The industrial revolution led to the rise of diverse labouring groups with different qualifications which constituted the basis of many new professions. The variety of professions has grown considerably as the industrial society evolved into the information and technology era. Therefore, each professional group needed to formulate principles to maintain high levels in their profession. They called the combination of these basic principles “professional ethics”. Professional ethics embody personal, institutional, and corporate standards for expected behaviour from employees in the profession (Durkheim, 2003; Koehn, 2001). Professional ethics for researchers comprise different aspects due to their scientific, collegial, and social responsibilities. The first aspect focuses on the essential virtues of the scientist to research with integrity, including courage, respect, resoluteness, sincerity, humility, and reflexivity (Macfarlane, 2009). Academic ethics also include standards of ethical conduct in science, objectivity in research, ethical issues in scientific publication, ethical issues in the laboratory, and responsibilities of scientists to society (Resnik, 2005). “Ethics of science” (EoS) is the inclusive term for all these scholarly virtues and ethical considerations (Erzan, 2008). Researchers generally gain awareness of the intrinsic principles and extrinsic rules within EoS during their postgraduate education (Erdem, 2012). Nowadays, universities all around the world offer EoS courses to graduate students. For example, European universities have mostly given Research Ethics, Academic Integrity, Ethical Issues in Scientific Research, or Ethics and Professionalism in Science courses since the Helsinki Declaration in 1964. Turkey started to take research and publication (R&P) ethics into consideration seriously after joining the European Higher Education Area in 2010.

As a result of being late initiating EoS education, 34% of academic theses produced between 2007 and 2016 in Turkey exhibited a heavy rate of plagiarism (Plagiarism scandal hits Turkish academia, 2016). Plagiarising students were suspended from their universities for one semester as punishment (Official Gazette, 08 August 2012), whereas no serious sanctions for unethical behaviour by Turkish academics were instituted in the period 2007-2016 (Unal, Toprak, & Baspınar, 2012). However, the Turkish government recently announced that the penalty for plagiarism would be dismissal from the academic profession (Official Gazette, 02 December 2016).
After the plagiarism scandal as well as sanctions against plagiarist students and academics, the Turkish Council of Higher Education inserted a compulsory course on R&P ethics in postgraduate education programmes (Official Gazette, 20 April 2016). Turkish universities then initiated various courses on R&P ethics in the 2016-2017 academic year. However, there is no unified curriculum or common content for these courses, and each lecturer has generated their own syllabus. In this regard, the core issues in similar courses at European universities may provide a basis for creating a comprehensive and common EoF course at Turkish universities. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify courses related to EoF in European universities and define important topics in order to compare and combine them with their counterpart courses in Turkish universities. For this purpose, the research questions are: i) Which courses related to EoF are offered to graduate students in European and Turkish universities?, ii) What are the prominent topics in EoF courses in European and Turkish universities, and iii) What are the similarities and differences between EoF courses in European and Turkish universities?

Method

This research was designed in the phenomenology pattern of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The data for qualitative inquiry were collected from the web pages of EoF courses in the educational (ECTS) information packages of European and Turkish universities. The documents related to EoF courses were then analysed employing the thematic descriptive analysis technique. The virtues proposed for scientists in Macfarlane’s (2009) study and ethical issues in scientific research and publication underlined in Resnik’s (2005) book were used as ready themes. During analysis, the researcher followed the qualitative data analysis steps suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014, 12-14): Data Condensation, Data Display, and Drawing/Verifying Conclusions.

Firstly, the researcher analysed each course document by coding significant keywords or phrases and formed a complete code list including codes from all documents. All documents were then given to another researcher experienced in qualitative research who coded them using the complete code list. The inter-coder reliability was calculated (.83) via Miles and Huberman’s (1994) formula [Consensus on data / (Consensus on data + Dissidence on data) x 100]. An interrater reliability of .70 and above is evidence of adequate internal reliability. After ensuring reliability, the research results were summarized according to the themes and are presented in the next section by comparing and combining the core issues of EoF courses in European and Turkish universities.

Expected Outcomes

This qualitative inquiry aimed to examine the content of R&P ethics courses at European and Turkish universities in terms of their appropriateness to the key topics in EoF. Therefore, the researcher collected website documents from 24 different EoF postgraduate courses in the educational (ECTS) information packages of 39 universities from 11 European countries, namely, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. The universities in each country have various practices for EoF courses. For instance, Finnish universities offer a nationwide research ethics course to PhD students via an online education platform. Universities from other European countries mostly offer short courses/seminars on EoF with various titles such as research ethics, academic integrity, ethics and professionalism in science, etc. On the other hand, Turkish universities give a one semester course in R&P ethics to their master and PhD students.

EoF courses at European universities mainly include issues such as research ethics committees, informed consent form, data collection/storage, participant confidentiality, ethical research on human or animal subjects, and research on vulnerable subjects/populations. Unlike the courses in European universities, those in Turkish universities focus generally on the steps of scientific research and publication ethics issues such as scientific fraud, plagiarism, data manipulation, fabrication, falsification, salarization, conflict of interest, responsible authorship, and peer review. However, none of the courses related to EoF in European or Turkish universities include the essential virtues of scientists. Furthermore, standards of ethical conduct in science are a constituent in only two courses at European universities, while objectivity in research is a topic taught in only one course at a Turkish university. In short, both European and Turkish universities should add scientific virtues, ethical standards, and research objectivity criteria to the topics of R&P ethics in order to constitute a more comprehensive EoF course.

References


Author Information

Baris Uslu (presenting)
Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University
Educational Sciences
Canakkale