A Qualitative Analysis of Pearson-Assured Accreditation Processes in Schools of Foreign Languages in Türkiye*

Türkiye'de Pearson Assured Tarafından Akredite Edilen Yabancı Diller Yüksekokullarının Nitel Analizi

Sebahat ÇAKIRLAR** iD   **Demet YAYLI***** iD

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to find out the views of a group of instructors and the administrators of the School of Foreign Languages (SFLs) on the Pearson Assured (PA) accreditation process in terms of the quality management of their institutions. To achieve this purpose, we employed document review and semi-structured interviews. To analyze the data; therefore, we used both document analysis and content analysis. The document analysis showed that the PA accreditation provides basic quality measurements with examples so that institutions can present their quality performances with evidence in order to ensure that the requirements in several headings are met. The qualitative content analysis of the verbal data captured in interviews revealed a change in the participants' views in time. Despite the partially negative opinions on the process held before and during accreditation, the high workload and immense amount of time required to provide necessary evidence, the participants generally had favorable opinions of PA accreditation and stated their wishes for it to continue, believing that accreditation process contributes to the quality management of their institutions as a whole.

Keywords: Accreditation, quality management processes, Pearson Assured (PA) accreditation, Schools of Foreign Languages (SFL).

ÖZ: Bu çalışmanın amacı, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokullarında (YDYO) görevli bir grup öğretim elemanı ve yöneticisinin Pearson Assured (PA) akreditasyon sürecine ilişkin görüşlerini kurumlarının kalite yönetimi açısından ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu amaca ulaşmak için doküman incelemesi ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler kullandık. Bu nedenle, verileri analiz etmek için hem doküman analizi hem de içerik analizi uyguladık. Doküman analizi, PA akreditasyonunun, kurumların çeşitli başlıklardaki gereksinimlerin karşılanmasını sağlamak ve kalite performanslarını kanıtlarla sunabilmeleri için temel kalite ölçümlerini örneklerle sağladığını göstermiştir. Görüşmelerde toplanan sözlü verilerin niteliksel içerik analizi, katılımcıların görüşlerinde zaman içinde bir değişiklik olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Akreditasyon öncesi ve sırasında sürece ilişkin kısmen olumsuz görüşlere, gerekli kanıtları sağlamak için gereken yüksek iş yüküne ve çok uzun süreye rağmen, katılımcılar genellikle PA akreditasyonu hakkında olumlu görüşlere sahiptiler ve akreditasyon sürecinin bir bütün olarak kurumlarının kalite yönetimine katkıda bulunduğundan bu sürecin devam etmesini istediklerini belirttiler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Akreditasyon, kalite yönetim süreçleri, Pearson Assured (PA) akreditasyonu, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulları (YDYO).

In 2022, the latest statistical data from Statista (2023) indicated that approximately 1.5 billion individuals across the globe utilized English either as their primary language or as a secondary language. This unequivocally underscores the indisputable prominence of English as the predominant global language. Notably, the language has risen to prominence in concordance with the development of new technology, functioning as the spearhead of modern vocabulary. In line with this, Kırkgöz (2005) emphasizes that "English serves an instrumental value, a means of gaining access to better education and a more prestigious job with good benefits and prospects for promotion" (pp. 10-11). As a result, a growing number of people show a growing desire to study English, as seen by the constant increase in the number of English learners. Since "the impact of globalization and economic development has made English the language of opportunity and a vital means of improving an individual's prospects for well-paid employment" (British Council, 2013, p. 3), it has evolved into a language that everyone wishes to study and communicate in.

Türkiye is one of the countries that is actively working to improve the quality of its English language education. Notably, in its pursuit of European Union (EU) membership, Türkiye aligns its educational reforms with EU directives. Türkiye has been a full member in the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since 2001, demonstrating its dedication to this critical educational framework (EHEA, 2022). "The Bologna Process seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe. It established the EHEA to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, and to make higher education in Europe more attractive and competitive worldwide" (The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, 2022, p. 1). Knowing English in this sense is also extremely important for the Turkish educational system, as it is for all EU members and membership candidates, in order to ensure coherence, mobility, and accessibility.

Since English has grown in importance, "...continuing demand for English education has led policymakers in Türkiye and several countries in the Middle East region to appropriate English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education in the interest of the country" (Kırkgöz, 2019, p. 9). Thus, at tertiary level in Türkiye, there are some departments where the EMI is entirely either in Turkish or English, and others where it is split between Turkish and English, "and others where the medium of instruction is split between Turkish, English or other languages for some lessons" (Language Education, Council of Higher Education, COHE, 2022, p. 1). If students' English skills are below pre-intermediate level (B1), they must study English in preparatory programs until they reach that language level. Preparatory programs provide intensive English instruction to tertiary-level students prior to their enrollment in specific faculties for their chosen fields of study (Arslan, 2020). Preparatory programs are the language programs of the SFLs that have all the necessary curricula, teachers, and evaluation processes in place and aim to get students ready for their particular departments. Being the most qualified school and providing the best language education are highly crucial for SFLs in Türkiye when assisting students in meeting the language demands of their departments. The reputation of SFLs as 'the best and the most qualified' has an impact on families' and students' preferences for these schools.

In the context of 'quality' within educational institutions, the foregrounding themes frequently include quality management, which has its roots in Total Quality

Management (TQM) principles, as well as accreditation. Within the academic sphere, a substantial body of literature comprising journal articles, books, book chapters, as well as master's and doctoral theses has been dedicated to these topics. This intense academic interest demonstrates the importance of quality in the globalized and intensely competitive world of the twenty-first century. In Türkiye, all the universities are obligated to COHE which places a high value on the quality of education at Turkish universities, as well. Hence, within the setting of Türkiye, academic initiatives in the realms of 'educational quality' and 'accreditation' have taken relevance and have gradually increased over time.

In a quick glance over the recent research studies on PA accreditation processes undertaken in tertiary level institutions, we see that there is an increasing interest in years. In 2007, Uçar and Levent for instance published an article detailing the successful PA accreditation process in a preparatory school dedicated to foreign language instruction at a foundation university in Türkiye. Also, Karaferye (2017) investigated accrediting institutions, notably the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) and PA in this study and explained the steps for getting accreditation certifications from these entities. In 2019, Kalaçay (2019) completed his master's thesis with the primary goal of determining whether accreditation has had a positive impact on the quality of English education provided by these institutions from the perspectives of directors and managers overseeing preparatory schools and programs affiliated with foundation universities in Istanbul. Furthermore, Sarı examined the application of accrediting procedures within a language program located inside a university context in her master's thesis in 2019. Additionally, as part of his doctoral thesis in 2021, Ataman (2021) inquired about the viewpoints of 31 academics from 12 different universities that had been evaluated by PA, CEA, or Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services (EAQUALS). Furthermore, Doğan (2022) examined both national and foreign quality assurance companies working in the sector of language instruction in Türkiye in his study completed in 2022.

Indeed, the issue of quality and accreditation within SFLs has gained significance and evolved into a key research topic in recent decades. COHE itself has also carried out studies on this subject of interest. First of all, to ensure quality in all universities, there is a specific organization created by COHE which is called The Higher Education Quality Council of Türkiye (THEQC). Specifically, to increase and ensure the quality of education in SFLs, COHE and THEQC hold an agreement with the British Council, and they have been conducting some pilot studies in terms of quality management in the SFLs. While the pilot studies are still ongoing, there is not a specific organization or committee to guide and inspect specifically the language education of SFLs by COHE itself yet. Because of this, several SFLs have started to submit applications to accreditation organizations for their SFLs in an effort to raise their quality and educational standards or to demonstrate that the language education they offer is of an international standard.

However, a word of caution is due here about the importance of accreditation in relation to the EMI practices followed in Turkish universities. Although accredited status is a strongly wished entity, there are not many accreditation bodies available to provide it. "Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or program meets at least minimal standards for its faculty, curriculum, student services,

and libraries" (Obadara & Alaka, 2013, p. 39). CEA, EAQUALS, and PA are some of the accreditation organizations that SFLs in Türkiye have been accredited or in the process of being accredited by. Since especially the initial stages in accreditation process mainly depend on a careful analysis of requirements and standards emphasized in the websites of the accreditation organizations and providing evidence for these requirements, in this study we decided to delve into both the document side of the PA accreditation process and also the views of the two main stakeholders involved (i.e., instructors and administrators). Taking these two aspects into account and following the line of thought in earlier studies (Ataman, 2021; Doğan, 2022; Kalaçay, 2019; Karaferye, 2017; Sarı, 2019; Uçar & Levent, 2007), this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What does the document analysis reveal for the matches/mismatches between the documents which the selected SFLs shared publicly, and the standards specified in the PA Handbook 2021 under the headings of managing the organization, managing learning/training, and managing assessment?

2. How do the participating instructors and administrators employed in a selected group of SFLs in Türkiye view the PA accreditation process?

>   2.a. What are their views about the assessment procedures of the accreditation process (i.e., documentation process about quality management and its requirements)?
>
>   2.b. What are their views about the effects of the accreditation process on the quality of their work?

3. What are the participants' views about how this accreditation process could be improved?

Literature Review

Accreditation

Since the introduction of quality management into the field of education, accreditation has developed into one of the necessities for offering and improving the quality of educational institutions. Accreditation has a long history that extends back to the 1800s in the United Kingdom (UK). "The quality assurance system in higher education has emerged by engaging external examiners. The University of Durham, UK engaged Oxford examiners in the year 1832 to assure the public that the standard of its degree programs was equivalent to Oxford" (as cited in Kumar et al., 2021, p. 2). On the other hand, during the 1800s within the United States of America (USA), it was evident that numerous colleges and universities existed, each characterized by distinct admissions criteria, academic curricula, and degree completion durations, lacking uniform standards. This scenario posed considerable challenges for institutional administrators in discerning between educational institutions and their respective programs. Due to the discrepancies in academic programs and degree requirements, institutions encountered challenges in facilitating credit transfers for transferring students. Moreover, colleges and universities faced difficulties in assessing the equivalency of qualifications for international students seeking admission to college or graduate school. Consequently, accrediting bodies were instituted by colleges and universities as voluntary associations to offer transparency and set benchmarks for

curricula, degrees, and credit transfer protocols via a peer evaluation mechanism (Flores, 2015). "Accreditation, in education, is the process by which an association or agency evaluates an educational institution or program of study and formally recognizes it as having met and satisfied, or exceeded, certain predetermined requirements and criteria or standards of educational quality" (Al-Haj Ibrahim, 2014, p. 106).

Figure 1

Establishment of accrediting bodies, accords, and agreements, and regulatory/statutory bodies (as cited in Kumar et al., 2021, p. 3)
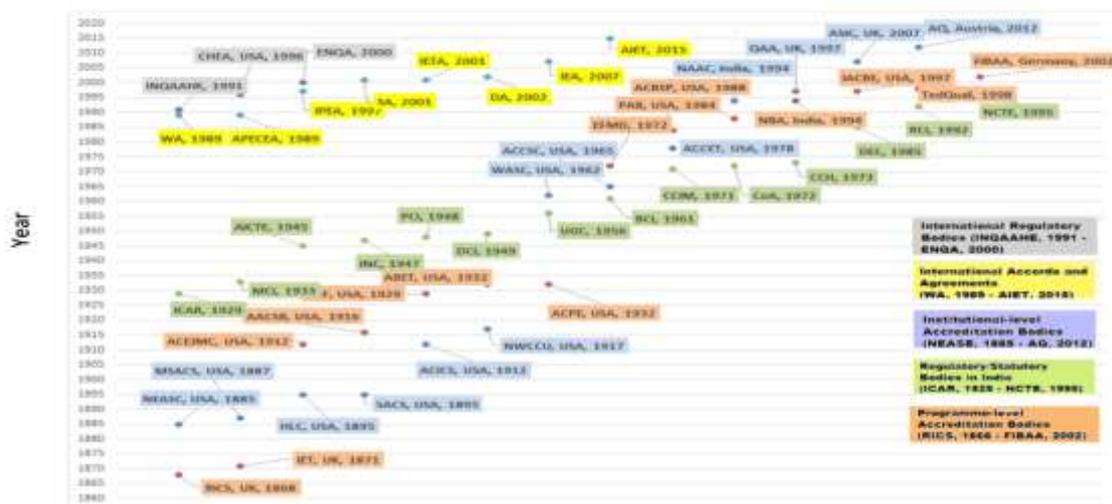

Figure 1 by Kumar et al. outlines the historical evolution of accreditation. The significance of accreditation is growing in parallel with its importance during the 1880s for similar reasons. In line with this, accreditation has grown in significance in Türkiye since "[t]he Turkish Council for Higher Education believes that the most important factors needed to prepare university graduates for effective practice are an assessment and evaluation mechanism leading to an accreditation system and flexible financial and administrative decision-making powers" (as cited in Akduman et al., 2001, p. 232). For institutions and their clients, such as students and parents in the case of educational institutions, accreditation brings a number of benefits. When a school or program receives accreditation, it indicates that it satisfies the standards set forth by the accrediting body and that the instruction provided to students adheres with those standards. The countability of the education offered at a given school or program is enhanced by accreditation authorities' monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of the standards and quality of education obtained there. Since the accreditation agency recognizes and upholds certain criteria, certified institutions permit its students to transfer their credits, and their degrees are recognized nationally or worldwide.

Although there may be a few small variations depending on the accrediting body, the general accreditation process includes the steps of application, peer review, visit and examination, reach a decision, and continuous review. Agencies expect accurate, verifiable reporting. Institutions that are attempting to earn these agencies' standards have to fulfill all requirements. Several SFLs have begun to apply to accreditation institutes for their SFLs in an effort to raise their quality and educational standards or to demonstrate that the language instruction they offer is recognized globally. "Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or

program meets at least minimal standards for its faculty, curriculum, student services, and libraries" (Obadara & Alaka, 2013, p. 39). Some accreditation bodies by which SFLs in Türkiye have been accredited or have applied to be accredited include CEA, EAQUALS, PA and DEDAK. Among these accreditation bodies, PA is the most frequently consulted, Because it is known that of the 210 universities operating in Turkiye, 168 have Foreign Language Schools (SFL) or Foreign Language Departments, and 48 of them are accredited for preparatory programs. 40 of these SFLs are accredited by PA, five by Eaquals, and four by CEA (Cinkara & Evişen, 2021). Additionally, one university holds DEDAK accreditation (DEDAK, 2024). Thus, this study examines PA accreditation process and some of the lived experiences stated.

Pearson Assured (PA) Accreditation

PA is a service that objectively evaluates and validates training given by diverse institutions and organizations. PA Handbook 2021 states that "[t]he Pearson Assured service provides a framework for you to develop policies and procedures that help you to offer high quality training programs, maintain their content and professionalize your delivery" (PA Handbook, 2021 p. 2). Essentially the PA accreditation procedure requires candidates to fill out an application form and pay for the PA service. The form demands the applicant institutions' current quality assurance policies and methods. The institutions must explain how each of the Quality Measures relates to the Quality Objectives, whether they are satisfied or how they are intended to be met. To get PA accreditation, all Quality Measures must be demonstrated; otherwise, PA cannot be awarded (PA Handbook, 2021). After submitting the application, a Quality Advisor visits the institutions. Finally, the Quality Advisor makes one of the following decisions: "all quality processes are in place and effective" or "all quality processes are in place but there are areas for improvement" or "there is insufficient evidence that effective quality processes exist" (PA Handbook, 2021, p. 10).

Methodology

Since information provided in PA Handbook (2021) is highly crucial for SFLs throughout their preparation for the accreditation process, we decided to analyze the content of this information supplied and how these requirements are met and shared online by SFLs which have been accredited. Besides a careful analysis of the document side of the PA accreditation (i.e., both on the PA Handbook on their website and on the online postings of the SFLs' related to their accreditation processes), one purpose of the current study is to learn how a group of instructors and administrators of SFLs view PA accreditation. According to Lambert and Lambert (2012, p. 255), "…qualitative descriptive studies tend to draw from naturalistic inquiry, which purports a commitment to studying something in its natural state to the extent that is possible within the context of the research arena." In line with this principle, this qualitative research study aims to examine accreditation experiences actually lived in the selected SFLs.

Participants

In this qualitative study, purposive and convenient sampling was used. According to the information acquired from COHE's website under the title of our universities, there are 55 universities in Istanbul, 11 of them are state universities and 44

of them are the foundation universities. Among those universities, only 12 foundation universities and two state universities' SFLs have been granted PA Accreditation. Among these 14 universities that fell within the scope of this study, only four of them responded positively to our request for data collection and thus provided the participants who were the instructors and the administrators in these four PA accredited universities (U1, U2, U3 and U4), all in Istanbul, Türkiye.

18 participants from four different SFLs agreed to contribute to the study voluntarily. Specifically, the administrators and the instructors both in the accreditation department and also the ones working as teaching staff in these SFLs formed the participants. Each interviewee and university were assigned a number instead of their actual name in order to preserve their privacy. The first set of questions (i.e., background information) focused on the participants' positions in their SFLs, their years of teaching experience, majors, and degrees. In the distribution of these titles, we also reflected frequency and percentage distribution. The initial data collected from the participants within this scope is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

General Information about the Participants

Variables	Answers	Frequency	Percent (%)
Positions	Administrator	4	22.22
	Instructor	5	27.78
	Both (instructor & unit member)	9	50
Years of Experience	1-5 years	1	5.56
	6-10 years	10	55.55
	11-15 years	3	16.66
	16-20 years	1	5.56
	21-25 years	1	5.56
	26-30 years	2	11.11
Major	ELT	8	44.44
	ELL	8	44.44
	Translation Studies	2	11.11
Degree	BA	2	11.11
	MA	16	88.89
	PhD	0	-

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

We gathered the data for this study through document collection and semi-structured interviews. As Bowen (2009) stated "[d]ocument analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Thus, for the documentation of this study, we scanned the relevant literature and examined the PA Handbook (2021) which is the latest one published online on PA website. In addition, we also collected and examined the documents that were prepared by the SFLs that were within the scope of this research and that were shared publicly. To support the

document analysis which is frequently used as a triangulation tool in conjunction with other qualitative research techniques (Bowen, 2009), this research study essentially employed semi-structured interviews to gather the views of the participants since communications frequently reveal the conscious and unconscious attitudes, values, and ideas of an individual or group (Frankel et al., 2011).

"A semi-structured interview is a data collection method that relies on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework. However, the questions are not set in order or in phrasing" (George, 2022, https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/semi-structured-interview/). For the data collection with interviews, firstly, we formed the interview questions after a perusal of the relevant literature. There were 13 questions prepared at the beginning. Later, we asked for the thoughts, criticisms, and feedback of three experts who are all colleagues of the second author. There were ultimately 15 interview questions to be used after receiving feedback from each academician and making the required edits and revisions. The interviews with the participants were conducted via Zoom. The first interview was done for piloting purposes, and it was not included in the analysis of the actual data. The piloting interview lasted 15 minutes and yielded no problems with the questions. All the interviews were done in English, and there were 15 questions in total to be answered. All the interviews were recorded, and they generally took 15-20 minutes. When the interviews were completed, the first author transcribed them. After the transcriptions of the interviews, we started to analyze the findings considered vital for interpretation and discussion.

Data Analysis

In this study, we analyzed both the written data obtained from PA and SFLs' websites, and the verbal data collected during semi-structured interviews considering the purpose of the study and then interpreted the findings through qualitative content analysis which is a qualitative data analysis method. Firstly, we carried out the documentation analyses to better understand the nature of PA accreditation. As stated by Bowen (2009) "[l]ike other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (as cited in Bowen 2009, p. 27). To do that, we analyzed both the PA Handbook 2021 which was published publicly and also the documents, which were allowed to be shared as they were online, gathered from the participating universities.

Secondly, to analyze the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews we performed qualitative content analysis. "Content analysis is a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications" (Frankel et al., 2011, p. 478). First of all, all the verbal data were transcribed verbatim and prepared for the content analysis. In essence, following the steps of qualitative content analysis suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the first author transcribed the interview data verbatim, and conducted the conventional type of qualitative content analysis on the whole data to build themes and categories. The second author analyzed a quarter of the data to see the matches and mismatches between the themes and the few mismatches were resolved. In sum, the conventional type of qualitative content analysis was shaped with several readings of the whole transcribed data.

The themes obtained through these repeated readings were categorized in light of the interview questions. The participants' statements in the oral interviews revealed 12 main themes and their opinions were then categorized according to these 12 themes. While doing the analysis, we took stability, repeatability, and accuracy aspects into account to increase the credibility of the content analysis. In the last stage of analysis, we examined the findings several times in terms of consistency and correctness. In order to support the emerging themes and establish the validity of the qualitative data, participants' own statements were reflected directly in quotations.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical approval and written permissions were obtained from Pamukkale University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with the decision dated 13.10.2022. Additionally, written permissions of each participant university's ethical board were provided. Every step of the research was conducted in accordance with ethical norms. The candidates gave their consent to participate voluntarily in the study.

Findings

This section described the findings of the data analysis. The research findings regarding the related documents and the administrators' and instructors' views on PA accreditation were presented.

Document Analysis

The results of the document analysis related to the PA Handbook were presented in this part. The PA Handbook is a resource for institutions seeking accreditation so that they can build a framework and understand the fundamental ideas behind the accreditation procedure. The PA establishes some quality measurements for attaining PA certification, and there are three key quality measurements that candidate institutions must meet. Those three measures are 'managing the organization, managing learning/training, and managing assessment (if applicable).'

Table 2

PA Quality Measurements

Managing the organization	Managing learning and training	Managing assessment (if applicable)
● The organization structures ● Staff resources (roles and team working) ● Physical resources ● Administrative systems	● Design of education/training ● Maintaining and improving quality ● Learner / Trainee recruitment ● Malpractice, appeals, and complaints	● Assessment practice

(PA Handbook, 2021, p. 12)

The PA handbook provides these three headings with subheadings and offers possible examples for the candidate institutions. It is said that an organization is not

necessary to provide instances of every item in those lists, but proper documentation must be provided in order to show that a 'Quality Measure' is being satisfied. In order to see the matches and discrepancies between the requirements of PA and the actual practices of the SFLs, possible evidence from the chosen institutions is to be provided. This match and mismatch analysis was done as part of the document analysis phase. Four universities' SFLs agreed to take part in this study, as was noted earlier. Since it is known that each SFL prepares three handbooks in their PA accreditation process—the 'student handbook, staff handbook, and quality handbook'—the documents given by these SFLs to PA were also requested in order to complete the documentation analysis portion of this research. To support the documentation process with examples from the participant SFLs, only the publicly shared data and documents from these institutions' websites and the papers shared with the researcher permitted to be used in the document analysis were focused on. The SFLs of three of the four participating universities' handbooks were accessible. The student handbooks for U1, U2, and U3 were posted on their public website, and the researcher also had access to the staff handbook for U3. These three universities' documents were mostly used as examples for how the PA Handbook requirements were realized.

Managing the Organization

There are five subheadings under the 'managing the organization' title, including 'the organizational chart,' 'staff resources,' 'physical resources,' and 'administrative system.' These subheadings each contain quality objectives, and the manual explains and provides examples for each of them. The objectives and examples are presented in this section.

Quality Objective O.1: Organization Structure

This section requests precise information on the SFLs' organizational structure, which must be supported by documentation from institutions that include an 'organizational structure, clear lines of communication, meeting schedules and minutes, and all reports and documented proofs related to those mechanisms.' In light of the examples from that manual, the researcher's document collection from the chosen SFLs showed that the participating institutions generated their pertinent documents, shared them with PA authorities, and made some of these documents available to the general public on their websites.

Figure 2

Timetable for 2022-2023 Education Year in U1

SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES ACADEMIC CALENDAR – ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023 (ENGLISH PREPARATORY CLASSES)					
Re-registration for Continuing Students	To be determined depending on the dates announced by ÖSYM				
Placement Test (For Students Admitted through Central Placement)	To be determined depending on the dates announced by ÖSYM / University Registration Week				
▇▇▇ (For Students Admitted through Central Placement)	To be determined depending on the dates announced by ÖSYM				
Placement Test (For Students Admitted through Extra Quota)	To be determined depending on the dates announced by ÖSYM / University Registration Week				
▇▇▇ (For Students Admitted through Extra Quota)	To be determined depending on the dates announced by ÖSYM				
School of Foreign Languages Student Orientation	3 October 2022				
Terms	Fall Term		Spring Term		Summer Term
Modules	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5
Classes Begin	3 October 2022	28 November 2022	6 February 2023	3 April 2023	5 June 2023
Classes End	18 November 2022	13 January 2023	24 March 2023	18 May 2023	6 July 2023
End of Module Exam	21-22 November 2022	16-17 January 2023	27-28 March 2023	22-23 May 2023	7 July 2023
▇▇▇▇▇ Language Exemption Test)	24 January 2023		30 May 2023		12 July 2023

As it can be seen in the Figure 2 above, there is a detailed and clear description of the timetable of U1. All the dates from pre-registration to the start and end of the modules and also the dates of important exams are provided both for the students and instructors and also open to public access.

Quality Objective O.2: Staff Sources (Roles and Team Working)

This quality assessment is focused on 'the staff recruitments, trainings, staffs' observations, and developments.' It is acknowledged that instructor development and recruitment processes have a particular role in the PA process. Figure 3 below in the U3 staff handbook contains an example relating to 'staff recruitment.'

Figure 3

Staff Recruitment procedures in U3

3.5 Operations V (Recruitment and Dismissal)

In the end of the second module in May, the number of instructors tha███████ need to hire is determined and the offer is notified to the Rector. The recruitment process flowchart is as follows:

Stage 1: The University applies to the Council of Higher Education students quota for the new academic year by March.
Stage 2: The Council of Higher Education sends back to the University the students quota approved by the Council by the end of April.
Stage 3: By May, ███████ Directorate works on the new year's students figures draft chart in which the previous year's figures and the estimated number of the repeat students are taken into consideration.
Stage 4: Estimated figures of the students and the number of the faculty to be hired for the following year are presented to the Rectorate.
Stage 5: ██████P sends a letter to the General Secretary to ask for an advertisement to hire instructors by the end of June the latest.
Stage 6: HR follows the recruitment procedures according to YÖK Recruitment Directives.

Quality Objective O.3: Physical Sources

This quality assessment focuses on the physical sources. The standards for this assessment overlap with university facilities generally. The student services offered to students, including as libraries, computer and internet services, are illustrated in the example from the U3 student handbook below.

Figure 4

Students' Services in U3

VIII. SERVICES PROVIDED TO STUDENTS
a. Academic Counselling Unit (ACUT)
b. Health, Culture, and Sports (SKS) Directorate Activities
b.1. Sports and Social Life
b.2. Registration to Student Clubs
b.3. Food and Beverage
b.4. Health Services
b.5. Insurance
b.6. Disabled Student and Special Needs Support
b.7. Library
b.8. Psychologic Guidance and Counselling (PDRM)
b.9. Accommodation
b.10. Computers and Internet
b.11. Photocopy

Quality Objective O.4: Administrative Systems

The 'accurate, current, and safe and secure maintenance of the documents', such as 'registers and attendance' of the students, is the main focus of quality evaluations of administrative systems. It can be inferred that the PA compels all officially recognized institutions to maintain their records in a safe and secure location with the necessary dates and signatures, all while being under the control of a document manager from a SFL.
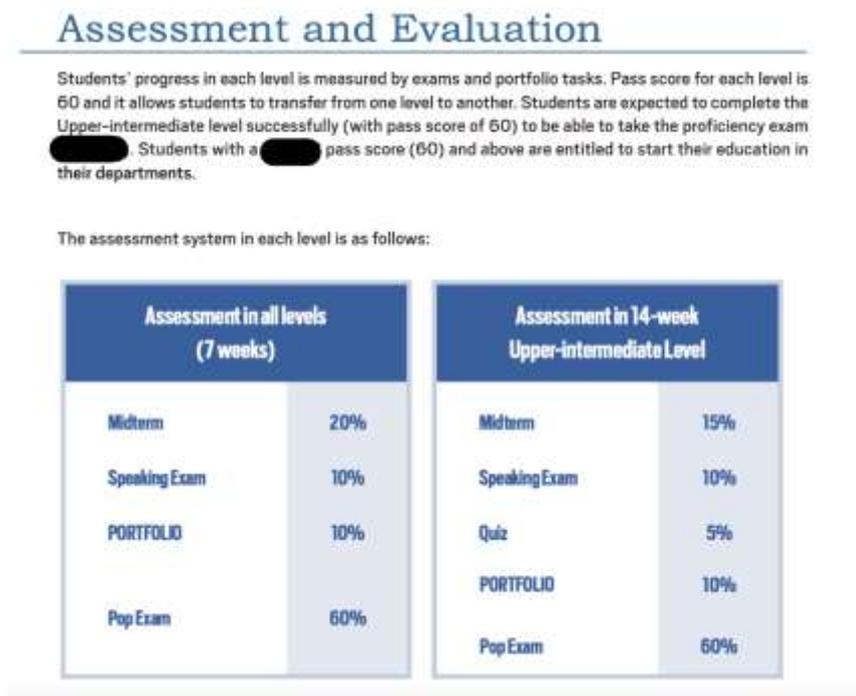
Managing Learning/Training

Four 'quality objectives' related to 'design of education/training, maintaining and improving quality, learner/trainee recruitment and malpractice, appeals and complaint, and managing learning/training' must all be supported by evidence. The manual provided an explanation and illustration of each of these quality goals. The tables in this section contain the objectives and examples.

Quality Objective L.1: Design of Education / Training Programmes

This heading makes it apparent that specific details on the educational and career goals of both teachers and students are needed. This quality measurement's key components include 'needs analysis, training programs, questionnaires, stakeholder participation, review meetings after trainings, and proper evaluation technique.' To meet these requirements, here is the assessment design of U2 in the example below:

Figure 5

Assessment Metrix Chart in U2

Assessment and Evaluation

Students' progress in each level is measured by exams and portfolio tasks. Pass score for each level is 60 and it allows students to transfer from one level to another. Students are expected to complete the Upper-intermediate level successfully (with pass score of 60) to be able to take the proficiency exam ▇▇▇. Students with a ▇▇▇ pass score (60) and above are entitled to start their education in their departments.

The assessment system in each level is as follows:

Assessment in all levels (7 weeks)		Assessment in 14-week Upper-intermediate Level	
Midterm	20%	Midterm	15%
Speaking Exam	10%	Speaking Exam	10%
PORTFOLIO	10%	Quiz	5%
Pop Exam	60%	PORTFOLIO	10%
		Pop Exam	60%

Quality Objective L.2: Maintaining and Improving Quality

For this heading, it is necessary to provide systematic justifications and explanations of the SFLs' quality management procedures. It's obvious that 'feedback' from the teachers and the students has a big impact in this situation because they were meant to be considered as 'suggestion boxes' in the instances. The exact composition of the quality circle must be established in order to reach that quality measurement. When the participant universities were assessed, it was found that they had 'student representatives' and a related section to manage their students' offers.

### *Quality Objective L.3: Learner/Trainee Recruitment*

This section primarily focuses on the 'accurate' data released by the SFLs. Here, emphasis is placed on the school websites. According to the statement, all webpages should be 'correct and updated.' Along with that information regarding students and trainees, it is also expected that the SFLs' plans and timetables be created and communicated.

Quality Objective L.4: Malpractice, Appeals and Complaints

The majority of the information under this topic relates to the SFLs' 'malpractice, appeals, and complaints procedures, both for instructors and students.' Under this topic, it is intended that the details, steps, and records of these processes will all be displayed and supported. The student handbook of the U1 also includes an example of the complaint procedure as seen below:

Figure 6

Student Complaint Chart in U1
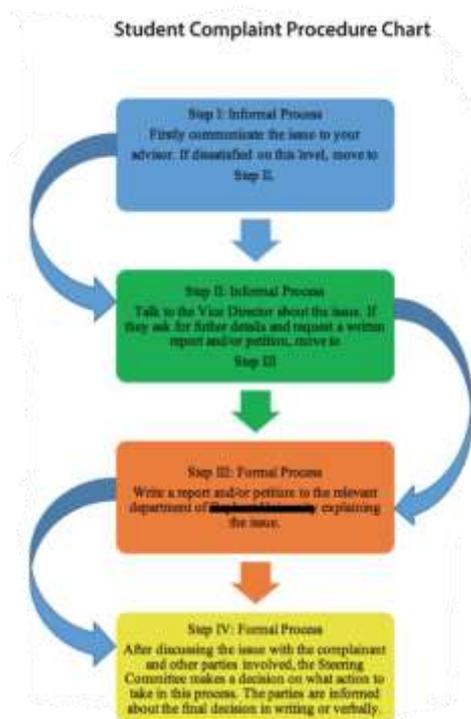
Quality Objective L.5: Alignment to Global Scale of English

The institutions are expected to provide a clear statement of the 'learning objectives' under this subject. Prior to the start of the academic year, all institutions prepare their learning objectives, and they have a specific unit called a 'curriculum unit' that all participating universities have.

Managing Learning/Training

As this section states, 'clear assessment procedures, valid and reliable assessment methods, standardized assessment procedures, accurate marking, safe and secure storage of the tests, and the rules of invigilation' are required. The U3 staff manual provides the example below, which satisfies the quality aim of managing evaluation measure.

Figure 7

Assessment Procedure for the Written Part of the Exams in U3

6.6.5.3 MARKING PROCEDURES FOR THE WRITTEN PART

➢ Levels will grade the papers together at the same time in their announced rooms.
➢ Exam packs **CANNOT** be taken home to be graded.
➢ 1st graders will use **a red pencil**. 2nd graders will use **a blue pencil**.
➢ Graders must stick to the answer key at all times. If they think there are alternative answers, they should not mark the sheets accordingly. Before acting individually, they should inform the Testing Office first so that they can inform everybody about possible accepted answers.
➢ Students who wish to appeal their results have to submit a petition to the Directorate of School of Foreign Languages **within 3 work days following the exam**. Then the Testing Office will make the final decision.
➢ If there is a need to change a grade because of any kind of a mistake found after entering the grades to OIS, the teacher should inform the University Student Affairs Office with a petition.

Administrators' and Instructors' Views on PA Accreditation

In order to elicit experience-related data and enable a range of responses that fell within the parameters of the study, we used semi-structured interviews in addition to the document analysis. For this reason, the participants were invited to give their open and frank opinions about the PA accreditation process they had undergone during the interviews. Throughout the interview, 15 questions were posed to the participants.

The themes obtained via conventional type of qualitative content analysis were created based on the information provided in the interviewees' responses. The statements made by the participants during the oral interviews revealed 12 key topics, and the opinions of the participants were reported in accordance with these themes. In sum, using content analysis techniques, the researchers identified the following themes, which were informed by the participants' responses and shaped by the interview questions:

1. The meaning of the PA accreditation.
2. Previous ideas about the PA accreditation
3. The effects of the PA accreditation
4. The challenges of the PA accreditation
5. The benefits of the PA accreditation
6. National and international recognition provided by the PA accreditation

7. The role of the PA accreditation on commitment and institutional belonging of the instructors

8. Securing the future by the PA accreditation

9. The reasons of the PA accreditation preference

10. Suggestions for improving the PA accreditation process

11. Wishes to be accredited in the following years

12. General comments for the PA accreditation process

Following a thorough analysis of the participants' background data, the following sections present an analysis and cite quotes from the participants' actual utterances to substantiate their opinions on the themes that were presented.

The Meaning of the PA Accreditation

The participants' perspectives on 'what PA accreditation means' are covered in this section. For the majority of the instructors, there was no clear definition of PA accreditation because they had no prior knowledge of it. On the other hand, the administrators from the participants claimed that it implied 'quality, standardization, and paperwork.' Below are participant quotes that serve as illustrations of what it meant to them:

> I had no idea what it was, what accreditation meant but after that process, yes I know that it means a lot for a university. It provides you some documents. (P1, Instructor & Testing and Assessment Unit Member)
>
> To me it means quality of course. The quality that we have in our SFL, the system if the system is working well or not. (P4, Vice Director, Administrator)
>
> It means a lot of paperwork. To me personally, it means a lot of not boring but repetitive paperwork but at the end it provides I think a good perspective to our institution. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)
>
> I can say it is a form of verification that shows our education program meets certain quality standards so it's kind of a quality control so that all the systems necessary for providing high quality of education are working effectively. (P16, Instructor & Administrator)

As can be seen from the quotations, all participants viewed accreditation primarily in terms of fostering quality in their SFLs, and they had a favorable attitude toward what certification means.

Previous Ideas about the PA Accreditation

This section discusses how the participants interpreted their earlier perceptions of PA accreditation. It is obvious from the statements made by the participants that they had a vague understanding of both the PA accreditation and accreditation in general. The following quotes from the participants serve to show their viewpoints:

> Actually, at first I did not have any ideas. I was the head of the testing and assessment unit; that is why I was involved in this process. We had a consultant, we had meetings and then things started to get clearer to me. After these meetings, some of my ideas changed of course in a positive way. (P4, Vice Director, Administrator)
>
> To be honest, I didn't know anything about PA before so there was no chance, but a little new information showed up in my mind. (P5, Instructor)
>
> Before I start doing this, I did not know very much but I thought that it must be a very very difficult process. But after I got involved in it, I saw that if you do stuff regularly and if you keep up to date with your handbooks and your proofs etc., it is not very difficult. I thought that it was much more difficult than it actually is. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)

The Effects of the PA Accreditation

In this section, the participants' opinions on the impact of PA accreditation on 'quality management, administration, and quality of education' are discussed. The participants discussed these themes, starting with how PA affected their SFL, moving on to how it affected them as instructors, and concluding with the benefits they saw in their SFLs generally during and after the process.

The Effects of the PA Accreditation on the SFLs

The participants defined the effects of PA accreditation on their SFLs mostly as follows: having certain standards, increased workload, causing a lot of paperwork and creating a new insight. The majority of the instructors thought that these consequences improved the institutions. Only paperwork was viewed negatively as a time-consuming task, but it was also seen as a useful tool for the institutions to create an archive and have all the necessary documentation. Overall, the PA accreditation had a favorable effect on both the administration and the instruction as expressed by the participants, especially in terms of establishing a standard in their SFLs. The following quotes from participants serve as examples:

> It gave us a standard I mean provided us with some standardization about all the levels, all the issues for all students and also administration and the instructors because we have to follow some rules and we have to be more creative in teaching and we can improve our techniques, methods also. It gave us standardization in fact shortly. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)
>
> I think even starting to get accredited and that process helps a lot and then after you get your accreditation, it helps the school with keeping records of everything. So, when you keep those records to be used as proofs or as an application material for another accreditation process, it provides the institution a great resource of insight again. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)
>
> One of those effects I believe is the awareness of actually being standard, being transparent and actually we learnt how to categorize everything we learnt how to collect proofs. (P15, Instructor & Testing and Assessment Unit Member)

The Effects of the PA Accreditation on Instructors

Participants were also asked what they thought of how the PA accreditation process affected them as instructors. The effects were commonly described by the participants as 'a way of boasting, self-assessment, an opportunity for personal development, having better and clearer goals, standardization in teaching, feeling more secure, and a strength to improve their belonging to their SFLs.' Some instances that support this are the following:

> It was a kind of self- assessment process for me. So, accreditation criteria are very useful for teachers so we can see ourselves from a different point of view. So, we can see our pros and cons. We can evaluate ourselves much better by using such kind of accreditation instructions. (P2, Instructor)
>
> After PA accreditation, we have more opportunities to improve ourselves for example our institution has provided us with more professional development seminars or conferences, or some trainings and they all helped me to improve myself as an instructor. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)
>
> As an instructor, it provides great standardization because it focuses mainly on how everything is done in your school. Does each and every instructor in your school know this process? Are things done in the same way throughout all the steps? So, I think it provides great standardization among instructors and in their teaching eventually. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)

It gives a sense of security for me to know everything is conducted according to a set of principles and I know that each and every student goes through the same processes like nobody plays it by ear everything has to be documented if my student is late to class 10 minutes and if I don't allow him in my class or if I mark him absent in my class and I know that another student in another class also goes through the same so students cannot come to me and complain about this and that. So, there's like a fair approach I can say. I feel safe and I am being fair.. (P16, Instructor & Administrator)

While the majority of the participants thought that the impact of the PA accreditation on instructors was beneficial, a small number of them thought that the accreditation was a burden and an unnecessary workload. The quotes that follow can help to support this assertion:

I don't think it has individual benefits other than unnecessary workload. (P5, Instructor)

Everybody is waiting for higher salaries but nothing like that. Most of the time to be honest it is a burden actually it seems like a burden it is important for the institutions not for the instructors I think. (P14, Instructor &Education Manager)

The Effects Observed in General During and After the PA Accreditation Process

In addition to the effects of the PA accreditation process on the SFLs and the instructors, the consequences of the PA accreditation process both during and after this procedure in general in the SFLs were also questioned. The participants primarily used the words 'intense, stressful, busy, hectic, and nervous' to describe the consequences they saw during PA certification. Additionally, they described the post-accreditation impacts as being happy, proud, and in a better situation. Some instances of these viewpoints are the statements that follow:

During the accreditation process, everybody was in panic, and they got some training about how to get accreditation, how to follow and how to go on the process but then everything started to be recorded and before that similar issues were done in fact, but they hadn't been recorded. So, everything started to be recorded during the process so when we saw the written form of everything, we understood as an instructor and also as a unit member in that time that we did everything in fact but now we can see, and we can prove what we had done already. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)

I have to say that I am proud of our academic units and in our school it was the academic units which were all involved in this process. We had the handbooks to write, and we had to put everything that we had been doing on paper, so it made me proud of what we already had. Because after we wrote the handbooks, we just looked at the handbooks and we said, "everything is real, we are not lying, we are doing all these things" As an example I can give double marking system. It is in the handbook and yes we are doing it. And we have been doing it for so long and it is part of the quality assurance, this is just one example. So, it is like you are testing yourself, too. Do we really do all these that we have written in the handbook? And if you can say yes then you should be proud of yourself. And after the accreditation process, we always tried to stick to our quality measures. The handbooks are the holly books for us, so we always try to follow what we promised so this means that you don't want to lose this accreditation, yes but also you have to do something for the quality enhancement. We always try to make it better and we show everything in our action plans, and we have some short-term goals and long-term goals, and we have very regular quality meetings and now it has been 4 years since we got the accreditation, and we still continue with everything as if it were new. We update everything, we modify, we make new changes, so we are still in this process. We just continue moving forward. (P4, Vice Director, Administrator).

During the process we were crazy busy, it was real hard work and after that it becomes easier because once a year you are being audited. Once you have it everything is okay for the school but during the process it was so hard for the administrators and the instructors as well. (P14, Instructor & Education Manager)

The Challenges of the PA Accreditation

As evident in the statements above, most of the participants valued the experiences they gained during the accreditation process. This section however outlines the participants' perspectives on the difficulties they had encountered with regard to the administration, testing, teaching, and paperwork-related issues during the PA accreditation processes in their SFLs. The most commonly cited difficulties among the participants were the high amount of paperwork, the increased amount of workload, providing the proofs of all the work they do in their SFLs, and organize and prepare the archives of their SFLs. Following are some quotes that shed light on how the participants described their difficulties:

> The most significant part here as far as I know is that we needed to get good education or training about the PA accreditation and what should be done to get it. This was the first step, and it was a little bit challenging at first but when they informed us about the process in detail properly, then it became better and easier. As I told you earlier, writing everything in some cases or recording everything or putting all issues in the written form were a little bit difficult but after doing it we saw that it was worth doing. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)
>
> I don't remember having any difficulties in the teaching process but there were some factors affecting the assessment and the evaluation process and these brought us too much paperwork. (P5, Instructor)
>
> Organizing and preparing archives was a bit more troublesome because it was a retrospective task. Think about it, I fulfilled my responsibilities as a teacher who gave lessons before. But then I became the assistant manager, and I had a hard time because the follow-up of these works was not done well before us, the dates were not documented properly. (P18, Vice Director, Administrator)

The Benefits of the PA Accreditation

While the participants stressed several major challenges embedded in the accreditation process, they also emphasized the specific benefits earned. In this section, the participants' opinions on the advantages they had encountered during the PA certification process in their SFLs with regard to their concerns with instruction, testing, administration, and paperwork were discussed. The participants listed some concepts such as being more standardized, being more organized, having the clear job descriptions, having handbooks which clearly states every detail for everyone in SFLs, creating an awareness, and feeling more organized as the benefits. Here are a few examples of participant statements:

> For example, in terms of teaching, we created level objectives, teaching objectives, teaching outcomes for each and every level. So that helped me when I was working in the curriculum and material unit. As an admin, I mean or as a member of a unit or as a teacher, it helped me become more organized because I keep in mind the process all the time. When I am doing something, I always think that I can use this as a proof in the future and I am much more organized and systematic now. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)
>
> I can say this is beneficial for the new instructors, to the newly hired instructors actually because they can learn many things if they read by the way. When they read the handbooks, they can learn many things about the process and the procedures of our SFL. (P14, Instructor &Education Manager)
>
> The creation of units was, in my opinion, the most beneficial activity. Description and foundation of Testing and Assessment, Level Coordinators, PDU… and their duties. In the past, the tasks were done by sharing the workload- that is, we used to take turns in preparing exams and so on. These things prevented a standard job and were incompatible due to differences in interpretations. But now it's better. (P18, Vice Director, Administrator)

National and International Recognition Provided by the PA Accreditation

Besides the potential challenges and benefits embedded during accreditation, the participants were also questioned about their opinions on the regional, national, and global respect that the PA accreditation confers. Some participants expressed doubt about international recognition, even though the majority of participants thought that PA accreditation leads to national recognition.

> As far as I know it is also valid in some European countries and internationally recognized. In current issues PA accreditation is well-known now in Türkiye, in national universities, even in state universities and it will spread the world I think because it has some really valuable principles and if you follow them you will get the accreditation, you will be a recognized institution and your students will get all the benefits about it. So, it provides both national and international recognition. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)
>
> Well, it has a credit of course, nationally we can say that but internationally maybe it facilitates but I don't know because as far as I know the students can benefit from it but not the instructors, students have the certificates for their academic lives. And nationally the other schools of course know you, they are aware of you as an PA accredited foreign language school but internationally I don't know. (P14, Instructor & Education Manager)

The Role of the PA Accreditation on Commitment and Institutional Belonging

The opinions of the participants regarding how the PA accreditation impacted their feelings of commitment and institutional belonging toward their SFLs are covered in this section. Some participants claimed that PA accreditation had no bearing on their commitment to teaching or their senses of belonging to their SFLs; however, most participants, especially those who worked in academic units and had administrative responsibilities, claimed that PA accreditation increased their commitment to and sense of belonging to their SFLs. To demonstrate their points, the following quotes are provided:

> I think there are other sources of motivation for instructors like financial benefits, salaries, other benefits that the school has to provide. I wouldn't say it is the priority right now. There is no doubt that it increases the level of commitment. (P1, Instructor & Testing and Assessment Unit Member)
>
> I think my respect level to my institution has increased. Whenever I talk to someone else outside I can say my school has the PA accreditation and our students get education according to these principals, so I feel myself more honored than before that means it increased my institutional commitment and institutional belonging. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)
>
> I think no. If better conditions are provided, I can work in a non-accredited institution. I don't think anyone would feel a sense of belonging just because of the quality of education. (P5, Instructor)

Securing the Future by the PA Accreditation

As a related theme to sense of commitment and belonging, the participants also revealed their views on the future of their institutions with PA accreditation. In this section, specifically the participants' opinions on how PA accreditation safeguards their SFLs' futures, their careers, and the careers of their students were reflected. None of the participants had a unified opinion on this issue. Although some participants believed that PA accreditation secures their future, others believe that it secures only the students' future, and yet others believe that it does not secure anyone's future at all. The participant quotes are as follows:

In terms of securing a future, yes, definitely I can agree with this idea as I just told. If I talk about myself, I can tell that I worked in a university which has the PA accreditation so for my students it is the same and valid for all the member of the SFL I think. So, it affects my school, me as an instructor and my students also. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)

I think PA does not guarantee a future for instructors. Similar to instructors, I don't think this document provides a guarantee for students to find a job or when they apply for a higher degree or something. Employers don't ask for a PA document when they look for someone. (P5, Instructor)

For students I can say yes because although the institution I work at is one of the old universities in Türkiye when they go abroad, they may have problems with the recognition of the diplomas or the certificates we provide. But if they see PA that person at least thinks 'oh they are assured by Pearson' so that is not a clown factor at least. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)

Yes, it secures the future of our school, and it secures the students' career but not the instructors' because I mean the only thing is that when you want to go somewhere else, I mean when we had to go somewhere else so other universities, you tell the others that you worked in PA accreditation, and it may boost your reputation maybe. It is a nice judgment actually, I mean you can prove that you can handle this hectic business, hectic duration actually it is a proof. (P14, Instructor & Education Manager)

The Reasons of the PA Accreditation Preference

The participants' justifications for choosing the PA to be accredited are explained in this section. Most of the participants claimed they were unaware of the cause and just offered their personal opinions on the matter. According to the participants' perspectives, it is clear that instructors were not aware of the basis for that preference; yet most of them believe that PA was picked because it is well-known. However, individuals who held administrative positions in their SFLs expressed a preference for PA accreditation by stating that PA creates a framework and provides consultancy. Following are some comments made by the participants:

I have no idea about it. Maybe it is because it is the most recognized one in the world. (P1, Instructor & Testing and Assessment Unit Member)

In fact, it is about the administration, but I think that they know all the advantages of PA accreditation, so they most probably preferred it because of that reason. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)

I think we saw this as a first step. As a first step, this was the right accreditation. Others may be more demanding; they are more into what is happening in the classrooms, and they are more focused on learning. PA is different from them, at least I think so. It is more interested in the system, how the system works. Of course, they are interested in what is happening in the classroom but the questions like 'How do your academic units work? Do you have handbooks? Do you follow the rules?' so I think this is a first step. (P4, Vice Director, Administrator)

Suggestions for Improving the PA Accreditation

The suggestions made by the participants to improve the PA accreditation process were also requested and recorded. Most of the participants were silent on this subject. However, when some of the participants discussed their proposals for improving the accreditation process for PA, it became clear that they were more focused on their own universities and how those institutions handled the process in general rather than on PA in particular. The following quotation serves as an example:

Instead of increasing the workload to achieve a certain quality, maybe both the quality of education and satisfaction of teachers and also that of students can be checked and considered further. (P5, Lecturer)

As can be seen, the PA does not prescribe standards for the institutions; rather, they only conduct audits when the institutions are able to manage their own standards, systems, proofs, and organizations, and to demonstrate this to the PA. PA evaluates the quality management system of the institutions as a whole. However, as the participants noted, teacher satisfaction is not a purview of any accrediting body. We can therefore draw the conclusion that the instructors in the institutions are misled about the PA accreditation procedures since not enough information regarding the PA accreditation is provided at the outset within the SFLs. Other participants, on the other hand, suggested that the PA accreditation procedure include classroom activities. This could appear to be an institutional idea as well. Here's a relevant quotation:

> Maybe the criteria may be modified a bit. There can be some items about what is happening in the actual classroom. For example, there is no classroom observation in this PA accreditation. They don't observe classes. So, I can say that they can add some more items in the criteria. (P4, Vice Director, Administrator)

Wishes to be Accredited in the Following Years

This section is devoted to the participants' goals and aspirations for having an accredited SFL in the next years. Most participants said they intended to pursue accreditation in the upcoming years. They intended to continue the certification procedures because they did not want to lose the accreditation, the habits they earned during this process, and the standardization within their SFLs that accreditation had brought to them. Additionally, the participants felt that it should continue despite the difficulties they had previously noted because it was an ongoing process. They claimed that being accredited aided them in exercising self-control and self-examination as well as in taking appropriate precautions. The following are relevant comments made by some participants:

> Yes, sure because it will cause us to be always ready to improve ourselves because if some time passes, as human beings it is our nature if we do the same thing, we get used to doing it continuously so if we are accredited again, it will make us alive again and we will improve ourselves better, I guess. (P3, Instructor & Previous Digital Learning Unit Member)
> Yes because like I said thanks to PA accreditation we keep ourselves in check so that accreditation process although it has become a routine for us now, still keeps us in check in terms of organizing, getting the data and everything else. (P6, Instructor & Administrator)
> Of course, to prove that we are a standard school, we have a very transparent policy to prove that. (P14, Instructor & Education Manager)
> Of course, we would. In this way, it takes root even more with the habits and principles it has brought to institutions. It becomes the culture of institutions. (P18, Administrator)

General Comments on the PA Accreditation

The further remarks made by the participants on the PA accreditation were presented in the last section. The participants were given the opportunity to add anything else they felt was important in addition to the researcher's questions. In general, there were no further remarks, and the participants said they covered everything because the interview questions were in-depth. On the other hand, a few administrators spoke up. A participant said that institutions should be curious about accreditation processes to create an insight, while another participant commented on the importance of teamwork in PA accreditation process. The following quotes from the participants can be used to highlight these views:

> I think institutions should be interested in it because it really shows what you are actually as an institution. You see your weaknesses and your strengths. It opens new horizons. Being in this process is also fun, yes it is hard, tiring but it is also fun. You can take this as a recommendation. (P4, Vice Director, Administrator)
>
> We needed the team very much during the preparations. The collection of the documents, the evidence, preparing the presentations, and advertising the importance of accreditation were done by a few people. When those few people put a lot of effort into the subject, they also took ownership of the issue, but it will take time to corporate this culture in the institution. As a foundation university member, I can say that it is necessary that senior management should also value this issue, otherwise you cannot receive support. (P18, Administrator)

The results of the semi-structured interviews were, in general, given in this part. Following the presentation of the themes that developed from the remarks made by the participants during the interviews, the key conclusions in each theme were stated and supported by participant citations. The discussion and conclusion will be offered in the next section.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the current study was both to perform a document analysis on the online information provided on PA Handbook website and on the SFLs' PA related sharings online on their websites; and also to gather a group of instructors' and administrators' views on PA accreditation and to discover how they view the accreditation process in relation to the quality control of their institutions. Document analysis and semi-structured interviews were employed in the current study to collect the qualitative data. Through document analysis and content analysis, the findings were achieved. For the document analysis part, firstly PA handbook was evaluated and reflected with the tables, charts, and then to be able to see the matches and mismatches between the requirements of PA and the actual practices of the SFLs, possible evidence from the selected universities was collected, analyzed and shared directly from their websites. Our analyses of these documents have revealed two main factors: (1) the PA Handbook is highly explicit providing necessary guidance for the SFLs applied and (2) the website sharing of the SFLs analyzed and the requirements stated by the PA website were compatible. For the semi-structured interviews 18 participants from four SFLs voluntarily joined the interviews. As a result of verbal data analysis, the opinions of the participants produced 12 key themes. For each theme, participants' views which highlighted some crucial and common points were documented and supported with the relevant quotations of the participants. Most of the participants although they acknowledged that they had had very limited idea and knowledge about PA at the beginning were observed to favor the accreditation process, the required preparation and paperwork, and saw all these as rewarding and edifying not only for their institutions but for their students and for themselves.

As previously noted, there is fierce competition among the growing number of higher education institutions today. Institutions prioritize their efforts to improve quality, seeking authorization and validation from independent organizations to remain competitive. Teaching a foreign language and ensuring a high standard of foreign language education are key characteristics that distinguish institutions in the globalized world of the twenty-first century. Therefore, in the context of quality studies, 'accreditation,' the focal point of this study, holds significant importance. Accreditation is perceived as a means to elevate schools' quality standards, approved by an authorized

organization, enabling schools to reap the benefits of accreditation processes and gain approval from the accrediting organization. As indicated by Karaferye (2017), the rise in school accreditations was a result of the implementation of English education in accordance with internationally recognized standards. Given the growing importance of accreditation, Ataman (2021) and Doğan (2022) also focused on international accreditation institutions, including PA. Ataman (2021) explored instructors' opinions on PA, CEA, and EAQUALS, concluding that opinions varied based on how prepared their universities were for accreditation rather than the quality assurance agency itself. Doğan (2022) studied both national and international accreditation agencies, including PA, and compared them in terms of general information and requirements such as procedures, goals, evaluation criteria, and fees.

Considering all the aforementioned points, this study aimed to shed light on the views of instructors and administrators on accreditation to reveal how they perceived the quality improvement efforts of their schools through accreditation. As Gidey et al., (2014) stated, quality management is a 'holistic philosophy,' and thus, the views of both instructors and administrators carry great importance, being crucial components of quality management in their SFLs. Gidey et al., (2014) also emphasized that quality management entails continuous improvements and structural problem-solving in response to constant feedback from customers. Therefore, the participants in this study provided feedback on quality management processes, even though they were not the 'customers' but crucial role players in their institutions' quality management processes. Besides, Kalaçay (2019) highlighted that accreditation is more than just a certificate; it is a comprehensive process that focuses on improving the applicant institution under the guidance and experience of the accreditor, ultimately resulting in the institution acquiring a renowned brand. In that sense, even receiving praise from a reputable and respected educator regarding the caliber of an institution's curriculum might be viewed as a form of accreditation. Kalaçay emphasized that receiving praise or criticism from educators are all milestones in the accreditation process since it involves and provides a continuous quality improvement cycle.

Therefore, accepting the views of educators is both important and guiding. Also, 'leadership, engagement of people, process approach, improvement, evidence-based decision making, customer focus, and relationship management' were the seven quality management principles of ISO 9001:2021 (ASQ, 2022). Thus, receiving feedback from educators was part of both engagement of people and relationship management. These pieces of feedback provided insights into whether these principles of quality management were applied during the accreditation process. Consequently, the results of the interviews and the analysis of the criteria revealed some matters that need highlighting, derived from the views of both instructors and administrators of the SFLs that received accreditation.

Overall, in the light of the research questions of the study, the findings of the current study reveal that most of the participants of the study had positive attitudes about the accreditation process in their SFLs. They perceived this process as an advantage since they believed it made their institution more organized, set standards within the institution for everybody and ensured that all the procedures in the school are performed in line with the accrediting process rather than the administrators' or anybody else's personal preferences. Similar results were also reported by Sarı (2019),

who identified positive effects of accreditation, defining them as a "better system in the organization, assessment of performance, change in teaching materials, increased teamwork spirit, better quality in education and professionalism resulting from standardizations, counseling sessions, use of original books, CPD units, and new documentation policies" (p. 65). Furthermore, the current research revealed that the accreditation process helped the participants to be more organized because they had to create the archives of everything they did which helped them to keep the documents of everything with the proofs. This documentation and proving everything helped them to control and check all their works although they stated that it was hard for them to create all the written documents and proofs of everything in the beginning. In line with his study, in addition to the previously mentioned points, the participants of the current study also emphasized the awareness and self-reflection that they earned via accreditation processes.

Furthermore, 'teamwork, standardization, and documentation' were some of the concepts used by the participants in this study. Some participants also mentioned that accreditation requires good organization within institutions, given its busy, intense, and tense nature, necessitating teamwork and team spirit to effectively manage the process. Additionally, the study by Uçar and Levent (2007) arrived at a similar conclusion, emphasizing the importance of managing significant organizational change through teamwork during the accreditation process. Furthermore, the current research revealed that the accreditation process helped the participants become more organized since they had to archive everything they did, aiding in document retention. This documentation and record-keeping helped them monitor and assess all their work, although they initially found it challenging to create all the required written documents and proofs. This aligns with the findings of Uçar and Levent's (2007) study. Kalaçay (2019) also reported similar results in his study, stating that "universities that were accredited experienced significant changes not only in terms of the predetermined categories but also in terms of awareness of quality and ability to self-reflect" (p. 66). In line with his study, the participants in the current study also emphasized 'awareness' and 'self-reflection' gained through the accreditation processes.

On the other hand, despite the predominantly positive attitudes of the participants, the findings revealed that since they were not a member of any academic units in their school, the instructors felt a bit excluded from the accreditation processes. In addition, some actions as having regular meetings, scheduling meeting minutes, having standardization sessions, collecting the proofs of their actions looked like a burden for them since they weren't informed about the accreditation process requirements in detail in the beginning. Sarı (2019) also reported similar negative findings, stating that "the accreditation program brought about unnecessary or excessive workloads for them, which decreased their motivation" (p. 66). The concern with paperwork was another prevalent theme, the administrators and the instructors in this study mentioned the significant quantity of paperwork they had to complete, which made the procedure somewhat monotonous and exhausting for them. In summary, based on the research questions, in terms of the quality management of the SFLs, both instructors and administrators held mostly positive views of the accreditation process. It can be noted that even if some of the participants were dissatisfied with the additional paperwork, in terms of observational responsibilities and standardization tasks that the

accreditation process entailed for them, they generally had a favorable attitude toward taking part in this process.

Implications

In conclusion, this study attempted to provide an insightful assessment on the PA accreditation process within SFLs by gathering the viewpoints of both instructors and administrators while also reviewing relevant documentation. An appreciable outcome of this research is the overwhelming expression of gratitude from nearly all participants for the opportunity to voice their insights on this subject. This shows that the researcher was successful in extracting frank and honest perspectives from all participants, which shed light on both good and negative perceptions of the certification process and provided helpful ideas.

The insights gained from the participants' comments could be a source of illumination for those in charge of educational institutions and accreditation agencies. For example, accreditation authorities may consider including instructors and students in the accreditation process, as indicated by some participants. Additionally, school administrators are encouraged to increase accreditation awareness through workshops and thus improve communication within their institutions. However, significant limitations in this study must also be recognized. It was done in a small number of universities in Istanbul, focusing only on the opinions of administrators and instructors. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted via remote communication means such as Zoom. Future research could include a broader range of universities as well as SFL students to gain a more comprehensive picture. Furthermore, because this study only looked at PA accreditation, future research might look at SFL personnel's perspectives on all certifying agencies, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the accreditation landscape.

Acknowledgements

Conflicts of Interest

This article has no financial, commercial, legal, or professional relationship with other organizations, or with the people working with them, that could influence our research.

Statement of Responsibility

Both authors would like to thank all the participants for their contribution to the interview part of the study.

References

ASQ, American society for quality. (2022). Retrieved from https://asq.org/quality-resources/quality-management-system

Arslan, R. Ş. (2020). The development of a scale to evaluate foreign language skills at preparatory schools. *International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education*, *7*(2), 223 - 235. https://dx.doi.org/10.21449/ 661025

Akduman, I., Özkale, L., & Ekinci, E. (2001). Accreditation in Turkish universities. *European Journal of Engineering Education, 26*(3), 231-239. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043790110053374

Al-Haj Ibrahim, H. (2014). Quality assurance and accreditation in education. *Open Journal of Education, 2*(2), 106-110. https://doi.org/10.12966/oje.06.06.2014

Ataman, O. (2021). *Determination of school of foreign languages quality standards and accreditation model suggestion* [Unpublished Doctoral Thesis]. Düzce University, Institute of Social Sciences, Düzce.

Bowen, G.A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *9*(2), 27-40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

British Council. (2013). *The English effect*. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/english-effect-report-v2.pdf

Cinkara, E., Evişen, N. (2021). Yabancı diller yüksekokullarında kalite güvence ve akreditasyon. In İşman, A., Aydın, C. H., Çiçek, O., Silman, F., Öztunç, M. (Ed.), *Yükseköğretimde kalite ve akreditasyon çalışmaları*. Eğitim Yayınevi.

COHE, The Council of Higher Education. (2022). *Language education*. Retrieved from https://uluslararasi.yok.gov.tr/en/international-students/language-education

DEDAK, The Association for Language Education, Evaluation and Accreditation. (2024). Retrieved from https://en.dedak.org/

Doğan, M. (2022). Foreign language accreditation in higher education: A study on quality assurance organizations in Türkiye. *E-International Journal of Educational Research, 13*(1), 137-157. https://doi.org/10.19160/10.19160/e-ijer.1086334

EHEA, European Higher Education Area. (2022). European higher education area and Bologna process. Retrieved from http://ehea.info/page-Türkiye

Flores, A. (2015). Hooked on accreditation: A historical perspective. Available at: https://www.americanprogress.org/article/hooked-on-accreditation-a-historical-perspective/

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2011). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). New York: Mc Graw Hill.

George, T. (2022). *Semi-structured interview: Definition, guide & examples*. Scribbr. Retrieved from https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/semi-structured-interview/

Gidey E., Jilcha K., Beshah B., & Kitaw D. (2014). The plan-do-check-act cycle of value addition. *Industrial Engineering & Management, 3*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.4172/2169-0316.1000124

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277-1288

ISO, International Organization for Standardization. (2022). Retrieved 2 June 2022, from https://www.iso.org/about-us.html

Kalaçay, B. (2019). *An analysis of the effects of accreditation on the quality of English preparatory schools of foundation universities in Istanbul* [Unpublished Master Thesis]. Maltepe University, İstanbul.

Karaferye, F. (2017). An introduction to program accreditation in foreign language schools in Turkey. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 2*(2), 62–66. Doi: 10.26417/ejms.2017-v4i2.

Kırkgöz, Y. (2005). Motivation and student perception of studying in an English-medium university. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 1*(1), 101–123.

Kırkgöz, Y. (2019). Investigating the growth of English-medium higher education in Türkiye and the Middle East region. In D. Staub (Ed.), *Quality assurance and accreditation in foreign language education: Global issues, models, and best practices from the Middle East and Türkiye* (pp. 9-19). Springer.

Kumar, P., Shukla, B., & Passey, D. (2021). Impact of accreditation on quality and excellence of higher education institutions. 1-19. Retrieved from https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/141916/1/Impact_of_Accreditation_on_Quality_and_Excellence_of_HEIs.pdf

Lambert, V., & Lambert, C. (2012). Qualitative descriptive research: An acceptable design. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research, 16*(4), 255-256.

Obadara, O., & Alaka, A. (2013). Accreditation and quality assurance in Nigerian universities. *Journal of Education and Practice, 4*(8), 34-41. Retrieved from https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/5184

Pearson Assured Handbook 2021 (2021). Retrieved from https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/pearson-assured/pearson-assured-handbook-2021.pdf

Sarı, E. (2019). *A study on the implementation of an accreditation process within a university intensive language program* [Unpublished Master Thesis]. Yeditepe University, İstanbul.

Statista, (2023). *Most spoken languages in the world*. Available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/

Staub, D. (2019). The increasing need for quality assurance and accreditation in foreign language education. In D. Staub (Ed.), *Quality assurance and accreditation in foreign language education: Global issues, models and best practices from the Middle East and Türkiye* (pp. 1-5). Springer.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, (2022), retrieved from https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/higher-education-initiatives/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/bologna-process

Uçar, E. & Levent F. (2017). An accreditation experience in higher education: The case of a foreign languages preparatory school of a foundation university in Türkiye.

The Journal of International Social Research, 10(52), 846-857.
http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2017.1941