement of women academics to higher academic and administrative positions. Many women academics struggle to reach salary and career positions equal to their male counterparts, although they have similar experience and skills (Brown et al., 2020). Present career barriers within academia, such as traditional gender roles and unsupportive career policies, contribute to discriminative policies (Zhuge et al., 2011).

The academic community is considered a suitable environment for women as gender discrimination is less than in other areas (Lieberman et al., 2018). Academic careers have been seen as an appropriate and safe area for women, as men prefer financially higher jobs, mostly in non-academic areas (Mun and Jung, 2018). In Turkey, women's employment rate in academia is 40%, which is higher (almost twice as) than many EU countries (İnce Yenilmez, 2016; Öztürk & Şimşek, 2019). Gender-based discrimination may not be felt at the entrance level to academia. However, numerous studies show that it exists even at the entry (Saglamer et al., 2018) as personal selection processes, including job application, interviews, references, and other selection steps, are dominated by gender discrimination (Gaucher et al., 2011). Despite some developments, academic promotions to administrative appointments lack necessary equality.

According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Report (2020), the most advanced countries in terms of gender equality are Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Turkey ranked 130th out of 153 countries listed in that report. The criteria in the gender equality report included women's participation in the economy, education opportunities, health opportunities, political empowerment of women, and equal opportunities (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2020).

According to She Figures (2018), 42,75% of all academicians in Turkey are women. Interestingly, Turkey scores lowest on Europe's Glass Ceiling index at 1.1, while between 2013 and 2016, the average glass ceiling index (the glass ceiling thickness) in European countries has decreased. This situation has been explained before through women's career entrance flexibility (Ozbilgin & Healy, 2004; Ginther & Kahn, 2004). Women academics are achieving esteem and academic status, and some precautions were taken to improve their work conditions in Turkish Academia (Göktürk & Tülübaş, 2020). In a recent study, gender-based academic discrimination practices have been a significant factor in explaining the current situation in Turkish academia in line with previous studies (Bulbul, 2021).

According to prior studies, the highest academic, administrative position in a university is the rector/university president, but according to prior studies, women are less represented at this level in Turkish academia. Erdoğan and Esen's study investigated sociodemographic characteristics and career preparation phases of Turkey's rectors (Erdoğan and Esen, 2014) by investigating 168 state and foundation universities.

Data collected from rectors' web pages, official websites of universities, statistics of the Council of Higher Education revealed that only 8.3% of all rectors in Turkish universities were women. Another study from 2014 revealed that women accounted for only 8% and 9% of rectors and deans in Turkey, respectively (İnce Yenilmez, 2016). In 2019, 19 women rectors were appointed at 197 Turkish universities, amounting to 9.6% (YÖK, 2019). These figures show that although the representation of female academics in Turkish Higher Education is high, the glass ceiling sits quite low, and there have been very few women in top managerial and administrative positions.

A recent study on glass-ceiling in Turkish academia found that only 6 (4%) of the rectors of the public universities are female. Only 322 out of 1797 deans are women (18%) (Karadag, 2020). This is interesting as the percentage of female researchers in Turkish universities (44%) is higher than the European Union average (33%) (YÖK 2019). These statistics reflect Turkey's cultural framework supporting women to participate in academic positions, keeping them restrained from managerial positions.

The results show that although the number of women in academia has been rising, conflicting gender roles and the glass ceiling syndrome have hindered them from reaching their full potential. This study considers the glass ceiling effect as the most influential factor. To support this argument, facts and empirical data of women's rectors will be investigated.

3. Research method and analysis

3.1 Research method

In this study, we use the Delphi technique and the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) to investigate the viral marketing strategies used in Taiwan's sports industry. First, we review the extant literature to collect and induct the factors of sharing. Subsequently, we use the Delphi technique to build the key factor indexes and conduct the analysis using the AHP of the performances of each index weight to understand the weight distribution.

The extant literature was reviewed for an objective analysis of historical data. After the data were collected, tested, and analyzed, the extant literature was used to understand the results and conclusions obtained in the past and to explain or predict social development (Yeh, 2000). In this study, we review and collate the findings of the following prior studies: Botha and Reyneke (2013), Eckler and Bolls (2011), Ho and Dempsey (2010), Lee (2013), Nguyen and Le (2013), Mills (2012), Phelps et al. (2004), Sudarević, Vlahović and Šurjanović (2013), and Yang et al. (2010). This is the first step in building the key factor indexes for the viral marketing applications of Taiwan's sports industry.

3.1 Delphi process

This study uses document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). Content analysis is an objective and systematic research method to analyze and categorize data as a qualitative research strategy (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015). Content analysis has been preferred as the representation of women academics in managerial roles in universities may be reflected in the websites of Turkish universities. Content analysis is employed as a qualitative research tool used to summarize the presence of present status in managerial roles. By using content analysis, we can quantify and analyze the picture, meanings, and relationships of the data. The data were analyzed to see the frequencies of the women in managerial roles compared to men in Turkish universities.

3.2 Sample and data collection

Data have been retrieved from 195 universities' official websites (127 public and 68 nonprofit foundation universities), and statistics about the gender distribution of the deans and rectors in the Turkish universities are from the Council of Higher Education. The number of male and female university administrators is compared to see Turkish academia's glass ceiling effect.

3.3 Findings

Table 1. Total number of academicians in Turkey (2021)

	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Professors	20478	9786	30264	32
Associate Professors	10559	7078	17637	40
Assistant Professors	22757	18517	41274	45
Lecturers	18835	19226	38061	51
Research Assistant	25193	26511	51704	51
Total	97822	81118	178940	45

Source: www.istatistik.yok.gov.tr/ YOK; 2021

The above table shows that 45% of academics in Turkey are women. 32% of professors, 40% of associate professors, 45% of faculty with a doctorate but no tenure, 51% of lecturers, and 51% of research staff are women. The proportion of women academicians in Turkey is higher than in many European countries (Şentürk, 2016: 2).

Table 2. Distribution of rector and deputy rectors

	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Rector	180	15	195	8
Deputy Rector	341	55	396	14

At the management level, the number of women is scant. Of the 195 presidentially appointed rectors, only 15 are women (8%). Besides academic success, political favoritism can affect these appointments—rectors, in return appointment their vice-rectors. In small universities, only the rector represents the university administration. However, in universities with many students and faculty, more than one vice-chancellor may be chosen. The female vice-chancellor rate is 14%. Although the female vice-chancellor ratio is higher than the female rector ratio, we can say that this ratio is still relatively low. We conclude that women are hesitant to become candidates for rector appointments because of the high responsibility of the office and therefore prefer to be a vice-rector instead.

Faculties of Engineering, Faculties of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAS), and Science and Arts are the basic faculties found in almost all universities (See table 3). Therefore, these faculties were preferred as examples. The female dean rate in engineering is 6%, 14% in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and 18% in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The proportion of female assistant deans is 21% in engineering faculty, 35% in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and 35%

in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Compared to female rectors and vice-rectors, we see that the ratio of female deans and deputy deans is high.

Table 3. Distribution of dean and deputy deans

	Male	Female	Total	% Female	% Universities with these faculties
Dean of Engineering Faculty	156	10	166	6	85
Deputy Dean of Engineering Faculty	201	55	256	21	-
Dean of FEAS Faculty ¹	144	24	168	14	86
Deputy Dean of FEAS Faculty	160	86	246	35	-
Dean of Faculty of Science and Arts	124	27	151	18	77
Deputy Dean of Faculty of Science and Arts	163	90	253	35	-

Table 4. Distribution of director and deputy directors

	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Director of Natural Sciences Institute	86	16	102	16
Deputy Director of Natural Sciences Institute	114	35	149	23
Director of Social Sciences Institute	88	19	107	18
Deputy Director of Social Sciences Institute	116	47	163	29
Director of Graduate School	60	18	78	23
Deputy Director of Graduate School	76	46	122	38

The data also show that female academics are not preferred for the post of Institute director. Only 16% of the Institute of Natural Sciences directors, 18% of the Institute of Social Sciences directors, and 23% of the Institute of graduate schools' directors are women. It is also seen that the proportion of female academics in deputy director positions is not very high. 23% of the Institute of Natural Sciences deputy directors, 29% of the Institute of Social Sciences deputy directors, and 38% of the Institute of Graduate Schools are women.

4. Conclusions, implications, limitations, and further research

4.1 Conclusions

Although there has been an increasing amount of literature on women's representation in Turkish academia, it was revealed that very little is known about the glass ceiling effect on top administrative positions. At the same time, academics are well represented in lower ranks to bestow Turkish academia the label of "academic paradise" (Poyraz, 2013), the glass ceiling is felt immensely. Not only has this effect been influential in Turkish academia but also the Western World (Öztürk & Şimşek, 2019). We have concluded that the glass

¹If there is no FEAS, Business School or Faculty of Political Sciences are included.

ceiling for women has been thickened in Turkey's academic administration in the last decade with the increasingly centralized bureaucratic organization structure. However, it may be claimed that Turkish society's transformation will contribute to women's current favorable positions in Turkish academia. As transformation and restructuring in public universities and the competition in private universities accelerate, academic organization structures will help women break the glass ceiling.

This study's findings show that factors impeding the advancement of women in Turkish academia are related glass ceiling effect. The appointment of the rectors is decided solely by the President, but the decision is a product of his personal choice and the product of the organizational culture features of the Turkish academia. The positive changes in the socio-economic conditions contributed to gender equality in terms of the number of women working in academic positions. However, only the increase in the percentage of women in upper academic positions will support women's participation in academia. Especially the increase in the number of women rectors, vice-rectors, and deans will encourage women academics and candidates aiming for an academic career. In this way, women academics who just started their academic careers will identify themselves with women in higher positions and receive support, guidance, and courage from their existence in their future careers.

The findings of this study imply that awareness of women's abilities and skills, the empowerment of women in academia, and reducing the prejudices against women in society will help break glass ceilings in Turkish academia. The present unbalanced distribution of directors, deans, rectors, and their deputies in Turkish academia was revealed by comparisons, and the analysis proves that the glass ceiling effect prevails in Turkish academia.

As to our limitations, only gender factors have been compared in the deanship and rector positions which may be considered a surface analysis. However, the percentage of academic, administrative positions filled by women may be an important sign of a glass ceiling effect. The glass ceiling effect perception may be investigated in-depth and from multidimensional perspectives. Another suggestion is developing a tool for ceiling glass effect perception assessment, as seen from reviewed studies. Society, parliament, and media all have responsibilities to help women break the glass ceiling. Glass ceiling effect may be eliminated or minimized by increased awareness and enlightenment, resulting in developments in legislation and norms.

Our results suggest that overcoming gender imbalances in leadership may not be as simple as it looks, and having women managers in high positions would not guarantee eliminating gender biases.

4.2 Academic and managerial implications

In terms of future studies, further qualitative and quantitative analyses may be conducted to examine the existing gender gap in academia around the world and suggest policies implications to overcome this gap. Evidence from the literature suggests that gender discrimination in academia exists, and social and legal policies should be developed. Universities and other institutions may support women through training to increase self-confidence, negotiation skills, and develop leadership skills. Talented women academics should be identified, nurtured, and supported, and universities should train men and women administrators to recognize and cope with the gender biases within themselves.

4.3 Limitations and further research

This study is limited as only secondary data from the websites of the universities have been used. Primary data sources may be used to understand the background and nature of the glass ceiling problem in Turkish universities. The research has been conducted only in Turkish universities. We could analyze the case

compared to other countries to position the glass-ceiling problem in Turkey. Also, researchers may conduct more in-depth and systematic researches analyzing the current status and reasons. Further research is needed to identify the importance of gender-based discrimination in Turkish academia, as accepting a glass ceiling is essential to improve gender equality in Turkish universities

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