

GASTRONOMY AND CULINARY ARTS EDUCATION IN TURKEY: DEPARTMENT HEADS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. This study investigated how gastronomy and culinary arts department heads perceived their programs and what their expectations were about the future of their field. A qualitative design was employed to collect data from the department heads. A total of nine department heads participated in the study. Findings revealed that course content was the most important concern, followed by the internship problems. Postgraduate programs were also desired for educating the necessary academics specialized and experienced in the field. Academic events and contests are also found to be important in supplementing and supporting the gastronomy and culinary arts education.

Keywords: Gastronomy and culinary arts education, department heads, perception.

JEL Classification: I22

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1. Introduction

Food has become a significant part of tourism in general. Therefore, it is vital that hospitality education and training include a gastronomy component in order to give students a greater understanding of the history and culture of food and drink (Santich, 2004). As such, the goal of university-level gastronomy education is to train and educate students, who have a good theoretical and practical knowledge, besides being capable of clearing up complex social, economic and technical problems of gastronomy; have high levels of knowledge, skills, and executive ability; have the capacity of abstraction, synthesis and decision-making by evaluating the efficiency of various factors; and are fluent in at least one foreign language (Avcikurt, 2000, p. 288; Hacıoglu et al., 2008, p. 44). In the same manner, gastronomy field of study is apparently interdisciplinary, with knowledge/skill requirements in technical culinary skills, communication skills, business knowledge, food science, and others (Harrington et al., 2005).

The growing importance of gastronomy in tourism is revealed by the prominent position of this field within academic research (Kivela and Crofts, 2006). Similarly studies have also examined a range of topics on gastronomy and its relevance to hospitality (Santich, 2004), practice skills of students/workers (Sarioglan, 2013; Shen, 2002; Yang, 2003; Getz, 1994), quality in culinary arts programs (Hertzman and Ackerman, 2010; Hegarty, 2011), employee expectations (Sarioglan, 2014), employee competences (Ko, 2010) and gastronomy education (Zahari et al., 2009; Ko and Chung, 2015). For example, the study of Powell (2005) suggested that most college graduates have received insufficient instruction from educators with professional experience. Similarly, Ko and Chung (2015) suggest that educators with inadequate practical professional experience may fail to teach content most relevant to the needs of the current work environment. Regarding the quality of gastronomy education, Hertzman and Ackerman (2010) note that faculty characteristics, organization and administration facilities, student learning opportunities, student outcomes and student services are considered important. However, research is still limited on gastronomy education. As such, studies at university-level gastronomy education are needed due to its importance in the well-being of the tourism industry as a whole.

Therefore, this study tries to reveal how department heads of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts (GCA) departments at Turkish universities evaluate the content and performance of programs. In this context, the opinions of department heads, as the most significant contributors of this field, are of great importance. This is extremely important especially in designing GCA programs that will meet the needs of the gastronomy sector and the tourism sector in general. For the purpose of the study, the paper starts with a review of GCA education in Turkey. The methodology utilized is explained in the following section, and the findings are presented in their dedicated section. The paper ends with a discussion of the results and suggestions drawn from the findings.

2. Gastronomy and Culinary Arts Education in Turkey

Tourism requires qualified personnel in order to maintain its competitive edge around the world (Anton et al., 2013). Therefore, education and training of the employees is crucial for the well-being of the industry. This is especially true for gastronomy sector where the skills, education and talent are vital for the provision of food and service. In Turkey, gastronomy and/or culinary education is provided in two separate ways including secondary education and university-level education.

Secondary level GCA education in Turkey has been offered in specialized high schools (Anatolian Culinary High School) in Bolu-Mengen, since 1985-1986, and has been converted into a department/program in Anatolian Hotel Management and Tourism Schools as from 2001-2002 academic year and spread over the country. This is followed by culinary education at associate, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees offered by universities (Cakir, 2010, p. 68). The first undergraduate program was opened in 2003 in Yeditepe University, Istanbul. Consequent years witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of GCA departments starting from 2009. While GCA departments offer programs within the Faculties of Tourism in many universities, these departments offer programs within the body of the Faculties of Fine Arts in some universities, under the impression that cookery is a work of art thanks to its preparation to presentation.

The primary goal of the departments of GCA in the faculties of tourism is to train and educate students in kitchen management, restaurant management, café-bar management, and food and beverage management. Further, these departments aim to train qualified personnel and executive chefs, who are endowed with knowledge and skills which they display on the international arena, and who are specialized in national and international cuisine culture. In general, all kitchen personnel should have a good knowledge of the kitchen domain. For a productive and profitable production, the information regarding the entire kitchen should be relayed precisely. This transfer of information should cover areas, such as the layout and physical properties of the kitchen, the materials used in the kitchen and what they are used for (Gokdemir, 2009, p. 32).

Moreover, postgraduate programs have a critical role in training more successful managers in the future (Lee et al., 2008). This is also important for the GCA departments, which occupies a significant place in tourism faculties. However, it is observed that only four universities in Turkey (Abant İzzet Baysal University in Bolu, Gazi University in Ankara, Gaziantep University in Gaziantep and Okan University in Istanbul) offer postgraduate programs in this field. Informal education services on culinary arts are also offered by programs organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Tourism Development and Education Foundation, and some other private institutes (Demirkol and Pelit, 2002). These programs set the ground for qualified kitchen personnel and ensure that food preparation is accepted to be a profession in society (Hughes, 2003, p. 10).

Meantime, it is crucial to create need-based course schedules and regularly update the course contents in the GCA programs. Bringing up qualified labor force is possible through an efficient instructor. A study by Cetin (1993) in Turkey reports that 46.2% of instructors do not have any sector experience, and 70.3% are graduates of different majors. Therefore, opportunities for practical education should be created in order for gastronomy departments to achieve its goals. In this context, a well-equipped kitchen laboratory, where the students can practice their theoretical knowledge, is essential in gastronomy education. It can be easily claimed that students are only provided with theoretical knowledge, and where the sole purpose is to pass courses or classes (Akinci, 2015). As such, rote learning without practice is at the core of such courses.

The role of educational institutes cannot be underestimated in the provision of quality GCA education. For example, Gilhespy (2005) claims that tourism schools at all levels, created by most of the world's universities in recent years, are designed to deliver a holistic, industry-oriented education. Therefore, these schools focus on both the employability of future professionals and the training intended for them to acquire the necessary skills. On the other hand, Sigala and Baum (2003) note that tourism schools have traditionally focused on helping students acquire the necessary technical expertise, while neglecting other aptitudes needed to rise to today's challenges.

Regarding the skills necessary for gastronomy sector, Anton et al. (2013) suggest that the cross-curricular skills necessary for the students are not compatible with the expectations and values of the sector. In case of Turkey, Tuyluoglu (2003) argues that equipment and laboratories required by gastronomy education are not available at university level educational institutes which eliminates the opportunity to practice the theoretical information. In their study, Cervera-Talet and Ruiz-Molina (2008, p. 64) suggest that students consider practical training being beneficial for their adaptation to the profession. Students also explain that applied training prepares them for their actual jobs, that the instructors are able to combine theory and practice with the help of applied training, and that applied training methods increase their professional skills and abilities. Thus, laboratories and simulated hotels in all schools are essential for gastronomy education (Capar, 2002). Along with these laboratories, the classrooms, which contain equipment and materials required by these courses, are also considered within this category (Soybali and Bayraktaroglu, 2013). In line with this, Cetin (1993) reports that 42.1% of the instructors experience problems with inadequate kitchen laboratories, and 53.1% encounter problems with insufficient laboratory equipment.

Internship or on-job training program is also crucial along with the course contents and practice, where students can find the opportunity to actively practice what they learned at schools. Kayayurt (2002) notes that 77.7% of kitchen personnel are self-educated, and are graduates of primary or secondary schools. In addition, his study findings reveal that merely 5.7% of the chefs received technical/vocational education in gastronomy. It is also suggested that since there are many untrained/

unschooled employees in the sector, the students are discouraged to work in the sector after graduation. As Robinson and Barron (2007, p. 913) state, cooking is a profession that suffers from the lack of qualified personnel. According to the results of a study by Gorkem and Ozturk (2011), it is observed that nearly one third of kitchen executives in hotels never received occupational education, and merely 1.2% graduated from university-level occupational education. Moreover, kitchen executives claim that the culinary education in schools is not precisely favorable for the sector (Gorkem and Ozturk, 2011). Consequently, the schools are being discredited due to their low-skilled graduates.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to understand the GCA department heads' opinions about the faculty programs. Qualitative researches stand out with their characteristics of revealing the viewpoints and semantic worlds of the subjects (Unisen and Kaya, 2015). A purposive sampling approach was adopted. The study population consists of GCA department heads ranked in Student Selection and Placement Center (OSYM) 2015 student manual. According to student manual, 29 universities in Turkey offer GCA programs. The intention was to reach all the department heads, and the question forms were e-mailed to 29 department heads between July 21 and August 5, 2015. Further, the survey was reminded to the GCA department heads two times, once at the end of August and once in September 2015. A total of nine responses were received.

Data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. The questionnaire used in this study was developed through literature review (Cetin, 1993; Demirkol, 2002; Kayayurt, 2002; Du, 2003; Koc et al., 2014) also taking into consideration the meeting report of GCA department heads, which was held in Anadolu University, Turkey, in 2014. The questions in the form were as follows:

* Please express your opinions on the contents of the courses offered in GCA departments considering the requirements of this field.

* What are your opinions on internship in GCA departments?

* Do you think postgraduate programs for GCA departments should be opened? What are your opinions on this?

* Do you think the national and international academic events/activities are adequate? What are your opinions on this?

* What are your opinions on national and international contests in the field of GCA?

* What are your suggestions and opinions for the future of GCA departments?

Descriptive analysis method was utilized for data analysis. According to this approach, the data obtained are summarized and interpreted on the basis of pre-determined themes. In order to conspicuously reflect the opinions of interviewed or observed individuals, direct citations are frequently used in descriptive analysis. The purpose of this type of analysis is to present the findings in a revised and interpreted manner. The data were analyzed in four stages in descriptive analysis method: (1) forming a frame for descriptive analysis, (2) finding the themes, (3) identifying the findings, (4) interpreting the findings. For credibility of the study, the data were first presented without any interpretations, and the data were analyzed by more than one researchers. The researchers of this study adhered to the hypothetical circle through continuous comparisons during data analysis (Ersoy and Anagun, 2009).

Another strategy pursued in qualitative researches for validity and credibility of the research is the expert/peer-review (Yildirim and Simsek, 2013). Peer-review method has been adopted in this study for credibility of the research. We have convened a group of experts in this field and method, informed them verbally, and carried out evaluations.

The themes within the transcript were identified using Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor's (2003) framework of steps to analyze qualitative data. The study used each question as the main theme: course contents, internship, graduate programs, academic events/activities, cooking contests and the future of this field. The data was processed in accordance with these six themes, and the results were presented and discussed. In the quotations, respondents were labeled as K1, K2, K3...K9 to ensure their anonymity.

4. Findings

4.1. Course Contents

Previous literature suggest that course contents are crucial for the success of the GCA departments, especially in meeting the needs of the industry (Santich, 2004; Sarioglan, 2014; Zahari et al., 2009). As such, the prime concern for the GCA department heads was found to be the course contents. When the answers of the GCA department heads were analyzed, it was seen that all participants indicated that the course contents were prepared in line with the requirements and expectations of the sector. In this regard, for example, K3 stated that *“the gastronomy courses offered in tourism faculties are compatible with the needs of tourism sector.”* However, K4 stated that they *“do not train chefs or cooks; the sector should be aware of this and anticipate this fact.”*

On the other hand, practical or experiential learning is a prerequisite in the quality of the program and the graduates (Sarioglan, 2014; Ko and Chung, 2015). This was also supported by the respondents who underlined the importance of practice opportunities. To take the argument further, K1 pointed out a different problem and noted that *“inefficacy of practice opportunities and specialists are important issues.”* In line with this opinion, K6 suggested that *“there are too many theoretical courses. The classes should be more practice-oriented.”*

Another emerging issue regarding the course content was found to be the skills of educators. Regarding the richness and diversity of gastronomy issues, K3 suggested that *“there is a broad relationship between gastronomy and other disciplines and the courses might have richer content.”* However, K8 commented that they *“do not have adequate number of instructors.”* In this vein, K5 indicated that *“the main issues are the problems encountered in the employment process of the specialists in public universities and in the financial support process for provision of practicing materials. Thus, some universities are having hard times while training qualified chefs/cooks required by the tourism industry.”*

It is clear that the course contents of GCA departments should be improved and renewed in line with the requirements of the sector. By airing their views, one can easily observe that the proportion of theoretical and practical courses should be well-conceived when planning the course

contents. The budgets should be increased and the university administrations should be aware of the importance of equipment and budgetary requirements of the gastronomy departments for State Universities. This can also increase the competitiveness of public universities against the private ones. Moreover, as Hegarty (2011) suggests raising the discipline of culinary arts and gastronomy beyond the craft-based/vocational (operational) level to under/postgraduate-degree level, educators themselves need to become critically reflective and knowledgeable to enable students to learn how to learn, to become entrepreneurial and technological innovators. Finally, educators and the GCA departments must also reinforce their relationship with the industry to ensure that the benefits to both students and industry from the educational process can be expanded.

4.2. Internship

Working in rough hospitality industries especially in food services, the staff should develop rigorous energetic personality, independent, critical, autonomous self-directed learning, self-confidence and charismatic leadership skills (Zakaria et al., 2010). As such, it is well documented that internship contributes to developing students' competencies in GCA (Walo, 2001). Internship, placements and the practicum are a variety of terms for what is, essentially, a period of employment in the tourism and hospitality industry (Busby and Gibson, 2010).

Study results suggested that respondents underlined the importance of internship. Having emphasized the relationship between internship and applied courses, K6 gave the following statement: *"Internship is necessary to consolidate practice. Internship should be done at the right place, where they make a considerable contribution to both the students and the businesses. Not only quantity should be considered while selecting the facilities for internship, there should also be some qualitative criteria."* According to K3, department, sector and students' compliance are very important for the internship performance. He/she commented that *"the interaction of these three stakeholders ensure a successful internship process. If the facility regards internship merely as low-cost labor, if the students do their internship half-heartedly, and if the faculties apply internship as a matter of circumstance, the internship performance would eventually be poor. Or it may also be quite*

the opposite.” K5 brought an alternative point of view focusing on the faculties, and noted that “the students should definitely be well-oriented and monitored throughout their internship in GCA departments. A commission consisting of the instructors should be constituted for optimum orientation and monitoring and these commissions should be financially supported by their universities.”

Two participants (K1 and K2) stated that they could only assess this question within the academic year since internship was not mandatory in their departments. However, K4 criticized the sector’s attitude towards internship: *“Internship is an obligatory practice that the students should definitely experience and fulfill, but since the sectoral authorities look upon interns as low-cost labor, our students always have a rough time during their internship periods.”* K9 added that *“internship periods are not satisfying per se, so work experience should be encouraged.”*

Internship is not only the weak shortcoming of GCA departments. It is among the common problems in the faculties of tourism. The sector should broaden its viewpoint on internship, stop looking upon interns as low-cost labor, and show due diligence and ultimate attention for a productive internship period. If the internship periods are monitored and evaluated through protocols between the businesses and the university, the internship would achieve its objectives. This would be a guiding factor to prevent the problems that would discourage the students and dissuade them from pursuing a career in this sector. On the other hand, the internship should be considered as a step to improve the practical knowledge acquired in applied courses. Long-lasting knowledge and skills are ensured by recommending internship for the students in accordance with their education.

4.3. Postgraduate Programs

Reflecting the maturation of tourism as a field of study, Ruhanen and McLennan (2012) suggest that competition within the labor market and students’ desire for professional and financial advancement are the primary drivers for many students to undertake further and /or higher-level studies. Moreover, postgraduate level education in GCA has the potential to support academic studies in the field, and educate the future

generations of instructors (Bayraktaroglu, 2013). What is expected from postgraduate education is to ensure that individuals specialize in certain fields and conduct scientific studies (Demirkol, 2002).

When the opinions of GCA department heads were considered on postgraduate programs, seven out of nine participants agreed upon the necessity of postgraduate programs in GCA. Having suggested that postgraduate programs should be offered, K3 noted that *“postgraduate programs are necessary for the development of the department, for academic improvement and especially for the sector to benefit from these academic improvements.”* According to K6, postgraduate programs are especially needed for the development of academic staff needed for GCA departments. On the contrary, K2 claimed that *“it is too early to offer these graduate programs”*. The participant continued that *“we need to face the problems associated with rapid popularization of undergraduate-level gastronomy programs.”* However, K8 suggested that *“if there is an undergraduate program, than there should also be a postgraduate program for the students, who would like to specialize on this subject.”*

Motivational factors such as a personal interest in the field of study, relevance to employment, enjoyment of study, skill development and career change have increased the demand for postgraduate programs in GCA (Ruhanen and McLennan, 2012). As such, postgraduate programs are significant, in terms of making up for lack of instructors and academic members. Since gastronomy is affiliated to many other disciplines, postgraduate programs would have a guiding role in terms of specialization. However, the lack of qualified instructors and academic personnel may be considered as an obstacle in offering postgraduate programs.

4.4. Academic Events/Activities

Academic events and activities provide educational opportunities for exchanging ideas among participants and serve as an educational and training platform (Getz, 1997; Dwyer, et al., 2000). Academic events also offer the potential to expand participants' expertise and knowledge in a given area. As such, these activities and events may act as a beneficial tool for students' development in GCA. Moreover, attending to these events offers networking opportunities for personal and professional development (Judith, 2014).

When the participants were asked whether the number of national and international academic events are sufficient, many participants stated that the frequency of these events on GCA was not adequate. In this regard, K1 suggested that *“initially, it is necessary to organize national and then international conferences and/or symposiums, which will be organized annually.”* K5 supported this idea and noted that *“the conferences and symposiums on GCA are not yet organized in a professional manner. It is necessary to organize conferences and symposiums similar to annual National Tourism Congress, which will encourage all GCA academics to participate.”* In regards to the outcome of these events, K4 stated that *“the number of academic events/activities will eventually increase as the quality of postgraduate education increases”*.

The increasing number of symposiums, conferences and workshops on GCA will also be an encouraging factor in terms of the quality of the departments. If these activities are financially supported and regulated in a qualitative manner, not only the academic personnel but also the students will be able to improve themselves and make appearances in various platforms.

4.5. Cooking Contests

Cooking contests or sensorial tastings constitute examples of activities that would encourage GCA students. In this regard, contests are educative and useful tools for students, educators, audiences, society and the sector. Contests also provide opportunities to discuss daily issues, create ideas to solve different problems, and share ideas among participants (Garip and Garip, 2012). Moreover, contests allow students to bond and encourage healthy competition in the educative environment (Saha, 2014). Contests further help students develop skills necessary for their professional career.

When the participants were asked about the national and international contests on GCA, K1 stated that the contests were not satisfying. K2 reflected his/her negative thoughts that *“it is the blind leading the blind. The ‘old-boy’ network is too obvious.”* K3 stated that he/she has been participating in all contests since 2010. He/she expressed both the pros and cons of the contests: *“The contests are not given due importance. The members of the*

jury are not experts in the field. The contests are usually far from being fair, but they offer opportunities for the participating students, since they always have the chance for networking and meeting chefs. In addition, they also get the chance to meet key people for employment purposes." Meanwhile, K4 approached this topic from another viewpoint and noted that *"the contests for the academics should have different concepts."* K6 stated his/her concerns regarding the evaluation processes of the contests that *"there are major issues regarding the evaluation criteria of the contests. There are abundant contests on cooking and food. And there are problems regarding the objectivity of the jury."* Agreeing on K6's point of view K7 expressed that *"not only the menu, but also the knowledge and skills of the competitors should be evaluated."*

The contests are among the significant events that will contribute to the development of GCA departments. The number of these events should be increased, especially for the development of the students. Moreover, it is important to motivate the students to participate in these events. However, fairness becomes a vital issue in planning and organizing these contests. As such, the evaluation criteria and the members of the jury should be set in a fair and just way.

4.6. Overall Assessment

Finally, the participants were asked to indicate their suggestions and opinions regarding the future of GCA departments. The majority of the department heads were hopeful about the future of the field. However, K8 was pessimistic and indicated that *"the gastronomy department will experience a turnaround as long as the number of GCA departments increased. Soon, there will be unemployed college-graduates."* In this regard K2 underlined the importance of cooperation among all stakeholders and setting quotas in terms of student numbers at the departments, and suggested that *"if universities can increase sectoral cooperation and utilize their chefs and kitchens, and if the quotas would not exceed 30 students, I believe the future of gastronomy department would be more promising."* Supporting the ideas of K2, K1 added that *"it is essential for any gastronomy department to promote itself and to search for support from university administrations and other institutes through various projects. Conferences, symposiums, various local festivals, contests, shows, workshops and scientific journals will also be significant improvements for the development of the gastronomy department."*

As the viewpoint towards food and beverage has been changing in recent years, gastronomy and food and beverage have become more significant. In order to have an educated, well-equipped, and sophisticated workforce, having the adequate skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the sector, the demands and expectations of the gastronomy departments should definitely be satisfied. The increase in the number of specific scientific events/activities regarding the gastronomy departments will contribute to their development. The vision and mission of the departments should be explained precisely to the society, the students and prospective students. Thus, this major will be well understood bereft of its fuzzy connotation.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of GCA department heads on their programs and the structure of GCA education. Findings of the study provide important contributions to the literature by investigating the components of GCA education such as course contents, internship, postgraduate programs, academic events/activities, cooking contests and the future of GCA departments.

Specifically, findings of this study reveal that course contents of GCA departments should be designed on the basis of sector requirements. Collaboration of the sector and the public and private universities when taking decisions regarding the course contents and courses, opening courses in line with the needs of the sector and training the students accordingly are essential for sector-university collaboration. Accordingly, it is also found that the course contents should be supplemented for graduates to meet the expectations of the sector. These courses should be student-centered, instead of assigning instructor-centered ones, and to collaborate with the sector by conferring on sectoral representatives while preparing the curriculum. Limiting the number of students in applied courses in order to increase the effectiveness of education will also ensure that the classes will be more efficient. Further, study findings reveal that theoretical education should be supplemented by applied courses. As suggested by Tuyluoglu (2003), the theoretical learning would be more permanent when supported with applied courses. Moreover, increasing the number of elective courses may allow students to specialize on their interested areas.

Study findings suggest that the sector and student congruence is very important for the performance of the internship, since internship has a significant influence on permanence of theoretical knowledge. Ensuring that students do their internship in line with their education should be considered as a part of education. The fact that intern students being treated as personnel and the businesses' higher expectations from these students cause problems between the student and the businesses, and the internship would end up as an unsatisfactory process. As such, the businesses should be informed about the fact that internship is a follow-up processes of education. Opportunities for internship and number of projects should be increased and diversified in collaboration with the stakeholders. The students should at least be paid the minimum wage, the internship conditions should be standardized and controllable. In addition, revision of the academic calendar in line with the sector, and extension of internship periods will both ensure that the students find places for internship and ensure a higher-quality internship period. In addition, occupational laws should be enacted, quality of employment should be increased, and job opportunities should be provided by revision of the wages policy (Kozak and Acikoz, 2015). Moreover, as Walo (2001) suggests, educators should consider incorporating a practical component such as internship or alternatively incorporate specialized training that will provide similar outcomes in terms of developing students' management competencies. Consequently, as suggested by Koc et al. (2014), there is a need for academics to spend more time on the planning and implementation of gastronomy internship programs.

The results also suggested that postgraduate programs are required in GCA education. Postgraduate programs are expected to ascertain that the individuals are specialized in certain fields, that they conduct scientific studies to pursue academic careers and that they acquire the ability to devise and implement projects for the sector as researchers and planners (Demirkol, 2002). This is also supported by a study by Cetin (1993) that instructors in gastronomy have no sector experience. Therefore, gastronomy graduates with industry experience should be encouraged to enroll postgraduate programs. Study findings also suggest that the number of academic events would expectedly increase as the number of postgraduate programs increase. Thus, high-quality tourism education at postgraduate level is important for training and educating qualified instructors and researchers (Du, 2003: 109). Consequently, it is recommended that the

number of postgraduate programs should be increased to improve the quality and quantity of academics in the field.

In line with the findings, it is clear that GCA departments do not only train chefs/cooks. The graduates of this major are also prospective academicians, executive chefs and facility managers. Thus, arming students with necessary knowledge and skills is one of the most important goals of these departments. Current drawbacks and the problems of the departments can be overcome when they are supported and backed by necessary resources needed for quality education. In this context, cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders provides an important tool for the department heads. Moreover, closer relationship among the department heads is required to solve the problems specific to these departments and to improve their educational services. Collaboration is also essential for the effectiveness of practical training and the internship. Setting closer relations with the sector, assigning qualified internship businesses and monitoring the students during their employment will help faculties to harvest desired outcomes. As the study findings suggest, increasing the number of contests will improve competitiveness of both the departments and the students. As such, the contribution of national and international prominent representatives to make assessments in a fair and righteous way is necessary for organizing contests and events on GCA. Last but not least, development of a positive attitude towards GCA is a prerequisite for the success of GCA departments at university level.

On the basis of study findings, it can be suggested that the academic development of these departments can be taken a step further if the instructors and academic personnel are supported and subsidized. In this regard, provision of adequate facilities, financial support for both the department and the instructors are important for the success of the departments. Similarly, sector-university collaboration can improve departments to overcome problems of course contents designed according to the needs and expectations of the sector and internship that would satisfy all parties. Moreover, organizing meetings, seminars and contests may help departments an agenda to share their experiences, programs and capabilities. Such events may also help students to expand their learning and to meet important players in the field. In addition, promotional activities designed to help prospective students to make right choices when building a career in this field can increase recognition about the field and the departments. As such, informing prospective students about

the advantages and disadvantages of the field may also help right students to choose GCA education.

Study findings revealed that the majority of the participants were unsatisfied with the number of the gastronomy contests. In such, contests provide an opportunity for GCA students to gain experience and to evaluate themselves in terms of their proficiency compared to their peers. According to the results of the Academic Tourism Education Search Conference (Kozak and Acikoz, 2015), academic events, such as conferences, contests and fairs, are the backbones of gastronomy. Moreover, these events offer students a chance to utilize and show their knowledge and skills, an opportunity to meet the sector employees. Therefore, increasing the number of student contests may help both the GCA departments and their students to evaluate themselves.

This study should be evaluated on the basis of certain limitations. The primary limitation of this study is that it is limited with the opinions of GCA department heads in Turkey. Moreover, although there are 29 faculties offering GCA programs, only nine department heads participated in the study. Further, this study is limited to the determined themes of course contents, internship, postgraduate programs, academic events, contests and overall evaluation. However, several other factors may have an impact on the GCA education. It is possible that inclusion of other factors may result in a better overview of GCA education. Therefore, future studies may examine other factors in GCA. Furthermore, this study included only the opinions and thoughts of department heads. Future research should examine perceptions of students and other stakeholders in GCA. Similar studies focusing on different stakeholders and different countries will broaden our knowledge and help us develop better understanding of GCA education.

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