

# Chapter 10

## Attitudes Towards Service Learning in Turkish Higher Education: Perspectives and Practical Approaches

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of service learning in Turkish higher education. Exploring the historical evolution of service learning, it aims to offer valuable insights to international readers regarding specific practices in the Turkish educational context. Objectives include investigating diverse methodologies, discussing challenges, and identifying case studies. Through an in-depth analysis, the chapter aims to derive meaningful insights contributing to a comprehensive service learning framework. Additionally, it explores service learning from the perspectives of educators, administrators, and students, highlighting benefits, challenges, and impacts on the educational experience. This chapter is significant for the global academic community and Turkish higher education administrators, serving as inspiration for developing and integrating service learning components within institutions.*

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SERVICE LEARNING IN TURKEY

Turkish culture traditionally encompasses the understanding of mutual aid, solidarity, and collaboration. The philosophical foundations of the concept are, thus, rooted in the culture of endowment and solidarity of both the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires. Alongside endowments, craftsmen and small artisans formed associations and unions, while, simultaneously, the idea of social solidarity began to sprout in cities and neighborhoods (Kartal, 2020). Contemporary examples of these can be found in community chests encountered in some areas (Kut, 1991, as cited in Şeker, 2009). Primarily, the idea of “Community Service Practices” was brought there by the Village Institutes and is now seen as a leader in the field. It

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is part of a plan to get students involved in solving problems in their communities through projects and hands-on learning, which will also improve programs that train teachers (Coşkun, 2012).

When discussing the function of community service, there exists a vast educational literature behind it, referred to by various names such as community education, community-based education, community development, adult education, agricultural education, and development education. Widely acknowledged, the relationship of this concept with education is traced back to the American philosopher John Dewey and has been associated with the experiential learning approach of the 1960s (Lin et al., 2014). The recent history of Turkish education underscores the implementation of educational activities designed to prepare students for societal contributions and enhance their roles as beneficial individuals in their communities. The term “service learning” is expressed as “community service practices” (CSP, henceforth) in Turkey. This nomenclatural difference implies focusing on solving societal problems rather than students’ self-improvement through the course (Beldag et al., 2015). Additionally, upon analyzing the education system in Turkey, it becomes apparent that primary, secondary, and tertiary education programs incorporate activities of volunteerism or community service, rather than using Service Learning (SL) approaches. An analysis of the existing literature reveals a limited adoption of the Service Learning (SL) methodology, with researchers frequently using the terms “service learning” and “community service” interchangeably, leading to a lack of clarity in their conceptual understanding (Colak, 2015). Additionally, an examination of the definitions related to the CSP course reveals that the implementation in education faculties primarily takes place within the context of “community service.” However, as emphasized by Furco (1996), service learning can occur healthily when a balance is established between service, outcomes, and learning.

Education faculties worldwide aim not only to train professionals but also to provide services in various institutions covering a wide range of topics starting from basic education. Through these services, they set an example for different organizations providing services to the community (Miser, 2006). However, it is observed that in our country, education faculties and community collaborations fall below the expected level (Uğurlu & Kıral, 2013). Undoubtedly, the Turkish education system encompasses various age groups and adult education services alongside higher education institutions. For the education system to effectively fulfil its pivotal role in the development of individuals and society, education faculties need to assume roles and responsibilities beyond providing pre-service training for the educational personnel required by other educational institutions (Yesilyaprak, 2006). The social functions and prestige of education faculties will increase in proportion to their ability to guide and contribute to educational institutions and society with an educational sciences perspective (Report of the Workshop on Education Faculties’ Community Service, 2006; Uğurlu & Kıral, 2013). Therefore, a prospective teacher who aims for success in their professional life desires to recognize society and its issues during pre-service education and acquire skills to be sensitive to these problems and generate solutions (Ayvaci & Akyıldız, 2009). In this context, in 2006, the Community Service Applications course was added to undergraduate programs in education faculties (Aykırı, 2022). It is stated in the principles of the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK), that future teachers need to develop not only general knowledge, subject expertise, and professional competence but also the qualifications that will contribute to society (Küçükkoğlu & Coşkun, 2012). Considering the crucial impact of the teaching profession on creating society’s future, the education supplied to aspiring teachers must be of exceptional quality, going beyond being a mere requirement and becoming an absolute necessity. The Higher Education Council (YÖK) occasionally revises and changes the programs of education faculties due to the importance placed on teacher training. Since the 2006-2007 academic year, a revision has been made to the education faculties’

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