

Evaluation of Learning and Teaching Centers in Turkish Higher Education in terms of Competencies Framework

Asu Altunoğlu¹, Tuğba Babacan²

¹Department of Educational Sciences, Anadolu University, Türkiye, ²Department of Educational Sciences, Anadolu University, Türkiye.

How to cite: Altunoğlu, A. & Babacan, T. (2025). Evaluation of Learning and Teaching Centers in Turkish Higher Education in terms of Competencies Framework. In: 11th International Conference on Higher Education Advances (HEAd'25). Valencia, 17-20 June 2025. <https://doi.org/10.4995/HEAd25.2025.20140>

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the learning-teaching centers in Türkiye through views of their directors and documents through a multidimensional framework, PROFXXI, based on contextualized understanding of institutional characteristics. Within the scope of the research, documents such as activity reports, annual evaluation reports, bulletins and policy documents openly published by centres or universities on their institutional web pages and interviews with directors of seven different centers have been analysed using qualitative content analysis. The findings reveal that Learning and Teaching Centers (LTCs) in Türkiye show substantial progress in instructor support, yet student support, technology integration, and evidence-based decision-making remain underdeveloped. Institutional differences affect engagement and structural maturity. To enhance impact, the study recommends establishing robust student feedback mechanisms, allocating dedicated staffing and budgeting for LTCs, and formally integrating these centers into institutional quality assurance and strategic planning processes.

Keywords: *Advancement of learning and teaching; quality education; education and teaching in higher education; centres for learning and teaching in higher education.*

1. Introduction

While the rise of the knowledge economy and globalization has positioned universities as key drivers of innovation and growth, emphasis shifted from teaching to research. Rankings and funding systems that prioritize research output reinforced this trend. However, teaching remains essential for shaping future generations, fostering critical thinking, and equipping students for a changing world. Today's rapid technological and societal changes have renewed focus on inclusive, student-centered teaching that meets diverse needs and prepares graduates for dynamic careers. This includes organizing teaching processes based on varying knowledge

levels, student profiles, individual differences, and expectations (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). Learning and teaching centers which aim to promote effective teaching and learning practices are designed as institutional and professional learning communities. Sorcinelli's (2002) study has offered a foundational framework for creating and sustaining such centers, emphasizing their role in meeting faculty needs and enhancing education quality.

Developed in response to the growing need for systemic transformation of Learning and Teaching Centers (LTCs) in Latin America and the Caribbean, the PROF-XXI framework (Kloos et al., 2021) provides a foundation for evaluating LTCs in diverse higher education contexts such as Türkiye, where higher education has critically enlarged in the last couple of decades. A notable study examining learning and teaching centers through a competency framework (Pérez-Sanagustín et al., 2022) applied the PROF-XXI model during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify and develop key competencies, particularly in teacher support and technology for learning. Findings highlighted initiatives that enhanced faculty members' digital and pedagogical skills, fostering sustainable transformation. In Türkiye, Elçi and İşeri (2022) emphasized the importance of such centers for faculty development amidst digitalization and lifelong learning demands, while Akınlar and Kavgaoglu (2024) explored how Ivy League centers contribute to quality education through various support mechanisms. The emergence of these centers in Turkey reflects growing efforts to align with global trends and improve teaching quality. However, existing studies are largely limited to document analysis. This study contributes to the literature by providing a multi-layered analysis of LTCs in Türkiye through the integration of document analysis and interview data. By applying the PROF-XXI framework, it offers a contextualized understanding of institutional strengths. It also informs policy by highlighting development areas and offering insights for institutional transformation. In this context, the aim of this research is to evaluate existing learning-teaching centers through faculty views and university documents, and to offer a multidimensional perspective by diversifying qualitative data. To reach this aim, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do faculty perspectives and national-level documents reveal the effectiveness of LTCs in Türkiye, when analyzed through the lens of the PROF-XXI framework?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The research was designed as a qualitative case study by evaluating the LTCs through the opinions of the faculty members and documents to conduct an in-depth examination of the phenomenon and present a special case.

2.2. Sources of data

The higher education institutions selected as the study group have been determined by criterion sampling method, based on the primary condition of having an LTC available. Of a total of 209 universities in Turkey, 31 institutions have a center. Documents from the websites of centers whose directors were interviewed have been included in the analysis.

For the interview data, 7 faculty members from different universities who act as directors or heads of LTCs in universities have been included as participants, based on the criterion that they have knowledge, expertise and experience on the activities and policies of LTCs. In interview studies, the diversity, richness and depth of the language produced are essential rather than the number of participants. The participants consisted of four female and three male faculty, all specialized in the field of education.

2.3. Data Collection

As the first qualitative data collection tool, a semi-structured interview protocol for directors of centers was created based on the dimensions of the PROF-XXI framework, which are teacher support, student support, leadership, culture and transformation, technology for learning and evidence-based practices (Kloos, et al., 2021). The draft form for faculty members was reviewed by two experts, revised and finalized. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted online and face to face in durations varying from 30-70 minutes. The audio recordings taken upon consent of the participants during the interviews were transcribed. Documents such as activity and annual reports published openly on the web pages of the centers included in the research have been subjected to qualitative content analysis.

2.4. Data analysis

The qualitative content analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's (2015) coding strategies, using open, axial, and selective coding to systematically examine university reports within the Prof XXI Competency Framework. This systematic approach ensured a rigorous, framework-driven analysis of teaching and learning centre activities, which resulted in the emergence of six themes as: multifaceted needs analysis, digitalization and innovation, faculty support and interaction, student support and engagement models, cultural transformation, and monitoring.

3. Findings

3.1. Multifaceted Needs Analysis

Effective identification of teaching and learning needs forms the foundation of strategic planning within LTCs, shaping their programs and long-term relevance. Centers use a multi-layered approach, combining tools such as institutional surveys to capture both explicit and

latent needs. As one participant explained, “We administered a needs assessment survey to all academic staff... the highest demand was for digital tools, particularly AI-related applications” (P1), while another emphasized the role of qualitative input: “We have mentors as part of our mentoring program; we rely on their feedback, and insights from benchmarking other universities, to shape our initiatives” (P2). Institutional reports echo this dual approach. At University M., it was noted that “training needs of academic staff were identified through regular feedback collection,” and University Y. described using “data from mentoring sessions and institutional evaluation surveys” to inform planning. Planning was shaped not only by strategic goals but also by bottom-up engagement, as staff proactively sought discipline-specific training. As described by one participant, “Faculty members came to us and said, ‘we want training as well.’ Sometimes we notice that change has already begun within departments even before we launch a program” (P6). Another noted, “Some faculties are quite proactive -for instance, we developed a separate program specifically for the Faculty of Aviation because they had distinct needs and explicitly requested support” (P4). These assessments reveal not only functional skill gaps but also contextual and evolving academic needs. By triangulating institutional data, mentoring insights, and faculty-driven demands, LTCs position themselves as responsive and strategically aligned actors in educational development.

3.2. Digitalization and innovation

Digital transformation emerged as a central theme across all universities, with LTCs actively supporting faculty in adopting LMS platforms, MOOCs, and hybrid models, particularly during the emergency transition to distance learning. As one participant noted, “Right after the pandemic, there was an intense demand... things like how to conduct interactive digital learning, how to integrate courses into learning management systems, and how to manage distance education became very prominent” (P3). While AI integration varies, some institutions have adopted a demand-driven approach - surveying faculty needs and organizing hands-on workshops. “The highest demand was for digital tools, especially artificial intelligence. Before the spring semester, we held a course design workshop where we experimented with AI-based content creation” (P7). Institutional documents mirror these developments; for example, University E. noted that “guides and tutorial videos were prepared to assist both instructors and students in using online learning systems.” Similarly, University S. reported that “hybrid research training workshops were conducted using virtual collaboration tools,” highlighting the growing shift toward more advanced digital pedagogies. Overall, data reveal that this momentum has triggered some progress in adaptive learning and AI-based assessment.

3.3. Faculty support and interaction

Faculty development remains a core function of Learning and Teaching Centers (LTCs), typically encompassing pedagogical training, instructional design, academic orientation, and,

in some cases, faculty mentorship. For instance, at University H., “orientation programs and digital tool trainings were provided to support the pedagogical development of faculty members,” while University M. reported that “instructors were offered observation-based feedback opportunities upon request, especially for active teaching strategies.” In this regard, P1 similarly noted, “Many instructors said they had never received any training on assessment or active teaching strategies, so we emphasized these topics in our orientation programs.” Adding to this, P5 reported that “faculties themselves acknowledged a lack of training in assessment methods, and even standard pedagogical techniques were perceived as innovative by many instructors.” Document and interview data depict that despite these structured supports, innovative approaches such as AI-driven learning analytics, gamification, and inclusive education frameworks are still in a development process. These areas often rely on individual faculty initiative rather than being integrated into a system-wide strategy.

3.4. Student support and engagement models

While Learning and Teaching Centers (LTCs) prioritize faculty training, student-focused support mechanisms are generally less developed. Most institutions offer orientation programs covering academic writing, research skills, and ethics. For example, University A. noted that “workshops on academic writing and academic integrity were held to enhance undergraduate students’ awareness of responsible scholarship.” Some universities, such as University M., have also implemented peer mentoring programs, reporting that “student peer support systems and competence development modules were integrated into the learning platform.” However, as illustrated by P4, such efforts often lack sustainability: “In 2022, I designed a peer support program... it was a very effective initiative, but we couldn’t sustain it. Sustainability requires committed human resources and institutional ownership, ... when key people change; the projects often fade out.” In contrast, P2 has been able to offer a more institutionalized engagement model: “Our mentors convey what it means to be a member of University S. It’s not just about knowledge, but a transfer of culture and belonging. Each mentor is responsible for about 20 students and follows up with them throughout the semester.” Efforts to enhance digital literacy are evident through online modules and LMS guides, yet adaptive or AI-driven student support tools have not been widely adopted. Although psychosocial support has gained interest particularly after recent crises, initiatives such as well-being services and career counseling remain secondary in most universities, suggesting a need for more structured and proactive student-centered strategies.

3.5. Cultural transformation

The extent to which LTCs influence institutional leadership and transformation differs markedly across universities. In some cases, LTCs have been restructured to highlight a strategic emphasis on innovation and digital pedagogy, as reflected in the naming of units like the *Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning and AI*. The inclusion of both public and foundation (private)

universities in the sample reveals varying levels of institutional autonomy, resource availability, and strategic visibility, which may influence how LTCs operate and evolve. The findings suggest that foundation universities, benefiting from relatively greater institutional resources and flexibility, tend to demonstrate more sustained faculty engagement and a more deeply embedded identity transformation within their Learning and Teaching Centers. At University O., it is stated that “Learning and Teaching Centers contribute directly to strategic decisions, especially in digital education and curriculum transformation.” Similarly, University H. reported that “university-wide meetings with senior leadership and faculty were held to foster a culture of innovation in teaching.” In line with this, P3 emphasized the strategic influence gained through alignment with accreditation processes: “The administration relies on us due to monitoring and accreditation processes. Quality assurance in teaching aligns perfectly with our scope. When we demonstrate impact, our leverage increases and we become more visible in strategic decision-making.” P2 also highlighted cultural transmission from a student perspective: “Mentorship among students help transferring values, identity, and a sense of belonging”. P6 also pointed to a growing sense of shared learning among faculty: “It’s gradually becoming part of the culture. As our trainings become known, faculty begin sharing them with one another, and we start receiving requests from other departments. This is slowly building a culture of shared learning.” Findings reflect how LTCs can contribute to cultural transformation at strategic, academic, and interpersonal levels, while pointing to the need for broader institutional commitment to fully integrate such practices across universities.

3.6. Monitoring

In several universities, sustainability of improvement in teaching and learning is subject to continuous evaluation through annual performance reports and academic development indicators, which were used to assess the long-term effectiveness and impact of training programs by including views of different stakeholders. University of E., for instance, reported that “student and instructor feedback mechanisms were established to evaluate teaching quality and continuously improve course design across academic units.” P1 confirmed this approach through: “We conducted a follow-up study based on student feedback to evaluate our recent training. We observed whether active learning strategies and web 2.0 tools were used in courses.” P2 similarly stressed responsiveness and improvement: “We try to evaluate all routine activities and one-on-one sessions. From orientation to mentoring, we collect feedback on effectiveness and impact; if some aspects are not working, we revise them based on student needs.” In sum, these practices reflect a growing commitment to monitoring of quality performance through data-driven strategies that enhance teaching and learning processes.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of LTCs in fostering faculty development and student learning through driving institutional transformation, integrating educational technology, and monitoring the sustainability of efforts. While LTCs have made notable progress in faculty training, digital learning adoption, and pedagogical innovation, their focus remains largely on teacher support, with student-centered initiatives and data-driven decision-making receiving comparatively less emphasis. Similarly, Forgie et al. (2018) describe how the role of LTCs often progresses from offering individualized support toward fostering teaching communities. This shift reflects a broader transformation in which LTCs gradually reposition themselves from service-oriented units to more strategically integrated structures.

While our findings indicate a growing commitment to improvement in LTCs, they are parallel with Kolomitro and Anstey's (2017) finding that most centers still focus primarily on participation and satisfaction data, with fewer evaluating changes in teaching practice or student learning outcomes. The integration of AI-driven learning analytics, adaptive assessment models, and personalized education strategies remains in its early stages, and institutional leadership varies in its engagement with LTCs as drivers of systemic change. As highlighted by Challis et al. (2009), LTCs need to evolve from peripheral support structures into strategic hubs for institutional learning. Additionally, their role in university governance should be reinforced, ensuring they contribute directly to policy formulation and institutional strategy. By embracing a more holistic and data-driven approach, LTCs can transition from being support units to key strategic entities, and from being local university-based organizations to internationally interacting organisms, shaping the future of higher education in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

When considered in relation to the PROF-XXI framework, the findings suggest that the instructor support dimension has shown significant progress across institutions in Türkiye. However, the areas of student support, technology and evidence-based decision-making require further development to ensure a more balanced and comprehensive transformation in teaching and learning practices. These differences may not only stem from disparities in financial resources but also from variations in governance structures, institutional culture, and strategic priorities, all of which shape how Learning and Teaching Centers are positioned within universities. While this study is limited to the Turkish context and relies solely on qualitative data, future research could expand its scope by student evaluations and mixed-method studies to assess the effectiveness of LTCs. Cross-cultural comparative analyses could also offer valuable cross-contextual insights.

References

- Akınlar, A., & Kavgaoglu, D. (2024). An Investigation of Teaching and Learning Centers of Ivy League Universities in Terms of Their Contribution to Quality Higher Education. *Journal of Education for Life*, 38(3), 610–625. <https://doi.org/10.33308/26674874.2024383781>
- Challis, D., Holt, D., & Palmer, S. (2009). Teaching and learning centres: Towards maturation. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(3), 371–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360903067021>
- D'Andrea, V.-M., & Gosling, D. (2005). Introduction. In Improving teaching and learning: A whole institution approach (pp. 1-9). *Open University Press*.
- Elçi, A. & İşeri, E. (2022). Türkiye’de öğretim elemanı mesleki gelişimi için öğrenme ve öğretme merkezleri: Yönetim ve örgüt yapısı. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 12(2), 280–295. doi:10.2399/yod.21.734565
- Forgie, S. E., Yonge, O., & Luth, W. (2018). The evolution of teaching and learning centres: From theory to practice. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(1). Retrieved from https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cjsotl_rcacea/vol9/iss1/9
- Kloos, C., Alario-Hoyos, C., Morales, M., Rocaël, H., Jerez, O., Pérez-Sanagustín, M., ... & López, A. (2021). PROF-XXI: Teaching and Learning Centers to Support the 21st Century Professor. *2021 World Engineering Education Forum/Global Engineering Deans Council (WEEF/GEDC)*, 447-454.
- Kolomitro, K., & Anstey, L. M. (2017). A survey on evaluation practices in teaching and learning centres. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 22(3), 186–198. doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2017.1313162
- Pérez-Sanagustín, M., Kotorov, I., Teixeira, A., Mansilla, F., Broisin, J., Alario-Hoyos, ... Gonzalez Lopez, A. H. (2022). A competency framework for teaching and learning innovation centers for the 21st century: Anticipating the post-COVID-19 age. *Electronics*, 11(3) 413. <https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics11030413>
- Sorcinelli, M. D. (2002). Ten principles of good practice in creating and sustaining teaching and learning centers. In A guide to faculty development: Practical advice, examples, and resources. Ed. by K. J. Gillespie & D.L. Robertson. Wiley & Sons, 9-23.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2015). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques (4th ed.). *Sage Publications*, Inc.
- <https://yulearnt.yeditepe.edu.tr/sites/default/files/YU-LEARNT-2023-January-December-Annual-Report-Final-ENG.pdf>
- <https://stl.hacettepe.edu.tr/en/publications/>
- <https://ogem.atauni.edu.tr/izleme/>
- <https://www.sabanciuniv.edu.tr/akademik/egitim-ve-kariyere-destek/bireysel-ve-akademik-gelisim-merkezi-bagem>
- <https://mukemmeliyet.ogu.edu.tr/>
- <https://ogeb.eskisehir.edu.tr/Uploads/ogeb/files/I%cc%87dari%20Personel%20Mergen%20K>
- <https://ogem.metu.edu.tr/en/ogem-research>