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Curriculum analysis of business ethics courses at universities in Türkiye

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Abstract

Economic and technological developments create new service areas in the business world, and accordingly, new regulations are made in all functions of enterprises/institutions. These new understandings, which manifest themselves in businesses, business strategies and management processes, also lead human resources processes to innovation. Accordingly, investment in labor resources is intensified, as in many other resources. While increasing the performance of the workforce with knowledge and talent development trainings, it is not known exactly how the ethical dimension will be provided in this process. Individuals are acquainted with ethical values before their university years and act in this direction in their social lives to a large extent. In addition, ethical education in schools is a guide for future managers in determining the direction in business life. Business ethics can become a phenomenon that is only needed in the increasingly complex business world, and its lack causes various problems. In this respect, it is important to examine the curriculum situation of business ethics courses in business departments that train human resources of enterprises. From this point of view, in this study, the teaching status of business ethics courses in business administration and other departments in associate, undergraduate and graduate programs in state and foundation universities in Türkiye was determined by document analysis method. In the light of the data obtained by examining the curricula of the departments of business administration and other related departments of universities, it has been tried to reveal the point of education with business ethics courses in higher education in Türkiye.

Keywords: Business ethics, Ethics education, Business schools

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1. Introduction

Some of the economic and financial crises that have emerged in different parts of the world are caused by businesses misguiding the public with practices and explanations that are far from transparency. This situation has made the discussions about business ethics even more important. After the scandals and failures in today's business world, there is a need to investigate the history of business ethics discipline (Brenkert, 2010, pp. 703-704). With this concept, which has been noticed and given importance by business circles, solutions are sought against possible violations.

As a result of issues such as corruption and bribery, reactions occur regarding the use of resources for individual benefits. According to Alayoğlu et al., (2012, p. 13), the establishment of ethics committees and commissions in the business world necessitates business ethics. Businesses and institutions are taking initiatives for new management approaches and precautionary measures for violations and tend towards transparency in their actions (Dana & Dienhart, 2007, pp. 163-164).

Firms try to build trust with the ethical rules they apply, and to reflect the moral behavior profiles to the outside. According to Belak (2013, p. 529), this condition, which can contribute to competitiveness, can be met. Business reliability, which provides a competitive advantage, can develop in an unstable order. This situation causes successes and failures to be variable. Therefore, businesses should act consciously in this process where they are constantly changing and create an order that will provide the most suitable conditions for successful ethical practices.

The situation of the workforce that will carry out the execution, business and decision-making activities according to the conditions and order in question is important. In particular, it should be qualified in terms of developing moral attitudes as well as cultural and professional (İşgüden & Çabuk, 2006, p.64). This process is not easy for businesses and institutions. The individual, who has provided the professional infrastructure with the courses he has taken at the university, can carry out his work in the institution where he started to work, with the contribution of corporate education. At this point, the role of ethics education emerges.

So, what is the status of business ethics or similar courses in the curriculum of these schools? What is the numerical equivalent of the situation in the curriculum of these courses, which should form the basis for the education applied by the enterprises? With the determinations that can answer these questions, it reveals the necessity of reviewing the status of ethics courses in business schools from now on. As a result, with an effective business ethics course, they will be able to support managers about the possible consequences of decisions that are against professional ethics. It can also provide guidance to operators regarding the harm that unethical practices can cause.

The impact of business ethics on the ethical climate is well known and business stakeholders need to pay more attention to this issue. In addition, the fact that individuals involved in business life have become more aware of their moral responsibilities has necessitated a study on the status of business ethics in education.

Therefore, it is very clear that business schools should investigate the dimensions of educational support for the issue of business ethics, which can affect the elements of the business and become more important in the labor market. There are studies on the necessity of investigating the level of providing this support in business ethics courses.

For example, Gill (2012, s.384-385) conducted a research on 5 business school students who took ethics courses during school term. In the research, he conducted a study 2 months after the end of the course and received opinions about the course through interview. He sought to learn how learning about business ethics affects personal ethics. He also explored the impact of this learning on future ethical decision-making. In the study aiming to reveal what they can do about future ethical decision-making events, the students made statements about the benefits from the course. Participants stated that they found time and opportunity to consider the preferences and effects of unethical decisions thanks to the course they had taken before, and that they took more initiative with the transparency factor.

A similar study was conducted by Varma (2019, p. 122) to examine the perceived and experienced benefits of the applied business ethics module taken in business school. The opinions of 4 graduates who took the course during the school period were consulted. Benefit perceptions of the participants emerged through the personal stories of these four students. Graduates declared that they benefited from the ethics education they received at school in their business life.

Ivory and Shipton (2020, p. 381) focused on the experiences of business schools in England. Within the scope of the research, the findings supported by the interviews with 15 business school deans were obtained. It is because business schools are far from society and never serve society ethically.

In the study of Rasche et al. (2013, p. 72), in which the curriculum of business schools was examined in terms of business ethics courses, research was conducted on 59 business schools between the years 2005-2009. It has been noted that 75% of ethics courses are given as elective and cannot be integrated into the curriculum. In addition, they emphasized that the courses should be compulsory with the structural changes to be implemented in the curriculum.

In a study conducted in Türkiye (Akdoğan, 2008, p. 83) to determine the status of professional ethics education given in faculties of economics and administrative sciences, a survey was applied to one faculty member from each of 32 faculties; In 26 of these faculties, it was found that this education was given only in the 3rd and 4th years.

Heller and Heller (2011, pp. 33-34) analyzed the curricula of 50 AACSB accredited business schools in order to determine whether the ethics courses taught in AACSB accredited business schools meet AACSB standards. After examining the content and textbooks of the ethics course given in these schools, it was determined that a sufficient number of ethics courses were given in the curriculum. In addition, it was concluded that more emphasis should be placed on the content.

Another study analyzing the place of business ethics courses in the curriculum of business schools was conducted for universities in Canada (Wymer & Rundle-Thiele, 2017, p. 7). According to the findings, in 62 of 98 universities in Canada, 43 of the business programs are taught in ethics, 40% of which is compulsory.

According to Adler (2002), scandals in the business world reveal the necessity of ethics education at schools. In this case, many business schools that have removed the ethics courses from their curriculum have reintroduced the relevant courses to the curriculum, even as compulsory (2002, p. 149). In his research, Nicholson (2009) evaluated the perceptions of deans regarding the level of ethics and social responsibility, which he applied to 380 business school deans who are members of the AACSB. As a result of the research, it was emphasized that the related courses were insufficient in number.

2. Social Responsibility and Moral Ground in Businesses

Businesses are affected by the habits, customs and morals of the society in which they operate. The decision-making bodies of the enterprise consist of individuals who have grown, educated and worked in that society. Businessmen, entrepreneurs and managers should not ignore the conditions they are in and the value judgments of the society when making decisions (Ülgen & Mirze, 2013, p. 487). The sensitivity of these three actors in terms of the subject will undoubtedly affect the business personnel along with the concept of social responsibility that binds the businesses. In this framework, Demir & Songür, (1999, p. 152) argue that the current conventional relationship between the business world and society is beginning to lose its effectiveness. According to them, managers take the view that they are responsible not only to the business but to all individuals. This is supported by the fact that managers are held responsible for the social effects of their behavior.

It is known that ethical behaviors affect success significantly while determining management methods in enterprises. Ethical behavior of employees in all business activities is important in business policy making and decision-making process. This situation has the power to positively affect the success of businesses, especially in the long run. According to Çabuk & Şengül, (2005, p. 171), unethical business activities may be exposed to political pressures, legal obstacles and even consumer boycotts.

On the other hand, the possibility of inadequate laws may cause business people/managers to experience behavioral problems in crises that have moral consequences. This situation reveals the necessity of a moral approach in case of inadequacy of the factors that have a role in the activities of the enterprises (Demir & Şahin, 2000, pp. 207-208). This result reveals the close relationship between the concept of social responsibility and business ethics. An environment with business ethics requires that businesses prioritize the interests of society rather than their own interests. In other words, business ethics requires entrepreneurs not only pursue profit but also consider whole society. In another view by Mendonca and Kanungo (İlhan, 2005, p. 266), entrepreneurs should also act in the interests of stakeholders to achieve their business goals.

3. Cooperation Practices for Ideal Climate in Organizations

There are many researches on business education in the world. The initiative steps of business education were first taken in the United States. In this regard, the Accredited Board of American Business Schools -American Assembly of Colligate of Business (AACSB) - can be a good example for business schools. The board monitors business education practices, reports on the subject, and seeks solutions for potential problems. AACSB, which put forward the first business education standards in 1919 (citing from Teker, Yelkikalan & Pazarcık, 2005, p.6) can contribute to the business sector with its activities in this direction.

Depending on the developments in the business world, children and women are started to be employed, and the issues related to business ethics have started to come to the fore more when profitability is seen as the most important goal. In this period, issues related to business and professional ethics began to be emphasized in the USA and the UK. Business ethics courses have come to the fore in business schools. With the increase in the number of professional occupations, business and professional ethics have started to be discussed more systematically in the business world. According to Torlak (2013, p. 11), with the increasing number of occupations, practices affecting people and societies have also increased and diversified. As a result of these developments, business ethics lessons have started to take place more in the curriculum, and both preventive and instructive efforts have been focused on these issues in the business world.

Although the concept of ethics has an important place in the education, the curriculum studies on ethics in higher education have gained momentum in recent years (Bayraktaroğlu, Özen Kutanis & Özdemir, 2005, p.378). In this sense, business departments deal with the issue of business ethics as a part of the management and carry out studies in this area (Egri&Sunar, 2010, p. 63). It can be seen on the corporate web pages that business ethics and similar courses are included in the business school and management department curricula of many universities in the United States, Italy, England and Germany.

The moral development that the individual follows from the first stage of his/her education life does not end with the enrollment in a university, and this development can be carried to higher levels with the higher education. Universities have many responsibilities in this regard. Relevant education at the university enables students to recognize moral facts in practice, increase their awareness of moral concepts, adopt rules, principles and values, and decide on the most appropriate course of action.

4. Ethics Education in Business Schools

As in many fields of study, the performance of business school graduates in business life reflects the educational quality of the university. Today, business schools that provide business education and train managers for all kinds of sectors are faced with an expectation to shape their business education programs and systems according to the current business world (Düzakin and Yılmaz, 2009, p.154).

Business gives people status to establish authority, and this cannot be prevented by established rules. As a result, problems and legal regulations that need to be controlled by laws arise. Changing this can be done by bringing a new regulation to the general business management and the attitudes of individuals in business management. Detailed ethics training to be given in university business schools is a start in determining the rules regarding this regulation (Evans & Marcal, 2005, p. 247).

In today's professional business world, there are some institutions and businesses that apply business education, including ethical issues, to all their personnel (Mirze, 2010, p. 386). However, such training practices organized by the institutions on their behalf have certain burdens and not every business can undertake this cost. Therefore, individuals who are today's students and tomorrow's managers can be more effective in preparing for the future if they receive ethics education during their higher education years before they start their business life. Practices carried out by the AACSB (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), which accredits business schools around the world, support this view. The report titled "Ethics Education in Business Schools", which includes the opinions of the Ethics Education Working Group Members formed by the relevant institution (Ethics Education in Business Schools report, 2004), encourages business school administrators to review their current thoughts on ethics education and accordingly to strengthen school curricula, especially regarding ethics. According to the report, when students graduate and start their careers, they face the moral challenges of modern business life. Therefore, only business schools can guide students to become ethical managers or leaders in the future.

Many studies address the various responsibilities of business schools in ethics education. According to Crane (2010), business schools should consider how they can most effectively use their position in encouraging students to think more deeply about ethical issues and strengthen their moral reasoning power. According to Solymossy (2015, p. 15), all students should be encouraged to develop their ability to identify institutional and professional goals, struggle with value conflicts and predict the reasoning bases of others.

5. Method

Model of the Research

In this research, the data obtained by document analysis and scanning method were processed with descriptive analysis method. In the qualitative method, the social behavior of individuals can be measured through observation, experimentation and testing, and the findings can be explained with numerical data. The answers for What?, how?, why? questions are sought (Bedir Erişti, 2013, p. 9). Document analysis is the examination of data on the researched subject (Karagöz, 2017, p.586). Descriptive analysis consists of four stages. In the first step, a

framework is created. In other words, it is determined under which category the data will be organized and given. In the second stage, the prepared data is processed, read, edited and the unsuitable ones are excluded from the analysis. In the third stage, the findings are interpreted and defined. In the fourth stage, the interpreted findings are associated with each other and concluding remarks are made (Akbulut, 2013, p.154).

Sample

The universe in the study is state and foundation universities in Türkiye. The list of universities was obtained from the website of the Council of Higher Education. Hence, a total of 208 universities, of which 129 are state and 79 are foundations, were identified. 6 of them were excluded from the analysis because 4 of them were colleges and 2 universities were not active. For these reasons, a total of 202 universities, of which 128 are state and 74 are foundations, were included into the evaluation. Researchers should review the various approaches and methodologies to determine the best education in ethics.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the collection of data, the curriculum of the business administration and related faculties of state and foundation universities in Türkiye was taken into account. The lesson plans and curricula for the 2021-2022 academic year were examined through the information package of the schools in order to determine the proportion of the ethics courses given under the names "business ethics" and similar names. The data were analyzed with descriptive analysis. The data were classified according to the purpose and subject of the study. With the pivot table method used to analyze and summarize the classified data, the tables could be made ready for interpretation. The analysis was carried out through comparisons of the obtained values and interpretation of the results.

Limitations

School web pages were used to collect the data within the scope of the study. However, the necessary information could not be obtained from the web pages of some schools, and an e-mail was sent to the relevant units of the schools regarding the information request. In this context, only data from schools that responded could be included in the study.

Results

From the database of the Council of Higher Education, it was obtained that there are 208 universities in Türkiye, of which 129 are state and 79 are foundations. Since 4 of them are colleges and 2 universities are not active, they were excluded from the examination. For these reasons, a total of 202 universities, of which 128 are state and 74 are foundations, were included into the evaluation.

The rates of related faculties and graduate programs obtained by examining the web pages of universities are shown in Table 1. According to this; there are a total of 155 business administration programs at universities in Türkiye.

Table 1. Number of state and foundation universities in Türkiye

	Number of Universities in Study	Number of Business Program
State	128	103
Foundation	74	52
TOTAL	202	155

Source: Created with information gathered from Universities` web pages that involved in the study.

Ethics and similar courses in the curriculum of business schools were included in the study without making any distinction between spring and fall semesters. In Table 2, the number of state and foundation universities with the courses of ethics and similar names at undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels are given. According to this; 106 of the undergraduate programs of business administration, 48 of the master's programs and 29 of the doctoral programs of the universities teach ethics and similar courses.

Table 2. Program degrees in which the course of ethics is taught in foundation and state universities

	BS	MA	Ph.D.	Total
State	73	38	25	136
Foundation	33	10	4	47
TOTAL	106	48	29	183

Source: Created with information gathered from Universities` web pages that involved in the study.

In Table 3, the number of programs with ethics and similar names based on compulsory/elective status in the curriculum at undergraduate, graduate and doctorate levels are given. According to this; it is compulsory to teach in 22 undergraduate programs, 4 master's programs and 3 doctoral programs.

Table 3. Number of compulsory/elective business ethics courses in their curricula

University	BS		MA		Ph.D.	
	Elective	Compulsory	Elective	Compulsory	Elective	Compulsory
State	61	12	35	3	22	3
Foundation	23	10	9	1	4	-
TOTAL	84	22	44	4	26	3

Source: Created with information gathered from Universities` web pages that involved in the study.

The situation of having more than one ""ethics course in the curriculum of undergraduate, graduate and doctorate degrees was examined, and the data are shown in Table 4. According to this; while the number of schools that have second course related to ethics in their undergraduate curriculum is 26 universities, the number of schools that include a third course is 4. While the number of schools with two ethics courses in their master's programs is 9, the number of schools with three ethics courses is 2. However, none of the foundation universities have second and third ethics courses in the business administration graduate program curricula. At the doctoral programs, while 25 state and 4 foundation universities have only one ethics related course, and 7 state universities have 2 ethics related courses in their curricula.

Table 4. Number of universities based on the presence of the courses related with business ethics in the curricula

University	BS			MS			Ph.D.		
	1.Course	2.Course	3.Course	1.Course	2.Course	3.Course	1.Course	2.Course	3.Course
State	73	20	4	38	9	2	25	7	-
Foundation	33	6	-	10	-	-	4	-	-
TOTAL	106	26	4	48	9	2	29	7	-

Source: Created with information gathered from Universities` web pages that involved in the study.

The data related to the purpose of the study are shown in Figure 1 comparatively in a study named "The Role of Business Schools in the Institutionalization of Moral Behaviors" in order to reveal the relationship between business faculties and the level of teaching ethics course. Figure 1 shows the change in number of universities

and business schools between 2009 and 2022. Results indicate that the number of state universities increased 37% while foundation universities increased 76%. As for the change in the number of business schools, it increased 20% in state universities and 85% in foundation universities.

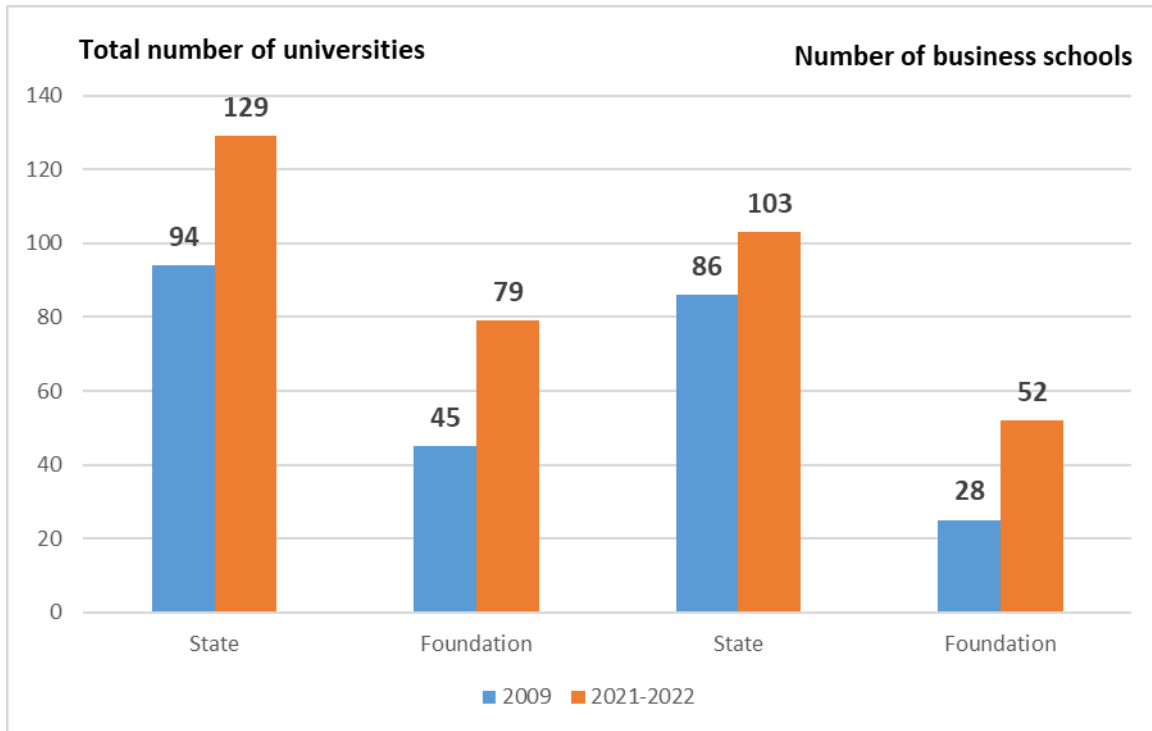


Fig. 1. Number of universities and business schools in 2009 and 2022 terms

The change in the number of ethics courses in program degrees are illustrated in Figure 2. The rates of increases in ethics courses in Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorate programs from 2009 to 2022 were 342%, 380% and 1350%, respectively.

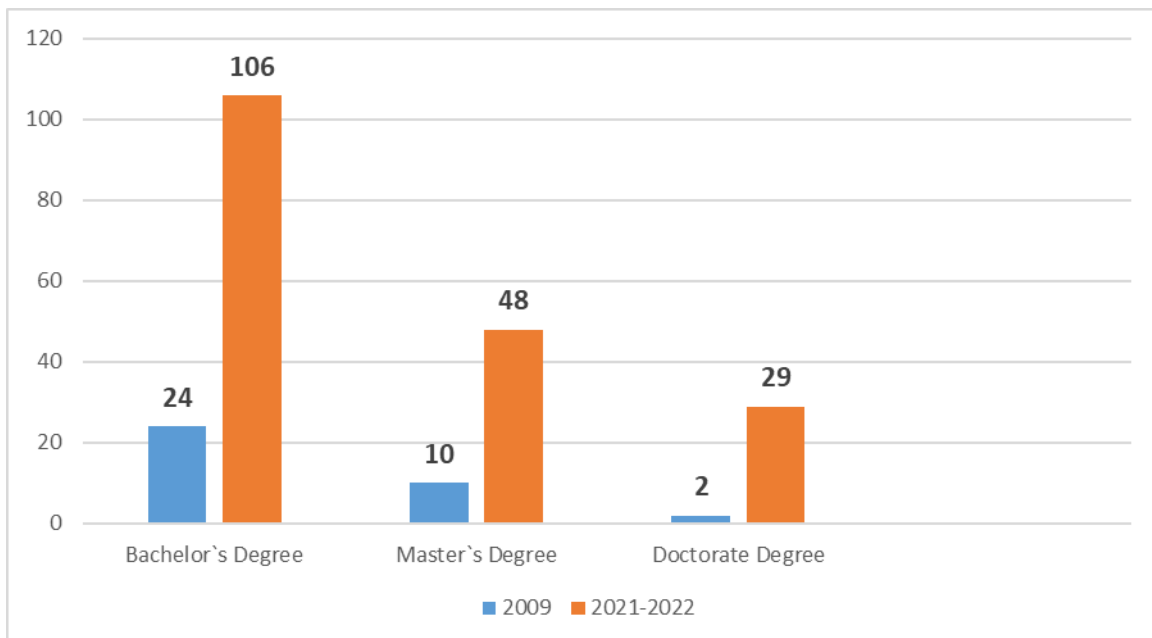


Fig. 2. Program degrees in which ethics course is taught in state and foundation universities.

Figure 3 shows the data on the teaching levels of the ethics course in 2009 and 2022. Data shows the sum of state and foundation universities. When we compare the compulsory-elective teaching of the ethics course between

2009 and 2022, we see that there is an increase of 164% in the number of compulsory and 516% in the number of elective courses. The comparison was also made for the compulsory/elective status at the undergraduate level. The rates of increases in the number of compulsory and elective courses at the undergraduate level were 267% and 367%, respectively.

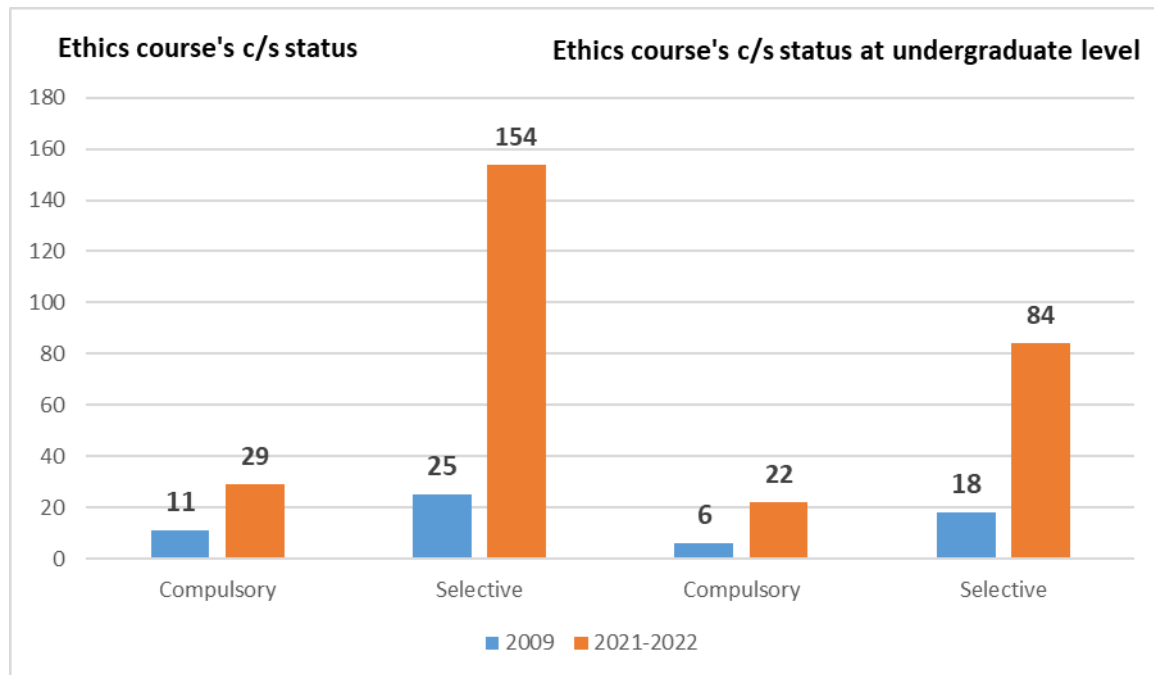


Fig. 3. The number of compulsory and elective ethics courses.

6. Conclusion

According to the findings obtained from the research, courses related to ethics are taught in 155 out of 208 universities in Türkiye. Of which 103 are state and 52 are foundation universities. Out of 73 ethics-related courses in business undergraduate programs, only 12 of them are compulsory in state universities and 10 in foundation universities. Since most of the ethics courses were elective and many students would not take these courses, the students who do not take the elective courses cannot benefit from these courses. Therefore, these students who were trained as personnel in the enterprises may not act in accordance with the ethical rules of the firms.

On the other hand, the situation in the master's program, which is seen as a complement to undergraduate education, presents a more negative picture. Out of 38 state universities only 3 schools have compulsory ethics courses in their master's programs, while out of 10, only one foundation university compulsory course. Master's education, which is the first step of graduate education, is one of the criteria sought when stepping into the business world. Considering the ratio of the courses and the status of the courses related to moral and/or ethical education, in the curricula of this academic education programs, it should not be ignored that these courses may not meet their purposes.

The study also looked at universities with doctoral programs offering courses on ethics. The information obtained is not much different from the master's programs. Out of 29 doctorate programs, only 3 of them have compulsory ethics courses. This implies that most of the Ph.D. students might be graduated without taking any ethics courses. However, according to Rutherford et al., (2012, p. 175), business schools are one of the main factors influencing in the decisions of future managers regarding the basic curriculum.

In recent years, businesses have been making great efforts to raise the moral and ethical values of their personnel and to bring their working levels to the required level. Innovations in this field should focus on the business world as well as the school education of business school students and instructors (Kaya, 2012, p. 36).

Many studies focus on the responsibilities of curriculum setters in teaching ethics courses. It can be suggested that the curriculum of business schools should include professional ethics courses, at least one of which is compulsory, prepared in cooperation with businesses. According to CHE statistics, the number of undergraduate

students studying "business and management is 1,296,009 in the 2021-2022 academic year (Higher Education Management Information System, 2022). The number of graduate students in the relevant field is 77,815, of which 67,167 are master and 10,648 are doctorate.

The numerical ratios of ethics courses included in the curriculum of higher education schools in the field of business in Türkiye are known. However, due to the fact that the related courses are generally elective, it cannot be determined how many of the branch students take this course. Therefore, it is important to apply in the first four semesters of education in this field, which trains personnel for public and private sector institutions. In addition, support from some other academic branches can be considered in order to contribute to the ethics, business ethics and similar courses given in business education. For example, receiving support from philosophy, psychology and sociology disciplines will increase academic contribution in this regard.

In this study, it has been tried to show the applications of the existence and necessity of ethics and similar courses in the business departments of universities in Türkiye with numerical ratios. However, the content of the given course is as important as its numerical value. Although the number of BECs has increased significantly, the impact of these courses on business world is unknown. Future studies can focus on this issue.

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