

Thematic Analysis of Status Reports Made within the Scope of Higher Education Assessment and Quality Assurance: The Comparative Case of England and Türkiye

Yükseköğretim Değerlendirme ve Kalite Güvencesi Kapsamında Gerçekleştirilen Durum Raporlarının Tematik Olarak İncelenmesi: İngiltere ve Türkiye Örneği

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Özet

Bu çalışmada 2015 yılından bu yana ortaya koyduğu amaçları gerçekleştiren Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu'nun (YÖKAK) 2016, 2017 ve 2018 yıllarında değerlendirme ve kalite güvencesi kapsamında yayınladığı durum raporlarının tematik olarak incelenmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, çalışma kapsamında elde edilen sonuçlar İngiltere'nin kalite güvence ve değerlendirme sistemi ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Bu noktadan hareketle, kalite güvencesinde ileriye yönelik yapılabilecek sürdürülebilir gelişim planlarındaki iyileştirmelere yönelik öneriler yer verilmiştir. Çalışmada sınırlı sayıda kaynağın derinlemesine betimlenmesi ve incelemesi hedeflentiği için nitel bir paradigmata takip edilerek durum çalışması deseni kullanılmıştır. İçerik analizinin kullanıldığı çalışmada, yükseköğretimde kalite kapsamında faydalanan toplam 77 kaynak içerik analizi yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Çalışmada elde edilen sonuçlar, kalite güvence sisteminin kalbini oluşturan kurumsal özerklik ve liderlik çalışmalarını uluslararasılaşma kapsamında ele alması ve ileriye yönelik misyonların oluşmasında öneriler sunması açısından önemlidir. Türkiye'deki yüksekokretim kurumları arasında iş birliği ve eklenmeye kapsamında hem diploma programları hem de mikro kredilendirme sistemlerine yönelik ileriye dönük öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Değerlendirme, içerik analizi, İngiltere, kalite güvence, Türkiye, yüksekokretim.

The world economy has undergone a change as knowledge overtakes material capital as a source of future wealth (Gencel, 2001). Uncertainties that arise in matters such as which information, to what extent, how and by how much universities are expected to produce knowledge and value present challenging problems for graduates, academics

Abstract

In this study it is aimed to examine the status reports which were published by the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (YÖKAK) in 2016, 2017 and 2018 within the scope of evaluation and quality assurance, thematically. In addition, the results were compared with the UK's quality assurance and evaluation system. From this point of view, suggestions for improvements in sustainable development plans that can be made for the future in quality assurance are included. This study describes and examines a limited number of sources in depth, so a case study design with a qualitative focus was employed. The study, in which content analysis was used, was analyzed with the content analysis method of a total of 77 resources used within the scope of quality in higher education. The results obtained in the study are important in terms of considering the institutional autonomy and leadership studies, which form the heart of the quality assurance system, within the scope of internationalization. Forward-looking suggestions were presented concerning both the diploma programs and micro-credit systems within the scope of collaboration and articulation among institutions of higher education in Türkiye.

Keywords: Content analysis, England, evaluation, higher education, quality assurance, Türkiye.

and employers (Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, 2003). This situation pushed many countries to develop common standards and policies within their higher education (HE) systems and the processes associated with them. Based on these changes, the concept of quality for achieving common standards in HE came to the fore with the *Bologna Process*, which was first dis-

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cussed at the global level in 1999. Evaluation of HE institutions called for both internal and external quality control processes that taken together would ultimately reveal quality assurance, which is stated as monitoring and evaluation of the studies carried out to determine that the quality standards are met, within the framework of a certain system and standards.

England

England has been a frontrunner in putting the quality of HE into its agenda. This positioned it to better cope with the globalization of HE and the liberalization of the market, making HE more relevant to social and economic needs, expanding access to HE, ensuring comparability of all provisions and processes within and among institutions (including international comparisons), ensuring financial accountability of HE to the public, training students to create a valuable workforce, and increasing the number of HE institutions.

Today's national system of quality assurance in the UK had its start in discussions about the concept of quality in a more practical way in the early 1990s due to the significant decrease in the number of students in HE (Harvey, 2005). The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), whose mandate is to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of higher education quality in the UK, was established in 1992 by the Committee of Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors (CVCP), the Polytechnic Directors Committee, the Scottish Central Funded Colleges Conference (CSCFC) and the Permanent Executives Conference (SCOP). Thanks to this Council, regular quality inspections were carried out between 1992 and 1997, and implementation guides were produced by creating improvement projects on quality.

In 1995, CVCP, SCOP and the Scottish Higher Education Directors Committee formed a Joint Planning Group to develop proposals for a new single quality assurance system for HE. The Joint Planning Group's draft report, prepared in 1996, suggested that a new and independent agency should be established to carry out all the functions of HEQC. The new organization, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), was established in 1997.

The purpose of QAA (2003) is defined as "to attract public attention to sound standards of HE qualifications and to promote continuous improvement in the management of HE quality". Aiming at much more than HEQC, QAA emphasizes standards. To evaluate whether the responsibilities in higher education institutions are fully fulfilled, QAA comes to the fore by reviewing the country's quality policy, determining a number of guiding reference points, and defining the standards in detail, step by step, based on these points (Harvey, 2005). With

the help of these standards, QAA has also put forward a framework of competencies. However, the final "qualifications framework" is implemented as two different qualifications frameworks, as a common agreement between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom could not be achieved (Harvey, 2005; QAA, 2003). In line with these determined standards, the first corporate audit program in England and Northern Ireland started in February 2003 (and separately in Scotland with its own framework) and is repeated every six years. Institutions can be subjected to interim evaluations when necessary if they have evidenced trouble in meeting the enunciated standards (QAA, 2003).

Türkiye

As discussed in both the *Bologna Process* and *Lisbon Strategies*, individuals in today's world should be able to work in cooperation with individuals living in different countries and make evaluations by considering the expectations of different markets and policies, beyond discovering many new things and knowing themselves in line with the labor expectations of their own country's policies and market. At this point, the establishment of a quality culture in the HE process will help individuals to take on responsibilities such as accessing information, being aware of the importance of information, using information, protecting and spreading information voluntarily, and taking it one step further, as a principle beyond acquiring a bachelor's degree that will provide a job opportunity. The *Regulation on Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions* was prepared in 2005 in Türkiye by the Council of Higher Education to improve the quality levels of the academic and administrative services of existing HE institutions and to develop cooperation among countries on quality assurance within the scope of the Bologna Process. The Higher Education Institutions Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Commission (YÖDEK), which consists of nine members elected by the Interuniversity Board and a student representative determined by the National Student Council, is responsible for the organization and coordination of academic evaluation and quality improvement studies in HE institutions, within the scope of this authorizing regulation (YÖDEK, 2005). YÖDEK prepared the *Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Guide in Higher Education Institutions*, which defines the processes that will guide the execution of academic evaluation and quality improvement studies in HE institutions in the light of the relevant regulation, with a focus on quality improvement (YÖDEK, 2007). The *Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation*, which came into effect as of being published in the *Official Gazette* dated 23.07.2015 and numbered 29423, amend-



ed the earlier YÖDEK Regulation and a new Higher Education Quality Board was established within the scope of the new regulation. With the *Omnibus Law* dated 01.07.2017 and numbered 7033 and the addition made to the 35th Article of the Law No. 2547, the internal and external quality assurance accreditation processes require evaluations according to national and international quality standards regarding the quality levels of education, research activities and administrative services of HE institutions. Executing the processes of authorizing independent external evaluation bodies begun to be carried out by an institution with administrative and financial autonomy, public legal personality and a special budget. The Higher Education Quality Board (YÖKAK), which was established to evaluate the quality assurance system in Türkiye, focuses on the concepts of accountability, transparency, and learning outcomes with an evidence-based approach and innovation. YÖKAK has brought an important dynamism to the HE quality processes with its trainings provided to the HE community, online visits, evaluation and training portals, and program accreditation agency registrations. YÖKAK, which guides HE institutions to establish and develop their own quality assurance systems, has three important objectives regarding quality assurance:

- Supporting the structuring of the internal quality system that focuses on the realization of the mission and objectives of HE institutions and the external evaluation of this system,
- Authorizing and recognizing national and international accreditation bodies, and,
- Disseminating a culture of quality assurance throughout the HE system.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The questions to be answered in the study were handled within the scope of the following:

- Thematic examination of the status reports of YÖKAK, which has been achieving its goals since 2015, within the scope of national evaluation and quality assurance report issued in 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- Comparing the results obtained in the study with the England's quality assurance and evaluation system demanded by other countries, based on the fact that 80% of the institutions that make up the HE system are overseas, and making suggestions for improvements in the sustainable development plans for quality assurance.

The results obtained in the study are important considering the institutional autonomy and leadership (YÖKAK, 2019a,b,c) studies, which form the heart of the Turkish quality assurance system and presenting suggestions for the crea-

tion of forward-looking missions. As such, this study seeks answers to the following research questions:

- What are the structures of the internal quality systems of Turkish HE institutions and how do they relate to the external evaluation processes of this Turkish national system?
- How are the authorization and recognition processes of national and international accreditation institutions of HE institutions carried out?
- What is the process for establishing and deepening the quality assurance culture throughout the Turkish HE system?
- When the works on improving quality in the HE institutions of England and Türkiye are comparatively examined, what are the similarities and differences between the English and the Turkish systems at both institutional and national levels?

Method

Since this study aimed to describe and examine a limited number of sources in depth, a case study design was used by following a qualitative paradigm. *Quality Assurance Evaluation Reports* published in Türkiye in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and 77 resources used in HE quality assurance activities in England were examined. The research in Türkiye regarding *Quality Assurance Evaluation Reports* published in 2016, 2017 and 2018 was deeply examined by using content analysis, and some thematic codes were obtained.

In the second stage of the study, the quality reports of a university in England evaluated by QAA were examined with the help of thematic codes obtained from the documents examined in Türkiye and evaluations were made through continuous comparisons. When the process of obtaining data is examined in the study, it can be said that content analysis was used, and summarizing of reports for each of the nation are used as a data collection tool.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the documents obtained in the analysis of the data were coded by two different experts at different times and placed in the appropriate themes. The codes created by the researchers at different times were consistent with the compared themes. The findings obtained by each researcher were interpreted and an opportunity was created for verification, support, or cross-validation. In addition, the reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to calculate the interrater reliability of the research. Based on this calculation [Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement)], the interrater reliability of the research was calculated as 81.81%. Reliability calculations over 70% are considered reliable for research purposes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Table 1.** Structuring of internal quality systems of higher education institutions and external evaluation processes of this system.

| Countries | Theme | Category | Code |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Türkiye | Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs) | Guide | Mission Evidence |
| England | | Status reports | Suitability for purpose Compliance with the guide Quality assurance system in the self-evaluation process of the institution Education and training in the self-evaluation process of the institution Research and development in the self-evaluation process of the institution Management system in the self-evaluation process of the institution |
| | Institutional external evaluation | Selection of evaluator teams | Demographic features General features Suggestions for the process |
| | | Improvements | Number of higher education institutions participating in the process Trainings Published documents |
| | | Missing aspects | Evaluation PDCA cycle Systematic structure |

Results

Examining the quality assurance status reports made for 2016, 2017 and 2018 in the context of the first question with the help of content analysis, the reports were grouped into two themes: institutional self-evaluation reports and institutional external evaluation. ■ Table 1 shows the themes, categories and codes revealed during the content analysis.

When the status reports made within the scope of quality assurance for 2016, 2017 and 2018 were examined in the context

of the second question with the help of content analysis, these reports were seen to gather under a single theme: *accreditation*.

■ Table 2 shows the themes, categories and codes revealed during the content analysis process.

Regarding the third question, when the quality assurance status reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 were examined with the help of content analysis, the reports were seen to fall under the theme of *disseminating the culture of quality assurance*. ■ Table 3 shows the themes, categories, and codes revealed during the content analysis.

Table 2. Execution of authorization and recognition processes of national and international accreditation institutions of higher education institutions.

| Countries | Theme | Category | Code |
|-----------|---------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Türkiye | Accreditation | Carried out | Published reports Organizations in the registration process |
| England | | Proposed | Dissemination |

Table 3. The process of disseminating the culture of quality assurance in the higher education system.

| Countries | Theme | Category | Code |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Türkiye | Dissemination of a quality assurance culture | Carried out | Board activities |
| England | | Proposed | Awareness |



Discussion

The mission and evidence sub-categories in the guide category under the theme of the institution's self-evaluation reports are handled with an evidence-based approach in all reports about how the cycles in the institution's quality assurance system are closed. The *mission* sub-category appears in the following form in the 2016 Report, "Include information on how the institution defines the main components of the internal quality assurance system, how it manages it, how it makes improvements and how it closes the cycle, in line with its mission and objectives"; and appears in the following form in the 2017 report, "Within the scope of the 'mission differentiation and specialization' project supported by the Council of Higher Education, universities are expected to focus on one of the issues such as education, research and technology production, regional development". It also appears in the following form in the 2018 report, "To guide the continuous development of HE institutions in line with their mission and goals, adopting the understanding of transparency and accountability regarding the use of resources, increasing the contribution of stakeholders to HE outputs, increasing the international reputation and competitiveness of the Turkish HE system, being among the most important achievements of the quality assurance system studies that stand out".

The status reports category under the theme of *self-evaluation reports* is explained in the context of management system in the process of the institution includes "compliance with the guide", "quality assurance system in the self-evaluation process", "education and training in the self-evaluation process", "research and development in the self-evaluation process" and "institutional self-evaluation". When the "quality assurance system in the self-evaluation process of the institution" sub-category is considered in the context of the 2017 report, it is seen that "the mechanisms related to the quality assurance system have started to be structured but have not yet been fully implemented in all education-training, research-development and administrative processes". When the reports for 2017 and 2018 are examined, it is seen that "improvement efforts in practices continue, awareness develops at the national level, and the culture of quality assurance is becoming more and more widespread" compared to the report of 2016.

The "Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle" sub-category under the "deficient aspects" category under the institutional external evaluation theme took its place in all three reports by emphasizing its importance. In the 2016 report, it was reported that "there is a need for improvement in the operation of the Implementation, Control and Action processes in the PDCA cycle, and especially the 'Check' – 'Take action' stages of the

PDCA cycle are areas open to improvement in terms of closing the cycles in the quality assurance system." In the 2017 report, it was added that "the most obvious problem in the field of research in HE institutions is related to the inability to operate the PDCA cycle in R&D activities and the lack of appropriate mechanisms for monitoring research outputs". In the 2018 report, attention was drawn to the "non-effective implementation of the PDCA cycle".

In the "dissemination" sub-category under the "recommended" sub-category under the accreditation theme, there are statements in the reports regarding the dissemination of accreditation, which is very important in the internationalization of HE institutions. In the 2016 report, it is aimed to "encourage and support program accreditation at all levels, to extend accreditation studies and to ensure their sustainability". When the 2017 report is examined, "the existence of program accreditation studies" is emphasized, and in the 2018 report, it is stated that "the number of HE institutions with accredited programs increased by 27% compared to the previous year's report".

When the "Awareness" sub-theme under the "Recommended" category of the theme of *disseminating the quality assurance culture* is examined in all reports, "The revival of the quality assurance tools (Bologna process, YÖDEK, etc.) that have been placed in the HE quality assurance system in Türkiye for many years" is central in all reports. However, it is seen as stated in the 2018 report, that "the quality assurance system does not yet cover all components".

The Processes of Structuring the Internal Quality Systems of HE Institutions and the External Evaluation of this System

Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs)

The theme of the *institutional self-evaluation reports* has two categories, namely, guiding QA and submitting status reports. The themes, categories and codes associations in question are shared below.

Guide

While it was stated that the "Mission, Vision, Values and Goals of the Institution" should be discussed in detail in the reports, in 2017 and 2018, for these topics, by preparing the annual evaluation reports that are required to be submitted by the HE institutions within the scope of the "Mission Differentiation Project of the Higher Education Council in the desired format. They are also expected to submit an additional report regarding the mission differentiation". The mission, vision, values and goals are handled in more detail by emphasizing that they should pro-



vide both statements as well as detailed explanations. The results of mission differentiation under the heading of *Mission and Strategic Purposes* which is found under the heading of Quality Assurance in the 2018 guide were included in the self-evaluation of the institution in the context of quality assurance. In addition, a self-evaluation of the Evaluation of Mission-Oriented Universities in the Higher Education Evaluation and Quality Assurance 2017 Status Report prepared in 2017 and the Evaluation of Mission-Oriented Universities thematically in the Higher Education Evaluation and Quality Assurance Status Report prepared in 2018, with a separate approach that requires an additional report within the differentiation of oriented-missions. It can be considered as a reflection of the universities' clear definition of their own mission and vision (i.e., the fact that they clearly state their duties and responsibilities, and that they set a clear plan regarding the implementation of their goals and objectives).

In the guide for 2018, HE institutions are expected to demonstrate their strengths and areas of improvement with evidence similar to the concrete evidence examples in the guide (When the development from the first guide is examined, it is seen that a more evidence-based approach has evolved over time.)

Status reports

When the Quality Assurance Status Reports are examined, it is seen that HE institutions prepare their reports in line with the *Institutional Self-Evaluation Report Preparation Guide*, which is revealed in detail for each year, as an annual Quality Assurance Status Report is published by YÖKAK based on the data submitted that is aligned with this guide. The guides of the mentioned years were examined in detail, and the similarities and differences revealed by establishing a connection with the Higher Education Quality Assurance Status Reports. All of the guides include General Information, Information about the Institution, Quality Assurance System, Education-Training, Research-Development and Social Contribution, Management System, Results and Evaluation.

In addition, the Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports, in the *Quality Assurance Status Reports*, were examined under the heading of suitability for purpose and compliance with the guide in 2016 and 2017, and in 2018 it was examined under the headings of Quality Assurance System in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Process, Education and Training in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Process, Research and Development in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Process, and Management System in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Process. According to the aforementioned evaluations in the 2016 status report, HE insti-

tutions were urged to submit an self-evaluation report in accordance with the guide, support their reports with quantitative and qualitative evidence, use plain and understandable language in the report, update contact information, evaluate internal quality in line with the mission and objectives of the institution, the system should be well defined, how this system is managed, how the improvements are made in the process and how the cycle are closed, and the dissemination of the integrated information management system. The status report of 2017 suggested that HE institutions share their self-evaluation reports on their web pages, and that the personnel working on this subject should be given training regarding compliance with the guide. In addition, it was emphasized that although HE institutions adopted a more evidence-based approach compared to the previous year, they needed to make improvements in these matters.

In addition, it was emphasized that they should make explanations providing a more transparent approach about the functioning of quality assurance, education, research, management and PDCA cycles, and the improvements made in this context. In the status report of 2018, it was observed that the mechanisms related to the Quality Assurance System of HE institutions began to be structured, but not yet implemented in all education-training, research-development and administrative processes. Quality policies had been prepared and announced in most of the institutions and quality commissions were created in all institutions. It is stated that duties, responsibilities, and activities are defined. The defined processes carried out in the design and approval process of the programs of HE institutions are not at a sufficient level of maturity in the process of monitoring and updating the programs, and they need to make improvements by reviewing the education-training processes in order to complete the PDCA cycles. In addition, it was stated that good practice examples were observed within the scope of "student-centered learning, teaching and evaluation" criteria and "learning resources, accessibility and support" criteria.

The processes related to the recruitment, appointment, promotion, and course assignment of educational staff in institutions are well-defined, but the training of trainers, the continuation of their professional development, and the improvement of their teaching skills need further support. It is stated that there are areas open to improvement in the subjects of how the research and development performance of HE institutions is monitored and evaluated, how the research and development performance is improved, and the monitoring and evaluation of the competencies of the research staff. While improvements were observed in the criteria of "structure of management and administrative units", "information management system", "efficiency and accountability of management" in the previous year,



there was a slight decrease in the criteria of "resource management" and "quality of services procured from outside the institution". In addition, establishing integrated information management systems to enable more efficient and effective maintenance and evaluation of all institutional processes is recommended. The level of organizational awareness regarding this issue has increased compared to previous years.

Institutional External Evaluation

The institutional external evaluation theme consists of the categories of selection of evaluator teams, improvements, and deficiencies.

Selection of evaluator teams

Selection of evaluator teams were explained with codes covering demographic characteristics, general characteristics and suggestions for the process. In 2016, 1341 people applied for to become an evaluator to take part in the first external evaluation process. A pool of evaluators was created by considering the competencies of the candidates for each of the subject areas. A total of 106 evaluators (80 professors, 6 associate professors, 18 administrative staff) from 56 different HE institutions took part in the institutional external evaluation process in 2016. In the first year's institutional external evaluation process, 32% of those who contributed as evaluators were from engineering, 17% from social sciences, 16% from health sciences, 11% from science, and the remaining others (24%) from agriculture, veterinary and educational sciences. In the 2016 status report, the following suggestions were made: (1) the evaluation team must get to know the institution better, since the efficiency of the external evaluation process can only be achieved by the team getting to know the institution with good preliminary preparation, (2) competent academic and administrative staff should be included in the evaluator pool, (3) have all evaluators sign an "Ethics Agreement", (4) avoid conflicts or conflicts of interest between the institutions to be evaluated and the evaluators, (5) update the evaluator training and include case studies, and (6) share the experience of the evaluator candidates with the institution in question.

As to overall skills, the report states that 45% of the team members have strong analytical skills and analytical skills, 32% are team-oriented, 12% have both features, 5% have the ability to bring different perspectives, and 3% are task-oriented. When the results regarding the behavioral characteristics of the team members in the team are examined, it is seen that the team members exhibit a harmonious blend in general. In addition, the fact that the team members made a little more effort to get to know the institution better before the field visit result-

ed in them asking more accurate questions during the visit. However, paying more attention to the timing was mentioned as a factor open to improvement.

While the evaluator pool was created in the external evaluation process in 2017, new evaluator applications were received in addition to the participation of the evaluators in 2016, and a total of 2596 applications were received. A pool of evaluators was created by considering the qualifications of the candidates in terms of quality assurance. A total of 280 evaluator candidates, 232 of them academic (199 professors, 31 associate professors and 2 assistant professors) and 48 of them administrative staff, were included in the evaluator pool created in this context. Formed by 36% female and 64% male evaluator candidates, 12% of them were from engineering, 11% from science, 21% from social sciences and 8% from educational sciences; the rest were from the fields of veterinary, agriculture, medicine and health sciences. This report recommended making evaluator application announcements more effective, emphasized stakeholder diversity in the formation of the evaluation team, and making evaluator training more effective.

In 2018, while the evaluator pool was created in the external evaluation process, new evaluator applications were received, including the evaluators who had been assigned as of 2016. A total of 2433 individuals, including academic (Professor, Associate Professor and Doctor Lecturer) and administrative staff (Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, Faculty/Institute Secretary, Head of Department and Quality Coordinator) from HE institutions, applied for the new evaluator candidacy. An evaluator pool of 528 people was created by considering criteria such as their competency, title, and geographical location at the time of their application. 464 of these evaluators participated in the *Institutional External Evaluation Program Evaluator Training*. Unlike previous years, a Jigsaw (separation and merger) technique was used in this training. Before the training, the subject of the content was divided into three sub-titles; these titles were numbered and distributed to the participants. First of all, the participants with the same numbered content left their groups and formed a new group with other participants with the same number and discussed the subject in line with the sub-title in their hands. Afterwards, they returned to their first group and shared the topics they discussed in detail with the other participants in their groups. The second activity of the face-to-face process was the group discussion about the case studies and problem situations presented to them and sharing their solution suggestions with other groups. At the end of the face-to-face activities, the participants were asked to evaluate the process and the moderators. As a result of the evaluation of the questionnaires filled by 416 out of 464



people who participated in the evaluator training, the participants in general stated that their satisfaction level was high in terms of “finding the training program useful”, “giving general information about the evaluation process of the training program” and “sharing experiences through teamwork”.

In the report of 2018, the following suggestions are made: The travel, daily and accommodation expenses of the evaluation team are not paid by the evaluated institution, the costs are absorbed by YÖKAK, there is a material and moral reward system, the evaluators do not make comparisons between the HE institution they work for and the HE institution they evaluate, and separate teams will be given to experienced team leaders. Additional suggestions include: A training session can be beneficial, evaluators gain awareness of foundation/state HE institution through inspection/evaluation, it is pleasing to include student evaluators in teams, support student evaluators to take a more active role in the process, academic, administrative and student evaluators contribute with different tasks and evaluators work in the team and emphasizing that their responsibilities are similar, while forming teams; taking into account whether the institution subject to evaluation is a foundation or a state HE institution, the other members will be chosen mainly from experienced people on the condition that the team heads are composed of experienced people, the teams are formed at least two months in advance to be able to review the documents required for the evaluation of the institution, the number of team members visits are increased. Having an alternate evaluator member for the city where the institution to be examined is located is also suggested.

Improvements

The *Improvements* category was analyzed with the number of HE institutions participating in the process, trainings, and published documents codes.

13 meetings were held, 20 HE institutions were involved in the evaluation, a training workshop was given to the evaluation team, and the place of external evaluation in the Council of Higher Education, mission differentiation and specialization (diversity), institutional autonomy (flexible structure) and competitive advantage, Institutional Self-Evaluation Report Preparation Guide and the preparation of Institutional External Evaluation Criteria and their sharing with HE institutions were improvements added in 2016.

Fifty HE institutions participated in the process in 2017 (an increase from the year before) was considered as an improvement. With the reshaping of the Higher Education Quality Board, important steps were taken for improvement. The most important of these was the publication of the

Institutional External Evaluation Directive, the Directive on the Authorization of External Evaluation and Accreditation Institutions Operating in the Field of Higher Education, and the revision of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and the Institutional External Evaluation Criteria guides and sharing them with HE institutions. In 2016, 99% of the institutions submitted their Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports and published them on their website; however, this percentage was 100% in 2017.

In 2018, the Institutional External Evaluation Program Evaluator Training Report for the Institutional External Evaluator Training was published and given to evaluator candidates by YÖKAK in line with the feedback from 2016 and 2017. English Preparatory Schools were evaluated thematically within the framework of “Minimum Standards”. In addition, “Mission-Oriented Evaluation” was handled as a separate theme. The board members and consultants provided mentoring services for the writing of the self-evaluation report, the structuring of the internal quality assurance system, and the scope of the external evaluation program to the institutions to be externally evaluated. Every month, meetings were held with experts with domestic and international experience on “Quality in Higher Education” on the external evaluation processes of universities, the reliability of the evaluation process and the internal quality assurance system. The participation of 2 foundation universities and 1 vocational school in the evaluation process was mentioned as an improvement. With the launch of the Quality Assurance Management Information System, Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports were uploaded to Quality Assurance Management Information System for the first time. The report also stated that national awareness for external evaluation had improved compared to previous years.

Shortcomings

The category of shortcomings was examined by evaluation, PDCA cycle and systematic building codes.

Regarding the ISERs prepared by HE institutions, the report published in 2016 states that there is a need to increase the awareness level of quality assurance and external evaluation process. There is a lack of concrete information and evidence for “Monitoring and Improvement” in the reports. Since the quality assurance system is limited to ISO processes and the corporate external evaluation process is perceived as “audit”, the fact that quantitative data is at the forefront without mentioning process management is one of the most common problems in the reports. The reports contain outdated or inconsistent information about the external evaluation experience. The following are recommended: (1) publishing an ISER Preparation



Guide supported by examples will help ensure that the concepts in the institution external evaluation checklist are understood by the evaluation teams and institutions in the same way, (2) accessing the forms and documents related to the external evaluation process on the Board web page in Word format, provides the highest efficiency due to the short duration of the field visits, (3) adding activities such as preliminary preparation, time extension, and monitoring, (4) increasing the competence of the evaluator team, (5) listening to the subordinates and superiors together during the field visit and ensuring the active participation of the students, (6) clarifying the times in the KGBR preparation calendar, (7) removing the scope of the institutional external evaluation process from the ESG effect and continuing to approach the EVA IEP process, (8) focusing on a general evaluation rather than a checklist, (9) explaining the content of Institutional Self-Evaluation Report specifically every year with four main questions for external evaluation, and finally, and (10) applying different criteria for respectively, vocational schools and foundation universities.

Although there is some progress in showing evidence in the preparation of Institutional Self-Evaluation Report in 2017, it seems insufficient. There are serious deficiencies in closing the cycles in the quality assurance system, especially in the “Check-Act” stages of the PDCA cycle. External evaluation does not aim at standardization; on the contrary, it is recommended to raise awareness that institutions should be structured in line with their missions. Thus, increasing the number of training programs, preparing content for awareness, and diversifying the participant profile are recommended. In addition, YÖKAK should play an informative and educational role in order for HE institutions to immediately establish quality policies, determine the method they should follow to reach their defined visions, and increase awareness and training activities.

All programs in 2018 were recommended to consult the opinions of internal and external stakeholders in the program design and update studies of HE institutions, to close the cycles from the PDCA cycle, to systematically monitor whether the program qualifications have been achieved, and to ensure the compatibility of program qualifications with the Turkish Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

Authorization and Recognition of National and International HE Accreditation Institutions

The accreditation theme consists of two categories: completed and proposed. The *completed* category examined published reports and organizations in the registration process; the proposed category was examined with the help of dissemination codes.

Completed

In 2016, the Higher Education Quality Board published the *Directive on the Authorization of External Evaluation and Accreditation Institutions Operating in the Field of Higher Education* for the authorization and recognition of accreditation institutions.

In 2017, the Board completed the sub-legislation studies for the registration of external evaluation and accreditation bodies. regarding the process of authorizing national accreditation bodies, No. 7033 published in the Official Gazette dated 1 July 2017; according to the “Law on the Amendment of Certain Statutory Decrees for the Development of Industry and Support of Production” and the Additional Article 35 added to the Higher Education Law No. 2547, the authority to decide on the authorization of accreditation bodies was directly given to YKK.

In the report of 2016, there is no organization that registered or extended the registration period.

In 2017, three institutions (MÜDEK, TEPDAD, VEDEK) applied to renew the registration certificate and four institutions (EPDAD, FEDAK, İLEDAK, TURAK) applied for registration for the first time, and six national (MÜDEK, TEPDAD, VEDEK, FEDEK, HEPDAK, MİAK) and eight international accreditation organizations (AACSB, ABET, AHPGS, AQAS, ASIIN, EQUIS, FIBBA, IACBE) continued their activities. The number of accredited undergraduate programs in 2016 (433) increased to 504 in 2017.

In 2018, the Board evaluated the registration applications of a total of nine accreditation bodies, five of which were new and four were within the scope of renewal of the registration period. Seven criteria for the process of authorization of national accreditation institutions, and two criteria for the authorization of international accreditation institutions are clearly revealed in detail by YÖKAK.

In 2018, there were 11 accreditation institutions holding the Quality Evaluation Registration Certificate.

Proposed

In the report published in 2016, HE institutions are recommended to expand accreditation studies at program level and to encourage and support program accreditation at all levels. Programs accredited in 2017 were limited to undergraduate programs only. This is recommended for all levels in the report.

In the report published in 2018, expanding accreditation activities and accreditation of institutions that will operate in different fields is encouraged.



The Process of Disseminating the Culture of Quality Assurance in the HE System

Promoting a Culture of Quality Assurance

The theme of disseminating the culture of quality assurance was analyzed under the categories *completed* and *proposed*. The *completed* category was examined with the help of the Board activities and the proposed category with the help of awareness codes.

Completed

In 2016, the “Committee for Dissemination of the Quality Assurance Culture” was established to ensure the dissemination and internalization of the quality assurance approach.

In 2017, 15 presentations were made on quality assurance and Quality Board activities in HE.

In 2018, the dissemination of the quality assurance culture was clearly set out within the strategic objectives. The level of awareness of institutions on this issue increased compared to previous years.

Proposed

The Council of Higher Education was suggested to increase the participant profile by expanding the information, promotion, and training activities aimed at disseminating the culture of quality assurance in HE in the 2016 report.

Organizing training programs to raise awareness for institutions and to spread the culture of quality assurance were recommended in 2017. That the quality culture had not spread to all institutional units still remained to need improvement in 2018.

Comparative Process of Quality Studies Carried out in HE Institutions in England

The management structure of universities in the UK, whose quality assurance and development activities are generally within the country and abroad; negotiation structure of universities (academic boards and infrastructures, faculty committees, academic quality regulation processes, and research programs) (Gemikonakli, 2009). The evaluation of the academic quality/regulation processes of universities is based on ensuring that students have a high-quality learning experience, determining the qualification standards at appropriate levels, and securing and maintaining quality and standards in the future. HE institutions offer their own diplomas by opening their programs in other regions outside the borders of the country (articulation) and award their own diploma (collaboration) by assigning academic staff to another HE institution outside the country in England (Gemikonakli, Kindberg, & Dikerdem, 2008; Middlesex University, 2008/2009). Universities are obliged to prepare a

report every year. However, when necessary, QAA conducts inspections. The purpose of universities in making annual reports is supporting staff in maintaining academic standards, assessing student experience and student outcomes, assessing and improving the quality of educational support, communicating general quality assurance issues to the university and identifying good practices in learning, teaching and assessment and sharing them widely to improve quality. The reporting processes for quality assessment of HE institutions in England are similar to Türkiye.

A very detailed definition has been provided for the units with internship application in the self-evaluation process in England. The criteria of the evaluation process are clearly explained by universities for internship applications. In addition, student questionnaires are one of the most important components in the preparation of self-evaluation reports. These questionnaires were derived from students by using The National Student Survey (NSS), the Graduate Taught Experience Questionnaire (PTES), the Graduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PRES) and the Module feedback.

The UK has established specific criteria for selecting the evaluator team in the institutional external evaluation process, which are listed in detail below.

- The External Evaluator should have appropriate stance, expertise and experience in the subject and audit being audited. This can be determined by considering their academic and/or professional qualifications; current (or last if retired) post or workplace; the scope of studies carried out in HE; momentarily involved in research or scientific and professional activities in the field of quality assurance and development.
- External Evaluators should be drawn, if possible, from a variety of institutional or professional contexts. If more than one evaluator is required for the event, they must not be from the same institution. It should be avoided that there is a conflict of interest or conflict between the institutions of the External Evaluators and the university that will enter the evaluation process.
- External Evaluators must not have previous close involvement with the University so as not to compromise their impartiality. In the last three years, the proposed External Evaluator must not be a member of the university or a close relative, administrator or student.
- External Evaluators should normally not be used more than once in an 18-month period. Exceptions may occur when the availability of potential Assessors is limited.

Universities appear to have benefited heavily from student participation in promoting quality assurance to continuously



improve the student experience at universities, to provide opportunities for students to participate in quality assurance and development processes to provide feedback, and to provide opportunities for the university to ‘close the feedback cycle’ (Mitchell, Sheriff, & Georgiadou, 2008). For this purpose, student representatives, program representatives, student surveys, campus forums, and student memberships in committees and panels are involved.

Since 80% of HE institutions are located abroad, accreditation in the UK is carried out to eliminate the problems of students and stakeholders such as curricula and teaching methods related to their ethnic origins, to ensure that the institution personnel can work at high quality without harming the reliability of the institution and to ensure continuity in taking the necessary responsibilities for their students (asic.org.uk). Accreditation bodies can be national or international. Universities in the country can accredit each other.

Suggestions

Considering the UK’s quality assurance and accreditation processes, it can be recommended to open a program in other universities outside the borders of the country and to give their diploma (articulation) and to implement the systems (collaboration) that assigns their own diplomas by assigning their academic staff to the quality systems in Türkiye. However, it should be noted that the micro-credit system is also very important within the scope of cooperation to be developed within the scope of quality assurance. Micro-credits (micro-credentials) are recognized as an innovation with transformative potential for working life during and after HE (Kır & Bozkurt, 2022). In today’s world of rapid change, diploma programs can be slow to show a quick reflex to change and manage the transformation. It is also recommended to develop and articulate collaborations with these programs in accordance with the skill-oriented micro-credit system. The mission of the UK in the quality assurance and evaluation system can support the steps that Türkiye will take within the scope of internationalization. Thus, institutional autonomy and leadership efforts in the sustainable development plans of institutions can be shared at the international level. In addition, it can be suggested that the national capital remains within the borders of the country by ensuring that universities are competent by YÖKAK as institutions accrediting each other within the borders of the country. Finally, expanding the participation of students studying at universities at all levels in decision-making and development processes e.g., forming a student senate) may also be beneficial in establishing and disseminating a culture of quality assurance and ensuring objectivity.

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