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Research Article

What Do Institutional Internal Evaluation Reports Say? Content Analysis of Fully Accredited Universities

Kurumsal İç Değerlendirme Raporları Ne Anlatıyor? Tam Akredite Üniversitelerin İçerik Analizi

Elif Yıldırım[1], Muazzezz Çakır Aydın[1]*

[1]Konya Teknik Üniversitesi, Rektörlük, Kalite Koordinatörlüğü, Konya, Türkiye

Abstract: Quality assurance in higher education is of critical importance in terms of increasing the competitiveness of institutions as well as creating trust in students, academics and society. This study examines the Institutional Internal Evaluation Reports of 19 state universities that have received full accreditation by the Higher Education Quality Board in Turkey until February 2025 using the content analysis method. The study aims to determine the strengths, common practices and areas of development regarding the quality assurance systems of universities. The findings show that action plans, stakeholder participation and strategic planning have become widespread in quality management processes; however, differences between institutions continue in monitoring process documents, ISO standards, digitalization and social contribution activities. Exemplary practices have been encountered, especially in terms of the integration of leadership, governance and student support mechanisms into quality processes. As a result, it has been determined that the full accreditation process contributes to the institutionalization of quality culture; however, more inclusive, digital and stakeholder-focused approaches are needed for the sustainability of this process.

Keywords: Institutional Accreditation, Internal Evaluation, Higher Education Quality Assurance, IIER, Content Analysis

Özet:Yükseköğretimde kalite güvencesi, kurumların rekabet gücünü artırmasının yanı sıra öğrenci, akademisyen ve toplum nezdinde güven yaratması açısından kritik öneme sahiptir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu tarafından 2025 yılı Şubat ayına kadar tam akreditasyon almış 19 devlet Üniversitesinin Kurumsal İç Değerlendirme Raporlarını içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelemektedir. Araştırmada, Üniversitelerin kalite güvencesi sistemlerine ilişkin güçlü yönleri, ortak uygulamaları ve gelişime açık alanları belirlemek amaçlanmıştır. Bulgular, kalite yönetimi süreçlerinde eylem planı, paydaş katılımı ve stratejik planlamanın yaygınlaştığını; ancak süreç belgeleri, ISO standartları, dijitalleşme ve toplumsal katkı faaliyetlerinin izlenmesinde kurumlar arası farklılıkların sürdüğünü göstermektedir. Özellikle liderlik, yönetişim ve öğrenci destek mekanizmalarının kalite süreçlerine entegrasyonu açısından örnek uygulamalara rastlanmıştır. Sonuç olarak, tam akreditasyon sürecinin kalite kültürünün kurumsallaşmasına katkı sunduğu; ancak bu sürecin sürdürülebilirliği için daha kapsayıcı, dijital ve paydaş odaklı yaklaşımlara ihtiyaç duyulduğu belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurumsal Akreditasyon, İç Değerlendirme, Yükseköğretim Kalite Güvencesi, KİDR, İçerik Analizi

1. Introduction

In the modern world, higher education institutions are in intense competition on a global scale (Köksal, 2020, p.58). This competition forces universities to stand out not only in knowledge production but also in terms of innovation, sustainability and the qualifications of their graduates. Accordingly, quality assurance systems now constitute a central pillar of higher education (Uludag et al., 2021, p. 93). Quality assurance does not only target academic excellence; it also covers multidimensional performance areas such as stakeholder satisfaction, graduate employment, scientific research, management structure and social contribution (Isik & Beykoz, 2018, p.8; Telli, 2023, p.328; Yesilbas Ozenc, 2024, p. 498).

One of the main goals of higher education institutions is to provide students with effective, qualified and universally accredited education and training opportunities. This goal can only be made sustainable with strong quality assurance systems and effective evaluation processes (Kayyali, 2023, p. 1). In order to maintain and improve the quality of education, institutions should establish and implement processes based on continuous

* İletişim Yazarı / *Corresponding author.*
✉ mcaydin@ktun.edu.tr

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improvement at the structural and administrative level. In this way, national and international recognition can be achieved (Isik & Beykoz, 2018, p. 8).

Quality assurance systems also strengthen the relationship between higher education and employment markets, ensuring that graduates are equipped with basic skills and are trained in line with employer expectations (Skolnik, 2016, p.316). In this perspective, quality requires the evaluation of not only educational activities but also research activities, institutional management and interaction with stakeholders as a whole (Yontem & Mazman, 2023, p.39).

Quality assurance systems are operated as a whole and are directly related to the accreditation process. The effective management of these processes contributes to the internal improvement processes of institutions and increases their prestige at national and international levels. The higher education institutional accreditation program in Turkey started in 2020 under the responsibility of the Higher Education Quality Board (HEQB). With this process, higher education institutions were encouraged to establish their quality assurance systems, prepare internal evaluation reports with a continuous improvement approach and participate in external evaluation processes.

There are very few studies conducted in this field in Turkish higher education that guide the institutional accreditation processes of universities. One of the pioneering studies in this field, Ayvaz et al. (2016), has examined in detail the formation process of the European Higher Education Quality Assurance Area and the establishment, functions, objectives and quality measurement and review mechanisms of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). In the same study, a comprehensive evaluation was made within the framework of the higher education quality assurance system in Turkey, internal and external evaluation processes, evaluator roles and legal legislation. Fidan et al. (2022) examined the perspectives of academics on accreditation processes in higher education using the content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods, and presented perceptions, challenges and suggestions regarding the processes. In the study conducted by Yilmaz et al. (2023), "good examples" encountered in the program accreditation process were evaluated and the contribution of these examples to the quality culture was discussed. Aziz (2020) examined the quality assurance system implemented in communication faculties in Turkey and the functioning of the accreditation process; in particular, he analyzed how field-specific applications were integrated into the quality assurance system. Ozcicek and Karaca (2019) evaluated quality assessment and accreditation processes at the program level in their study specific to engineering education. Tasci and Lapcin (2023), a more recent study focusing on institutional accreditation, examined the institutional accreditation reports of three higher education institutions that successfully completed the institutional accreditation process using the content analysis method and categorized the themes that emerged during this process. While the existing literature largely focuses on the accreditation processes carried out at the program level and the opinions of academicians about these processes, in this study, all universities that successfully completed the full accreditation process were comprehensively examined through the Institutional Internal Evaluation Reports (IIER) prepared by the institutions themselves. Thus, a content analysis was conducted and a practical guide was presented to guide higher education institutions that have just started the institutional accreditation process.

In this study, IIERs of all state universities (n=19) that have earned full accreditation by HEQB in Turkey until February 2025 were examined using the content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods. Within the scope of the analysis, the quality assurance systems of the universities were thematically classified under the titles of leadership, governance and quality, education-training, research-development and social contribution, and the level of institutionalization, application examples and development areas in each dimension were examined in detail. The findings obtained showed that the similarities between institutions were especially concentrated in the areas of leadership and education-training; on the other hand, the application differences became apparent in the areas of research-development and social contribution. In addition, it was determined that strategic planning, stakeholder participation and internal evaluation mechanisms have become widespread in quality processes; however, the development needs in digitalization, graduate tracking systems and student-centered applications continue. In this respect, this study provides evaluations that will support the sustainability of the quality assurance systems of universities fully accredited by HEQB, and also creates a guiding framework for universities preparing for the accreditation process.

1.1. Quality Assurance System in Higher Education

Quality assurance policies and processes in higher education have been implemented for many years around the world, and have a history of over forty years in countries such as Europe, New Zealand, Hong Kong and the USA. These processes vary according to the higher edu-

cation structure of each country and are shaped by various models, from internal quality assurance systems to external audit mechanisms.

For example, in the Netherlands, a special structure called 'Higher Education Inspectorate' has been established to ensure the sustainability of quality assurance processes. Within the scope of this structure, an 'inspector' is appointed to each university and it is aimed to find solutions to the problems that may be encountered in quality assurance and accreditation processes (Ozguzel, 2016, p. 21). Moreover, in the Netherlands, the government can directly intervene in the accreditation process by evaluating programmes and institutions that are not in demand (Shah et al., 2011, p. 477).

Sweden, on the other hand, adopts a different approach and prioritises internal quality assurance mechanisms of institutions instead of external evaluation. The National Agency for Higher Education conducts its audits based on the internal dynamics of institutions and supports quality processes within the framework of mutual interaction (Isik & Beykoz, 2018, pp. 13-14).

In the UK, quality assurance systems are more focussed on external quality assurance. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) ensures that quality standards are monitored by subjecting higher education institutions to external evaluation. This system is based on peer review and external reference points are integrated into quality processes (Kumar et al., 2020, p. 252).

In the United States, the accreditation process is generally voluntary. However, this process plays a critical role in terms of university recognition, financial support and student mobility (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023, p. 4).

In order to ensure the quality of higher education in Middle Eastern countries, quality assurance processes have been structured with a system and process-oriented approach. In this context, 19 standards have been set for institutional accreditation assessment. In South Africa, the quality assurance and accreditation process is carried out with a 'fit for purpose' approach and is based on the degree to which institutions achieve their missions and contribute to national priorities.

In New Zealand and Australia, an accreditation system based on external evaluation is applied. Institutions and programmes are evaluated by independent organisations and quality assurance processes are monitored externally (Shah et al., 2011, p. 477).

In Turkey, the HEQB is the supreme organisation responsible for the quality assurance processes of higher education institutions. Established in 2016 with an autonomous structure, HEQB aims to subject higher education institutions to external evaluation and institutionalise national quality standards. In this way, it is aimed for universities to reach certain standards not only in education and training but also in areas such as research, management and contribution to society (Yilmaz et al., 2023, p. 68).

In recent years, the interest of universities and programmes in accreditation processes has increased in Turkey. In addition to the mobility of students and academic staff, the effort to increase the international recognition of diplomas has also been effective in this increase. Especially within the scope of student exchange programmes carried out with European countries, the existence of accreditation processes provides an important advantage. These processes carried out within the scope of quality assurance support the establishment of a quality culture in higher education institutions and form a basis for sustainable development at both academic and administrative levels.

In Turkey, accreditation of programmes is carried out in line with the standards set by the relevant accreditation bodies. By applying to these bodies, universities certify the quality of their education programmes and thus gain national and international recognition. Institutionalisation of the quality assurance system in higher education institutions gains importance not only as an evaluation process but also as a strategic planning and continuous improvement tool.

1.2. Institutional Accreditation and Internal Evaluation Process

Although accreditation was initially seen as an assessment and quality assurance method applied only in the United States, today it has become a common practice in higher education on a global scale (Herdman, 2010, p.3). The European University Association defines accreditation as 'the assessment of the compliance of higher education institutions with national and international quality standards' and considers it as one of the basic components of the quality assurance system (Semerci et al., 2021, p.3; EUA, 2015).

In Turkey, quality assurance and accreditation practices have been on the agenda of higher education institutions especially since the 2000s, and various structural transformations have been experienced in this process in order to establish a quality culture. However, in this process, various difficulties were encountered at the institutional level regarding sustainable quality management (Ozen, 2022, p.8; Alpaydin & Topal, 2021, p.233).

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Accreditation is an external quality assurance mechanism that systematically assesses whether higher education institutions and programmes comply with established quality standards (Javed & Alenezi, 2023, p.4). In Turkey, the organisation responsible for the regulation and execution of these processes is the Higher Education Quality Board (HEQB, 2025).

The institutional accreditation process begins with internal evaluation reports, in which institutions analyse their current situation through self-assessment and identify areas for improvement. Internal evaluation reports have a wide range of evaluation areas covering the institution's teaching activities, research capacity, management structure and social contribution processes (Cheng, 2020, p.72; Husain & Ali, 2019, p.55). These reports not only reflect the current situation, but also provide data for strategic planning processes (Tariq & Farooq, 2022, p.147). Thus, internal evaluation becomes a learning process that strengthens the capacity of organisations to manage quality within themselves (Yesilbas Özenc, 2024, p.503).

There are two main types of accreditation applied in higher education institutions. The first one is institutional accreditation, in which the entire academic, administrative and financial structure of the institution is evaluated with a holistic approach (Alpaydin & Topal, 2021, p.233). The second is programme accreditation, where only a specific academic programme is evaluated within the scope of quality standards (Ozcicek & Karaca, 2019, p.123).

The Institutional Accreditation Programme (IAP) is a comprehensive external evaluation process that evaluates the processes of higher education institutions in the fields of quality assurance, education-training, research and development, social contribution and governance in accordance with the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle (HEQB, 2025). This process is carried out by evaluation teams assigned by HEQB in line with the Criteria for Institutional External Evaluation and Accreditation and the Guidelines for Institutional External Evaluation and Accreditation. During the evaluation process, institutions are visited in two stages (preliminary visit and field visit), and then Institutional Accreditation Reports (IAR) are prepared to provide data for HEQB's final decision-making process (Yilmaz et al., 2023, p.78).

The IAP assessment consists of four main headings:

- Leadership, Governance and Quality (300 points),
- Education and Training (400 points),
- Research and Development (200 points),
- Social Contribution (100 points).

As a result of the evaluation over a total of 1000 points;

- 'Full accreditation' (5 years) for institutions with 650 and above points,
- 'Conditional accreditation' (2 years) for institutions scoring between 500-649 points,

Institutions with less than 500 points are given the decision of 'denial of accreditation' (HEQB, 2025, p.22). In particular, obtaining at least 280 points from the 'Education and Training' title is a prerequisite for full accreditation. If this criterion is not met, full accreditation is not granted even if the overall score is sufficient. Accreditation is not only an evaluation process but also a mechanism for establishing a culture of accountability, transparency and continuous improvement in higher education (Alpaydin & Topal, 2021, p.233; ENQA, 2015). Programme accreditation is a specialised type of accreditation applied to improve the quality of education in certain disciplines and to secure professional qualifications (Tasci & Lapcin, 2023, p.2). Thanks to this type of accreditation, the professional competences of graduates are registered by independent organisations and the trust in the higher education system increases (Kilicaslan, 2020, p.12).

2. Methodology

In this study, the IIERs of the universities entitled to receive a full accreditation certificate until February 2025 were analysed by content analysis method. Content analysis is considered as a technique that enables the collection and analysis of text content (Neuman, 2012). In other words, content analysis can be defined as a research method that systematically examines the explicit or implicit messages contained in texts, makes sense through categories, and tries to reveal the contexts that are not visible on the surface of the text (Gokce, 2019). In this study, the institutional internal evaluation reports of state universities in Turkey that have been awarded full accreditation certificates were analysed by content analysis method. Institutional internal evaluation reports of universities with full accreditation certificates were obtained through the institutional page of HEQB. There are a total of 27 universities, 19 public and 9 foundation universities, which were entitled to receive the full accreditation certificate within the specified date range. Since state and foundation universities have different financing and management dynamics, only state universities were included in the study for a more homogenous analysis. Another inclusion criterion was the requirement for universities to have a full accreditation certificate before February 2025. In this

context, 19 state universities that met the inclusion criteria were taken into consideration within the scope of the study. In total, 19 IIERs were analysed, comprising approximately 1241 pages of qualitative data.

The IIERs included in the study were analysed in line with the criteria determined by HEQB and a chart consisting of categories, themes and codes determined by two expert evaluators. The categories were: general evaluation; leadership, management and quality; education - training, research - development; and social contribution. There are three themes and 19 codes in the general evaluation category; four themes and 32 codes in the leadership, management and quality category; seven themes and 13 codes in the education-training category; two themes and 6 codes in the research and development category; and two themes and 3 codes in the social contribution category. All IIERs were analysed in line with the prepared chart and scored by two experts in terms of the categories, themes and codes determined. To ensure transparency and clarity in the coding process, representative excerpts from the IIERs that exemplify the application of specific codes were also compiled. The examples of coded expressions are presented in ▶**Table 7** in the Appendix section.

After the scoring was completed, the agreement between the two experts was evaluated using the formula Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement) suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). In content analysis, a 70% or higher agreement rate among experts is considered sufficient (Kaltakcı vd. 2017). Accordingly, the agreement values for each code for the determined categories were calculated between 0.89 and 1.00 in the general evaluation category, 0.77 and 1.00 in category A, 0.83 and 1.00 in category B, 0.94 and 1.00 in category C, 0.88 and 1.00 in category D and 0.86 and 1.00 in the maturity levels score analysis. The codes with low agreement were re-evaluated and the final codes were determined. The descriptive statistics of 19 universities were analysed in detail based on the final codes.

In addition to the scoring and agreement analysis, examples of how specific codes were applied to real textual expressions in the IIERs were included to provide clarity and transparency in the coding process. These code examples illustrate how themes and sub-themes were operationalized in practice. The sample expressions used in the coding process are presented in ▶**Table 7** in the Appendix section of the study.

3. Findings

In this part of the study, the findings obtained from the content analysis of the IIERs of 19 state universities were analysed in detail. Themes and codes in five categories were examined using different descriptive statistics, and the results were interpreted and compared.

3.1. General Evaluation

In this category, issues such as quality management, stakeholder engagement, process management and documentation were considered. Basically, it provides information for the organization to evaluate its current situation and formulate strategies for the future. Considering the themes of action plan, process management, quality

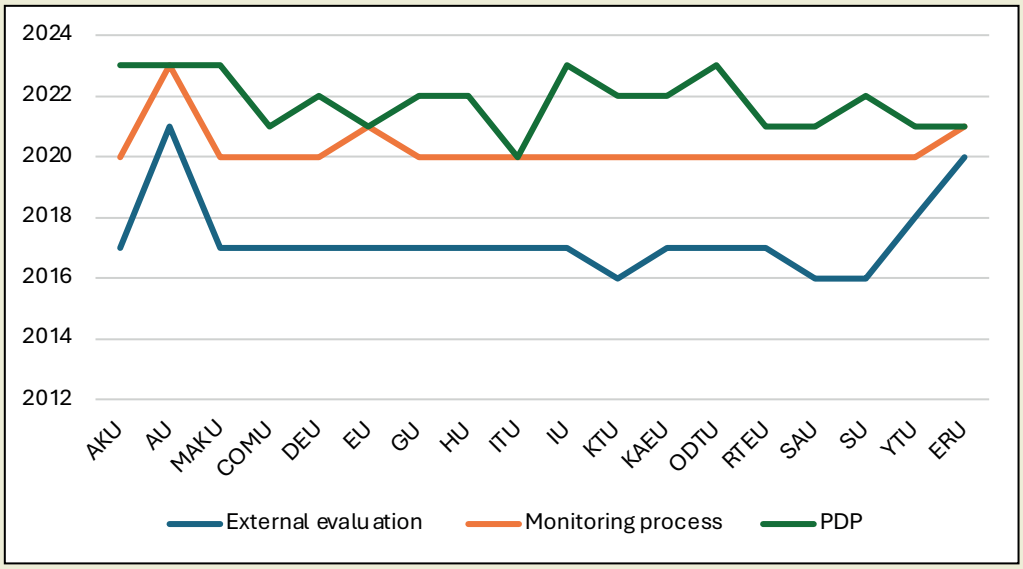

Figure 1. Timeline of Evaluation Processes in Accredited Universities

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standards and commission work, universities' perspectives on continuous improvement and quality assurance processes were investigated in detail. In addition, the study aimed to evaluate the processes by examining the current structures of the universities and IAP process calendars.

▶**Figure 1** showed that for most universities, there were 3 to 5 years between external evaluation and the IAP process. Universities that completed the evaluation process in 2016 generally completed the monitoring process in 2020 and the IAP process in 2021-2022. In 2017, most of the universities that completed the external evaluation process went through the monitoring process in 2020 and completed the PDP process between 2021-2023. In general, there was an average of 3 years between the external evaluation and monitoring processes of universities, while there was an average of 4.5 years between the external evaluation and the award of the institutional accreditation certificate. ERU, however, completed its external evaluation, monitoring, and PDP processes within a single year.

▶**Figure 2** showed that AKDU had the highest number of faculties, while AU and HU had the highest number of institutes. AKU, AU, and IU had more vocational schools compared to other universities, while MAKU had the highest number of colleges. These findings indicate that academic structures vary among universities and that each institution tends to specialize in line with its mission and vision.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Codes in General Evaluation Category

Code	n	Percent
Action Plan/ Future Plan	19	100.00
Stakeholder Engagement	19	100.00
Process Cards/ Process Handbook	15	78.95
Commission for A	18	94.74
Commission for B	18	94.74
Commission for C	16	84.21
Commission for D	15	78.95
Quality Handbook/ Guide	18	94.74
ISO 9001	13	68.42
Management Review Meeting (MRM)	11	57.89

According to ▶**Table 1**, action plan/ future plan (100%) and stakeholder engagement (100%) were common elements in all universities that successfully completed the IAP process, indicating that quality processes are carried out with a planning and stakeholder-based approach. The presence of a quality handbook/ guide (94.74%) and A - D commissions (78.95% - 94.74%) in almost all of the universities included in the study reveals that quality management is structured and disaggregated according to the main criteria set by HEQB. However, it is also evident that the structure for community contribution processes is lacking in some universities. In addition, the relatively low adoption of process cards/ process hansbook (78.95%) suggests that process management is not fully documented in some universities. Furthermore, the lower implementation rates of ISO 9001 (68.42%) and MRM (57.89%) processes

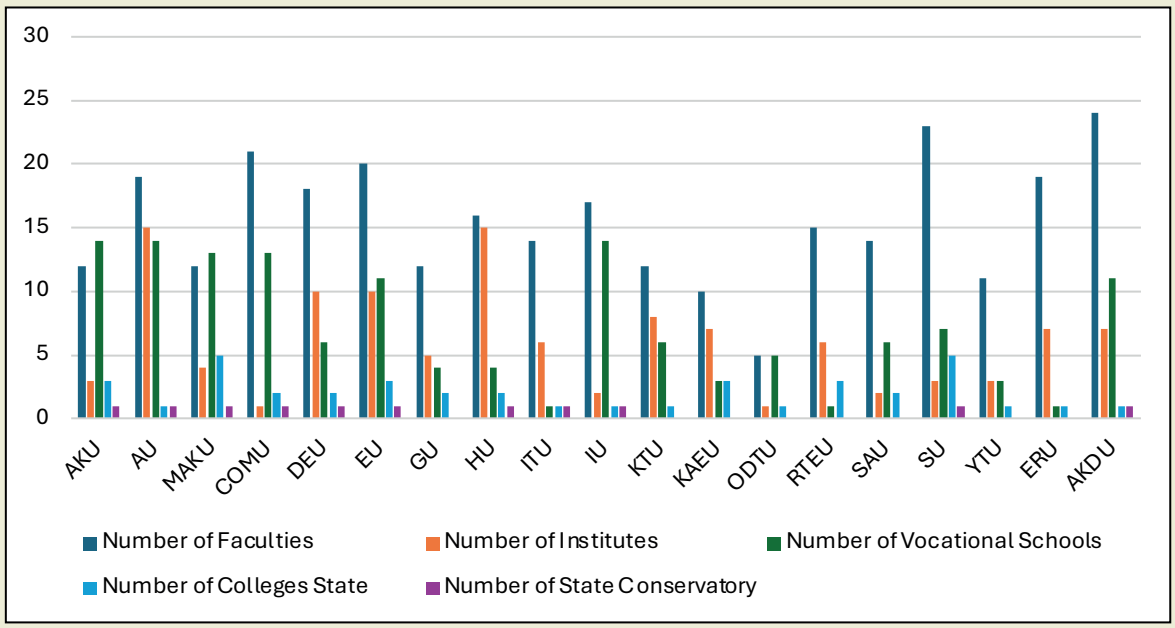

Figure 2. Distribution of Academic Unit Types Across Full Accredited Universities

compared to other components suggest that some universities are less active in adopting international quality standards and periodically reviewing their quality management processes. These findings generally indicate that quality management processes are largely institutionalized in universities with full accreditation, but the level of implementation of specific components (e.g. ISO 9001, MRM and process cards) varies depending on the institution.

3.2. Leadership, Management and Quality

The leadership, management and quality category covers the key components of universities' institutional management processes, decision-making mechanisms and quality assurance systems. The main purpose of defining this category is to analyze the level of sustainable management, stakeholder engagement and quality assurance of higher education institutions. The leadership dimension included universities' strategic decision-making processes, governance structures, and institutional management systems, while the management dimension addressed elements such as transparency of processes, job descriptions, internal control mechanisms, and information security. The quality dimension showed the sustainable development of education, research, and social contribution activities through processes such as self-assessment, peer assessment, risk analysis, and internal/external stakeholder feedback.

According to ▶**Table 2**, all universities (100%) that successfully completed the IAP process had an organizational chart, workflow, academic and administrative staff surveys, student survey, self-assessment and alumni information system. This suggests that during the IAP process, universities attach importance to transparency in their management structures and improvement processes based on stakeholder feedback. Similarly, the fact that student representative (94.74%), departmental quality ambassadors (94.74%), and external stakeholder survey (94.74%) systems were implemented in most universities indicates that institutions carry out quality processes in a planned and systematic manner. Additionally, the active involvement of stakeholders reveals that quality management processes are participatory.

Moreover, the implementation of systems such as the university advisory board (89.47%), risk analysis (89.47%), in-service trainings (89.47%), continuing relations with the university after graduation (89.47%), taking measures through SP indicators (89.47%), and graduate satisfaction surveys (89.47%) in most universities shows that the IAP process has led universities to involve not only current students but also alumni and other external stakeholders. In addition, relatively lower rates of implementation of practices such as survey automation system (63.16%), website quality pages (63.16%), administrative staff performance evaluation (63.16%), ISO 27001 Information Security Certificate (68.42%) indicate different practices and deficiencies in

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Codes in Leadership, Management and Quality Category

Code	n	Percent	Code	n	Percent
Organization Chart	19	100.00	Survey Automation System	12	63.16
Workflow	19	100.00	Academic Staff Survey	19	100.00
Job Descriptions	17	89.47	Administrative Staff Survey	19	100.00
Student Commission	7	36.84	In-Service Trainings	17	89.47
Student Representative	18	94.74	Administrative Staff Performance Evaluation	12	63.16
University Advisory Board	17	89.47	External Stakeholder Survey	18	94.74
Department Quality Ambassadors/ Officers	18	94.74	Student Survey	19	100.00
Website Quality Pages	12	63.16	Graduates' participation in the advisory board	8	42.11
Peer Review	11	57.89	Graduate information system	19	100.00
Self-Assessment	19	100.00	Events and meetings where graduates are included as stakeholders	16	84.21
Number of accredited units ($\bar{X}$ ±SD (Min-Max))	26.32 ± 16.55 (5-60)		Relationship with the university after graduation	17	89.47
Risk Analysis	17	89.47	Graduate satisfaction survey	17	89.47
Leadership Process Feedback	15	78.95	Graduate association	4	21.05
Taking measures with SP indicators	17	89.47	Stakeholder views on internationalization processes	15	78.95
Information Management System (IMS) Commission Directive	9	47.37	International week event	4	21.05
ISO 27001 Information Security Certificate	13	68.42	International Advisory Board	7	36.84

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these areas among universities.

Most universities that completed the IAP process had fewer graduates associations (21.05%), international week events (21.05%) and international advisory boards (36.84%). While these practices do not negatively affect the IAP process, focusing more on these areas is crucial for enhancing global visibility and alumni relations.

The evidence indicated that the frequencies of the codes in the leadership, management and quality category showed that universities that had completed the IAP process had common practices. In addition, it was determined that there were areas open to development, especially in some areas such as information security, internationalization processes and graduate relations.

3.3. Education and Training

The education and training category covers practices to improve the quality of academic processes in universities. This category was identified to assess universities' strategies to improve the quality of teaching, practices for the development of students and academics, and academic support mechanisms.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Codes in Education and Training Category

Code	n	Percent
Turkish Higher Education Qualifications Framework (THQF) Alignment and Curriculum Revision Guide	16	84.21
Bologna Information Packages Tracking	19	100.00
Training of Trainers	19	100.00
Diploma Supplement	18	94.74
Social Transcript	7	36.84
Easy Access to Academic Counseling (Support Desk)	17	89.47
Academic Counseling Satisfaction Survey	11	57.89
Barrier-Free University Award	19	100.00
Orientation for International Students	12	63.16
Monitoring Student Activities	12	63.16
Activity Evaluation Survey	11	57.89
Educational / Academic Performance Award	19	100.00
Student Dean's Office	8	42.11

According to ▶Table 3, Bologna information packages, training of trainers, barrier-free university award, and educational/academic performance award were available in all universities (100%). This indicates that universities that successfully completed the IAP process attach great importance to harmonizing their academic processes with international standards and to the professional development of educators. Practices such as diploma supplement, easy access to academic counseling, and THQF Alignment and Curriculum Revision Guide were also widely implemented in most universities (84.21%–94.74%). This shows that universities with institutional accreditation have developed academic support systems for students and staff incentive mechanisms.

Monitoring student activities (63.16%) and orientation programs for international students (63.16%) were relatively common in most universities, indicating the importance attached to student-centered services. The relatively low rate of implementation of the academic counseling satisfaction survey (57.89%) indicates that student feedback mechanisms are not systematically implemented in all universities. Furthermore, the presence of social transcripts (36.84%) and student dean's office (42.11%) in some universities with institutional accreditation suggests partial implementation, andappears not to directly affect the IAP process.

As a result, it observed that various systems to improve quality in education and training processes are widespread in universities with full accreditation, but there are differences between universities in some practices. In particular, disseminating student support systems and monitoring mechanisms as exemplary practices would contribute to strengthening quality assurance in higher education.

3.4. Research and Development

The research and development (R&D) category aims to increase the scientific productivity of universities, encourage the participation of academic staff in research activities and support the development of innovative projects. This category included important indicators to understand how universities manage and support research processes.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Codes in Research and Development Category

Code	n	Percent
Applications for Improving the BAP Budget	19	100.00
Academic Incentive Module	13	68.42
Award Commission Directive	16	84.21
Training/ Events for R&D	19	100.00
R&D Software (AVESIS)	16	84.21
Dean of Research	5	26.32

Table 4 showed that all state universities with full accreditation (100%) had practices to improve the BAP budget and training/activities for R&D. This shows that universities with full accreditation attach great

importance to financially supporting researchers and provide them with access to various activities to continue their academic development. In addition, the fact that 84.21% of universities had an award commission directive reveals that universities with full accreditation have a policy of rewarding academic achievements. Furthermore, the R&D software (AVESIS) application, which contributes to the digitalization of research processes, was available in 84.21% of universities and the academic incentive module was available in 68.42% of universities. This indicates that systems that facilitate the management of academic data are widely used in the universities included in the study. In addition, only 26.32% of the universities included in the study had a research deanship organization. While this is not seen as a factor affecting the IAP process, the study found that most universities conduct research management through different units (faculties, institutes, etc.). In conclusion, universities with institutional accreditation were found to attach great importance to R&D processes and had established various financial and academic mechanisms to support researchers.

3.5. Social Contribution

The social contribution category includes social responsibility projects, public benefit activities and sustainable development initiatives that universities undertake for society beyond their academic activities. In this context, universities undertake missions not only in the fields of education and research, but also in generating solutions to social problems, providing social benefits and supporting social development at local or national level. This category contains important indicators for understanding the mechanisms by which universities plan, implement and evaluate social responsibility projects.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Codes in Social Contribution Category

Code	n	Percent
Orientation to Social Responsibility Projects	19	100.00
Survey/ Monitoring of Social Contribution Activities	16	84.21
Social Contribution Policies	19	100.00

According to ▶**Table 5**, all universities included in the study (100%) had social contribution policies and practices to increase social responsibility projects. This suggests that universities with full accreditation implement social contribution activities within the framework of certain policies and encourage students and staff to engage in social responsibility projects.

Moreover, while 84.21% of the universities evaluated social contribution activities through various mechanisms, some universities were found to have deficiencies in this regard. This implies that some state universities with full accreditation focused only on the implementation of community-oriented activities, and feedback mechanisms were identified as an area for improvement. The evidence indicates that universities with institutional accreditation meet certain standards in managing community outreach processes but differ in measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of these processes.

3.6. Universities According to Maturity Levels

In this section, the maturity level scores given to universities that had received institutional accreditation certificates within the scope of four basic areas determined by HEQB (A: Leadership, quality and governance; B: Education and training; C: Research and development; D: Social contribution) and 46 criteria were examined and the universities were compared according to their average scores.

Table 6. The Mean Maturity Levels of Fully Accredited Universities

Universities	A	B	C	D	Total
AKU	3.94	4.00	3.57	3.67	3.80
AU	3.78	3.94	3.71	4.33	3.94
MAKU	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
COMU	4.17	4.17	3.86	4.33	4.13
DEU	4.83	4.67	4.60	5.00	4.78
EU	4.33	4.33	4.28	5.00	4.49
GU	4.17	3.94	4.29	4.00	4.10
HU	4.06	4.17	4.00	4.00	4.06
ITU	4.00	4.00	4.71	4.33	4.26
IU	4.00	3.67	4.00	4.00	3.92
KTU	3.94	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.99
KAEU	4.00	4.00	3.43	4.00	3.86
ODTU	4.78	4.28	4.86	4.67	4.64
RTEU	4.78	4.22	4.00	3.33	4.08
SAU	4.39	4.17	4.00	3.67	4.06
SU	3.94	3.89	4.00	4.00	3.96
YTU	3.94	3.94	4.14	3.33	3.84
ERU	4.83	4.83	5.00	5.00	4.92
AKDU	4.00	4.06	4.00	4.00	4.02

According to ▶**Table 6**, the mean maturity level of fully accredited universities ranged between 3.80 and 4.92. ERU was found to have values very close to the maximum scores in all sub-dimensions (4.92) and achieved the highest overall average among the fully accredited public universities. This suggests that ERU has integrated quality management systems in all areas, can effectively operate the institutional monitoring and continuous improvement cycle, and has exemplary practices for other institutions.

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DEU and ODTU were also among the highest-performing institutions among the fully accredited universities, with overall averages of 4.78 and 4.64, respectively. The high scores of these two universities, especially in D (Social contribution) and C (R&D), indicate that not only are their internal quality assurance systems strong, but their community outreach and knowledge creation processes are as well.

Among the universities with average scores in the 4.00-4.30 band, well-established institutions such as ITU, COMU, HU, EU, GU, and AKDU stood out. It can be said that these universities have integrated quality management systems into all areas and are able to effectively operate the institutional monitoring and continuous improvement cycle with internal and external stakeholders.

Furthermore, some universities had lower averages in certain dimensions. For example, AKU, RTEU, and YTU had institutional practices in place, especially in dimensions C and D, but had some shortcomings in continuous monitoring and improvement cycles.

In summary, despite the relative homogeneity in institutional maturity levels among fully accredited public universities, R&D and social contribution are areas where further development is needed in terms of the sustainability of quality management systems.

4. Discussion

This study analyzed the IIERs of 19 public universities in Turkey that had been fully accredited by the HEQB until February 2025 and comprehensively revealed the current status of quality assurance systems in these institutions. The findings showed that quality assurance processes had reached a certain level of institutionalization in most Universities; however, there are also significant differences in implementation. These findings emphasize that quality management in higher education should be established not only structurally but also functionally (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008, p. 42).

The study found that key quality components such as action plan, strategic management approach and stakeholder engagement were common to almost all universities. This shows that the national quality standards defined by HEQB have been adopted and internalized by the institutions. Lucander and Christersson (2020, p. 140) emphasize that the involvement of internal stakeholders plays a decisive role for the effectiveness of quality processes. However, significant differences between Universities were observed in more technical components such as process cards, ISO standards (e.g. ISO 9001, ISO 27001) and digitization of quality management systems. Vorobyova et al. (2022, p.76) found that ISO standards are effective in improving quality in higher education institutions and increase their competitiveness on a global scale. In this study, the limited application of ISO showed that some institutions have not yet fully utilized this potential.

The clear definition of organizational structures for leadership, management and quality dimension and the widespread use of stakeholder feedback mechanisms could be considered a positive development. However, the integration of the obtained data into policy and practice processes is still debatable. The weakness of the ties established with graduates showed that universities were open to development in terms of lifelong learning and establishing sustainable relationships. In line with this, Atatekin and Dulupcu (2018, p. 23) emphasize that graduate tracking systems are critical not only for quality management but also for the validity of program outcomes. The employment of graduates is one of the strongest indicators of the extent to which a program achieves its educational objectives. Among the reasons for this weakness, factors such as institutional capacity differences between universities, human resource deficiencies and graduate students not registering in digital systems came to the fore. The fact that strategies for graduate relations were often short-term or remained in the digital design phase led to these relations not being structured in a sustainable way. In addition, the dispersion of graduates to various cities could be considered as a factor that made tracking difficult.

In the education and training dimension, compliance with the Bologna process, the widespread use of diploma supplement applications and the existence of systems for the development of academic staff were considered as positive steps towards international standards. Kayyali's (2023, p. 3) study reveals that meeting students' expectations of a quality, transformative learning experience is one of the main motivations for quality assurance systems. In this context, the existence of practices such as training of trainers and academic performance awards are important. However, the lack of student-centered innovations such as social transcripts suggested that there was a need to support the student experience in a more holistic way. Tasci and Lapcin (2023, p. 14) state that the integration of student feedback mechanisms into strategic planning and improvement processes is essential for the functionality of the quality assurance system.

In the R&D dimension, the majority of universities had budgetary and incentive systems to support researchers. However, the lack of software that allowed digital

monitoring of research processes and the widespread absence of special structures such as research deans were not common. These evidence indicates strategic research policies need to be supported by institutional structures, not only at the document level. Javed and Alenezi (2023, p.5) argue that sustainable quality assurance systems should be embedded in governance structures that support the research capacity of Universities.

In the social contribution dimension, it was observed that all universities carried out social responsibility projects in line with certain policies, but there was a lack of consistency in the monitoring and evaluation processes of these projects. Similar to these findings, Yilmaz et al. (2023, p. 85) emphasize that community outreach activities should be designed not only as activities but also as sustainable initiatives that are integrated into the institutional strategy. This inconsistency was due to universities having different institutional priorities, limited budgets allocated to social contribution activities and lack of performance measurement systems. In addition, the fact that these projects were mostly carried out without establishing strong and continuous cooperation mechanisms with external stakeholders made it difficult to conduct healthy impact analyses. The socio-economic structure of the region where the university was located could also directly affect the practices in the field of social contribution; for example, while universities located in developing regions developed more intensive projects targeting local needs, the integration of these projects with institutional strategy might be limited.

Finally, there was a high degree of similarity in the maturity scores that universities gave themselves in the QIDRs, especially in areas A and B, while differences were more pronounced in areas C and D. This situation shows that quality systems are more institutionalized in some dimensions and open to development in some areas. The diversity of applications across institutions makes it necessary for quality assurance systems to be established not only formally but also functionally.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research provided a general picture of the current situation by analyzing the quality assurance systems of state universities that had received institutional accreditation certificates in a multidimensional manner. According to the findings, Universities with full accreditation had structured their quality assurance systems to a great extent and had increased the level of institutionalization in key areas such as internal and external stakeholder engagement and strategic planning. However, it was determined that there were important areas of development in areas such as process management, digitalization, student support mechanisms and the effectiveness level of social contribution activities. In line with these findings, the following recommendations will shed light on the sustainability of the quality assurance system of accredited Universities and the establishment of the quality system of Universities in the process of accreditation:

Short-Term

- Quality assurance processes should be digitalized through the widespread adoption of digital platforms, thereby enhancing traceability and minimizing reliance on document-based systems.
- Stakeholder feedback, including that from students, academic and administrative staff, and external partners, should be systematically integrated into institutional decision-making processes to reinforce continuous quality improvement.
- The effectiveness of social contribution activities should be regularly assessed based on structured feedback mechanisms, and such activities should be revised accordingly to ensure their relevance and impact.

Medium-Term

- Good practices should be disseminated and inter-institutional collaboration should be facilitated through platforms supported by the Higher Education Quality Board (HEQB), in order to foster a widespread and sustainable quality culture across institutions.
- Student support mechanisms should be diversified through the implementation of innovative, student-centered approaches—such as social transcripts and structured mentoring programs—that contribute to students' academic success, personal growth, and career readiness.

Long-Term

- Institutional research structures should be strengthened by transitioning from project-based frameworks to strategic, integrated research governance models, such as the establishment of research deanships or equivalent organizational units.
- A culture of quality should be fully embraced by institutional leadership, and organizational capacity should be enhanced through the development of quality-oriented leadership and the systematic investment in qualified human resources.

The evidence indicates, it is seen that there has been a significant transformation in the quality assurance sys-

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tems of higher education institutions in Turkey with the accreditation process; however, in order for this transformation to deepen qualitatively, institutional capacity must be strengthened, leadership must embrace quality, and student-research-society oriented policies must be developed in coordination.

6. Limitations and directions for further studies

The biggest limitation of the study was that foundation universities were not included in the study since foundation and state universities have different administrative structures. In future studies, foundation universities can also be included and structural differences between universities can also be analysed.

Abbreviations

AKU: Afyon Kocatepe University, AU: Ankara University, MAKU: Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, COMU: Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, DEU: Dokuz Eylul University, EU: Ege Univerity, GU: Gazi University, HU: Hacettepe University, ITU: Istanbul Technik University, IU: Istanbul University, KTU: Karadeniz Technical University, KAEU: Kirşehir Ahi Evran University, ODTU: Middle Dogu Technical University, RTEU: Recep Tayyyip Erdogan University, SAU: Sakarya University, SU: Selcuk University, YTU: Yıldız Technical University, ERU: Erciyes University, AKDU: Akdeniz University.

Research Ethics

Not applicable.

Author Contributions

Kavramsallaştırma / *Conceptualization*: [Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Metodoloji / *Methodology*: [Elif Yıldırım], Formal Analiz / *Formal Analysis*: [Elif Yıldırım], Araştırma / *Investigation*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Kaynaklar / *Resources*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Veri Düzenleme / *Data Curation*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Yazım - İlk Taslak Hazırlığı / *Writing - Original Draft Preparation*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Yazım - Gözden Geçirme ve Düzenleme / *Writing - Review & Editing*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Görselleştirme / *Visualization*: [Elif Yıldırım], Denetim / *Supervision*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Proje Yönetimi / *Project Administration*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın], Fon Sağlama / *Funding Acquisition*: [Elif Yıldırım/Muazzez Çakır Aydın]

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Orcid

Elif Yıldırım https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3171-655X

Muazzezz Çakir Aydın https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9925-5350

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7. Appendix

Table 7. Sample Codes and Categories Extracted from IIERs

Category	Code Name	Sample Phrase from Reports
General Evaluation	Action Plan/ Future Plan	AKU: "… Kurumsal Akreditasyon Raporunda yer alan önerilerden hareketle bir kalite eylem planı hazırlanarak uygulamaya konulmuştur"
	Stakeholder Engagement	COMU: "Üniversitemiz tüm süreçlerinde paydaş katılımının arttırılması için 01.03.2024 tarihli ve 07/03 no.lu Senato Kararı gereği Üniversite …"
	Process Cards/ Process Handbook	AU: "Üniversitenin pek çok biriminde süreç kartları kullanılmaktadır."
	Quality Handbook/ Guide	ERU: "ERU Kalite El Kitabının güncellenmesi ve …"
	ISO 9001	RTEU: "ISO 9001 Kalite Yönetim Sistemi: ilk belgelendirme 2019, ikinci belgelendirme 2023."
A	Organization Chart	AKDU: "Bu bilgilere üniversite organizasyon şeması ve "Organizasyon El Kitabında" detaylı olarak yer verilmiştir."
	Workflow	SU: "… birim yöneticisinin onayıyla yapılan iş akışları çerçevesinde izlenmekte …"
	Job Descriptions	ITU: "… görev tanımlarına ilgili birimin web sayfalarından erişilebilmektedir."
	Student Commission	GU: "…aynı zamanda öğrenci temsilcisi bulunmaktadır."
	Student Representative	KTU: "Ayrıca, KTÜ Kalite Komisyonu Üyesi Öğrenci temsilcisi …"
B	TYQF Alignment and Curriculum Revision Guide	AKDU: "… "Program Tasarımı, Değerlendirilmesi ve Güncellenmesi Kılavuzu" doğrultusunda gerçekleştirilmekte ve …"
	Bologna Information Packages Tracking	COMU: "Bologna Bilgi Girişi Kontrol Listesi ile sistematik olarak takip edilmekte ve içerik iyileştirmesi sağlanmaktadır."
	Training of Trainers	DEU: "2024'te "Eğiticinin Eğitimi" programı IAPsamında ayrıca, akademik araştırmalar …"
	Diploma Supplement	AU: "Diploma almaya hak kazanan öğrencilere, bir de diploma eki verilmektedir."
	Social Transcript	GU: "Sosyal Transkript Sistemi, Gazi Üniversitesi öğrencilerinin …"
C	Applications for Improving the BAP Budget	MAKU: "Araştırma kaynaklarının yeterliliği belirli aralıklarla gerçekleştirilen anketlerle takip edilmekte olup talepler üzerine ek kaynaklar eklenmektedir"
	Academic Incentive Module	DEU: "… akademik teşvik başvuruları, Akademik Teşvik Ödeneği Süreç Yönetim Sistemi (ATÖSİS) …"
	Award Commission Directive	EU: "Ege Üniversitesi Ödül Yönergesi IAPsamında performansın desteklenmesi .."
	Training/ Events for R&D	GU: "Öğretim elemanlarının araştırma yetkinliklerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik … çalıştaylar, kurslar, uygulamalı eğitimler, konferanslar düzenlenerek araştırmacıların makale yazma…"
	R&D Software (AVESIS)	HU: "Akademik veriler, web tabanlı sistemler aracılığıyla takip edilmekte olup, bu süreçte BAPSİS, AVESİS ve DAPSİS gibi platformlar"
D	Orientation to Social Responsibility Projects	IU: "Toplumsal katkı faaliyetlerinin etkinliğini ölçmek amacıyla, Sosyal Sorumluluk Projeleri Performans Göstergeleri ve Raporları,"
	Survey/ Monitoring of Social Contribution Activities	KAEU: "Toplumsal katkı süreçlerinin geliştirilmesiamacıyla üniversite toplantılar, toplumsalalgı anketi, vb. kanallarla toplum paydaşlarının görüşlerini …"
	Social Contribution Policies	KTU: "Toplumsal katkı süreçlerinin yönetim ve organizasyonel yapısı, KTÜ'nün toplumsal katkı politikası ile uyumludur."