

Networking and Collaboration in Service Quality for a Smart University and Society

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Abstract— This reflection report sheds a light on how collaboration among higher education institutions fosters opportunities for the quality improvement in societies. Higher education institutions have a great role to integrate possible emerging services to the societies. They need to collaborate for both personal and professional development. In this reflection report, there are lots of events that were done jointly and these events added a value for the service quality of the higher education institutions. Societal research and development center have conducted many collaborative projects with different institutions in different themes. It was revealed that joint actions enrich the implications for the benefits of societal values and increase the necessity of further collaborations. Besides joint events, reflections on practice and process of professionals provided rational roadmap on service quality. In addition to this, it was revealed that networking and collaborations put an emphasis on quality for establishing smart university and society.

Index Terms— Collaboration, higher education, networking, smart, quality

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions have crucial roles to fulfill the welfare of the society based on expected needs and problems through scientific projects and attempts. For the societal problems, there is a significant need for collaboration between communities and partners. Considering the social problems within the scientific sense is highly important by the merits of technology as a role of higher education institutions.

The Societal Research and Development Centre, established in Near East University in 2013, continues to emphasize social responsibility awareness through studies and activities on women, children and individuals with disabilities representing the university.

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The Center has taken the role of a guide in determining practical needs by conducting a social analysis, with the awareness of team spirit and scientific studies at the basis of research and development. In line with its vision and missions, the Societal Research and Development Centre primarily engaged in activities for the people with disabilities. The mission of the center is to put forward a miracle to raise the rights of citizens with disabilities and learners with emphasizing the role of technology as pathway for solution. This sheds a light to underline the importance of different types of collaborations with different collaborators.

Our connected synergy is to pay attention to disability, sensitivity, equal access and opportunities in education and also for smart society. In our university, we have started to work as a team for disability. This became our milestone to pay attention to collaboration with the different bodies of society. Our aim is to remove barriers by facilitating awareness into the society and educate people to be more sensitive for the rights of human beings. All of joint collaborations rely on the emerging the uses of technology and digitalization for societal and educational values. Every service can be possible regardless for everyone in order to provide service quality in education. Our further collaborations will open a door for synergy as a whole picture in a society.

II. RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTCOMES

The Societal Research and Development Centre plays an important role in the research and recognition of the research at the University. The vision of the Societal Research and Development Centre is to support conducting high-quality research in line with scientific and technological developments, and adapting to social responsibility. The mission of the Societal Research Centre is to become a centre within the university that carries out social responsibility projects and research services within the framework of inter-university and cooperation with the society. The centre carries out activities in cooperation with many universities and civil organizations especially non-profit organizations for citizens with disabilities. In the context, the Societal Research and Development Centre has carried out the following activities, events and projects since its establishment 2013.

In this respect, center has done cooperation agreement with Manisa Celal Bayar University which undertook the task of Unobstructed Technologies & Barrier Free Communication Information Technologies for Disabled Citizens as platform, Many comprehensive international academic events to improve the rights of people with disabilities in Northern Cyprus has been organized within the scope of these collaborations. Those academic events provided collaboration among institutions and increased awareness on the subject of disability in all fields. As a concrete example, the Societal Research and Development Centre has become a part of the significant event that was organized by the platform of Manisa Celal Bayar University. A comprehensive look into pandemic time for the life of people with disabilities has been examined with scientific

cases to propose roadmap for the future. "COVID19 Process and Barrier-Free Informatics Summit" was organized and reflections of the COVID19 process on distance learning and open educational resources were discussed among professionals at different sessions. Due to the many decisions taken at "Barrier-Free Informatics Conferences" which was held in North Cyprus, it has made amendments to the legal regulations for the benefit of the people with disabilities. Before the pandemic times, regular events for the disability and technology were held in Near East University with cooperation of Manisa Celal Bayar University. It is crucial to focus on consideration of the disability and technology as hand by hand where technological facilities are becoming better solution for inclusion, and equal opportunity. University activities pioneered the establishment of the Prime Ministry Disabled Coordination Board and facilitated the lives of the people with disabilities in many areas. Due to the collaborations of the Societal Research and Development Centre and also many activities, it has created serious awareness in the society in Northern Cyprus, and also has both facilitated to set decisions for all ministers in order to take actions to reform the lack of services in the life of the people with disabilities. In one of the event in relation to cooperation with platform in Manisa Celal Bayar University, all representatives of governmental and non-profit organizations became part of the discussions and meetings to set decisions on how upcoming new technologies may affect the future of education, health, transportation, etc. for the social inclusion, life standards of citizens with disabilities. The most significant role of those regular cooperative events with Manisa Celal Bayar University showed how new technologies and cases can be shared for the benefit of all and how cooperation can be enriched among institutions. In all sessions of those events, services for people with disabilities, existing studies, regulations, successful examples and problems in Turkey and in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has been expressed and reported to set recommendations for the future. This shows how universities can collaborate with all institutions and work areas for the benefit and welfare of the society. Accessibility is the main issue for the life of people with disabilities which also need to set collaborative efforts for the solution. Cooperation between the institutions, Accessible Information Days were organized and led up the implementation of legal legislation and practices for people with disabilities in TRNC. Important steps were taken towards sharing experiences and developing forward-looking cooperation with the event organized. Particularly, steps have been taken in order to realize new work areas in TRNC in the fields of "Access of the Deaf, Deaf and Visually Impaired to Broadcast Services", "Web Accessibility" and "Use of Technology in Special Education". Accessibility issue and events also supported and collaborated by Manisa Celal Bayar University.

There is another collaboration example between Societal Research and Development Centre and Anadolu University professional based on research project in the field of distance learning. On a voluntary basis, beside the professional from Anadolu University, more than 11 scholars around the world participated in the project on how to develop knowledge management process in distance education practices which is entitled as "Knowledge Management Process in Higher Education Applications: Intercultural Views to Online Education Practices. Nowadays, it is crucial to reveal the results of the project in pandemic time. In this respect, collaborative efforts, networking are extremely needed for the future of online learning. Internalization of online pedagogy, integrating open education resources policy into practice are crucial significantly in pandemic time. In this context, within the scope of the project, seminars were given in order to analyze the organizational and pedagogical aspects

of online education. The themes of seminars are related to knowledge management approach, block chain, online learning and higher education.

Beside the international project, some scholars worked for the module to support the barrier free module for learners with disabilities. As a result, the scholars set standards, recommendations on how the families with learners with disabilities can get mentoring and guidance services during their learning process. This provides logical attempts on practice about providing mentoring and guidance services for families through online platforms which could be more confidential, practical and need expectation oriented.

The Societal Research and Development Centre has worked with many projects in accordance with its vision and missions. In this project, in collaboration with international participants, a seminar was held with the participation in science education and its learners and a joint research process was also carried out in order to evaluate Teacher Education in the Field of Natural Sciences Teaching. Another project in cooperation with Maribor University was organized within the scope of the Barrier-Free Campus, Environmental Education and Environmental Protection Project, and a conference on the barrier-free campus "Employment of the Disabled: Human Resources Management for Quality in Higher Education" which was the project of the Societal Research and Development Centre, was also conducted.

It was aimed to create a database of citizens with disabilities in Northern Cyprus as a result of this project. In addition, suggestions about employment strategies for students with disabilities have also been developed with the project.

Another project of the Societal Research and Development Centre is the "Women as Social Entrepreneurs" project. In this project, collaboration was made with the Research and Development Centre, Tourism Research Centre and Municipalities as a research team. This project included training on entrepreneurship and career planning to help rural women find or create their own jobs.

Moreover, "Women with children with disabilities: Increasing digital literacy skills" project. This project included enhancing digital literacy skills in order to receive educational and psychological counseling services for the children of mothers with children with disabilities.

In addition to above mentioned projects, "Safe Schools" project was held. In this project, collaboration with the Societal Research and Development Center and the City Security Group was made as a research team. This project included the proposal for a safe school policy for the future. Serious contributions have been made to the field such as school culture, cyber bullying, crisis management, and etc.

Likewise previously mentioned projects cooperative events were held, "Transformation of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to Open Learning" was also carried out by the center. Effective collaboration has been made with international researchers in the project. This project covered how transformation can be in teaching and learning for open learning in higher education. The research provided forward-looking suggestions and roadmap.

Within the scope of the projects carried out and completed, the Center contributed to the field through the "Preparation for Online Learning: Being a Smart Society" project and the "Current Status of Special Education: Use of Online Education" projects through collaborations with international researchers.

Moreover, "Digital transformation, disability and online learning: higher education applications" project was carried out with the participation of international researchers. Analyses on digital transformation, the role of higher education institutions and practical

solutions for students with disabilities through online learning have been introduced.

Furthermore, another significant project namely is "Analysis of Societies: Transformation, Technology and Education" project was fulfilled. This project was carried out in cooperation with Karadeniz Trabzon University. This project revealed the dimensions of societies to analyze changing trends in technology and education through transformation.

Apart from above mentioned projects, other crucial projects were accomplished with international collaborations by the Center which were "Critical Success Factors in Online Learning: Learning Analytics" and "Sensitivity Education for Non-Governmental Organizations" projects.

The Societal Research and Development Center also organized conferences in cooperation with University of Kyrenia in many fields. "Service for the Community in Social Transformation Workshop" was organized. The workshop focused on recent research and projects on titled the society that participated in life, especially in the social transformation that occurred during the pandemic process we are experiencing today.

In addition, "Barrier-Free Education and Distance Education Panel" was held in cooperation with Near East University Societal Research and Development Center, University of Kyrenia, Tunisia with the establishment of Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) and Trabzon University. Significant contributions were made on how to improve distance education by focusing on the recent research on the development of disability free education and the possible development of distance education in the pandemic process and afterwards.

"2nd Barrier-Free Tourism and Health Conference" was held in collaboration with the Near East University Center of Excellence, the Societal Research and Development Center, Surrey University, Oxford Brookes University and University of Kyrenia. Tourism and health services for everyone, which took place within the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at University of Kyrenia, were included in the conference.

A seminar titled 'Society and Children in the Digital Age' was organized in collaboration with Faculty of Education and Psychological Counseling, Guidance Department of University of Kyrenia and Societal Research and Development Center. Subject "The Most Children at Risk in Cyber Bullying" was discussed in the seminar.

In addition, a conference was held to analyze the status of social responsibility and projects within the scope of Community Service Practices in the fields of education and health, in cooperation with the University of Kyrenia and the Societal Research and Development Center. Due to the conference, how students should produce and implement projects in community service practices, which are part of education and training at universities was examined.

In addition to these conferences, "Disabled Tourism and Health" conference was organized in cooperation with the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, hosted by the Near East University Center of Excellence Societal Research and Development Center and University of Kyrenia,. TRNC Prime Ministry Disabled Services Coordination Board was in cooperation in this event. Due to the conference, the area was supported in order to increase the living standards of the disabled and to ensure full and equal participation in the society.

Any universities and nonprofit organizations, centers from any country are welcome to collaborate in order to expand achieved projects in different contexts.

III. FUTURE COLLABORATIONS

Digitalization has happened and increased the visibility of services of higher education system in the networked society structure. For example, it became clear that people with disabilities are watcher of actions rather than become actor of their rights. Because of this dilemma, we have decided to become proactive and make people with disabilities to be actors of their life destinations by making joint collaborations. In this respect, future collaborations will be continued to focus on disability in every aspects of life with the integration of technology and smart conditions. Therefore, nonprofit organizations for disability, experts in accessibility, educators on special education, and experts in online education are welcome to join these collaboration on disability and digitalization in higher education. These joint collaborations will foster a model for a smart university examples.

As we focused on educational development of key actors for making them actors to transform and diffuse universal rights in the society,. We also will continue to establish collaborations with different parties in order to make an adding value for the citizens based on equal access and sharing through online learning activities. These students also enrich their knowledge by participating in many seminars. In this respects, representatives of education ministries, accreditation committees, peace building communities, primary education teachers are welcome to develop cross cultural understanding for universal values and rights in all levels of education. In addition to this, training on online learning activities will be done respectively by international partners to understand different models and experiences.

Online education practices make visibility and create a voice for everyone especially for people with disabilities. In online classes, socialization among other people and disabilities has happened in equal manner. All people become equal based on equal accessibility of information, tolerance and understanding. It is obvious that our students developed their skills and competences in online learning environment. Creativity and entrepreneurship have become keys for people with disabilities, education for all in order to broaden proactive attempts in the society. Continuing education centers, teachers, representatives of education faculties, graduate schools, representatives of ministries, university representatives and also higher education councils are welcome to join this project. These kinds of collaborations will be enriched foster to expand our leadership, and innovative potential. Intellectual capacity, sharing and collaboration skills for the common welfare of the society through the services of higher education institutions for a whole picture within smart societies.

In addition to this, digital transformation, disability and online learning: higher education practices which concentrates on the analysis of digital transformation, the role of higher education institutions and practical solutions for learners with disabilities through online learning will become agenda for joint and comparative studies. Analysis of Societies: Transformation, Technology and Education that fosters the dimensions for societies in analyzing changing trends in technology and education through transformation will be another project for further collaborations. Critical Success Factors in Online Learning: Learning Analytics and analysis of critical friendship will be focus of further collaborations. Experts, instructors, team in distance education centers are welcome to acquire these ideas together. Understanding the different contexts practices will add a value of our context practices. Therefore exchanging ideas, researchers and also professional knowledge will contribute to the development of society and also our center. Future collaborations will be examined to reflect win-win policy of partners

and also societies. Sensitivity Training for Non-Governmental Institutions will be further collaboration ideas to realize the importance of work based learning and digitalization for the welfare of societies. Importance of open education resources and the way of using open education resources in the national context will be examined.

The above explored concrete examples and collaborations with other scholars, institutions will show the connected bones of shared efforts, dialogue and logical pathway for better solutions together. Disability, children and women projects are the scope of societal research and development centre. All the cases that were reflected in collaborative work manner within conducted projects. Based on improvement, scientific meetings and agreed decisions by all authorities in which will become more functional by further collaborations. Further to this, the framework of smart societies with new and accessible technologies for all will be the direction of future education which social presence, inclusion and equal opportunities in all aspects of life are issues need to be undertaken.

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