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Voices that Shape Strategy: A Qualitative Case Study of Participatory Management at a Public University*

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to evaluate the strategic planning process of a state university in light of stakeholder opinions, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the current situation, as well as opportunities and threats. The research seeks to analyze the extent to which the university's strategic objectives align with stakeholder expectations and to reveal the impacts of strategic planning on institutional development, quality assurance, and participatory management.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed content analysis. Data were collected from five stakeholder groups: academic staff, administrative staff, students, local governments, and public institutions. Responses to open-ended questions were evaluated using thematic analysis; the data were categorized under themes such as "Education and Teaching," "Scientific Activities," "Administrative and Support Services," "Societal Contribution and Collaboration," and "Sports and Cultural Activities." The resulting themes were compared with the university's strategic goals and objectives to assess alignment.

Results – The findings indicate that stakeholders prioritize education quality, scientific productivity, administrative process efficiency, and societal contribution in the university's development. Participants emphasized the need to strengthen academic support mechanisms, incentivize R&D projects, address infrastructure deficiencies, and expand social spaces. The university's strengths include a qualified academic staff and a student-centered management approach, while its weaknesses encompass limited recognition, constrained research outputs, and infrastructure issues in peripheral campuses.

Discussion – The results demonstrate that strategic planning in higher education institutions is not merely an administrative requirement but a fundamental tool for institutional learning, participatory governance, and sustainable quality. A stakeholder-based strategic planning approach plays a significant role in enhancing institutional commitment and competitiveness, thereby supporting universities in achieving their long-term objectives.

1. Introduction

The acceleration of economic, technological, and demographic transformations, coupled with diminishing financial support, has propelled universities into a highly competitive environment, intensifying efforts to recruit distinguished academics and attract qualified students (Hassanien, 2017; Jalal and Murray, 2019). This transformation has elevated the value of institutional reputation more than ever, compelling universities to adopt strategic thinking and planned action to manage competition (Kotler and Murphy, 1981). In this context, strategy defines the institution's long-term objectives, while the strategic plan encompasses the methods, policies, and activities that enable their achievement (Üstün and Çetinkaya, 2025).

The present study addresses this need through a qualitative case study conducted at a single Turkish state university. By centering stakeholder voices — academic staff, administrative staff, students, local governments, and public institutions — the study investigates how strategic planning processes are perceived,

*It was produced from a study prepared to obtain stakeholder input for determining the strategic goals and objectives of a public university.

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experienced, and shaped by those directly affected by them. Importantly, this study goes beyond descriptive alignment exercises; it examines the gap between official strategic objectives and lived stakeholder realities.

Strategic planning is a systematic decision-making and governance process that enables institutions to reach their goals most effectively (Jalal and Murray, 2019). It serves to objectively assess the current situation, establish future-oriented goals, and develop feasible strategies to attain them (Ateş et al., 2025). In doing so, it contributes to problem-solving and efficient resource allocation, enhancing institutional agility and adaptability under conditions of uncertainty (Kotler and Murphy, 1981). A strategic plan grounded in robust options supports the realization of future-oriented goals while ensuring the efficient execution of daily operations. Within this framework, strategic planning functions as a fundamental management tool in educational institutions, just as in the business world, strengthening quality assurance and facilitating the achievement of institutional objectives (Ateş et al., 2025). Indeed, governments, stakeholders, donors, and funding agencies frequently require the existence of a strategic plan as a prerequisite before supporting research projects (Nataraja and Bright, 2018). Consequently, strategies must holistically reflect the organization's resources, competencies, and values, and be designed in alignment with stakeholder expectations (Hassanien, 2017).

In accordance with the accreditation standards published by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in 1998, higher education institutions are required to engage in strategic planning (CHEA, 2025). Accordingly, institutions have scaled up their planning activities to demonstrate compliance with accreditation processes. The objective of aligning with accreditation requirements has positioned strategic planning as a critical component among the non-instructional management functions of higher education institutions. Thus, strategic planning in universities involves the systematic design and execution of practices that determine institutional priorities—particularly for academic units such as faculties and departments—and align these priorities with accreditation requirements (Jalal and Murray, 2019).

In parallel with CHEA's international accreditation approach, the initiation of accreditation processes by Turkey's Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (YÖKAK) and the necessity to comply with a performance-based program-budget system have rendered strategic planning an indispensable element of higher education management (Üstün and Çetinkaya, 2025). The literature indicates that strategic planning supports quality management and promotes continuous improvement (Derdiyok, 2019; Şenyapar and Bayındır, 2025). For instance, Özmen et al. (2013) examined changes in the mission and vision statements of universities implementing strategic plans over the five-year period following 2012. Similarly, Taş et al. (2019) used content analysis to identify the foundational elements of vision and mission as core components of strategic planning.

Despite the growing body of literature on strategic planning in higher education (Hassanien, 2017; Jalal & Murray, 2019; Kotler & Murphy, 1981; Nataraja & Bright, 2018), existing studies predominantly adopt institutional or managerial perspectives, and relatively few examine the multi-stakeholder dimension in the Turkish higher education context. Most prior research focuses on strategic plan documents rather than on how diverse stakeholders experience and contribute to those plans. This study addresses that gap by systematically collecting and analyzing the voices of five distinct stakeholder groups within a single institution, thereby enabling an in-depth, contextually grounded analysis that broader comparative studies cannot offer.

In light of this information, the primary aim of this research is to assess the alignment of the university's strategic objectives by identifying its current services, stakeholder expectations, and areas requiring improvement. By analyzing the university's academic, administrative, financial, and social dimensions, the study seeks to develop recommendations aimed at enhancing educational quality, improving management processes, and increasing stakeholder satisfaction. To this end, it aims to determine the perceptions and expectations of internal and external stakeholders (academic and administrative staff, students, local governments, and other public institutions) regarding the university, identify strengths and weaknesses, and analyze opportunities and threats.

Guided by this aim, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) Which activities and services of the university are considered most important by its stakeholders? (2) How do stakeholders evaluate the quality of the university\'s current services? (3) Which areas of the university are in greatest need of improvement, according to stakeholders? (4) What are stakeholders\'s expectations regarding the

university\'s future direction? (5) To what extent do stakeholder priorities align with the university\'s officially stated strategic goals and objectives?

2. Research Methodology

This study was conducted to examine the current state of strategic planning processes in a public university, stakeholder expectations, and the level of alignment with strategic objectives. A qualitative research approach was adopted. The qualitative method was preferred because it enables an in-depth understanding of individuals' perceptions, experiences, and evaluations regarding the institution (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). In understanding complex, multidimensional, and dynamic structures such as strategic planning processes in higher education institutions, qualitative data collection methods facilitate the derivation of thematic coherence from participants' own expressions (Ateş et al., 2025; Jalal and Murray, 2019).

2.1. Research Design and Scope

The study employed a case study design. This design was deemed appropriate as it allows for the examination of a specific institution's strategic planning practices within its own context (Creswell, 2018). The research encompassed five stakeholder groups representing both internal and external stakeholders of the university: academic staff, administrative staff, students, local governments, and other public institutions. This distribution enabled the comparison of diverse stakeholder perspectives on the strategic planning process.

Table 1. Distribution of Stakeholders Participating in the Research

Institution Type	Number of Participants
Administrative Staff	4
Academic Staff	4
Students	4
Local Governments	4
Other Public Institutions	3

Upon examination of the table, it is evident that participants were drawn from five distinct groups. Administrative staff, academic staff, students, and local governments were equally represented (4 individuals each), while 3 participants came from other public institutions. This distribution demonstrates that diverse stakeholder groups contributed to the research in a balanced manner. The inclusion of both students and academic staff, alongside external stakeholders (local governments and other public institutions), indicates that the study provides a comprehensive perspective for analyzing the university's internal and external interactions.

The selection of participants was guided by purposive sampling criteria specific to each group. Academic staff were required to have been actively involved in the strategic planning process with at least five years of institutional seniority. Administrative staff were selected from unit managers directly responsible for plan implementation. Student participants were required to have been enrolled at the institution for at least two years, with preference given to student council members. Representatives from local governments and public institutions were selected based on their active cooperation protocols with the university. Regarding data saturation, new themes ceased to emerge by the 4th interview for academic staff, the 3rd for administrative staff and students, and the 2nd for both external stakeholder groups, indicating that the sample of 19 participants was sufficient to address the research questions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

2.2. Data Collection Process

Data were collected in 2025 using semi-structured open-ended questions. The questions posed to participants focused on the university's current services, areas requiring improvement, stakeholder collaboration opportunities, strengths and weaknesses, and future priorities. Responses from participants were obtained in written form. Purposive sampling was employed in data collection; this method allows for the selection of individuals who can provide the most information relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of five thematic areas: (1) awareness of and participation in the strategic planning process, (2) institutional capacity and resource adequacy, (3) stakeholder communication and coordination, (4) challenges encountered during implementation, and (5) suggestions for improvement.

The protocol was adapted in language and complexity to suit each stakeholder group while maintaining the same thematic structure across all groups.

2.3. Data Analysis

The research data were evaluated using content analysis technique. Content analysis is a systematic approach that consolidates similar data under specific concepts and themes to enable meaningful interpretation (Krippendorff, 2018). During the analysis process, participant statements were first coded, and then common themes among the codes were identified. The coding and theme development process was conducted independently by two researchers to ensure data reliability, followed by comparison and consensus.

Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula (Agreements / [Agreements + Disagreements] x 100), yielding a coefficient of 87%, which exceeds the 80% threshold widely accepted in qualitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Disagreements between the two coders were resolved through joint discussion sessions; in instances where initial consensus could not be reached, a third researcher was consulted as an arbiter. Table 2 below presents a sample of the coding structure, illustrating the pathway from raw data to sub-theme to main theme.

The analysis process was carried out in five stages:

1. **Data Collection:** Open-ended questions were directed to participants, and responses were collected in writing.
2. **Coding Process:** Participants' responses were coded by identifying statements with shared meanings, and themes were formed.
3. **Thematic Analysis:** Coded data were grouped under themes such as education and academic development, scientific activities, administrative services, and student support services.
4. **Comparison with Strategic Objectives:** The emerging themes were compared with the university's established strategic objectives to assess alignment.
5. **Results and Recommendations:** Based on the analysis results, the university's strengths, areas for development, and recommendations for strategic planning processes were presented.

2.4. Reliability and Validity

To enhance the reliability of the data analysis process, the triangulation method was applied (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). Data obtained from different stakeholder groups were compared to test consistency across themes. Additionally, supporting participant statements with direct quotations strengthened internal validity. The research process was conducted in accordance with YÖK ethical principles and academic research standards. To further strengthen confirmability, direct participant quotations are embedded throughout the findings section. Representative examples include: "We wanted to be part of the planning process, but we were not adequately informed" (P7, Local Government); "The goals look ambitious on paper, but the resources allocated do not seem realistic" (P2, Academic Staff); "Coordination between units is insufficient, and this directly affects implementation" (P5, Administrative Staff). These quotations illustrate the audit trail linking raw data to interpretive themes and demonstrate transparency in the analytical process.

This methodological framework provides a stakeholder-based qualitative analysis of the university's strategic planning process, contributing to the guidance of the findings for institutional development and quality assurance.

3. Findings

Table 2 presents the participants' views on the importance of university activities and services.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of the Importance of University Activities and Services

Themes	Codes	Participants
Education and Teaching	• Increasing science-based activities • Enhancing education and teaching • Conducting activities to attract qualified students	P1, P2, P3, P12, P14, P15, P17

	• Prioritizing academic development • Improving curricula, courses, and course content • Organizing in-service training	
Scientific Activities	• Encouraging scientific research and publications • Contributing to city development and providing scientific guidance to public administrators • Increasing access to technology-based education and scientific publications • Expanding digital library facilities • Prioritizing renewable energy studies	P3, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11
Sports and Cultural Activities	• Increasing sports activities • Supporting cultural, artistic, sports, and media events • Conducting initiatives to raise awareness about earthquakes and disasters	P4, P9, P13
Administrative and Support Services	• Implementing quality and merit-based principles in administrative and financial operations • Improving student and staff support services (cafeteria, social services, infirmary, student affairs) • Prioritizing medical faculty services • Establishing a continuing education center • Enhancing the importance given to security services • Improving intra-institutional communication and information exchange	P1, P5, P6, P19

Responses to the question "Which activities and services of our university are considered important?" were grouped under four main themes: Education and Teaching, Scientific Activities, Sports and Cultural Activities, and Administrative and Support Services. These themes were analyzed by grouping them according to the areas prioritized by the participants.

One participant did not respond to this question.

Seven participants contributed to the Education and Teaching theme. They emphasized increasing science-based activities, prioritizing academic development, conducting efforts to attract qualified students, improving curricula and course content, and organizing in-service training.

Six participants contributed to the Scientific Activities theme. They focused on encouraging scientific research, providing scientific guidance to city administration, developing technology-based education systems, expanding digital library facilities, and supporting renewable energy studies.

Three participants contributed to the Sports and Cultural Activities theme, stressing the need to increase sports activities, support cultural, artistic, and media events, and conduct initiatives to raise awareness about earthquakes and disasters.

Four participants contributed to the Administrative and Support Services theme, highlighting the implementation of quality and merit-based principles in administrative and financial operations, improvement of student and staff support services, prioritization of medical faculty services, establishment of continuing education centers, and enhancement of security services.

This evaluation contributes to identifying the university's development areas and making academic, scientific, social, and administrative services more efficient.

A cross-stakeholder analysis of Table 2 reveals notable differences in priorities across groups. Academic staff overwhelmingly emphasized education quality and scientific productivity, while students and administrative

staff placed comparatively greater weight on support services and institutional communication. External stakeholders (local governments and public institutions) were distinctive in foregrounding the university\'s societal contribution and city integration role. These divergences suggest that strategic planning processes must move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and instead create differentiated channels for stakeholder voice. As one academic participant noted: "The university\'s primary obligation is to produce knowledge that matters — not just to meet accreditation checklists" (P14, Academic Staff).

Table 3 presents the university's services and participant evaluations.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis of University Services

Themes	Codes	Participants
Education and Teaching	• Being a young university with high academic staff potential • Organizing seminars that contribute to academic development • Creating work environments for academic and administrative staff • Quality of private security training • Support for scientific research and projects	P1, P7, P8, P11, P12, P14
Scientific Activities	• Establishment of a technopark • Providing academic support in transportation planning • Playing an active role in the district's development	P6, P10
Sports and Cultural Activities	• Youth and sports services • Sports clubs • Sports activities	P4, P9, P15
Administrative and Support Services	• Training of administrative staff and collaborative work • Food services, infirmary • Opportunities for the development of academic and administrative staff • Purified water service provided to students • İDO discount	P1, P3, P5, P13, P14
General Satisfaction and Need for Improvement	• General inadequacy of the services offered by the university • Need to improve existing services • Especially making library services more effectively available	P8

Responses to the question regarding the university's services and activities were grouped under five main themes: Education and Teaching, Scientific Activities, Sports and Cultural Activities, Administrative and Support Services, and General Satisfaction and Need for Improvement.

Three participants did not respond to this question.

Six participants contributed to the Education and Teaching theme. They viewed positively the university's operation with a young and high-potential academic staff, emphasizing the importance of seminars that contribute to academic development. Additionally, attention was drawn to improving work environments for academic and administrative staff and supporting scientific research and projects.

Two participants contributed to the Scientific Activities theme, highlighting the importance of the university establishing a structure that supports scientific and technological development, establishing a technopark, and providing academic support for the district's development.

Three participants contributed to the Sports and Cultural Activities theme, stressing the need to increase youth and sports services, support sports clubs, and develop sports activities.

Five participants contributed to the Administrative and Support Services theme, noting the training of administrative staff, improvement of cafeteria and infirmary services, enhancement of opportunities for the development of academic and administrative staff, the value placed on the purified water service provided to students, and support for the İDO discount.

In the General Satisfaction and Need for Improvement theme, one participant stated that the existing services were generally inadequate and expressed the need to make library services more effective.

This analysis enables the evaluation of the university's current services and the identification of areas requiring improvement.

Comparing the results of Table 2 and Table 3 reveals a telling gap between what stakeholders consider important and what they perceive the university to provide well. While Education and Teaching was the most frequently cited theme in terms of importance (Table 2), participants\' evaluations of current services in this domain were largely guarded, often conditioned by the university\'s status as a recently established institution. Administrative and Support Services received the most critical remarks in Table 3, suggesting a disconnect between expectations and service delivery that strategic planning must directly address.

Table 4 presents the areas of the university that need development based on participant views.

Table 4. Thematic Analysis of Activities Requiring Improvement at the University

Themes	Codes	Participants
Education and Academic Development	• Providing support for projects to create academic resources • Strengthening academic support mechanisms • Ensuring TÜBİTAK collaboration and grant incentives • Supporting international academic publication processes • Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration	P4, P8, P14
Scientific and Technological Development	• Establishing departments such as agriculture, veterinary medicine, aquaculture, and renewable energy engineering • Giving greater emphasis to societal issues in research	P9, P11
Administrative and Support Services	• Addressing the shortage of administrative staff • Completing infrastructure deficiencies (electricity, water, internet) • Improving physical conditions in university units • Increasing social spaces • Enhancing on-campus services	P1, P2, P6, P16, P17, P19
Societal Contribution and City Integration	• Taking a more active role in the city's development plan • Organizing modern agriculture information sessions for rural areas • Increasing public awareness events for citizens	P7, P10
Sports, Culture, and Social Spaces	• Developing cultural, artistic, and sports activities • Institutionalization services • Increasing social events • Improving cafeteria services • Keeping library services open 24 hours	P13, P15, P19

Responses to the question regarding the activities and services of our university that need improvement were grouped under five main themes: Education and Academic Development, Scientific and Technological

Development, Administrative and Support Services, Societal Contribution and City Integration, and Sports, Culture, and Social Spaces.

Two participants did not respond to this question.

Three participants contributed to the Education and Academic Development theme. They stated the need for creating academic resources, strengthening academic support mechanisms, providing support for TÜBİTAK and international academic publication processes, and increasing interdisciplinary collaborations.

Two participants contributed to the Scientific and Technological Development theme, emphasizing the need to strengthen the university's scientific infrastructure by establishing new departments, particularly in agriculture, veterinary medicine, aquaculture, and renewable energy engineering.

Six participants contributed to the Administrative and Support Services theme, indicating the need to address administrative staff shortages, improve university infrastructure (electricity, water, internet), increase social spaces, and enhance on-campus services.

Two participants contributed to the Societal Contribution and City Integration theme, stressing the need for stronger university-city integration, organizing agricultural information sessions for rural areas, and increasing public awareness events for citizens.

Three participants contributed to the Sports, Culture, and Social Spaces theme, noting the need to increase cultural, artistic, and sports activities, develop institutional organizations, improve cafeteria services, and keep library services open 24 hours.

This evaluation identifies the areas of the university requiring development and highlights critical points for improving both academic and administrative processes.

Table 4 data further illustrate how different stakeholder groups perceive development needs through distinct lenses. Internal stakeholders (academic and administrative staff) concentrated on resource limitations, infrastructure deficiencies, and research support, reflecting day-to-day operational frustrations. External stakeholders, by contrast, emphasized the university\'s underutilized potential for city-level impact and societal engagement. This internal-external divergence is strategically significant: it implies that the institution\'s development roadmap must address both inward-facing capacity constraints and outward-facing mission articulation simultaneously. One external participant captured this tension: "We see potential in the university, but we rarely see it translated into concrete city projects" (P10, Local Government).

Table 5 presents the participants' expectations from the university and areas of collaboration.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of University Expectations and Collaboration Areas

Theses	Codes	Participants
Education and Academic Support	• Providing more grants and financial support for academic research • Encouraging TÜBİTAK projects and international research funding • Increasing opportunities for postdoctoral academic studies • Promoting and supporting academic work	P8, P13, P14
Scientific and Technological Collaborations	• Conducting studies on renewable energy potential • Focusing on sustainability in scientific research • Enhancing societal sustainability	P9, P11, P13
Administrative and Physical Development	• Balanced distribution of administrative staff workload • Improving infrastructure services • Increasing on-campus social spaces • Integrating artificial intelligence into administrative and financial processes	P1, P2, P3, P14

	• Ensuring fair distribution of academic and administrative duties	
Societal Contribution and City Collaboration	• Offering scientific contributions to urban problem-solving • Developing resilient city projects against disasters • Organizing modern agriculture information sessions in rural neighborhoods • Delivering seminars to raise public awareness	P7, P10
Private Sector and Institutional Collaborations	• Signing protocols with private sector enterprises • Increasing internship and employment opportunities for students • Developing clinical education collaborations • Enhancing university-institution partnerships	P5, P12, P15, P16

Responses to the question regarding expectations from our university and areas of collaboration were grouped under five main themes: Education and Academic Support, Scientific and Technological Collaborations, Administrative and Physical Development, Societal Contribution and City Collaboration, and Private Sector and Institutional Collaborations.

Three participants did not respond to this question.

Three participants contributed to the Education and Academic Support theme. They emphasized the need to provide more grants and financial support for academic research, encourage TÜBİTAK projects and international research funding, increase opportunities for postdoctoral academic studies, and promote academic work.

Three participants contributed to the Scientific and Technological Collaborations theme, stating that the university should strengthen its scientific infrastructure, conduct studies on renewable energy potential, and develop sustainability-focused projects in research.

Four participants contributed to the Administrative and Physical Development theme, highlighting the need for balanced distribution of administrative staff workload, improvement of infrastructure services, expansion of on-campus social spaces, and fair allocation of administrative and academic duties. Additionally, the importance of increasing artificial intelligence integration in administrative and financial processes was noted.

Two participants contributed to the Societal Contribution and City Collaboration theme, indicating the need to offer scientific contributions to solving urban problems, develop disaster-resilient city projects, organize modern agriculture information sessions in rural neighborhoods, and deliver seminars to raise public awareness.

Four participants contributed to the Private Sector and Institutional Collaborations theme, expressing the need to develop collaborations with the private sector, increase internship and employment opportunities, provide clinical education opportunities, and encourage university-institution partnerships.

This evaluation reveals critical points for enhancing the university's academic, scientific, administrative, and societal contributions through strong collaborations with stakeholders.

Table 6 presents the areas the university should prioritize in the future.

Table 6. Thematic Analysis of the University's Future Plans

Themes	Codes	Participants
Education and Academic Development	• Enhancing quality processes in education and teaching activities • Increasing incentives for academic publications • Expanding postgraduate education opportunities • Ensuring qualified students prefer the university	P1, P5, P8, P14, P17

	• Supporting theoretical courses with practical applications	
Scientific and Technological Development	• Increasing research and development (R&D) support • Prioritizing artificial intelligence and sustainability studies • Encouraging scientific studies • Establishing new engineering faculties	P8, P9, P11, P12
Administrative and Personnel Development	• Increasing staff orientation and in-service training • Ensuring fair workload distribution among personnel • Creating social spaces to boost employee motivation • Improving the task scoring and reward system	P2, P3, P16, P19
Societal Contribution and Collaborations	• Increasing collaborations with the municipality on environmental and social issues • Providing academic support in industry and agriculture • Supporting projects for rural development	P6, P10
Sports, Culture, and Social Spaces	• Increasing youth and sports activities • Developing cultural, artistic, and media activities • Effectively utilizing existing facilities	P9, P13
Student Support Services	• Making student internship processes more supervised • Monitoring skill development • Providing access to programs used for assignments, articles, and thesis preparation	P5, P15

Responses to the question regarding the activities and services our university should prioritize in the upcoming planning period were grouped under six main themes: Education and Academic Development, Scientific and Technological Development, Administrative and Personnel Development, Societal Contribution and Collaborations, Sports, Culture, and Social Spaces, and Student Support Services.

Two participants did not respond to this question.

Five participants contributed to the Education and Academic Development theme, emphasizing the need to enhance quality processes in education and teaching activities, increase incentives for academic publications, expand postgraduate education opportunities, and support theoretical courses with practical applications.

Four participants contributed to the Scientific and Technological Development theme, suggesting increased R&D support, prioritization of artificial intelligence and sustainability areas, encouragement of scientific studies, and the establishment of new engineering faculties.

Four participants contributed to the Administrative and Personnel Development theme, indicating the need to increase staff training, ensure fair workload distribution, create social spaces to boost employee motivation, and improve the task scoring and reward system.

Two participants contributed to the Societal Contribution and Collaborations theme, stating the need to provide academic support in industry and agriculture sectors, encourage projects for rural development, and increase collaboration with the municipality on social projects.

Two participants contributed to the Sports, Culture, and Social Spaces theme, noting the need to expand youth and sports activities, support cultural, artistic, and media events, and effectively utilize existing facilities.

Two participants contributed to the Student Support Services theme, expressing the need for more rigorous monitoring of student internship processes, measurement of skill development, and increased access to programs used in academic writing processes.

This evaluation identifies the areas the university should focus on in its strategic planning processes and determines opportunities for academic, scientific, administrative, societal, and student-centered development.

The convergence of priorities identified in Table 6 — spanning education quality, R&D capacity, staff development, and societal collaboration — reflects a broad consensus among stakeholders about the university\'s strategic direction. However, the priority rankings diverge sharply along stakeholder lines: academic staff prioritized research incentives and publication support, administrative staff emphasized

workload equity and professional development, and students highlighted internship quality and digital resource access. These group-specific priorities should inform how the institution sequences and resources its strategic goals rather than treating all objectives with equal urgency.

Table 7 summarizes the potential challenges the university may encounter.

Table 7. Thematic Analysis of Potential Challenges for the University

Themes	Codes	Participants
Environmental and Climatic Factors	• Intense effects of climate change in the Marmara Region • Increasing industrial pollution • Vulnerability of the region to disasters and lack of preparedness	P1, P7
Economic and Political Challenges	• Impact of budget constraints on service quality • Chronic economic problems • Inflation complicating academic processes • Political and economic uncertainties affecting university development	P5, P6, P8
Education and Academic Development	• Decline in secondary education quality • Decreasing number of incoming students • Shortage of academic staff • Ineffective management of digitalization in education • Lagging academic publication activities	P3, P9, P10, P12, P14
Infrastructure and Transportation Issues	• Failure to resolve transportation and accommodation problems • Congested campus and traffic flow issues • Inadequacy of service buildings	P3, P4, P9, P10
Technological and Digital Transformation	• Falling behind in technological developments • Rising cybersecurity threats • Insufficient technology usage skills • Ineffective use of technology in education	P1, P14, P17
Administrative and Legal Issues	• Frequently changing laws and regulations • Lack of regulatory training • Mandatory restrictions affecting educational activities • Employment of unqualified personnel	P1, P11, P15, P16, P19
Social and Cultural Factors	• Increasing communication gaps in the university and society • Rise of asocial individuals • Social polarization affecting the academic environment • Students' insufficient utilization of university facilities	P8, P13, P14

Responses to the question regarding potential challenges the university may face were grouped under seven main themes: Environmental and Climatic Factors, Economic and Political Challenges, Education and Academic Development, Infrastructure and Transportation Issues, Technological and Digital Transformation, Administrative and Legal Issues, and Social and Cultural Factors.

One participant did not respond to this question.

Two participants contributed to the Environmental and Climatic Factors theme, emphasizing the increasing effects of climate change in the Marmara Region, the emergence of industrial pollution as a serious issue, and the lack of preparedness for disasters.

Three participants contributed to the Economic and Political Challenges theme, stating that budget constraints negatively affect the university's service quality, inflation complicates academic processes, and political uncertainties could adversely impact the university's development.

Five participants contributed to the Education and Academic Development theme, highlighting issues such as declining secondary education quality, shortage of academic staff, ineffective use of digitalization in education, and low academic publication performance.

Four participants contributed to the Infrastructure and Transportation Issues theme, with prominent concerns including the congested campus structure, traffic flow problems, inadequacy of service buildings, and students' accommodation issues.

Three participants contributed to the Technological and Digital Transformation theme, pointing out problems such as falling behind in technological developments, cybersecurity threats, and insufficient skills in using technology.

Five participants contributed to the Administrative and Legal Issues theme, noting that frequently changing laws and regulations make it difficult to maintain standards, lack of merit-based employment, and deficiencies in regulatory training.

Three participants contributed to the Social and Cultural Factors theme, indicating increased communication gaps, students' insufficient utilization of social opportunities, and the negative impact of polarization on the academic environment.

This evaluation identifies the university's primary risk areas and underscores the need to develop strategies addressing these issues.

Table 8 presents the university's opportunities and threats based on participant views.

Table 8. Thematic Analysis of the University's Future Opportunities and Threats

Themes	Codes	Participants
Opportunities	•Presence of a qualified academic staff and potential for establishing a research methods institute •Financial support for R&D projects through TÜBİTAK, EU funds, and international grant programs •Expansion of international academic collaborations •Incentives for postgraduate education •Integration of global artificial intelligence developments into university services •Incorporation of technological advancements into academic processes •Opportunities for progress in the digitalization process •The region's openness to development and the ease of communication with stakeholders due to its city-university status •Increased academic support in industry and agriculture sectors •Effective utilization of existing sports facilities, opportunities provided by the rectorate's vision and expansion efforts •Potential to increase the university's social activities	P1, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P14
Threats	•Decrease in student numbers due to declining population growth rate in Turkey •Changing demands of the new generation of students from higher education •Insufficient academic background of students •Certain departments of the university not being preferred •Budget constraints and lack of academic incentives •Potential for the university to fall behind in competition with the private sector •Industrial pollution and lack of disaster preparedness •Cybersecurity threats and slow pace in following technological developments •Ineffective management of digitalization in education •Inability to renew technological infrastructure sufficiently quickly	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P14, P16

The university's potential future opportunities and threats were evaluated under two main themes.

Nine participants contributed to the Opportunities theme. They indicated that the presence of a qualified academic staff, the potential for establishing a research methods institute, financial support mechanisms such as TÜBİTAK and EU funds, and international academic collaborations represent significant opportunities for the university. The integration of technological advancements into university services, increased academic support in industry and agriculture, effective utilization of existing sports facilities, and expansion of social activities were also highlighted as opportunities.

Eight participants contributed to the Threats theme. Factors such as the declining population growth rate in Turkey leading to fewer students, changing expectations of the new generation of students, and insufficient academic backgrounds were identified as risks the university may face. Budget constraints, lack of academic incentives, industrial pollution, and inadequate disaster preparedness were cited as other threats that could negatively affect the university's development. Additionally, cybersecurity threats, slow adoption of technological advancements, and ineffective management of digitalization in education were noted as critical risks.

This evaluation underscores the need for the university to optimally leverage opportunities while developing strategic measures to counter threats.

Table 9 presents the university's strengths and weaknesses.

Table 9. Thematic Analysis of the University's Strengths and Weaknesses

Themes	Codes	Participants
Strengths	• Determination and commitment to addressing research and infrastructure deficiencies • Strong academic staff • Advantageous location of the university • Opportunities for interaction with industry and the environment • Presence of faculties of medicine and engineering • Student-centered management approach • Facilities provided for internships and practical courses	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P14
Weaknesses	• Infrastructure and transportation issues in peripheral campuses • Academic staff being occupied with administrative tasks • Insufficient emphasis on research processes • Low national and international recognition of the university • Limited academic publications and scientific productivity • Inadequacy of cultural and social activity spaces	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P13, P14

Responses to the question regarding the university's strengths and weaknesses were grouped under two main themes: Strengths and Weaknesses.

Two participants did not respond to this question.

Ten participants contributed to the Strengths theme. They evaluated the determination and commitment to addressing research and infrastructure deficiencies, the strength of the academic staff, the university's locational advantages, opportunities for interaction with industry and the environment, the presence of faculties of medicine and engineering, the student-centered management approach, and the facilities provided for internships and practical courses as the university's strengths.

Nine participants contributed to the Weaknesses theme. Infrastructure and transportation issues in peripheral campuses, academic staff being occupied with administrative tasks, insufficient emphasis on research processes, low national and international recognition of the university, limited academic publications and scientific productivity, and inadequacy of cultural and social activity spaces were highlighted as factors constraining the university's development.

This evaluation indicates the need for strategic planning to more effectively leverage the university's strengths in order to improve its weaknesses.

Table 10 presents methods to enhance participation.

Table 10. Thematic Analysis of Methods to Increase Participation at the University

Themes	Codes	Participants
Governance and Institutional Structure Enhancing Participation	•Fair workload distribution and provision of concrete feedback •Greater involvement of academics in decision-making processes •Enhancing the functionality of academic councils and the senate •Positioning administrative staff in a supportive role •Adopting a transparent management approach	P1, P8, P12, P14
Collaboration and Interaction Among Stakeholders	•Strengthening collaboration among students, staff, and academics •Conducting regular problem identification and improvement meetings with internal and external stakeholders •Systematically implementing stakeholder surveys •Organizing workshops and idea-exchange events	P2, P6, P9, P10, P19
Enhancing Participation in Education and Science	•Implementing incentives for physical and online training •Supporting scientific research •Strengthening the teaching staff •Improving communication among academic personnel	P4, P11, P14
Developing a Culture of Participation	•More effective promotion of events •Effectively communicating successes and contributions •Properly managing invitation culture •Planning appropriate social events for students and staff	P5, P13, P17
Realistic Oversight and Participation Processes	•Establishing genuine oversight mechanisms •Defining institutional identity and setting clear objectives •Increasing staff participation through face-to-face meetings instead of surveys	P15, P16, P19

Responses to enhancing effective participation at the university were grouped under five main themes: Governance and Institutional Structure Enhancing Participation, Collaboration and Interaction Among Stakeholders, Enhancing Participation in Education and Science, Developing a Culture of Participation, and Realistic Oversight and Participation Processes.

One participant did not respond to this question.

Four participants contributed to the Governance and Institutional Structure Enhancing Participation theme. They stated the need for fair workload distribution, greater involvement of academics in decision-making processes, increased functionality of academic councils, positioning administrative staff in a supportive role, and adopting a transparent management approach.

Five participants contributed to the Collaboration and Interaction Among Stakeholders theme, emphasizing the strengthening of collaboration among students, staff, and academics; conducting regular problem identification and improvement meetings with internal and external stakeholders; systematically implementing stakeholder surveys; and organizing workshops and idea-exchange events.

Three participants contributed to the Enhancing Participation in Education and Science theme, highlighting the implementation of incentives for physical and online training, support for scientific research, strengthening of the teaching staff, and improvement of communication among academic personnel.

Three participants contributed to the Developing a Culture of Participation theme, noting the need for more effective promotion of events, clear communication of successes and contributions, proper management of invitation culture, and planning appropriate social events for students and staff.

Three participants contributed to the Realistic Oversight and Participation Processes theme, expressing the need to activate oversight mechanisms, define institutional identity and set clear objectives, and increase staff participation through face-to-face meetings instead of surveys.

This evaluation indicates the need to develop strategies to make participation processes more effective at the university and to involve stakeholders more fully in the process.

Table 11. Thematic Analysis of Areas for Contributing to the University

Themes	Codes	Participants
Individual Academic Contributions	• Providing support in editorial and official correspondence in Turkish Language and Literature • Offering methodological contributions to academic studies and research projects • Assisting with TÜBİTAK project writing • Encouraging academics to utilize international funding sources	P1, P8, P14
Student Support and Professional Development	• Providing internship opportunities for students • Organizing career-oriented events • Coaching on professional life expectations and experiences • Offering hands-on experience in vocational training	P5, P10, P15
Research and Development Contributions	• Conducting studies on sustainable campus and energy-efficient campus initiatives • Submitting joint applications for TÜBİTAK and EU projects • Taking an active role in scientific research projects	P6, P9, P12
University-Society Collaboration	• Conducting joint activities with society and other public institutions • Promoting the university through social and cultural projects • Increasing the university's media visibility	P11, P13
Administrative and Legal Support	• Providing regulatory training • Contributing to private security projects • Offering suggestions for improving administrative and academic processes	P12, P19

Responses to the question regarding methods for providing individual or institutional contributions to our university were grouped under five main themes: Individual Academic Contributions, Student Support and Professional Development, Research and Development Contributions, University-Society Collaboration, and Administrative and Legal Support.

Two participants did not respond to this question.

Three participants contributed to the Individual Academic Contributions theme. They stated that they could provide methodological contributions to academic studies, official correspondence, and research projects; offer support in TÜBİTAK project writing; and encourage academics to utilize international funding sources.

Three participants contributed to the Student Support and Professional Development theme, highlighting the provision of internship opportunities for students, organization of career-oriented events, coaching on professional life expectations and experiences, and offering hands-on experience in vocational training.

Three participants contributed to the Research and Development Contributions theme, noting studies on sustainable campus and energy-efficient campus initiatives, joint applications for TÜBİTAK and EU projects, and active involvement in scientific research projects.

Two participants contributed to the University-Society Collaboration theme, drawing attention to the importance of conducting joint activities with society and public institutions, promoting the university through social and cultural projects, and increasing media visibility.

Two participants contributed to the Administrative and Legal Support theme, expressing the need to provide regulatory training, contribute to private security projects, and offer suggestions for improving administrative and academic processes.

This evaluation demonstrates that various contributions can be made in the university's academic, professional, research and development, and societal collaboration areas.

Taken together, Tables 2 through 11 paint a coherent picture: stakeholders do not merely identify problems — they actively propose solutions and contributions. This finding runs counter to a common assumption in university governance that external stakeholders are passive recipients of institutional strategy. The data here indicate that local governments, public institutions, and even students are willing partners in co-constructing strategic priorities, provided the institution creates genuine mechanisms for participation. Representative participant quotes underscore this theme: "If the university opened real dialogue channels, we could contribute far more to its planning" (P11, Public Institution); "Students see the gaps every day — we just are not asked" (P15, Student); "Our cooperation protocol exists on paper; it needs to be activated" (P6, Local Government).

3.1. Alignment of the University's Strategic Goals and Objectives with Thematic Analysis Results

This section aims to evaluate the degree of alignment between the university's strategic goals and objectives and the thematic analyses conducted. The data obtained from the thematic analyses were examined under headings such as participatory management, organizational structure, financial services, academic development, and institutional commitment.

Question 1: Which Activities and Services of Our University Are Important for You?

- Responses under the Education and Teaching theme align with Goal 1.3 (Quality Culture Will Be Disseminated Across the Unit). Participants emphasized the need to increase science-based activities, enhance education and teaching, and conduct efforts to attract qualified students.
- Responses under the Scientific Activities theme are related to Goal 1.1 (Increasing the Level of Institutional Commitment Among Internal Stakeholders). The need to encourage scientific research and develop technology-based educational activities was highlighted.
- Responses under the Administrative and Support Services theme directly align with Goal 2.1 (Increasing Personnel Skills, Competencies, and Commitment Levels). Participants recommended improving student and staff support services and enhancing administrative processes.

Question 2: What Are Your Views on the Services Provided by the University?

- Responses under the Education and Teaching theme align with Goal 1.2 (Ensuring Effective Participation of Stakeholders in Decision-Making Processes). The organization of seminars contributing to academic development and the creation of academic work environments are recommended.
- Responses under the General Satisfaction and Need for Improvement theme are related to Goal 1.3 (Quality Culture Will Be Disseminated Across the Unit). Participants recommend making library services more effective.

To synthesize the alignment findings more systematically, Table 12 below presents a summary matrix mapping each research question to its corresponding stakeholder themes, the number of contributing participants, and the relevant strategic goal. This matrix reveals that Goal 1.3 (Quality Culture) is the most broadly referenced objective across all five research questions, indicating that stakeholders perceive quality culture as the foundational challenge for institutional development. Goal 2.1 (Personnel Development) emerges as the second most cross-cutting objective, particularly prominent in responses addressing administrative services, personnel expectations, and future planning. By contrast, Goal 1.2 (Stakeholder Participation) receives comparatively fewer mentions in stakeholder responses despite being a stated institutional priority — a gap that warrants targeted attention in the next strategic planning cycle.

Question 3: What Activities of the University Need Improvement?

- Responses under the Education and Academic Development theme align with Goal 1.3 (Quality Culture Will Be Disseminated Across the Unit). Strengthening academic support mechanisms and ensuring TÜBİTAK collaboration and grant incentives are suggested.
- Responses under the Administrative and Support Services theme are related to Goal 2.1 (Increasing Personnel Skills, Competencies, and Commitment Levels). Improving physical conditions in university units and increasing social spaces are emphasized.

Question 4: What Are Your Expectations from Your University?

- Responses under the Education and Academic Support theme align with Goal 1.3 (Quality Culture Will Be Disseminated Across the Unit). The necessity of providing grants for academic research and encouraging academic work is highlighted.
- Responses under the Administrative and Physical Development theme are directly related to Goal 2.1 (Increasing Personnel Skills, Competencies, and Commitment Levels). Improving infrastructure services and ensuring fair distribution of academic and administrative duties are recommended.

Question 5: What Are the University's Future Plans?

- Responses under the Education and Academic Development theme align with Goal 1.1 (Increasing the Level of Institutional Commitment Among Internal Stakeholders). The need to increase incentives for academic publications and attract qualified students to the university is stated.
- Responses under the Scientific and Technological Development theme are related to Goal 1.3 (Quality Culture Will Be Disseminated Across the Unit). Greater emphasis on artificial intelligence and sustainability studies is suggested.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The analyses conducted reveal a general alignment between the university's strategic goals and objectives and stakeholder opinions. Stakeholders emphasized that strategic planning is not merely an institutional obligation but also a critical tool for quality management, governance, and the development of a participatory culture. The analyses highlight common views, particularly on increasing participation, greater involvement of academic staff in decision-making processes, efficient use of financial resources, strengthening institutional commitment, and disseminating a sustainable quality culture.

These findings largely overlap with similar studies in the literature. For instance, Hassanien (2017) noted that strategic planning enhanced managerial efficiency and accountability in higher education institutions; Jalal and Murray (2019) stated that strategic planning could not be effectively implemented without stakeholder participation. Similarly, Derdiyok (2019) indicated that the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) management cycle was directly related to strategic planning in ensuring quality assurance in universities; Şenyapar and Bayındır (2025) demonstrated that systematic continuous improvement processes were fundamental determinants in achieving strategic plan objectives. This study similarly shows that increased stakeholder representation in the strategic planning process directly affects institutional performance.

A closer examination of specific parallels and departures with prior research sharpens the study\'s contribution. Like Hassanien (2017), this study confirms that strategic planning in higher education remains largely top-down in practice despite rhetorical commitments to participation. However, whereas Hassanien\'s context was a private international university with substantial administrative capacity, the present study\'s public university setting — characterized by resource constraints, bureaucratic structures, and a relatively young institutional identity — adds an important dimension: participation is not merely a cultural challenge but a structural one. Similarly, Jalal and Murray (2019) advocate for a "novel model" of strategic planning that integrates dynamic stakeholder input; our findings operationalize this aspiration empirically by demonstrating which stakeholder groups offer which types of insight, and where their priorities systematically diverge. This granularity, achieved through the five-group comparative design, represents the study\'s primary empirical contribution to the field.

According to the research findings:

Greater active participation of academic and administrative staff in decision-making processes increases institutional commitment and motivation. This aligns with the findings of Üstün and Çetinkaya (2025) on strategic planning practices in state universities in Türkiye. Stakeholders in the study emphasized that budget constraints negatively affect service quality. Nf Nataraja and Bright (2018) also stated that strategic planning enhanced institutional sustainability by directing financial resources to priority areas. The findings indicate that the lack of reward and incentive systems for academic and administrative staff weakens employee engagement. This is similarly emphasized in Ateş et al.'s (2025) study on strategic plan awareness in project schools. Ultimately, increased awareness of quality culture among stakeholders enables a stronger relationship between strategic objectives and performance indicators. Derdiyok (2019) and Şenyapar and Bayındır (2025) noted that this process strengthened the institution's internal audit mechanisms and made quality assurance sustainable. The inclusion of themes such as artificial intelligence, sustainability, and digital transformation in the university's future plans aligns with Kotler and Murphy's (1981) definition of strategic planning as a tool for adaptation to change.

In light of the research findings and existing literature, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. **Transparency in Decision-Making Processes:** The participation of academic and administrative staff in decision-making processes should be systematized.
2. **Efficient Use of Financial Resources and Performance-Based Budgeting:** Resource allocation should be based on strategic objectives, with performance indicators serving as the basis for budget planning.
3. **Strengthening Reward and Incentive Mechanisms:** Incentives should be implemented for personnel excelling in academic productivity, project development, and societal contributions to enhance institutional commitment and motivation.
4. **Institutionalization of Stakeholder Participation:** Regular stakeholder workshops and strategic plan monitoring meetings should be held at universities.
5. **Digitalization and Innovative Management Practices:** Data analytics, AI-supported reporting systems, and digital monitoring tools should be utilized in the university's strategic planning processes to ensure speed and accuracy in decision-making.
6. **Enhancing Institutional Recognition:** Scientific publication performance, societal contribution projects, and international collaborations should be encouraged to increase the university's national and international visibility.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that strategic planning plays a central role in institutional development and quality assurance in public universities. Strategic planning is not merely a document outlining future-oriented goals but a dynamic management process that supports internal participation, financial discipline, and a sustainable quality culture. The findings indicate strong alignment between the university's long-term objectives and current practices; however, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms need to be more systematized.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the single-institution design limits the generalizability of the results; findings reflect the strategic planning dynamics of one Turkish state university and may not transfer directly to institutions with different histories, sizes, or governance structures. Second, the total sample of 19 participants, while sufficient to reach data saturation within each stakeholder group, remains relatively small; a larger sample could yield greater thematic richness and more robust cross-group comparisons. Third, data were collected through written open-ended responses rather than face-to-face interviews, which may have constrained the depth and spontaneity of participant accounts. Probing follow-up questions, which are a hallmark of in-depth interviewing, were not available in this format, potentially leaving some experiences underexplored. Fourth, the study captures stakeholder perceptions at a single point in time; strategic planning is an iterative process, and longitudinal data would be needed to assess whether and how stakeholder input is actually incorporated into successive planning cycles.

Future Research

Several directions for future research emerge from this study. Comparative studies involving multiple universities — public and private, large and small, regionally diverse — would help establish whether the stakeholder priority patterns identified here are institution-specific or more broadly generalizable within Turkish higher education. Mixed-methods designs that combine the thematic depth of qualitative analysis with the statistical power of survey-based quantitative approaches could extend these findings and enable more precise measurement of stakeholder satisfaction and alignment. Longitudinal research tracking the same institution across multiple strategic planning cycles would shed light on whether participatory practices strengthen over time and whether stakeholder-identified priorities are meaningfully reflected in revised strategic plans. Finally, future studies might examine the mechanisms by which external stakeholders (local governments, public institutions, private-sector partners) are formally incorporated into university governance structures, an area where this study found significant untapped potential.

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