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## THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THEQC IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN TÜRKİYE

*Cihan Cenk ÇİÇEK<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

Higher education, which has a wide stakeholder structure with many actors at different levels, from international organizations to students, has a complex structure in which various actors are intertwined. Quality assurance is one of the policy areas that represents this complexity with many stakeholders at the international, national and institutional level. Quality assurance is an important issue in the Turkish higher education system and improvements are needed in this area. Massification and internationalization activities in higher education have brought quality problems to the fore. It is important to design a quality assurance system so that Türkiye can compete internationally and achieve qualitative growth.

The focus of this study is the institutional leadership role of the Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC). It is important for THEQC to assume an effective leadership role in the development and implementation of quality assurance processes. The aim of the study is to analyze the quality processes in higher education and develop recommendations based on this in the center of the institutional leadership role of YÖKAK in the quality assurance system. Within the scope of the study, the development and implementation of quality assurance in the Turkish higher education system, the issues that should be done during the development phase in order to respond qualitatively to the quantitative development of quality assurance processes, and the improvement of the current leadership role of YÖKAK were emphasized. Document analysis method was used in the study. The institutional leadership role in quality processes has been tried to be interpreted by reviewing the provisions in the Constitution on the basis of the duties and responsibilities of CHE, and the regulation and other institutional or text-based documents regarding the quality assurance system for the development of the quality assurance system.

**Keywords:** Quality Assurance, Corporate Leadership, International Competition, Quality Assurance System, THEQC.

### ***Türkiye’de Yükseköğretimde Kalite Güvencesi Sisteminin Geliştirilmesinde YÖKAK’ın Liderlik Rolü***

### **Öz**

Uluslararası kuruluşlardan öğrencilere kadar farklı düzeylerde pek çok aktörün yer aldığı geniş bir paydaş yapısına sahip olan yükseköğretim, çeşitli aktörlerin iç içe geçtiği karmaşık bir yapıya sahiptir. Kalite güvencesi, uluslararası, ulusal ve kurumsal düzeyde birçok paydaş ile bu karmaşıklığı temsil eden politika alanlarından biridir. Kalite güvencesi, Türk yükseköğretim sisteminde önemli bir konudur ve bu alanda iyileştirmelere ihtiyaç vardır. Yükseköğretimde kitleselleştirme ve uluslararasılaşma faaliyetleri kalite sorunlarını ön plana çıkarmıştır. Türkiye’nin uluslararası alanda rekabet edebilmesi ve niteliksel olarak büyüebilmesi için bir kalite güvence sisteminin tasarlanması önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın odak noktası,

<sup>1</sup> Graduate Student, Hacettepe University, Graduate School of Educational Sciences, E-mail: [ccihancenk@gmail.com](mailto:ccihancenk@gmail.com), ORCID: 0009-0005-7027-057X

# The Leadership Role of THEQC in The Development of Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in Türkiye

*Cihan Cenk ÇIÇEK*

Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu'nun (YÖKAK) kurumsal liderlik rolüdür. Kalite güvencesi süreçlerinin geliştirilmesi ve uygulanmasında YÖKAK'ın etkin bir liderlik rolü üstlenmesi önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kalite güvence sisteminin iyileştirilmesinde YÖKAK'ın kurumsal liderlik rolüne odaklanarak önerilerde bulunmaktır. Çalışma kapsamında Türk yükseköğretim sisteminde kalite güvencesinin geliştirilmesi ve uygulanması, kalite güvencesi süreçlerinin niceliksel gelişimine nitel olarak yanıt verebilmesi için geliştirilmesi aşamasında yapılması gereken hususlar ve YÖKAK'ın mevcut liderlik rolünün iyileştirilmesi hususları üzerinde durulmuştur. Çalışmada doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Kalite güvencesi sisteminin geliştirilmesine yönelik başta YÖK'ün görev ve sorumlulukları temelinde Anayasa'da yer alan hükümler ve kalite güvence sistemine yönelik yönetmelik ve diğer kurumsal veya yazı temelli dokümanlar gözden geçirilerek kalite süreçlerinde kurumsal liderlik rolü yorumlanmaya çalışılmıştır.

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kalite Güvencesi, Kurumsal Liderlik, Uluslararası Rekabet, Kalite Güvence Sistemi, YÖKAK.

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## Introduction

The main discussion topic in the higher education system in Türkiye before 1981 was the autonomy of higher education institutions. (Çelik, 2014, s.21). However, although the topics discussed include more quantitative targets such as the inability to train a sufficient number of education in the newly established higher education system and the inability to complete the higher education service by its users, and reaching these, quality has started to be talked about more at this point and the targets related to this field have started to be focused on.

The first step regarding quality assurance practices in Türkiye was the publication of the Higher Education Law. The purpose of this Law; In addition to determining the aims and principles related to higher education, it is the regulation of basic education related to the administrative units of education, research and higher education institutions.

## Quality Assurance System in the 1980s

Higher education in Türkiye is administered by the Higher Education Council (YÖK), which was established in 1981 with the Higher Education Law No. 2547. In the past, higher education had a dispersed appearance consisting of state academies, state engineering schools and academies of fine arts, institutes affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and other ministries, vocational schools and sports academies. With the adoption of the new higher education law, which envisages the gathering of higher education institutions under a single roof, it is aimed to eliminate this dispersed structure in the education system by gathering colleges, academies and conservatories affiliated to different ministries under the roof of universities and to eliminate this problem by providing similarity in planning, effective coordination and programs between higher education institutions. YÖK is the only institution responsible for the establishment, unification and services of academic units at universities within the scope of its constitutional mandate and responsible for the planning, organization and supervision of higher education. The studies and missions/descriptions of YÖK, to which all universities are administratively and academically affiliated, were targeted with the Higher Education Law No. 2457 in 1981 and the 1982 Constitution (Eurydice, 2022). It is seen that the higher education system in Türkiye is a centralized structure. Originally under the protection of universities in many parts of the world; Planning and supervision of education is given to YÖK in Türkiye.

The limitation of the powers of YÖK for the said centralized and bureaucratic cage, and the issue of the units of the autonomy and structure of higher education institutions have been discussed for a long time. This bureaucratic and centralized structure did not encourage universities to create a quality assurance in accordance with their characteristics. In the new understanding of YÖK, important projects and practices have been carried out in recent years in order for YÖK to transfer some of its powers, to share some of its powers, and to change the uniform structure of universities. most important ones; The formation of the Higher Education Council as an independent national quality assurance institution, the

arrangement of the Education Advisory Council and the Vocational Schools Coordination Council, the differentiation of their missions, and the redefinition of the types of higher education institutions with their specialization practices.

Another application for quality improvement has been the accreditation of engineering programs of some universities by the Engineering and Technology Accreditation Council operating in the USA since the first half of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The “ABET Substantial Equivalence” document, which is the equivalent accreditation given to institutions outside the USA, was obtained from Türkiye under the leadership of Middle East Technical University (METU) (13), Istanbul Technical University (ITU) (25), Boğaziçi University (6), Hacettepe University (1), Bilkent. University (4) and Istanbul Gelisim University (3) have been awarded a total of 52 programs from six universities.

In 1997, within the scope of cooperation between YÖK and the British Consulate, “Turkish Universities Quality Determination Project” studies were initiated in order to improve the quality of Turkish universities, increase accreditation, internal evaluation of institutions, peer audit, performance evaluation, reporting of results and establishment of a national quality office, and to establish a quality assurance system; but the project could not be realized. Since the 1998-99 academic year, accreditation of teacher education has been carried out within the scope of quality-enhancing regulations in education faculties (Tezsürücü and Bursalıoğlu, 2013, s.105).

Two years after the Bologna Declaration was published, Türkiye was participated in the Bologna process at the meeting held in Prague in 2001 and the issue of quality was brought to the agenda of the Turkish higher education system. Since this date, policy transfer has been experienced intensively and widespread practices related to quality assurance have begun to be implemented. Quality assurance is one of the main policy areas of the Bologna Process, which aims to promote European cooperation to develop comparable criteria and methodologies.

It is aimed to increase the quality of education, training, research activities and administrative services of higher education institutions by establishing comprehensive, systematic and regular evaluation and development mechanisms. The quality assurance dimension in the Bologna process focuses on the establishment of independent agencies, the establishment of internal and external evaluation mechanisms and the participation of relevant stakeholders. In this context, the Bologna Process provided a comprehensive quality assurance framework for the Turkish higher education system and YÖK was authorized as the institution responsible for the coordination of reforms. However, a national framework for quality assurance could not be established until 2005, when Türkiye joined the EU Education and Youth programs and the formal negotiation process with the European Union began.

### **Quality Assurance System in the 2000s**

Until 2005, the need for a legal framework increased with the developments aimed at ensuring quality in higher education, and in 2005, the "Regulation for Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions" was put into effect in order to establish quality assurance in Türkiye and to ensure international harmony, in line with ESG-2005. “Higher Education Evaluation and Quality Improvement Commission (HEEQIC)” was established within the body of YÖK, responsible for the implementation of the regulation. (Kurulu, 2007, s.182)

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<sup>2</sup> The Accreditation Council for Engineering and Technology is a non-governmental organization that accredits higher education institutions' programs in applied science, engineering, technology and informatics.

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YÖDEK has defined the processes and performance indicators required for higher education institutions to carry out academic evaluation and quality improvement activities in a systematic way. The fact that the Commission established at that time was not independent and the inclusiveness of the commission members in terms of ensuring the representation of the relevant stakeholders shows that it is far from the practices in the EHEA. Within the framework of the "Regulation for Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions", each higher education institution has established its own Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Council (AEQIC, which is responsible for academic evaluation and quality improvement studies. After the institutional evaluation process that will take place in a higher education institution, academic evaluation and quality improvement reports are prepared by the Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Council of the relevant higher education institution based on the evaluation reports from the evaluators.

The relevant report is sent to YÖDEK after the approval of the higher education institution's senate and administrative institutions, and YÖDEK creates the Higher Education Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Report in the light of the reports from ADEK and presents it to YÖK. While the internal evaluation process carried out in this way is repeated regularly every year, the external evaluation process carried out by independent experts' takes place every five years. External evaluation can be applied on an institutional basis as well as on a program and unit basis. Although ADEK reports were prepared by higher education institutions until 2014, the relevant reports are not available on the web pages of many higher education institutions. However, due to the problems stemming from the institutional culture and perception regarding the reports in question, the development did not reach the expected level. The fact that the aforementioned reports were not adopted at the institutional level and could not be internalized by all administrative and academic units in the higher education institution prevented the formation of a quality culture. It was established as an independent platform under the name of Engineering Evaluation Council in 2002 by the Engineering Deans Council (MDK), which consists of the deans of faculties providing engineering education in Türkiye and the TRNC, in order to organize and implement a detailed program for the evaluation of engineering undergraduate programs of these faculties started the evaluation of its programs and became an association in 2007 by obtaining the "Quality Evaluation Registration Certificate".

YÖK started to issue registration certificates to some accreditation institutions other than MÜDEK in order to enable them to make program-based external evaluations. In order to increase the quality of education and training, regulations were made in the criteria for opening masters and doctoral programs in 2014. In this context, the minimum number of faculty members in the doctoral program was increased from 5 to 6, and while foreign faculty members were not previously considered among the minimum faculty members, one foreign faculty member was accepted with these changes. (Taşci and Lapçın, 2023, s.11).

Another development regarding quality assurance was the entry into force of the "Public Financial Management and Control Law" No. 5018, which brought fundamental changes in the public financial management system in 2016. With the law, it is aimed to make strategic planning and performance-based budgeting in order to ensure efficiency and accountability in the use of public resources. However, within the scope of the Bologna Process, the "Bologna Coordination Commission (BEK)" was established in universities according to the decision of the General Assembly of Higher Education dated 20.11.2008. In this process, ADEK and BEK have been structures that complement each other (Ayvaz et al. 2016, s.57). Finally, YÖDEK applied for ENQA membership and the application was accepted by the ENQA Council on 15 June 2007.

## Quality Assurance Practices and Structures in Higher Education in Türkiye-THEQC

Although quality assurance was on the agenda in Türkiye in 2015, it has not yet become a holistic strategic policy area for policy makers. In 2015, a more systematic quality approach was adopted in line with the new vision of YÖK on the higher education system. In this context, a new quality policy has been established in line with the restructuring of the system. In 2015, YÖK put into practice a new understanding of higher education system defined as mission differentiation, diversity, institutional autonomy and flexible structure.

The new vision for quality required significant changes in the existing higher education system, which has a long history of being centralized, uniform and bureaucratic. (Erdem, 2006, s.302) Thus, with the creation of new policies, legal frameworks and institutional structures, a new roadmap for quality assurance has been adopted. In this context, the first step taken was the enactment of a new legal framework in line with the policy change. With the "Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation" published in 2015, the rules regarding the internal and external quality assurance of education and research activities and administrative services of higher education institutions, accreditation processes and the authorization of independent external evaluation institutions have been determined. (Bakioğlu and Baltacı, 2000, S.42)

The regulation dealt with quality assurance with a conceptual approach in line with international standards and formed the basic building blocks of the quality policy formulation designed in line with quality assurance, accreditation, external evaluation, internal evaluation, self-evaluation, strategic planning, Quality Assurance Standards and Principles in the European Higher Education Area. "THEQC", which was established under the YÖK in the first place, has been transformed into an administratively and financially independent structure with the Law dated 1 July 2017 (YÖK, 2018, s.6). The main responsibilities of THEQC are to raise awareness on external institutional evaluation, registration of accreditation institutions and development of quality culture in order to organize and carry out quality assessment and assurance in higher education institutions.

This formation of the Council can be considered as an important development in ensuring stakeholder participation, which has been observed for a long time as an important deficiency of the quality assurance system in the Turkish higher education system. THEQC elects the President and the Vice-President from among its members by absolute majority. The term of office of the student member of the Council is determined as one year, while the term of office of the other members is determined as four years. In accordance with the regulation, the members of the Council can be a member for a maximum of two terms. The Council convenes with at least two-thirds majority of the total number of members and takes decisions with the absolute majority of the total number of members.

Quality assurance practices at the national level in Türkiye; internal quality assurance, program accreditation and institutional external evaluation practices. Higher education institutions are responsible for internal quality assurance, accreditation agencies for program accreditation and THEQC for institutional external evaluation. While the internal quality assurance practices of higher education institutions and the institutional external evaluation processes carried out by the Higher Education Quality Council are legally compulsory, program accreditation is not mandatory. Program accreditation can be carried out by national accreditation agencies as well as by international accreditation agencies. There is no legal obstacle for international accreditation agencies to operate in Türkiye.

One of the most important implementation tools for THEQC's quality assurance system is the Institutional Evaluation Program. The program focuses on two main mechanisms, Self-evaluation and

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External evaluation. Institutional Internal Evaluation Reports (KİDR) are prepared by higher education institutions every year as a basis for the Institutional External Evaluation Program. The program aims to evaluate the procedures related to education, research and management systems of higher education institutions and their quality improvement activities within the scope of Institutional Evaluation Criteria. All higher education institutions are required to attend the Program at least once every five years. Evaluation is made according to the self-evaluation reports submitted annually by the universities within the scope of the program. After the institutions to be included in the program are determined, the evaluation teams that will carry out the evaluation process are determined (Uludağ et al. 2018, s.96).

Team members are selected from the THEQC evaluator pool. Evaluation teams include academics and administrative staff. Each team has a chairperson, and this team head is determined by the Council from among those experienced in quality assurance and managerial processes in higher education. Throughout the program, the team makes a preliminary visit to the assessed institution and a site visit. After the visits, each evaluation team drafts an Institutional Feedback Report (KGBR), which will be made public by the Council. The program therefore includes both an internal evaluation conducted by the universities and an external evaluation by the Council (Uludağ et al. 2018, s.96).

Implementation and continuous improvement of mission, vision and target statements within the scope of internal quality assurance of higher education institutions; quality assurance policy; quality management mechanisms, reflection of institutional policies at faculty level; awareness of these policies and the functioning of quality assurance processes. The Self-Assessment Report is one of the most important tools that enables the institution to analyze and evaluate itself with all these aspects. The said report enables the institution to realize its own strengths and weaknesses and to realize further improvement processes.

THEQC started the mentoring program in 2019 to support the functioning of quality assurance systems at universities. The mentoring program was created to guide the institutions to be evaluated within the scope of the Institutional Evaluation Program. The purpose of the mentoring system is to contribute to the establishment of an internal quality assurance system in institutions and to the dissemination and internalization of the quality assurance culture in higher education. The most important criticism of the structure of the Higher Education Quality Council, established within the scope of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation, was that it could not be independent in terms of administrative and financial aspects.

With the legal regulation in 2017, this problem was eliminated and a structure with a public legal personality was created. According to ESG standards (2015), quality assurance bodies are required to have a legal basis. This situation has been ensured with the said legal regulation. The most important task undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Council is to carry out the external evaluation of higher education institutions. The Council conducts these evaluations through evaluation teams it has formed. The Council carries out the external evaluation of higher education institutions at least once every five years, taking into account the internal evaluation report prepared by higher education institutions every year.

In the Institutional External Evaluation process, the quality of educational, research and social contribution activities and administrative services of institutions is evaluated; this process includes the evaluation of the institution through an evaluation team commissioned by THEQC. The stages of the institutional external evaluation process; It consists of pre-evaluation, pre-visit, site visit/s and post-visit activities that result in KGBR over KİDR. Institutions are informed in detail about the "strengths" and "prospects for improvement" regarding the quality assurance system after a site visit after the

preliminary evaluation. In this context, the Council expects higher education institutions to complete the short-term improvement points in KİDR and to design the necessary infrastructure for long-term improvements.

Another important mechanism of quality policy in the Turkish higher education system is accreditation. The program was conducted by an independent evaluation team by THEQC, based on the maturity level of the "planning, implementation, control and taking action (PUKÖ)" cycle in education and training, research and development, social contribution and administrative service processes, based on the level of meeting the criteria qualitatively and quantitatively. It is an evaluation process in which the accreditation decision of the institution and the report given by the Council are shared with the public.

With the new regulation made by YÖK regarding the Higher Education Institutions Examination (YKS), in order to increase the quality of education and training, the application of "limitation according to success" in the admission of students to some programs has started. First of all, in 2015, the order of success limits in medicine and law programs were determined, and in the same context, the order of success restriction was implemented in 2016 for programs in the field of engineering and architecture, and in 2017 for teaching programs.

Accredited programs started to be included in the Higher Education Programs and Preference Guide as of 2016 in order to increase the quality of higher education programs and to encourage the accreditation of their programs by creating a competitive environment among universities. All these regulations signaled a new roadmap in terms of both internal and external quality assurance in higher education institutions.

As of June 2019, an administrative staff of twenty-three people has been established in the Higher Education Quality Council with the legal regulation. When the volume of higher education in Türkiye is evaluated, it is seen that the number of staff in question is quite insufficient. In addition, the titles of the cadres given to reach a human resource specialized in the field of quality assurance are also insufficient. The Higher Education Quality Council used the budget of YÖK until the legal regulation on financial resources.

As in almost all fields, the pandemic crisis represents a break in the higher education and quality assurance system. THEQC, within the scope of its activities in line with its aims and objectives, for the first time in 2020; He prepared the principles and calendar regarding the internal and external evaluation processes, and these principles and the calendar were shared with higher education institutions as of January. However, the Covid-19 pandemic, which started to show its effect in our country in March, has necessitated the need for reorganization in the application calendar, application principles/principles and methods. All activities were tried to be continued without interruption by ensuring the adaptation of all implementations to the current situation.

In this context, all meetings held with various stakeholders at different levels, as well as training activities and field visits related to external evaluation processes, were transformed into online and mixed formats. In 2020, in order to ensure the continuity of the quality assurance system during the Covid-19 pandemic process, more than 40 information meetings were held face-to-face and/or online with higher education institutions, accreditation institutions, evaluation teams, team leaders and all stakeholders (THEQC, 2020, s.10).

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The pandemic crisis, which is effective in the field of higher education like all social systems, has brought with it the need for a rapid online transformation. THEQC has adapted to this sudden change in an agile manner and has moved all its activities to the online environment. In order to ensure the continuity of the quality assurance system during the pandemic process, more than 40 information meetings were held face-to-face and/or online with higher education institutions, accreditation bodies, evaluator teams, team leaders and all stakeholders.

The five basic headings of the THEQC quality assurance view, therefore the quality assurance system and evaluation in Turkish higher education, are divided into the five main headings of "Quality Assurance System", "Education and Training", "Research and Development", "Social Contribution" and "Management System" under the "Distance Education and Quality" sections. Assurance" section was added in 2020. "Quality Assurance Criteria in Distance Education and Evaluation Guide 2020" has been prepared by THEQC in order to determine the quality standards for distance education, which has started to be implemented in higher education institutions and presented to higher education institutions. (Emin, 2022, s.90)

Within the scope of this guide, self-evaluation reports were received by higher education institutions and a general evaluation report was prepared by THEQC. Global changes, which are felt in all areas of life and accelerated with the pandemic period, have caused the outputs expected from higher education institutions to change and transform. In this context, it has been seen that higher education institutions with strong internal quality assurance in this change environment accompanied by uncertainty are more successful in change management and turning crises into opportunities, and the importance of the quality assurance system, especially in education and training processes, has been revealed once again (a.g.e, s.135).

## **THEQC in the Focus of Institutional Leadership**

The concept of leadership is a fundamental and important component in organizations, and it presents a dynamic structure with the changing organizational theories and definitions in the leadership literature. Although it is emphasized that leadership theories are constantly changing and transforming over time, the phenomenon of leadership is inevitably affected by this situation.

Leaders function as key actors in organizations based on their authority to initiate, shape and direct management. Leaders contribute to the achievement of their goals by undertaking responsibilities such as setting vision and strategic goals, directing resources, building and motivating teams. (Yeşil, 2016, s.160)

Leaders also undertake tasks such as shaping organizational culture, setting values and ethical standards, managing the performance of employees and supporting their development. At the same time, leaders have important roles and abilities such as coping with crises, managing change and promoting innovation. As a result, leaders are vital to the success of organizations by assuming responsibilities based on the authority to initiate, shape and direct management as key actors in organizations.

Studies in the field of leadership from past to present, such as James MacGregor Burns' transformational leadership and Bernard Bass's transformational and transactional leadership, are shown as successful examples by arousing significant interest in the literature. Corporate leadership, which is not focused enough due to its periodic and theoretical effects, can be considered as a leadership approach

that has an important position in the organizational context and can have a stronger field with its effects compared to others.

Institutional leadership is a design that is often overlooked in organizational research and more emphasis should be placed on this issue (Silva, 2020, s.81). It can be stated by referring to authors such as Scott, who argue that institutional leadership is formed by integrating with the formal structure and routinizing (Scott, 2003, s.72). Selznick, on the other hand, defines institutionalization as a process that enables structures and activities to become value-infused beyond technical requirements (Selznick, 1997, s.23).

These statements draw attention to the importance of corporate leadership and how institutionalization affects leadership. Corporate leadership involves leaders embracing the organization's mission, values, and goals, shaping the corporate culture, and developing a strategic vision for the organization's sustainable success. Institutionalization, along with this leadership effect, ensures that the structure and activities are compatible with the values, mission and goals of the institution.

In this context, it is important to emphasize the institutional leadership role of THEQC in improving the quality assurance system. THEQC needs to guide quality assurance processes based on corporate leadership principles and guide institutions to meet quality standards. It is also important for THEQC to take measures to improve its management skills and strategic thinking capacity in order to strengthen its corporate leadership abilities. In this way, it can be ensured that the institutional leadership plays an active role in the quality assurance processes and the goal of raising the quality standards of the Turkish higher education system can be better achieved.

### **Identification of the Main Problem Area for Higher Education Quality Assurance Policies Evaluations on the Main Problem Areas within the Scope of THEQC Activities**

- Although quality assurance was on the agenda with the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Council in 2015, it was stated by policy makers that it did not become a holistic and strategic policy area. At this point, it has been stated that the quality assurance processes carried out within THEQC are in a very good condition compared to the starting point, but there are areas that need improvement.
- It has been stated that quality assurance processes in Türkiye should get rid of their advisory nature and result in some obligations and gains. It has been stated that the lack of an award-incentive mechanism causes universities to perceive quality processes as an administrative workload and there are difficulties in motivation.
- Although THEQC is a member of many international agencies, it does not have departments, assistant general secretariat, legal counsel, personnel department, strategy development department within its administrative structure. It was stated that under the law of quality assurance in higher education, the administrative structure of THEQC should be regulated and that quality is an area that requires expertise, and that specialist staff should be created in the execution of these processes. In this context, it has been stated that the institutional capacity of THEQC needs to be improved.
- It has been stated that the application of the same criteria for all higher education institutions in the institutional external evaluation process carried out by THEQC, due to the move away from the uniform higher education institution approach within the new YÖK understanding, is not applicable for a long time within the scope of YÖK's policies.

- It has been stated that the absence of a central database in the field of quality assurance makes the current processes bureaucratic and this situation causes a loss of motivation in academics and administrative staff.
- It has been stated that due to the centralized nature of quality assurance processes in higher education, the policy making phase is generally carried out by the bureaucracy and universities are involved in the implementation phase. It has been stated that this situation has a very limited effect on the decision-making processes of universities and this causes incompatibility between formulation and practice.
- It has been stated that in the selection of rectors, who are described as the leaders of higher education institutions, a measurement and evaluation, certain and objective criteria are not established and the rectors are not appointed accordingly. It has been stated that this situation makes it impossible to provide a top-to-bottom quality in institutions.
- Considering the locality of Türkiye, it has been stated that the lack of an external audit poses a problem in establishing internal quality assurance in higher education institutions and ensuring that it is established.

### **Solution Suggestions for The Main Problem Areas of The Quality Assurance System Within the Scope of THEQC and Higher Education Institutions Activities**

- The importance of data and digitalization in the changing world becomes even more prominent. Adopting this approach in higher education will provide insights in many areas, from the estimation of the graduation and employment time of the student to the effectiveness of the academician in education and research. In this context, it was stated that the quality assurance processes of both THEQC and higher education institutions should be digitalized.
- Higher education institutions should develop performance indicators, in which they evaluate quality, in line with changing learning outcomes. Higher education systems are transforming into a level such as online assisted learning, shortened courses instead of diplomas, certificates, recognition of prior learning, counting the knowledge and skills that a person has gained through informal means outside the classroom environment into courses and credits. In this context, it was stated that curricula should have a dynamic structure in order to compete in today's world, in parallel with the learning outcomes.
- Considering the fact that quality is a relative concept and not absolute quality, it was stated that higher education institutions should clearly define the meaning of quality in their context and be clear about the purpose of internal quality assurance.
- It has been stated that higher education institutions should establish structures (offices, units or centers) to support the implementation of internal quality assurance systems and processes and that adequate resources (human, physical and financial) should be provided to these structures. Because it has been stated that quality assurance cannot be effective if sufficient resources are not provided.
- While establishing the quality assurance system in higher education institutions, it should be individualized by taking into account the institutional characteristics, various organizational cultures, historical location and regional structure of the institution. In this context, the opinion was expressed that institutions will be encouraged to adopt an all-encompassing approach to develop an internal quality assurance system and mechanism that is guided by their own strategic goals and adapts to the nature of the institutions, with systems specially prepared for the relevant institutions.
- It was stated that within the scope of the external evaluation program carried out by the Higher Education Quality Council, local evaluators should be integrated into the system in order to ensure professionalization in quality and human resources to take place as evaluators.

### **Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations**

Higher education institutions in Türkiye should fully document and periodically review their quality systems after carrying out a major review. In quality assurance processes, THEQC should set a time limit, and universities should be asked to provide standards, and sanctions such as budget constraints or termination of education activities should be applied to universities that do not. While determining this period, it is necessary to ensure that what is expected is prepared competently. Institutions should consider establishing departmental, faculty and central institutional level quality assurance structures to address quality issues. Responsibility for assuring the quality of education provided should ultimately rest with the institutions, in partnership with THEQC.

Considering the relative infancy of quality assurance in Türkiye, the provision of external quality control is also of great importance. It is of great importance to ensure external quality control by considering the current status of established or newly established universities. Considering the cultural context, it should not be assumed that the mere existence of a formal internal assurance system will ensure quality by itself. With the audit, THEQC will monitor and verify to what extent these internal systems contribute to the maintenance and improvement of institutional quality and standards, and their effectiveness.

Since the actual quality assurance procedures adopted and implemented differ between institutions, the needs of individual institutions should be taken into account when conducting the audit and a national model of how to implement improvement works and procedures should not be established. While evaluating the quality of an institution by THEQC, it should focus on the institution's own goals, mission and the effectiveness of the institution's own systems in achieving these stated goals.

Quality assurance processes in higher education in the world lead to decision-making consequences in many countries. These decisions may be for the continuity of the activities of the higher education institution or program, as well as for the financing of these structures. Quality assurance processes in Türkiye are currently advisory. Planning such as quotas, staff distribution, program/unit opening, distribution of resources determined by YÖK initiative, should be made taking into account the results of the reports prepared by THEQC, and motivation, incentive and rewarding mechanisms should be strengthened for higher education institutions with institutional accreditation or the number of accredited programs. (Aktan and Gencel, 2010, s.141)

With this incentive, a competitive environment will be created between higher education institutions, and this will have a positive effect on the improvement of quality. The revenues of the Higher Education Quality Council are in the Higher Education Law No. 2547; Aids from the general budget, operating income, all kinds of donations and aids and other incomes. The Higher Education Quality Council does not have any income items within the scope of its activities. Many quality assurance agencies in the AYA have their own revenues from their own activities. In this context, the Higher Education Quality Council; Authorization of national accreditation agencies, Institutional External Evaluation Program and national or international projects to be carried out should generate own revenues. (Güney, 2019, s. 410)

Due to the centralized structure of the higher education system, it has been observed that the universities cannot be flexible in the processes and the systems imported without adapting to the cultural structure are not successful in the implementation phase. Although the positive developments in this field gained momentum with the policies and practices implemented after 2015 and the administrative

and financial restructuring of THEQC in 2017, it is still not at the desired point in terms of ensuring quality in higher education institutions.

As a result of the situation reports published by THEQC and the interviews, it is seen that the level of awareness about the "Quality Assurance System" in higher education institutions has increased compared to previous years, but the first steps of the PÜKO cycle, which is the most important step of the internal evaluation process, are concentrated on and the improvement processes are neglected. Monitoring and improvement mechanisms, which are seen in very few institutions, need to be extended to all institutions. In this context, since the digitalization of processes and the creation of integrated information management systems will reduce the current bureaucracy and workload, it will increase the motivation of the institutions at the point of closing all the cycles in the internal assurance processes.

One of the most important problems faced by Türkiye in establishing and maintaining quality assurance processes is leadership. The quality process is a dynamic process that includes the full participation of everyone, starting from the top management. With this rapid change in the world, people who can keep up with this change and can lead agile should be included in the process and evaluated according to indicators that can measure whether they have leadership qualities and qualifications. Even when the manager changes, ensuring that the system is still sustainable and functional is only provided by leadership. In this context, quality assurance processes should be designed independently of individuals and the new leader should be included in the process with his team.

Since quality is an area that requires expertise, the institutional capacity and legal basis of THEQC, similar to international practices, should be strengthened. Planning such as quotas, staff distribution, program/unit opening, and distribution of resources determined by YÖK initiative, should be made taking into account the results of the reports prepared by THEQC, and motivation, incentive and rewarding mechanisms should be strengthened for higher education institutions with institutional accreditation or the number of accredited programs competitive environment will be created and this will have a positive effect on the improvement of quality.

Concepts such as quality assurance and accreditation in the Turkish higher education system have started to be spoken loudly in recent years. In particular, the fact that accredited program information has been included in the ÖSYS Higher Education Programs and Quotas Guide since 2016 has created a serious awareness about accreditation and encouraged higher education institutions to accredit their programs. This practice also encourages the organization of accreditation agencies in different disciplines as civil initiatives. Such studies should be intensified more in order to raise awareness about quality assurance in higher education institutions.

### **Statement of Research and Publication Ethics**

The research was carried out in accordance with the principles of publication ethics.

### **Authors' Contribution Rate**

The author has prepared the article alone.

### **Statement of Interest**

The author has no conflict of interest with any person or organization.

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