
Leadership and Decision-Making Roles of Early Career Researchers: Insights from a Western Anatolian University

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Résumé

The role of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in the governance of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is increasingly acknowledged, yet their involvement remains underexplored compared to other academic stakeholder groups. This case study investigates the contributions of ECRs at a western Anatolian university in Türkiye, focusing on their roles in research, teaching, and decision-making processes. Despite their significant input, ECRs often face barriers due to traditional academic hierarchies, limiting their participation in governance. Recent reforms in university governance and European Union policies have aimed to enhance inclusivity within academic settings, yet the specific role of ECRs has not been extensively examined. This study emphasises the importance of including ECRs in governance to foster positive change in HEIs and promote gender equality across all career levels. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants, including eight ECRs (four involved in decision-making and four not) and also two administrative staff including managers/administrators. In the selection process, we ensured diversity across STEM and Social Sciences/Humanities disciplines by exemplifying two ECRs from STEM and two from business/social sciences/humanities. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, with informed consent obtained, and data were anonymised and securely stored. Findings revealed that while ECRs possess valuable insights and perspectives, their representation in decision-making processes remains very limited. The study emphasises the importance of structural reforms to enhance the involvement of ECRs, fostering more inclusive governance practices and promoting a fairer academic environment in the country. This research highlights the need for further studies on ECRs' roles in HEI governance to ensure their contributions are properly recognised and effectively utilised. **Keywords:** Early Career Researchers (ECRs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Governance, Decision-Making, Inclusivity.

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