

Evaluating the open admission practice in vocational colleges (Kirklareli University case)

By Ertuğ Can

4 Evaluating the open admission practice in vocational colleges (Kirkklareli University case)¹

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Abstract

With a regulation made in 2001, vocational and technical secondary education graduates were given the right to enroll to vocational colleges without taking the national central exam. However, this regulation was repealed in 2016. If the students are placed in an associate degree program in the same field, additional points are added to the points gained from central examination. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the open admission practice which had been going on for more than fifteen years and the abolition of this practice according to the opinions of the academics who work in vocational colleges of Kirkklareli University. The data of the research were collected with the help of 4 open ended questions in written form, with the qualitative research method. The abolition of the open admission practice is evaluated as a positive development by academic staff of Kirkklareli University, in terms of the quality of education and employability.

Keywords: vocational colleges; vocational and technical education; open admission practice; scoring system; employability.

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8 1. Introduction

9 The first vocational colleges in Turkey, operating under the Ministry of Education, opened in
10 1974-1975 academic year. Vocational colleges were later incorporated into the Higher Education
11 Council (YÖK) (1981). (Can et al., 2017, 22). Vocational colleges regulated in the Higher Education
12 Law No. 2547, defined as; "It is a higher education institution that aims to train qualified human
13 resources for certain professions, which lasts two or three semesters per year for two years and
14 gives associate degree." (YÖK, 2018). As stated in this definition, vocational colleges are part of
15 higher education. Vocational colleges are also a valuable resource to meet the needs of intermediate
16 and small sized enterprises. (Gençtürk et al., 2008, 210; Ulus et al., 2015, 177). Starting from this
17 resource feature, vocational colleges are defined as "higher education institutions that provide
18 intermediate human power with the title of technician and professional staff" (Kızıgn, 2005, 120) or
19 "institutions that provide education and training for a certain profession aimed at raising qualified
20 human power" (Erdönmez, 2017, 57).

21 In the Turkey's Tenth Development Plan (2013, 203-204), it is stated that the students' success
22 remained below the international average, there is a need to improve the quality, training of
23 qualified human power is needed to ensure the development in the long term in Turkey.
24 Procedures preferred for student admission to vocational colleges differed over time. In this
25 research, the educational effects of the recent legislative changes on the system adopted at the
26 vocational colleges will be evaluated within the framework of the opinions of the instructors of the
27 vocational colleges of Kırklareli University.

28 Open admission practice was accepted in 2001. It has been stated that the students who
29 graduated from vocational and technical secondary education institutions who want to enter a
30 higher education program not covered by vocational and technical education zones continue to
31 have the right to enter the university entrance examination. Within the scope of the regulation, "the
32 possibility of placement without taking a national examination to the higher education institutions
33 brought to the students graduated from vocational and technical secondary education institutions"
34 has been integrated with the name of "open admission practice". With this changes of the
35 implementation "significant achievements in vocational and technical education in Turkey will be
36 taken and ultimately, to achieving results in the reform of qualifications in vocational and technical
37 education" had been hoped (YÖK, 2004, 73). The implementation started in the 2002-2003
38 academic year and the graduation years, duration of education, school types, vocational and
39 technical education zones, vocational secondary school achievement scores, preferences and quotas
40 were taken into consideration. However, this practice has been criticized in the first years for not
41 having any predictions of how to solve the problem of unemployment of graduates and has been
42 predicted to be "problematic" because it was dealt with coping the numerical pressures in higher
43 education (Akpınar, 2003, 23). In a study in which the open admission practice was evaluated, it
44 was determined that the students do not make enough efforts to gain knowledge and skills, since
45 they would enter the vocational college with open admission practice, the students who did not
46 acquire sufficient knowledge and skills from vocational and technical secondary education lowered
47 the success in the vocational colleges and decreased the qualification and number of students in
48 vocational colleges (Tunç, 2005, 80). In a study conducted on students in the third year of the open
49 admission practice, 61.1% of the students reported that the system was not beneficial and should
50 be abolished (Henden, 2006, 164-165). Parallel to these findings, it is stated in the Tenth
51 Development Plan that under the heading of educational policies, the secondary and tertiary
52 education system will be brought to a process-oriented evaluation structure with the support of
53 effective guidance and guidance services considering the interests and abilities of students (Tenth
54 Development Plan, 2013, 32).

55 "Open admission practice" which had been going on for fifteen years, was abandoned in 2016
 56 and replaced with "additional points system" (Yıldırım & Çarıkçı, 2017). With this application, if
 57 students are placed in vocational program in the areas of their secondary education graduation, they
 58 get additional placement points by multiplying the secondary achievement score by 0,06 (Can et al.,
 59 2017, 22). The aim of this research is to evaluate the open admission practice according to the
 60 opinions of the instructors.

61 2. Method

62 2.1. The research question

64 The research question is formulated as "How do the academic staff evaluate the open
 65 admission practice in vocational colleges?" and the following questions were sought:

- 66 1. What is the level of knowledge of academic staff about the open admission practice in vocational
 67 colleges?
- 68 2. What are the opinions of the academic staff regarding the elimination of the open admission
 69 practice?
- 70 3. According to the opinions of the instructors, what are the differences between the students who
 71 come with the open admission practice and the ones who took the national exam?

72 2.2. Data collection

74 The research was carried out in the spring semester of 2017-2018 academic year with the
 75 participation of faculty members of Vocational Colleges of Kırklareli University. Qualitative
 76 method was used in the research. A purposeful sampling method was used to identify the
 77 participants. Purposive sampling allows for in-depth study of situations that are thought to have
 78 rich knowledge. Qualitative research data were obtained in written form with the participation of 29
 79 instructors using structured interview form consisting of 4 open ended questions and evaluated
 80 with the help of content analysis.

81 Qualitative research is a type of research in which data collection techniques such as
 82 observation, interview and document analysis are used, and a process is pursued to reveal
 83 perceptions and events in a natural and realistic way. Qualitative research patterns provide a flexible
 84 approach to the researcher and contribute to the coherence of the various stages within a given
 85 focus (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). In the analysis of the qualitative data, content analysis based on
 86 coding was conducted. The basic process in content analysis is to bring together similar data within
 87 the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them in a way that the reader can
 88 understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). In the analysis of the qualitative research data, each
 89 participant was given a number and coding. To provide reliability in the presentation of research
 90 findings, direct quotations were made from participant opinions, stating as K1, K5 etc.

91 3. Findings

93 According to the research findings, 16 of the 29 participants were male and 13 were female. 27
 94 of the participants are instructors and 2 are assistant professors. Participants' average duration of
 95 work as an academician is 7 years. Within the scope of the research, they were asked their personal
 96 information such as age, sex, duration of experience, as well as whether they were aware of "open
 97 admission practice". In the second part of the survey, participants were asked to compare the
 98 elimination of the open admission practice, to evaluate the students in terms of employability, and
 99 to compare the students who took the national placement exam and the students who are placed
 100 with the open admission practice. According to findings, 9 of the respondents described the
 101 elimination of the open admission practice negatively, while 20 considered the abolition of
 102 implementation as positive. Regarding the effect of the elimination of the open admission practice
 103 on employability, 16 participants stated that it would affect positively, 6 of them said it would have
 104 a negative impact, and 7 participants stated that it would have no effect on employability.

105 According to the findings of the research, 3 of the participants stated that the students those
 106 who did not take the exam were more successful than the ones who did, 17 of the participants
 107 stated that the students who are placed in the vocational college by being successful in the national
 108 exam were more successful, and 9 of the participants stated that there was no difference between
 109 the students. As a result, 20 participants evaluated the elimination of the open admission practice as
 110 positive in general terms, 17 participants evaluated it as positive considering the quality of education
 111 and 16 participants evaluated it as positive in terms of employability.

113 3.1. Participants Demographics

114 **Table 1.** *Gender of participants*

Gender	Freq.	% (Appr)
Male	16	55
Female	13	45
Total	29	100

115 Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by gender. The number of male participants is
 116 16 and the number of female participants is 13. It can be said that participation in the survey is
 117 represented in equal place in terms of gender.

118 **Table 2.** *Academic title of participants*

Akademik Unvan	Frekanslar	Yüzdeler
Öğretim Görevlisi	27	93
Doktor Öğretim Üyesi	2	7
Toplam	29	100

119 Table 2 shows the distribution of participants by academic title. 27 participants are instructors
 120 and 2 participants are assistant professors. This high rate of instructors is a parallel indicator that
 121 most of the academic staff in vocational colleges consist of instructors.

122 **Table 3.** *Administrative duty of participants*

Administrative duty	Freq.	% (Appr.)
Department Head	3	10
Deputy Headmaster	1	4
None	25	86
Total	29	100

123 Table 3 shows a distribution of participants' administrative duties. Participants include only 1
 124 deputy headmaster (4%) and 3 department heads (10%). 25 of the participants (86%) do not have
 125 any administrative duties. To investigate the evaluations of academic staff with administrative
 126 duties, it is expected that they will make contributions in terms of procedures/principles and
 127 implementation.

128 3.2. Participants' Opinions about the Removal of Open Admission Practice

129 In the second part of the survey, participants were requested to evaluate their general opinions
 130 of the elimination of the open admission practice enabling students to pass from the secondary
 131 education to the higher education in terms of employability and to evaluate the differences between
 132 the students who passed the national central exam and the students who enrolled with open
 133 admission practice. In addition, other opinions about the related subject were also asked.

134 3.2.1. General evaluations on the elimination of the open admission practice to transfer 135 from secondary education to tertiary education

136 Participants evaluated positively the elimination of the open admission practice by a high
 137 majority (20 persons). The base of this opinion is the thought that the qualification and the
 138 successes of the vocational college students will be increased with the help of increased number of
 139 students who took the national central exam. In a similar study evaluating the views of

140 administrators and teachers working in high schools, it was considered a good decision to abolish
141 the open admission practice (Yıldırım & Çarıkçı, 2017, 211).

142 However, the participants who found cancellation of the open admission practice as negative (9
143 participants) base their opinions on the decrease of the number of students in general (K24, K27),
144 the decrease of department quotas (K19) and the fact that those who have not received secondary
145 education in the related profession are not interested in the related departments curriculum (K7).
146 Interestingly, according to one participant's opinion, "The right granted to them for vocational
147 training development by vocational high school students has been withdrawn" (K29).

148 In a similar study (Yıldırım & Çarıkçı, 2017, 214), 40,85% of the administrators and teachers in
149 the high schools stated that "the application of the additional points would decrease the number of
150 vocational and technical high school students who go on their education with a higher degree and
151 this would cause department quota vacancies in the colleges."

152 **Table 4.** *Participants' views about the removal of open admission practice*

Opinion	Positive	Negative	Ineffective
General view	20	9	0
Effect on employability	16	7	6

153 When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the participants' views on the open admission practice
154 as positive, negative and ineffective. When the general opinions of the participants regarding the
155 elimination of the open admission practice were examined, it was found that a large part (20
156 participants) of the participants see it as positive, while the other participants (9 participants) stated
157 that it is negative to eliminate the open admission practice.

158 On the other hand, when the participant's views on the effect of the elimination of open
159 admission practice on the employability are examined, 16 participants gave a positive opinion and 7
160 gave a negative opinion; whereas the 6 of them stated that elimination of the open admission
161 practice would not have any effect on employment.

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163 3.2.2. Evaluation of the elimination of the open admission practice from secondary 164 education to tertiary education in terms of employability

165 **Table 5.** *Evaluation of the elimination of the open admission practice from secondary education to tertiary
166 education in terms of employability*

Opinion	Freq.	%(Appr.)
Positive	16	55
Negative	7	24
Ineffective	5	17
No opinion	1	4
Total	29	100

167 In Table 5 it is seen that the participants declare their opinion on the effect of elimination of the
168 open admission practice from secondary to higher education on the employability as basically as
169 "positive, negative and ineffective" and 1 person does not declare any opinion on the subject.

170 It appears that 16 of the participants (55%) said that abolishing the open admission practice
171 would positively affect employability, and 7 of the participants (24%) said it would negatively affect
172 employability. In addition, 5 people (17%) said eliminating the open admission practice would have
173 no effect on employability.

174 Participant with positive opinions about the effects of the abolition of the open admission
175 practice are presented in Table 6.

176 **Table 6.** *Opinions of those who find it positive to eliminate the practice of open admission.*

1. Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of qualified staff to be employed increases, qualified staff to be trained (K1). - As the quality increases, employment rate also increases (K5). - More qualified employees can be trained (K9). - The sectors in the market will be provided with more qualified and trained graduates (K15). - I think the number of students will be more positive in terms of proficiency (K18). - As the quality increases, employment also increases (K21). - I think it will result in qualified staff. At least the percentage of graduates who are unemployed will decrease (K25).
2. Employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As the quality increases, employment rate also increases (K5). - Since the students are more successful, their chances of being employed may increase (K11). - The direct effect of hiring is the issue. In this respect, students who receive enough points from the test technique can work in different fields on sectoral basis by taking training (K14). - As the quality increases, employment also increases (K21). - I think that the students who are studying on a regular basis have a high success rate and therefore will have a positive impact on finding a job and working (K23). - The employability of the student who enrolled in the vocational college with taking the national central exam may be higher (K26.)

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As seen in Table 6, participants assessed the positive effects of the elimination of the open admission practice under two headings: quality and employment. From this point of view, the fact that the vocational colleges can not respond to the needs of the sector from time to time during the period of open admission practice is declared by the business community (Erdönmez, 2017, 57) supports the findings of the research.

3.2.3. Evaluation of the differences between the students who pass the national central exam and the students who enrolled with the open admission practice

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Table 7. Evaluation of the academic achievements of the students who enrolled with the open admission practice

Opinion	Freq.	%(Appr.)
Successful	3	10
Unsuccessful	17	59
Same	9	31
Total	29	100

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In Table 7, it was seen that the participants expressed their opinions about the academic success of the students who enrolled with the open admission practice as "successful, unsuccessful and same". It is seen that 3 of the participants (10%) see the students who enrolled with the open admission practice as more successful than the students who took and passed the national central exam, whereas 17 (59%) of the participants see them as more unsuccessful. In addition, 9 participants (31%) stated that there was no difference in success rates among the students. As you can see, the participants generally find students unsuccessful who enrolled with the open admission practice. These findings are similar to the findings of different studies on the subject (Kızılgın, 2005, 126; Çağlar&Türeli, 2005, 372, 375; GÜDÜ Demirebulat et al., 2017, 120; Bostan, 2007, 26, 27; Aşiloğlu et al., 2016, 87; Erdönmez, 2017, 58; Durukan et al., 2015, 216).

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Table 8 lists the participants' views about the differences between the students who pass the examination and the students who did not take the exam by evaluating the in class achievements of the students.

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Table 8. Evaluation of the differences between the students who came with the exams and who came without the exams, according to their in class achievements

1. Students who come without taking an exam are more successful in their lessons/more interested in the lessons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We saw that the students who came without an exam were more related to the department. Other students were unwilling. They had no goals (K6). - Students who came without an exam are more interested (K7). - Students who came with an exam are not interested in the field. Students who did not take departmental courses before, are less interested in classes (K20).
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<p>2. Students who take the exam are more successful in their lessons/more interested in the lessons.</p>	<p><i>-The students who come with the exam are more qualified, at least they are more attentive because they make more effort (K1).</i></p> <p><i>-The students who come without exam come as lacking the most basic knowledge and responsibilities. The students who come with the exam are those who have better quality of education and worry about the future than the others (K2).</i></p> <p><i>-I see that the students who take the exam are more responsible and their grades are higher (K4).</i></p> <p><i>- Learning and comprehension is better in students who come with the exam (K5).</i></p> <p><i>- Knowledge level, self-discipline, level of success attributed to students, tends to be low in students who come without the exam (K8).</i></p> <p><i>- I find the students who come with the exam more successful. They are target oriented (K11).</i></p> <p><i>- Those who come to the exam are more interested, they have goals (K16).</i></p> <p><i>- In terms of quality and willingness, students who come with the exam are better (K23).</i></p> <p><i>- The student who come with the exam is more aware of the needs of the profession (K26).</i></p> <p><i>- I can indicate that the academic achievements of the students who come without taking the exam are low, especially according to the results of the assessment and evaluation. They have difficulties in expressing themselves in writing and in exams, especially on the multiple choice tests (K29).</i></p>
<p>3. There is no difference between the students who come with the exam and the ones who come without taking the exam.</p>	<p><i>- This difference has not yet appeared (K3).</i></p> <p><i>- I did not notice any obvious difference (K12, K13, K24).</i></p> <p><i>- There are no major differences in performance (K14).</i></p> <p><i>- There is no difference (K19).</i></p> <p><i>- I do not see any difference between students in vocational colleges (K27).</i></p> <p><i>- It may be early to make an assessment because it is the first year of the implementation. However, I did not notice a significant difference compared to the general student level in the past years in the classes I entered for this year (K28).</i></p>

202 As seen in Table 8, the participants made assessments on the differences between the students
 203 who came without examination and the students who came with the exam. The participants who
 204 made these evaluations according to the achievement of the students' interest in the lessons stated
 205 three different opininons: 1. the students who did not take the exam were more successful and
 206 related to the field, 2. the students who came with the exam were more successful and interested
 207 and 3. They did not see any difference between them. Some participants commented that it was too
 208 early to make an assessment because it was the first year of implementation (K18 and K28).

209 When the participant's assessment of the subjects related to the open admission practice was
 210 examined, 10 participants made additional comments on the subject. Three of these participants
 211 expressed their views clearly as following statements: "I wish for the return to the old system" (K6),
 212 "Lets go back to the open admission practice" (K7) and "Open admission practice should go on"
 213 (K20). 1 participant wrote "I think it was an opportunity for students to come to vocational college
 214 without taking an exam" (K27), favoring the open admission practice. 3 of the participants wrote,
 215 "I support the system with the exam as the must" (K21), "I hope we do not return to the old
 216 system" (K22), "We should continue with the new system" (K3). 1 participant said, "With the
 217 removal of the open admission practice, now it would have been much more effective than the old
 218 form but if it were in the form of a "soft transition" that would be carried out over a large scale and
 219 spread over time, where all of the institutions involved would be a better option" (K28), suggesting
 220 a softened transition model.

221 222 4. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

223 According to the findings of the research, there are three important results about the removal
 224 of the examination without examination. Participants see the removal of the open admission

225 **practice as a positive** practice. Participants stated that it is positive to remove the open admission
 226 practice by 69% (20 participants). The views of some participants on this idea are as follows:

227 *"I evaluate it positively. I am not a fan of old system"* (K2),

228 *"I thought it was absolutely necessary to be removed. It is a positive development for the universities. I think that*
 229 *the quality will increase (in terms of student profile). I believe that the goal is to get the students who really come to*
 230 *achieve their goals."* (K4),

231 *"I find it positive. It has been observed that the system applied in the past reduced the quality in the relevant*
 232 *sections. First, the student does not see the place where s/he has come to be. Considering the quality of high school*
 233 *system in Turkey, it is a success. The problem of low success rates in high school is causing the inferior success rates in*
 234 *the higher education. Therefore, the rate of low levels of a certain age and knowledge, cognitive level, reduce the level of*
 235 *the department of higher education."* (K10),

236 *"The removal of the application is the right decision. The higher education level of the students who come with the*
 237 *exams will increase the overall success levels."* (K13),

238 *"I find it as the right decision. During the transition period, the student population had a very low level of*
 239 *knowledge and a very low level of success rates. I now observe that the relative readiness of the students is high"* (K15).

240 According to the findings of the research, it is parallel to many other studies that participants
 241 express positively the elimination of the open admission practice. For example, in a study on
 242 vocational education in health services, "the re-examination of the open admission practice" applied
 243 for student acquisition is recommended (Bostan, 2007, 27). In another study where the quality of
 244 vocational colleges was assessed against the open admission practice, it was proposed to reconsider
 245 changes in the old system at the university entrance practices (Odabaşı, 2013, 283). In both two
 246 research, it is seen that the open admission practice is evaluated negatively. In another parallel study
 247 (Henden, 2006, 164-165) in which the open admission practice was assessed by vocational school
 248 students', 68.1% of the students who participated in the research indicated that the system was not
 249 beneficial and should be abolished. In addition, research findings of Odabaşı (2013, 283) and
 250 Bostan (2007, 27) which stated the enrolling system to the universities should be reconsidered,
 251 support our findings.

252 Participants mostly think that removing the open admission practice is also a positive decision in
 253 terms of employability. Participants expressed their opinion that elimination of the open admission
 254 practice would have a positive effect on employability by 55% (16 participants). The views of some
 255 participants on this idea are as follows:

256 *"As quality increases, so does the employment levels."* (K5)

257 *"As the quality increases, the levels of employability will increase."* (K21)

258 *"I think that students who make efforts have a high success rate, so I think it will be a positive*
 259 *influence in finding a job and employability."* (K23)

260 *"I think it will result in training more qualified graduates. At least the percentage of graduates who*
 261 *are unemployed will decrease."* (K25),

262 *"The employability of the student who comes with the exam may be higher"* (K26).

263 The survey does not reach findings that showed difference or similarity in the literature in
 264 terms of views on employability. Finally, in comparison between the students who come with the
 265 exam and who doesn't, most of the participants find that the students who come without the exam
 266 are more unsuccessful than the students who come with the exam with 59% (17 people). The
 267 students who come with the exam are more successful. The views of some participants on this idea
 268 are as follows:

269 *"The students who come without the exam come as lacking the most basic knowledge and responsibilities. The*
 270 *students who come with the exam are those who have better quality of education and worry about the future than*
 271 *others"* (K2)

272 *"I see that the students who take the exam have more responsibility and their grades are higher."* (K4)

273 *"Learning and comprehension levels are better in students who come with the exam."* (K5),

274 *"I find the students who come with the exam more successful. They can be focused."* (K11),

275 *"In terms of quality and willingness, students who come with the exam are better"* (K23).

276 In the findings of Aşlıoğlu et al. (2016, 87), it was stated that the students who came to the
277 vocational college by passing the national central exam, complete the school in a shorter period
278 with a higher gpa. The finding that most of the participants think that the students who settled in
279 the vocational college with the open admission practice are more unsuccessful than the students
280 who took the exam, are supported by different research findings in the literature. According to the
281 findings of Kızgın (2005, 126), the success of the students who come to the vocational college with
282 the open admission practice is lower than the students who came with the exam. According to the
283 findings of Çağlar & Türeli (2005, 372-375), the success averages of the students who came to the
284 vocational college were higher than those who did not pass the exam. According to the findings of
285 Demirbulat et al. (2017, 120), the GPA of students who are enrolled with the national central exam
286 result have higher GPAs. According to the findings of Bostan (2007, 26-27), the successes of the
287 students who are enrolled with the open admission practice were found to be significantly lower
288 this constitutes a problem in terms of the success of health services vocational colleges. In the
289 findings of Aşlıoğlu et al. (2016, 87), it was determined that the students who came to the
290 vocational college completed the school in a shorter period with a higher GPA.

291 In addition, it is observed that the students who came through the central university exam all
292 over the 15 years are more successful than the students who settled with the open admission
293 practice (Erdönmez, 2017, 58) and the students who settled with the open admission practice are
294 less successful in the mathematics than the students who took the national central exam and that
295 the ratio of the students who did not take the examination was higher than the students who did
296 not take the exam and moreover, the ratio of the course repetition is higher in the students who
297 settled in vocational colleges with the open admission practice (Durukan et al., 216) and all these
298 research findings support our research findings. However, Kuşat's finding (2014, 77) which stated
299 that it does not make a difference between the successes of students coming to vocational colleges
300 with or without examination is not like our research findings.

301 The research findings show that eliminating the open admission practice is a positive practice.
302 Considering that the needs and expectations of the society and the labor market have changed in
303 the face of the changing and developing technology, it is expected that in the coordination of the
304 Ministry of National Education and the Higher Education Council, in the important structural
305 system changes, especially the education policies applied/planned to be applied for secondary
306 education and higher education, cooperation with higher education institutions, students, parents,
307 non-governmental organizations, teachers, administrators, field specialists and labor market will be
308 more beneficial to make pilot research data and regulations based on community needs and
309 expectations.

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