

QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY:  
THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- This thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or a diploma in any other educational institution;
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## ABSTRACT

### Quality Assurance Policies in Higher Education in Turkey: Perceptions of Key Stakeholders

This qualitative study to examine the quality-assurance experience of higher education (HE) in Turkey, comprehensively. The perspectives of major stakeholders of higher education are placed at the center of this work. To this end, interviews were held with important stakeholders about institutional external evaluation, which is a crucial tool for quality assurance, to show the approach to quality assurance in higher education in Turkey. The findings imply that quality assurance practices, specifically institutional external evaluation, are a crucial need for a more effective higher education system. Furthermore, the study has pointed out that institutional external evaluation is not free of challenges and that the common challenge is a lack of understanding about institutional external evaluation. Moreover, the study has indicated that there are developmental influences of institutional external evaluation as it is a means to determine the strengths of universities and to identify points that are open to improvement.

There are several contributions of this study to the literature. One is that this study examines how quality assurance is perceived by key stakeholders in the HE system in terms of the operations of the process as well as the difficulties in the process and their underlying reasons, and the effects of the process. In this context, this study presents some implications for policymakers, quality assurance practitioners, quality assurance evaluators, and groups affected by quality assurance practices. The findings imply that Turkish higher education is affected by the experiences of globalizing higher education systems to the same extent, and in some

cases even more. Furthermore, in accordance with the study, it can be said that although quality assurance is an area that has gained importance and is followed carefully in the world, it is valuable to reveal the points where quality assurance systems are criticized for a healthier functioning system. The findings imply that a significant part of the difficulties experienced in the quality assurance process is due to widespread prejudices and incomplete information on the subject. In addition, even if the concept is positively received by higher education institutions, the problems that institutions experience in many aspects (managerial approach, regional expectations, financial concerns, etc.) may cause difficulties in the implementation of quality assurance. Third, the findings indicate that quality assurance practices should be implemented regularly for tertiary education systems to work effectively. The implementation of these practices also goes through the internalization of the quality culture, from the highest-level manager to the personnel working in the lower units. It is crucial to underline that this study was conducted with a limited number of participants. It is not possible to generalize the findings for the whole higher education community. Also, though important, one study is not considered enough to reflect the growing complexity of quality assurance practices in higher education systems.

## ÖZET

### Türkiye Yükseköğretiminde Kalite Güvencesi Politikaları:

#### Önemli Paydaşların Görüşleri

Bu nitel çalışma, yükseköğretimin kalite güvence deneyimini yükseköğretimin önemli paydaşları açısından kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla, Türkiye'de yükseköğretimde kalite güvencesi yaklaşımını ortaya çıkarmak için önemli kalite güvence araçlarından biri olan kurumsal dış değerlendirme konusunda önemli paydaşlarla görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara dayalı olarak kalite güvence uygulamalarının, özellikle kurumsal dış değerlendirmenin, etkin olarak işleyen bir yükseköğretim sistemi için çok önemli bir ihtiyaç olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Ayrıca, çalışma, kurumsal dış değerlendirmenin zorluklardan muaf olmadığına ve ortak zorluğun kurumsal dış değerlendirme hakkında ortak anlayış eksikliği olduğuna işaret etmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, çalışma, kurumsal dış değerlendirmenin üniversitelerin güçlü yönlerini belirlemede ve gelişmeye açık noktaları belirlemede bir araç olduğu için dönüştürücü etkilerinin olduğunu göstermiştir.

Bu çalışmanın literatüre çeşitli katkıları bulunmaktadır. Birincisi, bu çalışmanın kalite güvencesinin yükseköğretim sistemindeki kilit paydaşlar tarafından sürecin işleyişi, sürecin nedenleri, sürecin zorlukları ve sürecin etkileri açısından nasıl algılandığını incelemesidir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma politika yapıcılar, kalite güvence uygulayıcıları, kalite güvence değerlendiricileri ve kalite güvence uygulamalarından etkilenen gruplar için bazı çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, Türk yükseköğretiminin küreselleşen yükseköğretim sistemlerinin

deneyimlerinden aynı ölçüde, hatta bazı durumlarda daha fazla etkilendiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışmanın bulguları ışığında, dünyada önem kazanan ve dikkatle takip edilen bir alan olan kalite güvencesinin eleştirildiği noktaları ortaya koymak mümkün olmuştur. Çalışmanın bulguları, kalite güvence sürecinde yaşanan zorlukların önemli bir bölümünün, konuyla ilgili yaygın önyargılardan ve eksik bilgidен kaynaklandığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, kavram yükseköğretim kurumları tarafından olumlu karşılanırsa bile kurumların birçok yönden (yönetimsel yaklaşım, bölgesel beklentiler, finansal kaygılar vb.) yaşadığı sorunlar kalite güvencesinin uygulanmasında zorluklara neden olabilmektedir. Ek olarak, bu çalışmanın bulguları, yükseköğretim sistemlerinin etkin bir şekilde çalışabilmesi için kalite güvence uygulamalarının düzenli olarak uygulanması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Bu uygulamaların hayata geçirilmesi, en üst düzey yöneticiden alt birimlerde çalışan personele kadar kalite kültürünün içselleştirilmesinden de geçmektedir. Bu çalışmanın sınırlı sayıda katılımcı ile gerçekleştirildiğini belirtmekte fayda var. Araştırmanın bulguları tüm yükseköğretim camiasına genellenemez. Ayrıca, önemli olmakla birlikte, yükseköğretim sistemlerinde kalite güvencesi uygulamalarının artan karmaşıklığını yansıtmak için tek bir çalışma yeterli görülmemektedir.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AArU	Association of Arab Universities
ABET	Accreditation Board for Engineering & Technology
AEUU	Association of European Union Universities
ANQAHE	Arab Quality Assurance in Higher Education
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
AUNASEAN	University Network
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CHEA	American Higher Education Accreditation Board
CIQG	International Quality Group
CoE	Council of Europe
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
EACEA	Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EI	Education International
ESG	The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Higher Education Quality Assurance
EQAR	The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ENQA	The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher

	Education
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ESU	European Students' Union
ETUCE	Union of Industrial and Employers 'Confederations of Europe
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association Institutions in Higher Education
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HE	Higher Education
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAP	Institutional Accreditation Program
IAU	International Association of Universities
IAR	Institutional Accreditation Reports
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IEE	Institutional External Evaluation
INQAAHE	The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISE	Institutional Self-Evaluation
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITU	Istanbul Technical University
K-12	Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade
KIDR	Internal Evaluation Report of the Institution
KGBR	The Institutional Feedback Report

METU	Middle East Technical University
MÜDEK	Engineering Programs Evaluation and Accreditation Association ( <i>Mühendislik Programları Değerlendirme ve Akreditasyon Derneği</i> )
NPM	New Public Management
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Commission
QE	Quality Enhancement
OECD	Organization for Economic and Cultural Development
R&D	Research and Development
THE	Times Higher Education
THES	Times Higher Education Supplement
THEQC	Turkish Higher Education Quality Council
TUIK	Turkish Statistical Institute ( <i>Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu</i> )
UNESCO	the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UK	the United Kingdom
URAP	University Ranking by Academic Performance
US	the United States of America
USA	the United States of America
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization
WB	World Bank
YÖDEK	Higher Education Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Commission ( <i>Yükseköğretim Akademik Değerlendirme ve Kalite Geliştirme Komisyonu</i> )
YÖK	Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu)

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Globalization has led to profound changes in many fields including higher education (HE) by having an intense impact both on the objectives of higher education and on the earth. The increased improvements of spontaneous communication, international bodies and global traveling have considerably affected the philosophies, content and programs, recruitment, outreach, and financial activity of universities (Hobson, 2007). Higher education institutions (HEIs) have responded to challenges caused by globalization in various ways.

One common response to globalization has been the radical rise in the figures of students who attend universities. The higher education systems of many countries have enormously enlarged in the last decades. Thus, they have changed from elitist to massified tertiary education with the ideology that completing university education will provide much better career opportunities and upward social mobility for millions of people (Altbach et al., 2010). As it is realized, the fact that a wide range of students had access to tertiary education has resulted in certain positive outcomes such as the democratization of higher education, training an advanced workforce for national progress, realizing self-potential capacity, and achieving equal chances (Chou & Li-Tien, 2014). Furthermore, as highlighted by Rizvi (2018), the expansion of higher education brings positive returns to governments. For instance, a lot of countries become more integrated into the global economic system because through educating their youth, governments gain access to a growing level of economic, social, and political power.

However, the drastic rise in the figures of students in tertiary education posed some serious questions in the massified system. As highlighted by Trow (2000), the expansion of access to HE led to major problems in terms of “funding, organization and governance” (p. 1). Some of these serious challenges involve shouldering the burden on governments’ budget, unequal distribution of the resources, tuition disparities between state and private universities, harsh competition to maximize the recruitment process of students, and growing worries about falling standards and quality (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994).

More specifically, also noted by Chou & Li-Tien (2014), governments have not been ready for the accelerated speed of the expansion in the number of HEIs in terms of funding and capacity building, and the availability of academic staff. Also, they have not been ready for the needs of the new profile of students, many of whom are coming from families that have a lack of higher learning culture. As a response to this challenge, a lot of governments have become eager to the entry of the private sector into HE with their wide range of commitment, expertise, and resources. In addition to the public universities, private ones have been a solution to the rise in the figures of students studying in tertiary education.

Another problem is related to capacity. Governments have become very motivated to open both public and private universities. Plus, they have become so eager to enlarge existing ones that they have been unable to update their curricula resulting in inadequate content, which is generally limited to subjects that do not demand upscale laboratories, well-stocked libraries, and high-quality academicians. In conclusion, the number of graduates in some fields has become too high for the economies to absorb. Stakeholders in a variety of sectors including the economy have realized that students have been graduating from universities with a lack of

necessary knowledge and skills. This has led students to feel unconfident to find a decent job, thus creating a risk of higher unemployability and motivation crisis (Rizvi, 2018). Hence, quality debates stemming from massification-related challenges have deepened in higher education.

Another response to globalization in higher education has been internationalization. Through globalization, the way has been paved to international universities in which there is expanded mobility of students and departmental programs (Hou, 2012). Thus, universities have become more international places. As highlighted by Scott (1992), countries can benefit from the internationalization of higher education in certain ways. To illustrate, they can increase economic competitiveness as there is an impact of internationalization on international trade and local business. Plus, access to jobs is likely in international companies for the local workforce. In addition to financial benefits, internationalization leads to diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion and results in harmonious connections among nations. Similarly, as highlighted by Knight (2007), internationally oriented personnel and students and better educational quality, income generation, and brain gain can also be listed as the benefits of internationalization of HE.

That said, it is important to highlight that internationalization of HE has added another layer to quality debates. In addition to massified higher education, universities that open their campuses to international students and academics have caused quality debates in higher education. An important example of this can be given from *Task Force on Higher Education* (2000). The book highlights that despite the positive impact of democratization at universities, universities in many countries including China, Indonesia, and India with enrollments of around two million have difficulty in adapting to this drastic increase as they are challenged by

scarcity and allocation of resources. The thing is challenges of resource scarcity and allocation bring about quality concerns in these countries. Facing these problems, a lot of countries suffer from the reality of brain drain, which causes a potential loss of talents. To be able to minimize brain drain, they try to emphasize developing educational conditions, enhancing educational opportunities, and boosting research quality in home countries. All these issues lead to a much-heated debate regarding the quality of universities in homelands (Mok & Han, 2016).

Another major occurrence resulting in quality debates has been the emergence of neoliberal ideologies in the 1970s. Under the governance of Reagan in the US, neoliberal ideologies gained utmost importance in the region. Also, the ideology got so popular that its principles were implemented by Thatcher in Great Britain in the 1980s, as well. One main principle of neoliberal ideology is accountability in any field including education. During those years which witnessed the emergence of neoliberalism in the world, one key concept, namely accountability gained importance. The accountability movement revolved around regulated achievement examinations and the administration of state schools by businesses. Moreover, important leaders and educational experts paid significant attention to the expansion of accountability culture (Ambrosio, 2013).

Under the influence of neoliberal ideologies, like numerous other sectors, higher education has been exposed to regulation by agencies that set standards and monitor activities (King, 2007). This has also led to some concerns about the societal advantages of HE and accountability for these advantages. Such concerns have caused governments and societies not to trust higher education institutions anymore. Thus, by regulating funding sources, “the new regulatory state in its accentuated rationality” has exercised “accountability and steerage” (p.413).



Furthermore, one drastic impact of neoliberal ideologies on the nature of HE is that neoliberalism has enhanced entrepreneurship culture in universities. When the term has penetrated the educational sphere, university campuses have turned into factories with a managerial system that is based on certification for teachers and investment policy. The ideology has generated a business atmosphere within the universities. In time, long-term decisions and educational goals that do not generate income have been considered something marginal. In general, the core values of universities – students and academicians- have become more familiar with an entrepreneurial corporative culture that is more sensitive to customer needs (Oleksenko, 2017).

This loss of trust and the growing demands of customers ushered in a new period of accountability for tertiary education (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). For instance, almost half of the countries have formed systems that measure educational quality in higher education institutions. The rise of the regulatory state that makes use of new public management tools has caused universities to become organizational actors with a more enterprising image (Maassen et al., 2011). Thus, evaluative labels for assessing the performance of institutions have become so crucial for universities. They have been growingly used as tools for decisions on funding from the state fiscal capacities (Christensen & Laegreid, 2010).

From the perspective of those who are concerned by the growing influences of quality assurance practice, such regulatory mechanisms lead to the reduction and lack of the basic organizational goals of the university. As put forward by Leveille (2006), higher education institutions should act in line with the interests of the whole society. However, it seems that the last thing that matters is “merely the public's servants in government” (p.29). The fact that higher education serves in line with the

expectations of a certain segment may cause an important mission, the "objective search for the truth," to be endangered. As Fallis (2004) states, all universities have basic duties such as conducting research, providing education, and being beneficial to society. Expectations that come to the fore with quality assurance may cause damage by disrupting the nature of the social agreement between universities and society.

Globalization and the popularity of neoliberal ideologies among many other factors have caused the introduction of privatization in the educational sphere (Zumeta, 2000). Moreover, over the years, the number of private universities has gone up radically because public universities could not absorb the drastic increase of university students in number. Thus, private universities are believed to fill the gap between demand and supply in many countries (Jamshidi et al., 2012). As the relationship between privatization and education gets blurry, certain core principles of privatization penetrate the educational sphere. Some of these principles involve

- (1) "a shift toward allowing market forces more sway"
- (2) "increased tuition and enrollment flexibility"
- (3) "more procedural and operational autonomy"
- (4) "level funding from the state (typically, in inflation-adjusted dollars)"
- (5) "more emphasis on entrepreneurialism in generating new revenues"
- (6) "the introduction of performance standards and accountability measures"

*(Shifting Ground: Privatization American Council on Education Public Higher Education, 2004b, p. 5 as cited in Hanewich, 2007)*

Also noted by Agarwal (2007), in the last decades, the private sector has grown in such huge numbers. The unprecedented expansion of private universities has inevitably caused certain concerns among stakeholders including students, parents,

educational experts, and governments in terms of the quality of education in these institutions. Underlined by Abbott-Chapman (2006), for instance, students -to be able to decide which institution they would like to study- need adequate information about the educational quality in such institutions.

On the other hand, the competition of preferability by students has become a concern not only for private but also for public universities. All universities have been influenced by this harsh competition. Especially with the introduction of global and regional rankings, which make comparisons among universities in terms of several academic issues, diverse stakeholders have been more curious about the performances of universities. Rankings that provide stakeholders with information about the institutional performance have been a crucial indicator for authorities. Several factors, such as the effect of globalization on HE systems, the cuts in tertiary education funding, the competition of HEIs in receiving resources and students, and the increase in academic mobility, among many others (Marginson & van Der Wende, 2007; Harvey, 2008) have caused the dissemination of rankings. With the introduction of rankings in higher education, HEIs have started to be careful about these league tables to enhance their decreasing resources and to attract more students.

As highlighted by Chalmers and Johnson (2012), students have seen them as proof of superior quality and means of transparency. They have been used to classifying higher education institutions by potential students; and thus, rankings have intensified the quality debate which revolves around the increasing competition (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015). Moreover, one main duty of governments is to make sure that citizens receive a high-quality education from any source, private or public. Thus, with necessary instruments of monitoring, governments need to evaluate aspects of education in terms of quality in higher institutions (Jamshidi et al., 2012).

Governments need to protect the educational rights of taxpayers for all segments equally (Holzhacker et al., 2009). With this respect, QA policies in all HEIs need to be evaluated by governmental organizations or independent bodies.

In conclusion, quality assurance systems have emerged out of synergy among specific changes occurring in tertiary education. Among these changes, globalization, massification, internationalization, neoliberalism, privatization, and competition are so influential that they have affected universities differently; and one of these changes is quality assurance practices. QA has gained crucial importance in a lot of countries (Shuiyun, 2016). Many countries have set up and have followed QA regulations to enhance quality (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). With the help of quality assurance services, they aimed to meet the demands of diversified stakeholders about the quality of higher education. Furthermore, they have intended to accomplish excellence in tertiary education by assuring that the quality of instructional programs fit not only local but also international standards. Thus, the question of quality, which is primarily planted in the in-house activities of HEIs, has gone beyond institutional limitations and developed into the domain of society and politics including diverse parties (Ryan, 2015).

## 1. 2 Statement of the research problem

The concurrent occurrences in higher education have influenced universities and have created the need for comparative evaluation methods, which led to sound quality assurance systems in all universities. Thus, many countries have formed quality assurance systems to guarantee high standards in all types of universities. They have aimed to respond to the needs of all parties taking part in universities (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). The important point is that by referring to the radical

increase in the number of HEIs, it can be said that the developments caused an increasing claim for accountability. These expectations from universities necessitated a culture of quality when dealing with the problems of globalized tertiary education (Ryan, 2015).

Turkey has also experienced dramatic changes in its higher education system because of economic and political developments and its demographic trends (Tuzcu, 2006). Today, tertiary education in Turkey deals with some 207 universities, which provide education to a figure of 4,937,169 million students. Moreover, the number of universities and the number of students has been continuously increasing in line with the developments occurring both in the local and global context (*Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi* [Higher Education Information Management System], n.d.).

All the incidents in line with the huge increase in figures indicate that the emergence of new universities and the condition of the current universities need special attention in terms of QA. Realizing the importance of the impacts of the occurrences in HEIs, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) publishes reports on core topics, one of which is 2020 *Vakıf Yükseköğretim Kurumları* [2020 Foundation Higher Education Institutions]. According to this report, 70 private universities have undergone evaluation and inspection in the 2018-2019 academic year by CoHE and 661 sanctions have been applied. Another report which gives insights into the current condition of HEIs in Turkey is the one called 2019 YÖK *Üniversite İzleme ve Değerlendirme Genel Raporu* [2019 Higher Education Council University Monitoring and Evaluation General Report]. The report paints a detailed picture of not only the state but also private HEIs for 2019. The report states that the number of universities with at least one accredited undergraduate program in the 2018

*Yükseköğretim Kurumları Sınavı* [Higher Institutions Exam] Guide is 61. The total number of accredited undergraduate programs is 420. While the number of universities with ten or more accredited undergraduate programs is 15, no undergraduate programs out of 111 universities are accredited. The thing is going through the accreditation process for a university means that its main pillars, which are teaching, research, public services, financing, and facilities, are well thought out and well-established. But the updated figures regarding the accreditation process in Turkish universities imply that they need to take certain steps to assure quality assurance and to provide a quality-based higher education.

CoHE, which is the local authority for coordinating all HE processes, has become aware of the issue of quality for many years. Being responsible for structural reforms regarding universities in Turkey, one main step taken by CoHE to enhance education quality in universities was to become a member of the Bologna Process in 2001. Another step was to establish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC) in 2017. Since the Bologna Declaration and the foundation of THEQC, quality assurance has become an important educational vision of universities in the country (<https://www.yok.gov.tr/>).

In this context, the position of QA practices at universities in Turkey is the major focus of this study. In what way or to what degree the HE system in Turkey is influenced by the quality assurance practices is a question in mind.

### 1. 3 Purpose of the study

This study is an attempt to understand QA policies affected by concurrent developments in the higher education arena in Turkey. Thus, it examines policies and practices about QA of HEIs from the perspective of finding out possible challenges

which QA in tertiary education in Turkey has been experiencing. Given the fact that QA in Turkey is in its infancy, universities encounter a lot of problems. One way to handle these challenges is to adopt a comprehensive approach towards quality assurance policies. Hence, first of all, the national external evaluation process in Turkish Higher Education is analyzed. Second, the conveniences, the challenges, and the influences of institutional external evaluation are in this study's scope of exploration. To this end, perceptions of key stakeholders regarding institutional external QA activities in Turkish Higher Education are examined. This exploration is expected to provide an insight into quality assurance evaluations at home, which could enhance the quality culture of HE in Turkey comprehensively.

#### 1. 4 Research question

The research question for this study is as follows.

What are the experiences of key stakeholders about quality assurance practices, in particular, institutional external evaluation in Turkish higher education?

The question is asked to understand the experiences of the main stakeholders participating in the institutional external evaluation in higher education. To discover their perceptions about quality assurance, the researcher, focusing on the experiences of key stakeholders, tries to explore why quality assurance practices, in particular, institutional external evaluation, have emerged in higher education; how institutional external evaluation takes place with all its steps; what kind of challenges are encountered in the process; and how the process impacts quality in higher education. Through this question, a comprehensive comparison is made in terms of the experiences of team leaders, THEQC members, university administrators, and

quality commission leaders. The issue of approaching quality assurance from three different perspectives determines the place of QA in HE in the national sense.

#### 1. 5 Significance of the study

Higher education is in a time of transition globally and Turkey is not an exception. Universities in Turkey have been dealing with fundamental changes happening in the higher education arena. More specifically, after the establishment of HEC in 1981, various policies have been followed to widen access to tertiary education and to enlarge the system.

To this end, both public and private universities have been opened. There has been an increase in the quotas in existing universities. More and more undergraduate and associate degree programs through the open education system have been integrated into the system (Gür & Özoğlu, 2015). Such trends in higher education have intensified in the 2000s especially after the decision of each university in every city in Turkey in 2006 (Günay & Günay, 2017). In addition to the emergence of new universities, the adaptation process of the existing universities to the ever-changing higher education system has led to the quality vs quantity debate in higher education in Turkey (Akbulut Yıldırımış & Seggie, 2018).

Thus, under the influence of such factors, many countries including Turkey have made a great effort to attune their tertiary education systems utilizing quality assurance practices. That is why this study aims to better understand QA practices both locally and globally by keeping in mind that quality assurance practices deserve scholarly attention.

This way, the study aims to be enlightening for several parties involved in the higher education ecosystem, one of which is policymakers. Policymakers, while



following developments globally in the process of making decisions regarding quality assurance systems, need to be fully aware of different aspects of the massive higher education in Turkey. They need to aim at establishing regional and international networking and strengthening existing networks in the Middle Eastern countries, Far and Central Asian countries, and Europe to expand the vision of the Turkish higher education. This study, in this sense, as it discusses the recent trends and developments in HEIs across the world concerning quality assurance, can be significant for policymakers.

Secondly, although several studies evaluate quality assurance from different angles (Başaran, 2012; Hacıfazlıoğlu, 2006; Karakaya, 2017; Uygur, 2018; Özdemir, 2015), institutional external evaluations are under-researched. This study examines how quality assurance is perceived by key stakeholders in terms of its operation, rationale, influences, and challenges. In this context, the study is inclusive in terms of conveying the perceptions and experiences of the different groups involved in this process. Thus, the study tries to fill a gap regarding a common quality assurance practice, the institutional external assurance, by revealing the experiences of the key stakeholders. As highlighted by Kahveci et al. (2012), QA is comprehensive including all processes in HE. Thus, institutional external quality assurance, which is as effective as an internal one, needs to be researched for a holistic approach.

Thirdly, this study aims to elicit perceptions of different stakeholders such as HE policymakers and HE administrative and academic personnel regarding external quality practices. Thus, the nature of the study is qualitative rather than quantitative. Through an in-depth-qualitative method, the study is an attempt to reveal the perceptions, values, and beliefs regarding institutional external quality assurance practices. The study enriches the literature related to QA in HE; and the way the

study is conducted makes it an in-depth one. Finally, this thesis has benefited from a critical analysis of both local and global literature. That is why the findings of the study can be enlightening for practitioners in HEIs in Turkey. This study should give insight to other countries to better evaluate the quality assurance in Turkey and the reasons affecting QA activities within the country.

#### 1. 6 Organization of the study

This study includes six chapters. Chapter one includes introductory information about the background of the study by focusing on the research problem and research question and significance of the study. Chapter two presents an extensive review of the literature on QA in HE in the world. Chapter three, by discussing the evolution of QA in the country, the main quality assurance practices in line with the Bologna Process, EHEA, and THEQC present an extensive review of the literature on quality assurance in higher education in Turkey. Chapter four includes the methodological details about the study including the research design, research question, data collection instruments, research setting, participants, pilot study, data collection procedures, the credibility of the data, data analysis, ethical assurances, and position of the researcher. Chapter five presents the evaluation of the semi-structured interview findings. Chapter six includes a discussion on the findings in the categories of the rationalization of quality assurance in higher education, challenges, and transformative influences in higher education. It also presents the conclusion and final remarks including implications, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions.

#### 1.7 Summary of the chapter

This chapter provided introductory information about the background of the study, statement of the research problem, the purpose of the study, research question,

significance, and organization of the study. The next chapter will present a detailed review of the related literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides eight sections. The first section includes an extensive discussion about the definition of quality assurance in higher education. In the second section, the main approaches towards quality assurance are discussed in detail. These sections are followed by a third section, in which rationales for quality assurance are explained. The next section evaluates the main criticisms against quality assurance. This section is followed by the historical background and present trends in the world by evaluating the developments on quality assurance at regional levels.

#### 2.1 Quality in higher education

The concept is usually regarded as a term difficult to define. It is seen that there are several alternative definitions of quality in the literature. Moreover, some other researchers claim that the term is a buzzword, and it cannot be truly defined or quantified because of the dependence on individual perspectives (Bobby, 2014). This indicates a fragmentation among researchers regarding the terminology. Due to this fragmentation, the concept of quality cannot be examined in an inclusive way (Elken & Stensaker, 2018). Although describing quality is hard, many researchers try to determine why quality is a need, what its consequences are, and what mechanisms there can be for evaluating quality. Despite such efforts, quality remains an uncertain and difficult issue in higher education (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

There are some main reasons why the term is difficult to define. One main reason for the difficulty to make an exact definition of quality is that quality can have

several usages and meanings in different cultures, fields, and countries (Kecetep & Özkan, 2014). Moreover, it is hard to develop a common framework probably because various regions take different approaches while dealing with the issue and quality is not a purely national undertaking (Green et al., 2012).

Another reason is that, based on the views of different stakeholders, there is a variety of interpretations of quality (Bobby, 2014; Martin & Stella, 2007). While defining quality, it is vital to consider main stakeholders, who are fund providers, tax-paying parents, beneficiaries of products such as students, beneficiaries of outputs such as companies, and employers of the market (Schindler et al., 2015; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). Every group has a variety of expectations from higher education. To illustrate, employers are interested in the quality of the final output. On the other hand, academicians may be concerned about the facilities that they are provided with. Thus, for an effective definition of quality, all stakeholders are to be involved to make sure that different needs are addressed (Bobby, 2014). This reality implies that various people understand quality differently.

For instance, a survey on the perspectives of several employees, students, and executives by Dicker et al. (2019) indicates clear differences. The survey reveals that employers are usually not worried about what is happening in classes in terms of methods and procedures. They are more focused on the features of students and tend to believe that external relations with market forces are a good sign of quality. For staff and students, however, the positive communication between academic staff and students is a good indicator of quality. They feel that high turnover rates in institutions for staff have an adverse influence on educational quality. Also, challenges of providing high-quality education in a continuously changing environment in line with conflicting priorities hamper quality in higher education.

One more reason which makes the concept difficult to examine is that in addition to approaches dealing with quality from the perceptions of different stakeholders, some suggest that quality can be achieved by employing public accountability. The outputs regarding teaching and research need to be evaluated to serve this end. They also highlight that quality can be seen as a concept changing for both teachers and students in that it serves as a mechanism that leads to changes (Dicker et al., 2019; Harvey & Knight, 1996). All these different expectations from the concept of quality make an operational definition necessary for more clarity.

As mentioned before, to various people, the description can change; and therefore, the indicators used to define the concept can differ. Several people can underline the quality of inputs of HE systems, while others highlight the quality of procedures and output (Cheng & Tam, 1997). For academic staff, for instance, it may mean research activities and institutional support mechanisms; for students, on the other hand, it may mean teaching and learning experiences (Cheng, 2016). Even the very same person, at times, can adopt different conceptualizations at different moments (Vettori, 2018). This indicates that each stakeholder takes a different approach when defining quality.

As a result, it is unlikely to think of quality as one clear concept. However, the meaning attributed to the quality and the different contexts is closely related (Martin, 2011). Furthermore, the term is difficult to define because quality is a multidirectional concept (Green, 1994). The fact that it is both multidimensional and contextual makes it vague and hard to define (Schindler et al., 2015). That is why one-dimensional definitions, which lack sophisticated interpretation, or which are very general, are problematic (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). Quality is a changing

conception, regarded in the larger context of education, economy, politics, and sociology (Opre & Opre, 2006; Harvey, 2005).

### 2.1.1 Quality in higher education

As put by Machumu and Kisanga (2014), quality is perceived in different ways because from the very early times, a variety of fields such as industry, market, and education addressed the concept from different angles. Despite the difficulty in defining the term, it is worth being aware of the definitions available in the literature. In examining the definitions of quality, the first point that draws attention is that quality is mainly discussed at two ends of the pendulum.

The first end of the pendulum focuses on the quality of the initial outputs. The latter approach, however, focuses on processes in the realization of institutional activities. From the perspective of outputs to quality, the teaching and research carried out in institutions are evaluated to the extent that such activities could achieve predetermined goals.

Another point that needs to be highlighted is that two of the most cited authors regarding the definition of quality are Harvey & Green (1994).

Table 1. Defining Quality

1.exceptional
2.perfection or consistency
3.fitness for purpose
4.value for money
5.transformation

Source: [Harvey & Green, 1993, pp. 11-24].

In their view, quality is defined in five categorizations which are “exceptional” (p.11), “perfection or consistency” (p.15), “fitness for purpose” (p.16), “value for money (p.21), and “transformation” (p.24). These conceptions present various perspectives on quality (Lomas, 2010). However, as fitness for a purpose is one of the most accepted ones, it is relevant to question what it means in the higher education context (Woodhouse, 1999). The concept goes back to Total Quality Management in the industry. It points out the foundation of institutional organizations for assessing quality; and it is responsible for assuring structural and managerial actions in organizations. The term, in this regard, can be considered as a management concept for governments and higher education institutions (Cheng, 2016). Furthermore, when quality is linked with fitness for purpose, the satisfaction of the expectations of key stakeholders such as policymakers, school administrators, instructors, and parents are given priority (Cheng & Tam, 1997). This is an effective understanding of quality because it enables them to define their goals. Quality is attained by achieving these goals and objectives. This definition removes the danger of institutions becoming clones of each other and allows them to be unique (Woodhouse, 1999). The focus of the concept of quality being fit for an objective is whether the product or service is fit for the mentioned objective. For example, when fitness for a purpose is adopted as quality, one main aim is to understand whether a university's mission is compatible with the services provided or not. This mostly complies with the requirements of accreditation organizations or quality assurance bodies (Newton, 2007).



The concept of value for money is another well-known perspective. Suggested by the 1984 Audit Commission<sup>1</sup> (McSweeney & Sherer, 1990), value for money connects quality with expenditures and financial exchange. The concept meant that clients are eager to give money for higher quality, and what satisfies clients most is better quality (Drummond et al., 1998). Accountability is crucial while defining quality as financial value; and it is highly connected to the economic philosophy (Salter & Tapper, 1994). This means that education needs to advance a country's industry and countries should assess the performance of the educational institutions to understand if money given to the universities by governments is efficiently used or not. To illustrate, a survey that measures perceptions of 68 undergraduate students who study in seven UK HEIs was conducted by Tomlinson (2014). This survey highlights how students may regard quality from the perspective of financial value. One important result of the survey is that the students' relationship to tertiary education has drastically differed because they regard the outputs entitled them as they have been paying more fees. Also, the value students attach to tertiary education is directly linked to the expenditures, and all aspects such as teaching, learning, student experience are questioned depending on students' expenditures. Thus, the survey reveals that getting good value for money effectively becomes a guiding principle in evaluating how core activities in higher education institutions are implemented.

Another categorization by Harvey and Green (1993) in describing what quality is given by the concept of exception. The concept of exception has two

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<sup>1</sup> The 1984 Audit Commission located in London is a part of the National Audit Office. It inspects public spending for Parliament to assist the government to promote public services both nationally and locally. The economic conditions of all central government departments, agencies and other public organizations are audited by the Commission and the results are reported to Parliament, (<https://www.nao.org.uk/>).

distinctive variations which are excellence, and minimum standards. When quality is related to distinctiveness, it is considered special and of high status (Pfeffer & Coote, 1991). In this variation, quality is not evaluated through an assessment or supervision. There are no benchmarks to make comparisons. Quality is instinctively known and felt. Thus, universities, for instance, do not need to show their quality because they already embody it (Church, 1988). The second variation of quality as an exception is excellence. The term is perceived as outstanding and exceeding normal expectations. It is often closely related to the fame of HEIs and student success. Excellence implies that the others simply meet standards, and they are somehow a means of distinguishing the performance of 'excellent' institutions and departments (Brusoni et al., 2014). Moreover, because excellence is hard to reach, it is an elitist approach toward quality. Quality is regarded as a concept that can be realized under certain conditions. For instance, having a lecturer who has been awarded a scientific prize, studying in a modern laboratory with the most recent scientific tools, or building up an impressive library with a valuable collection of books may lead to excellent results (Harvey & Knight, 1996). The next variation of exception means checking minimum standards. From this perspective, a quality product in line with a set of criteria can pass certain quality checks and meet minimum standards. In the higher education context, for example, coursework or an exam can get a pass sign based on criteria if it meets certain standards. Any item that meets certain standards that exceed the threshold can be considered quality (Harvey & Mason, 1995). A wide number of products and services can be compared by referring to a set of standards. External agencies decide on standards and evaluate the quality of products that are like each other (Harvey & Green, 1993).

The next category by Harvey and Green (1993) is “perfection,” (p.3) which has many associations like rankings and controlling standards. Assurance is realized via external examiners, accreditation, or audit. Here, quality is perceived as consistency (Newton, 2007). This approach is also referred to as ‘zero defects’. The definition by Managers-Net (n. d.) in Analytic Quality Glossary describes zero defects as lessening errors in a process and doing the right things. Its main goal is to decrease the level of defects to zero. Mishra explains that zero-defect was coined by Philip Crosby, who is famous for his contribution to quality management practices. As explained by the author (2007), in Crosby’s view, quality is not about being good or extravagant. It is real and affordable. When perceived as consistent quality becomes a notion that everybody can have. Focusing on the process, the aim is to make sure that errors in each phase do not occur. Thus, it is directly related to prevention, as well (Harvey & Green, 1993).

According to Harvey & Green (1993), the transformative aspect of quality is closely related to the concept of changes in different ways. Just as ice turns into water or evaporates in a warmer environment, quality has transformative power in this context. In terms of quality, transformation is not just visible or physical. It includes “cognitive transcendence” (p. 24). In the concept of quality as transformation, institutional changes for the student are at the forefront. For example, in the transformation process, the enhancement of the students via the learning process is crucial. When the concept of quality is handled in this way, accreditation can be considered among the popular applied mechanisms. The principal evaluation means is forward-looking improvement audit and agenda-setting. It concentrates on changes (Newton, 2007). Quality as a means of transformation is important in that higher education can transform students. By making them more talented,

knowledgeable, and intellectual, it gives them the power to change. In today's world, this is what is needed. People who can handle and foresee change, for instance, people who can participate in the transformation of the organizations are needed. Thus, higher education enables learners to become transformative agents (Harvey & Knight, 1999).

The categorizations of quality by Harvey and Green are of crucial importance to evaluate quality in the higher education context. To this end, other researchers have identified the common themes in describing quality. For example, Igbape and Idogno (2014) have categorized the existing definitions into five main categories. Similarly, one analysis by Schindler et al. (2015) has found two ways to describe the concept. Firstly, it is to form a general definition addressing one main aim or result. In their analysis, they underline that several descriptions are driven by standards, and they focus on applying previously determined guidelines and requirements. These definitions concentrate on transcending the top requirements to achieve excellence and exclusivity. On the other hand, other descriptions are mostly stakeholder-driven that focus on social accountability and presenting a transformational education to contribute to students and authorities. In their analysis of these two strategies, Schindler et al. (2015) have revealed four general categories. They are "purposeful, exceptional, transformative, accountable" (p.7).



Figure 1 Classification of quality  
Source: [Schindler et al., 2015, p.7]

Although there is no common description that everybody agrees on, many definitions are closely interrelated. Therefore, it is necessary to target both a general strategy that concentrates on core aims and a specific method to determine quality indicators to evaluate whether the identified goals are achieved. This indicates that it is more reasonable to internalize an all-around approach towards describing quality. This approach should elicit stakeholders' viewpoints to build a general conceptualization and should correctly choose distinct indicators to assess its conceptualization (Schindler et al., 2015).

### 2.1.2 Implications for quality assurance

As underlined before, quality is a core term, and there are various perceptions of it. This may lead to a lot of debates among different stakeholders. But still, a lot of descriptions are closely related. Thus, quality remains a contested concept in higher education. Based on disparate viewpoints on how to achieve quality and on disparate worries about the implementations, many people may refer to peculiar indicators to

measure quality; and they may refer to diverse strategies to accomplish quality assurance (Cheng & Tam, 1997). Similarly, Chua (2004) states that although there is not a common definition, many standards are improved, and a wide range of criteria are used to evaluate quality in HEIs. Being aware of the parameters of quality is crucial.

Defining quality is still a crucial prerequisite for defining what quality assurance is. When determining what quality is, it is then possible to know how to assure it. According to Shin and Toutkoushian (2011), QA is one of three ways of observing techniques including the rankings, and accountability assessments. Regulatory methods are linked with threshold criteria and economic rewards or costs for performance. Thus, it is believed that quality can be assured. Authorities state that the important goal is to secure not only quality improvement but also to ensure that organizations are accountable to the public about performance and capability.

Likewise, there are some accepted structural components across definitions of quality assurance despite the huge variety of available definitions in the literature. In their analysis of the definition of quality assurance, by reviewing a huge body of literature, Schindler et al. (2015) come up with a construct. According to this construct, they state that in many definitions, quality assurance is seen as processes or policies conducted by quality and accreditation bodies outside or by the institution inside. Moreover, while defining quality assurance, some prefer to construct it more broadly whereas others highlight peculiar elements of quality assurance. Also, many definitions focus on components of quality that are related to accountability and ongoing improvement.

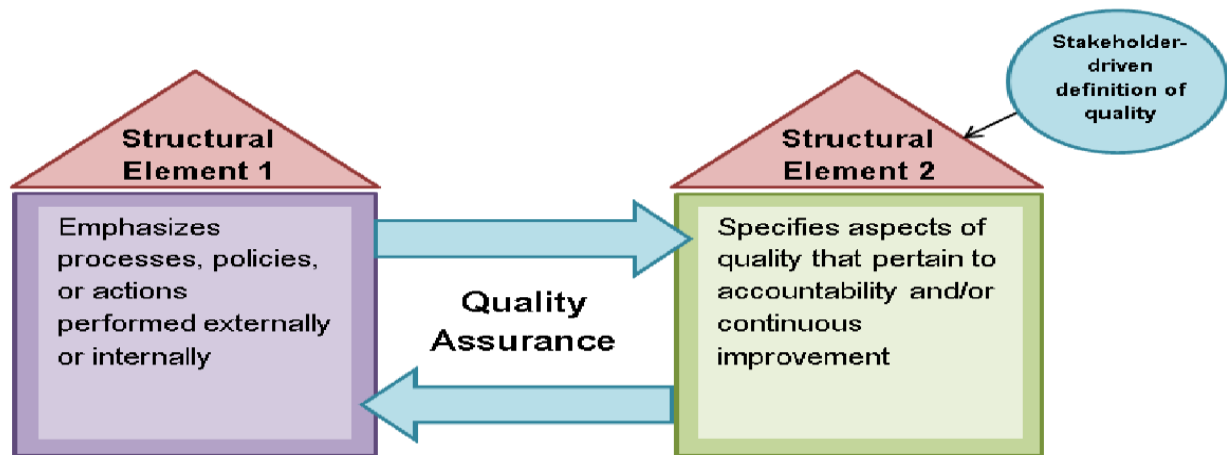


Figure 2: Definition of quality assurance

Source: [Schindler et al., 2015, p.8]

One point in the figure is that accountability and continuous improvement are the key elements of quality assurance. This is an important issue to touch upon regarding quality assurance because there is an ongoing discussion about the connection between QA and QE in the literature. As stated by Williams (2016), many discussions about quality revolve around these two concerns which are quality assurance and quality enhancement. As underlined by Thune (1996), a considerable number of quality discussions also focus on the continuum between improvement or accountability, which are highly linked to the notions of assurance and enhancement. As put forward by Matei and Iwinska (2016), quality assurance by definition is a complex phenomenon, and this results in a variety of approaches to it depending on the region or the country. Highlighting the difficulty in defining the term as in quality, they state that there are certain characteristics of QA. For instance, QA is more focused on the outputs such as skills and capabilities of university graduates and such as the knowledge created by universities through research. In an academic atmosphere where academicians are eager to train students with twenty-first-century skills, in a global market where graduates compete to show their knowledge and capabilities, quality assurance is a must (A Road Map to Quality, 2010). Moreover,

Machumu & Kisanga (2014) suggest that quality is a method for control as a means of ongoing assessment of performance based on evidence so that HEIs can have the opportunity to upgrade what they do and how they do it.

To Harvey (2005), in the quality assurance process, the inclusion of independent agencies or governmental departments is a necessity. For this reason, the purpose, and the methodology of quality assurance are directly in line with regulations. This fact causes HEIs – through conviction - to abide by the procedures and participate in QA. However, to him, if the goal is to check whether a university complies with government policies or not, then there is not enough room for democracy. Vlasceanu et al. (2007) have a similar point of view on quality assurance. They state that quality assurance has given way to bureaucracy. Through its positive effects such as effectiveness, standardization, and control, quality assurance brings about certain constrict such as enforcing hierarchies of power in terms of discourse.

Likewise, according to Olssen (2000), “such a stringent accountability regime” (p.168) has turned into a step towards the loss of the autonomy of universities. Supporting measurable results and the transformation of universities into profit-making institutions increase government control over universities through tools such as quality assurance. This naturally causes the concept of autonomy to be re-defined and deviated from the definition traditionally adopted by universities. According to Kai (2009), universities need to be autonomous to sustain themselves effectively. However, the pressure of the accountability discourse on universities has opened the way for governments to intervene in the internal affairs of these institutions. This situation is defined by Sadler (2011) as "clashes of authority" (p.2).



The clash of the expectations of the authorities causes the current quality assurance mechanisms to be questioned by the academicians.

Others suggest that quality assurance is related to evaluating certain aspects of education such as teaching. However, it is not possible to break teaching into measurable units, or for instance, quality assurance aims to indicate the relation between teaching and student learning, but it is again not possible to show such a direct cause & effect relationship (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). Despite such criticisms towards quality assurance in some circles, for some others, quality assurance has certain benefits. For instance, it is commonly believed that the main goal of QA is enabling HE mechanisms to reach a predetermined threshold. Also, quality assurance is directly related to accountability. Quality assurance and accountability are used interchangeably by many colleagues and institutions in the field (Williams, 2016). Accountability is a key concern because HEIs are held responsible for their stakeholders' financial contribution to these institutions. Higher education institutions get funding from public bodies such as governments or private stakeholders such as students and parents. Thus, concerning the quality of education within the borders of their campuses, universities need to inform a variety of stakeholders about the decisions they make. As underlined by Aithal et al. (2015), quality assurance operates as an accountability and monitoring mechanism. Likewise, Tapper and Filippakou (2008) support the idea that quality has a contested agenda, which symbolizes the battle between governments and the interest of higher education in terms of identifying the roles and governance.

### 2.1.3 Quality assurance or quality enhancement

Literature review on quality assurance reveals that the only concern regarding quality assurance is not how it is defined or regarded differently. Another hot debate on quality assurance is its relation to quality enhancement. A huge body of literature while assessing the issue concentrates on the enhancement of quality as well. The literature highlights that QA and QE are two different concepts with distinctive meanings. As there is an edgy balance between these two concepts, the usual question of incompatibility exists (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Moreover, it is underlined that the focus of attention has shifted towards quality enhancement in higher education in recent years (Filippakou & Tapper, 2008; Williams, 2016).

The major factor for the change is the apparent advantages of quality enhancement. For Vlasceanu et al. (2007), for instance, quality can be associated with continuous improvement because it concentrates on the duties of universities to utilize their autonomy and freedom. Similarly, Filippakou and Tapper (2008) underscore that quality enhancement has the potential to give more room for freedom as it leads to more interpretation. As an approach, quality assurance is related to making judgments based on fixed criteria. On the other hand, quality enhancement is less bordered. Through quality enhancement, universities experience new opportunities.

Similarly, Elassy (2015) mentions the basic distinctions between QA and QE. QE, in her view, first, is more concentrated on learning and teaching steps; and it is more related to permanent improvement. Secondly, institutional standards are more important, and it is usually from the lower to the top level. Also, quality enhancement, being more qualitative, concentrates on the now and the future. In terms of freedom, in the case of quality enhancement, academicians have more space

to have a say. On the other hand, in quality assurance, managers are more powerful than academicians.

Furthermore, Conole (2016) makes a comparison between quality assurance and enhancement and identifies the basic differences between these two approaches to quality.

Table 2. Comparison between QA and QE

Quality Assurance
Focus on teaching Teaching as individual performance Focus on monitoring/judgment Top-down implementation by managers not active in teaching Inflexible, non-negotiable approach based on standards Little acknowledgment of the link between teaching and research May undermine professional autonomy through surveillance activity Focuses on the teacher as an individual practitioner Emphasis on documentation
Quality Enhancement
Focus on learning Learning as social practice Focus on professional development Active engagement of teachers during implementation Flexible, context-sensitive approach based on building knowledge Seeks to establish links between teaching and research through reflection on practice Respects and values professional autonomy Seeks to increase collaboration between teachers and across disciplines Emphasis on discussion

Source: [Conole, 2016, p.5].

As the table implies, quality enhancement is more open to an interaction between different stakeholders. As it is a more interactive process, it boosts creativity and innovation, thus enabling restructuring higher institutions that are more compatible with modern market demands (Behera, 2016). Moreover, quality enhancement is associated with improvements and is considered an evolving operation in certain areas such as the organization and the content of lessons (Harvey & Green, 1993; Neave, 2014). Similarly, for Lemaitre (2008), quality enhancement determines the position of current quality standards and focuses on the ability to form and

implement sufficient approaches and mechanisms for self-regulation, and the continued momentum towards quality.

On the other hand, quality assurance brings about positive consequences, as well. Among many others, the focus on accountability stands out. With a systematic mindset that leads to planning and assessing their implementations, higher education institutions can at least try to make informed decisions and meet minimum standards for various stakeholders (Macau University of Science and Technology, 2021). Informing the public through sharing and exchanging, higher education institutions try to provide minimum standards as they have a chance to determine their weak and strong points (JM Consulting, Universities UK, SCOP, the DfES, & QAF, 2005).

The thing is although there are different perspectives about the functions of QA and QE, they are considered as two distinctive concepts. It is worth mentioning that there is also an ongoing discussion about the relationship between QA and QE. To illustrate, it is mentioned that the key concepts can be thought of as part of a continuum, and both are needed for a continuous process (Elassy, 2015). Furthermore, Williams (2010) states that quality assurance is an umbrella term that has the function of accountability, which is mostly associated with QA, and function of improvement, which is generally associated with QE. Moreover, ESG states that the successful application of QA leads to the quality of HEIs (accountability) and recommendations on improvement (enhancement). This underlines the fact that these two terms are interrelated and all-embracing. This explanation in ESG is important in that the document adopted by many countries including Turkey is considered one of the key documents, which contributes to the understanding of quality culture.

As also stated by Newton (2007), the conceptual journey regarding quality reveals that in practical terms, the most constructive method is to internalize a

perspective that agrees on the changing nature of quality, which is changing following beneficiaries, context and quality assurance methodologies. As a result of vagueness in the definition of quality, one needs to accept the multiple dimensions of quality and say no to accepting one single definition. Defining quality in tertiary education is solely possible with a special focus.

Thus, this study based on the model by Schindler et al. (2015) internalizes an all-around approach. For this study, QA is seen as a mechanism that is concentrated on the needs of a variety of stakeholders and on peculiar methods to determine quality indicators to evaluate whether the identified goals are achieved. By eliciting stakeholders' viewpoints to build a general conceptualization and correctly choosing distinct indicators to assess the conceptualization, quality can be assured in higher education systems (Schindler et al., 2015).

## 2.2 Main approaches to quality assurance

Quality has become a concern for HEIs at both regional and international levels. Debates on various instruments regarding QA have risen in the last decades, and this led to different methods. In reviewing the concept of QA, itself, Ryan (2015) highlights that although there is a need for a common framework, there is no agreement regarding a QA model. Similarly, Nicholson (2011) points to the lack of common ground surrounding the methods. Being on the same page with Nicholson et al. (2007), he underlines the diversity of definitions can be confusing at times as it implies that there is no common understanding about the issue. Plus, varied definitions for a given concept have resulted in many operational meanings in use. In this regard, it is necessary to evaluate the main methods used because despite the

lack of a common framework for QA, there are still main approaches that differ in perspectives, but are widely used (Kis, 2005).

### 2.2.1 Accreditation

Among a variety of practices, accreditation is one of the most widely used methods. Historically, accreditation evolved in the American HE at a chaotic period when there was not a main regulation body to identify standards about education. At that time, there was no agreement about the content of the teaching and learning programs by HEIs (Hedji, 2017). As for other regions, including Europe, accreditation was previously considered to have a relatively weak status as a mode of regulation. However, this situation has changed a lot in the last two decades. This change has occurred in Eastern Europe following the fall of the Regime because of a shift to the market economy. Accreditation has also gained a high status in western Europe as part of the Bologna Declaration (Stensaker, 2010). Moreover, in the last three decades, accreditation methods have been formed based on the US methods in Asia and Latin America (Hsu, 2017).

Nobarian and Adbi (2007) state that accreditation is the official recognition of a person or body as meeting a threshold. The concept means showing advancement that goes beyond basic standards set by the accreditation organization. For Dill (2000), it means a form of quality assurance that evaluates if an organization or program can reach minimum qualifications for a certain position. Similarly, Chalmers and Johnston (2012) attach importance to meeting required standards set by the certification body while defining accreditation. To the authors, the result of accreditation is dual. This means that an institute, a course, or a program either passes or fails on the way to accreditation. Furthermore, defining accreditation,

Sanyal and Martin (2007) focus on its certain advantages which are (i) “quality control (minimum standards) in higher education”; (ii) “accountability and transparency”; (iii) “quality enhancement”; and (iv) “the facilitation of student mobility” (p.6).

There are certain principles of accreditation in higher education. Dill (2000) underscores that accreditation is criterion-referenced. This way, there is a comparison of observed performance of an institution against preset standards of an accrediting agency. Moreover, accreditation is not only related to the objectives but also to the application of objectives. In accreditation, different performance indicators, which are self-study and peer review, are applied. One more important point is that accreditation, which can be either institutional and/or program level, is always conducted by an agency external to the institution itself.

One more important issue to pinpoint about accreditation is that there are basically two approaches to accreditation. The first one controls if a higher education institution (HEI) or program is reaching its mentioned goals and confirms if the objective can be sustainable. They cannot all be evaluated through the same criteria for they provide peculiar services for target groups in a diversified system of HE. The approach is thought to be more suitable for QE. On the other hand, it is also claimed that in accreditation systems, all HEIs need to meet certain standards and be responsible. The argument is related to the standard-based approach. In this one, detailed standards are identified for a variety of features of institutions or programs’ quality. Organizations or programs aim to reach certain thresholds. The compiled proof is evaluated concerning overall structures instead of every specific criterion. An organization or a program can be weak in one field. However, it may have strong points in other fields and is certified for accreditation (Sanyal & Martin, 2007).

### 2.2.2 Benchmarking

Among a variety of practices, benchmarking is another commonly applied method of QA. In the late 1900s, the benchmarking method was commonly used in business as an explicit and functional tool for building up the competitive competence of firms. Then, the method gained popularity, and was a means of enhancement of efficiency (Alstete, 1995).

Benchmarking is a concept that is commonly applied within the quality sector. Vlasceanu et al. (2007) defined benchmarking as a diagnostic means and a self-improvement tool that enable institutions to contrast themselves with other institutions about several forms of performance. The aim here is to detect ways to ameliorate present performance. Moreover, as stated by Epper (1999), business leaders find benchmarking to be easier comparing oneself against a statistical norm or standard. As benchmarking involves first looking into and understanding your internal work procedures, then exploring for best practices in other institutions, this will eventually help to adopt those practices within your organization to enhance performance. This is to say that benchmarking is a systematic method of learning from each other and making alterations in what you have been doing (Epper, 1999).

According to McKinnon et al. (2000), benchmarking provides a tool for universities. To give more details, through benchmarking, HEIs determine performance trends and start self-improvement. They can compare their performance to that of others and discover their competitive positions. Likewise, Epper (1999) emphasizes that by employing benchmarking, the ground is prepared for networking, it paves the way for generating alternative ideas, and the quality process is actively improved.



Furthermore, to Popa et al. (2009), benchmarking increases the capability of institutions to evaluate themselves in an increasingly competitive environment. Benchmarking functions in many ways for an institution to reinforce its place in the field. To give a few examples, HEIs learn how to do well and why, spot innovative opinions, learn from peers for development, collect information to enhance decisions with strategic improvements, determine objectives for the development of procedures and methods to enhance performance, build up organizational culture, enhance reputation, find responses for national performance indicators, and determine innovative criteria in HE. It is advantageous to managers who oversee the developmental processes of their organization. Through a regular compilation of information, and determined objectives, decisions are made for better performance outcomes. Benchmarking is an effective solution to the self-approval, which is seen as a problem of HE (Sorensen et al., 2005).

Despite the existence of good examples, benchmarking is criticized in terms of its applications in universities (Putkiranta, 2012). One common criticism against benchmarking is that it is regarded as a method for marginally advancing current procedures, that it is relevant merely to managerial procedures. Also, it is believed by some that it is somehow a euphemism for copying that prevents innovation; and that there is a risk of revealing institutional shortcomings (Shafer & Coate, 1992; Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015).

### 2.2.3 Quality audit

Another popular approach is the quality audit. The quality audit was improved in Britain in the nineteen-eighties. Afterwards, countries such as New Zealand and Hong Kong started to apply it in their national contexts. The main factors that have

made quality audits so popular include critical concerns about educational standards, the deterioration in the sustainability of HE, lack of innovation capacity, and the need to promote quality culture in HEIs (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002).

As described by Harvey (2004-21) in *Analytic Quality Glossary*, audit means “a process for checking that procedures are in place to assure quality, integrity, standards of provision and outcomes”. To Costes et al. (2008), an audit is an assessment of the strong points and shortcomings of the quality systems founded by an organization itself to regularly check and ameliorate the practices of either a subject, a program, or all units of an organization. Kastelliz et al. (2014) underscore that there are at least three common characteristics of audit procedures that can be identified in the different national contexts. These are paying attention to organizational QA, motivation for enhancement, and proof via examples.

In recent years, various European countries have applied quality audits as a perspective to external QA in tertiary education for some reasons. One reason is that a quality audit focuses on ameliorating the capacity of HEIs to ensure the quality of diplomas and education. Moreover, it is underlined that quality audit leads institutions to evaluate themselves, and this way enhance by self-assessing their strengths and shortcomings, and taking remedial action (Hsu, 2017). It is also believed that audit enables a better understanding of challenges by receiving a third party’s particular capabilities, hi-tech, and experience, which might not be present internally (Cohn Reznick, n.d.). Although cost-effective and easy to apply in comparison to institutional accreditation reviews, audits can be underrated as a means of accountability as they concentrate on process instead of the assessment of academic results (Hsu, 2017).

To conclude, it needs to be stated that QA can be addressed in many ways. The definitions of the various approaches are not sharp, and these don't have to be necessarily consistent with each other. There may exist a lot of similarities in structure. However, so many nuances may also exist. Such nuances may lead to wide ranges of differences in practice. Moreover, as expressed by Woodhouse (1999), differences between them can go beyond the technical peculiarities of quality assurance mechanisms, and be more related to cultural, political, financial, and social considerations of any country. Thus, in practice, a combination of the basic approaches can be followed depending on the operation model and the purpose in mind.

### 2.3 Rationales for quality assurance in higher education

The world is experiencing enormous problems in all walks of life and new improvements are becoming apparent with growing difficulties for HE (Darwish & Batool, 2016). All these challenges have greatly influenced the content and the delivery of higher education. Challenges such as globalization, massification, internationalization, the use of new technologies, accountability, competition, and dominance of market forces (Hallak & Poisson, 2013) have affected the nature of HE; and these core issues have led to the proliferation of quality practices in HE. Thus, quality assurance has started to be discussed and become a crucial aspect of higher education and governments have globally given importance to quality in HE.

#### 2.3.1. Globalization

Globalization in higher education systems is a complex or complicated phenomenon. It causes the introduction of global and intercultural elements into education and

research. To Darwish & Batool (2016), higher education is shaped in new dimensions due to globalization. Emerging foreign providers expanded the number of off-shore campuses of universities, joint degrees, international degrees, associate degrees, and cross-border affiliations have become inevitable aspects of HE (p.175).

As stated by Scott (2000), it is a must to understand the difficulties universities are experiencing in the modern world by taking the phenomenon of globalization seriously. Globalization, by rejecting the boundaries of nations, draws countries into turbulence. It is a paradigm shift, a shift from modernity to post-modernity, thus leading to fundamental changes in societies and leading to profound re-construction of notions and understandings of the modern era. Universities are not an exception, and they have been drawn into turbulence created by globalization, which means they have had to challenge their limits and re-designed their notions and missions, as well.

The reason for this is that globalization, as underlined by Altbach and Knight (2007), causes a boost in the service sector and dependence of a lot of nations on knowledge productions and well-educated cadre for financial prosperity. All nations today experience major new challenges in a global environment where the role of knowledge is becoming more and more important. Among the major crucial elements of change are the global concurrent influences and the rising position of knowledge as an impetus for improvement. Thus, globalization has caused higher education systems to meet certain problems to be dealt with nationally and internationally. Quality in education is not a local issue anymore; and it is related to international standards since it has larger geographical land to contest across borders (Mok & Welch, 2003).

Globalization has made a tremendous change in universities, and it has considerably influenced the educational quality provided by these institutions. To Darwish & Batool (2016), universities are currently playing important roles to build communities of the present times. HEIs in the developed countries influence HE mechanisms of the less developed nations by leading “transnational education” (p.175) with international contracts, off-shore university branches, and connections. Thus, the overall quality in education and research is upgraded with competition and better students who have knowledge, talents, and qualities, which are necessary for improving socially and financially.

As mentioned by Pedraja-Rejas et al. (2016), globalized HE necessitates a functioning system that provides graduates with higher training, which leads to competitive skills that help them to be successfully integrated into not only national but also the international labor market. Thus, education quality received in a variety of universities needs to be monitored through evaluative systems such as accreditation and evaluation practices. Similarly, Lemaitre (2008) underscores that quality assurance procedures are highly crucial for universities that are exposed to the challenges of globalization. The reason for this is that all nations are to assure the quality of education they offer in their universities not only for their students but also for those coming from other countries because of the global context of higher education. Thus, in his view, quality assurance bodies play a big role as they determine minimum standards of quality education, and this way, they operate as trustworthy organizations that students can count on while making their decisions to study abroad.

It is crucial to highlight that globalization in higher education claims to offer better standards. These standards are related to the quality of faculties’ research and

education activities overall, and they necessitate attention on QA and betterment in HE. Assessments and different measurement tools need to be dealt with while setting and improving the professional organizations to reach the relevant objectives of globalization and QA.

### 2.3.2 Massification

Under the influence of globalization that leads to profound changes in many fields including education, the demand for tertiary education is getting higher. Countries worldwide have been experiencing expanded enrollment rates for the last decades. It is strongly believed that this increase will go on in the following years as well. According to the figures, it is thought that this could go up to 263 million by 2025, and around 400 million students by 2040 (Karaim, 2011; Knobel, 2015).

Hallak and Poisson (2013) state that the figures of students at universities have exploded in the late 20th century primarily due to the dramatic demand for tertiary education among people and the necessity for educated and qualified people. In 1970, the figures in tertiary education institutions were 28.2 million. Till 1990, this number went up to 70.8, and by 2004 to 132 million. Countries, which had a limited number of people attending university, have given importance to their programs on a much larger population in reaction to the changes across the world.

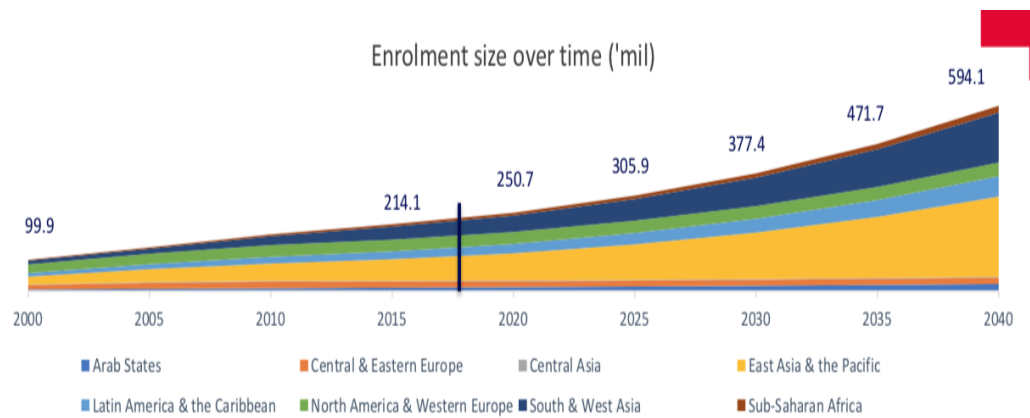


Figure 3. Massification and enrollment rates  
Source: [Calderon, 2018, p.3].

These figures imply that the increase in the enrollment rates will continue in the upcoming years. There are several important factors for the growth in the figures of students who are eager to attend HE. HE is linked to improved health, empowerment, and economic development. Moreover, higher education can serve both public and private advantages for countries. Other benefits of massification include social mobility for more population and diversification of educational systems, thus resulting in the democratization of higher education (Altbach et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, massification has posed a myriad of challenges for countries that allow high enrolments in HE mechanisms. To illustrate, the nations, unable to meet the growing demands stemming from massification, have had to deal with problems such as large numbers of students, lack of high-quality instructional materials, and crowded lecture halls (Obanya, 2004; Özer et al., 2016; Arap 2010; Kipchumba, 2019; Akalu, 2007). Furthermore, massification has led to lecturers devoting less time to research and upgrading themselves since they need to allocate more time to lecturing and assessment (Abagi & Olweya, 1999). Similarly, research by Mukurunge et al. (2019) reveals that in response to the drastic increase in enrolment rates, academicians have had to bear more responsibilities for providing

quality education with insufficient sources such as inadequate facilities, scanty humanpower, and limited funding.

One important result of massification is that universities have started to receive funding from a wide range of beneficiaries in addition to governments. Thus, students, parents, for-profit organizations have become more influential in universities in terms of decision-making. For instance, as stated by Knobel (2015), the change in the funding policy has led certain universities to focus on short-term goals that are more related to financial return. With such a vision in mind, universities fall into the trap of unelaborate planning, which causes universities to open programs without giving much attention to “investment in infrastructure, faculty qualifications and program stability” (p.9). In his article, he concludes that to be able to provide high-quality education in massified higher education, universities are to form distinguishing programs to assure both the access and the success of students without sacrificing quality. Therefore, countries need to improve the framework for evaluating quality processes and for promoting institutional diversity at the same time.

Knobel is not alone in his perspective. Similarly, Mohamedbhai (2008) reports that massified higher education institutions need to form systems that can combine wide access with high quality. In his dissertation, it is underlined that universities that receive funding from students are inclined to accept less qualified students to be able to raise more funding, which means deterioration in quality in terms of education.

Likewise, Ashcroft (2004) highlights that not only developing but also developed HE systems such as in Britain have experienced a lot of challenges because of massification; and this has caused quality debates in those countries as



well. The changes in student profile and funding regimes have encouraged universities to find new ways for updated teaching, learning, and assessment procedures. Universities have found themselves competing for students on the grounds of quality and the services they offer. The harsh competition between universities for receiving more funding has resulted in the introduction of more scrutiny, especially for quality and accountability. Moreover, as underlined by Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018), the rapid increase in heterogeneous student profiles has heated the debates revolving around quality assurance in terms of the new nature of teaching methodologies. It has been a necessity to innovate traditional teaching methodologies to appeal to changing student profiles.

In conclusion, for many countries, there has been a big problem with establishing a system of higher education, which can balance the twin demands of excellence and massification. These occurrences have undoubtedly resulted in concerns about high-quality education and students. As noted by many authors, due to the proliferation of universities globally, QA has been a center of attention. Thus, QA has been an issue in the international higher education agenda for four decades (Mok, 2000; Peterson, 1999).

### 2.3.3 Internationalization

Globalization paving the way to dramatic economic and social developments has resulted in a massive expansion in internationalization. Internationalization is considered as the process of the exchange of viewpoints, data, and academic mobility (Deem, 2001); and it is described differently by focusing on various aspects of the term (Teichler, 2017). But reviewing the literature, it is possible to highlight that the most accepted definition of the term comes from Knight (2003), which is “the

process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p.2).

Furthermore, one important point while defining internationalization is its relation to globalization. From Abdouli’s perspective, internationalization is not a synonym for globalization, and one should be careful and should not confuse the term with globalization (n.d.). In addition to the impact of globalization, certain crucial occurrences have put internationalization in higher education in the center. To de wit & Altbach (2020), these are listed as the growing globalization and “regionalization” (introduction, parag. 2) of markets and nationalities and “the end of the Cold War” (introduction, parag. 2). Also, as underlined by Guri-Rosenblit (2015), the rise in the figures of students who go to university, the influence of digital technology and the co-dependent world have caused universities to prioritize internationalization on their agenda. Universities in a lot of regions including Europe have started to shift to a more international arena.

Moreover, among the important occurrences stated above, as also expressed by Benneworth et al. (2012), the economic rationale has been a catalyzer for international HE. Revenue generation has become crucial in the last decades, specifically in countries in which international students pay their tuition fees. Thus, universities have focused on important strategies to generate additional resources to compensate for budget cuts from governments. Likewise, as underscored by Crisan-Mitra and Borza (2015), universities have concentrated on innovative strategies to attract students and to be successful in the global competition in globalized higher education. Being competitive through internationalization has been influential on trends in higher education and led to a dynamic evolution by resulting in radical changes in universities.

All these discussions on the internationalization of higher education demonstrate that the concept has caused the evolution of the nature of universities. The expanding mobility of academic staff and students, forming more innovative and updated curricula, and mergers between institutions among many other developments have affected the vision of education quality within higher institutions (Damme, 2001). Moreover, the mobilization of talent in support of global research and the creation of dynamic international networks among academic circles have had a tremendous impact on the quality of education as well. Plus, internationalization has resulted in several positive outcomes such as enhancing the learning environment with students and staff who are internationally oriented and with a curriculum that is coordinated with international content (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). At present, there is a big variety of state and for-profit and distance education services because of internationalization in HE.

In addition to the important impacts of internationalization in HE, it is important to underline that the concept has paved the way to build international trust through networks between nationalities. Internationalization is a very effective way of communication in terms of international relations conducted by universities. It is a way to have a connection in terms of policy, practice, and research at universities (Rosyidah et al., 2020). Moreover, universities by realizing the economic impact of internationalization have taken proactive roles over the past decades. It is regarded as a catalyzer for national financial progress, trade, and reputation. It is seen to attract global students and academicians, to open branch campuses and to do networking with international providers, to heat competition for international talent (de Wit & Altbach, 2020).

On the other hand, within the scope of the discussions about the positive influences of internationalization, universities are to be ready for the challenges of the concept as well. As stated by Crisan-Mitra and Borza (2015), to reach the desired goals, universities need to adopt intelligible strategies of internationalization and improve quality management systems, which give them a framework to be able to efficiently apply the measures necessary to achieve higher performances. In today's present situation of higher education, internationalization and a quality assurance dimension need to go hand in hand.

Moreover, as underscored by Henard et al. (2012), the challenges resulting from internationalization enforce universities to form practical policies and bodies to elevate their competitiveness in the world. One crucial issue to pinpoint regarding internationalization is the spread of present QA approaches. The growing trend in internationalization has caused international activities in HE regarding speed and size. Many initiatives have appeared to safeguard the quality of such activities. In the instantaneously changing atmosphere of HE, the continuance of high quality and standards in education has become a primary concern for HEIs, so the demand for QA processes that focus on accountability and transparency has gone up. As a result, as highlighted by Nobarian and Abdi (2007), many countries have established national quality assurance systems that lead to a necessity to create a culture of quality when handling the concerns of tertiary education globally.

In recent years, specific QA procedures have emerged. For instance, the UK and the Netherlands, among many other countries, have come up with instruments for the revision of the internationalization policies of organizations. Both governmental and private organizations have implemented quality checks on the education of organizations in their global network (Van Damme, 2002).

Similarly, in Europe, from which Turkey is inclined to borrow policies in terms of quality assurance, there have been some steps taken for the internationalization of quality assurance. For instance, as mentioned by Campbell and van der Wende (2000), a research team about assessment and QA in internationalization was founded by the Academic Cooperation Association in 1993. Furthermore, the Bologna Process and the promotion of European higher education in the region have led to the efforts for the development of quality assessment tools (de Boer et al., 2010).

#### 2.3.4. Neoliberal managerialism

In addition to the main occurrences that have happened under the influence of globalization, the economic activities have impacted HE, too. Theorized by the viewpoints of economists such as Friedman and Hayek and popularized by Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US, neoliberalism has come to the center of attention since the 1970s. The economic stagnation of the 1970s has led to implausible welfare policies in western countries. Thus, the question of how to provide effective public welfare has become a key concern for policy agendas (Salter & Tapper, 2002). Moreover, since the 1980s, the link between authorities and the public has evolved with the emergence of the values related to neoliberal policies. Thus, neoliberalism has penetrated publicly funded institutions and workplaces (Kandiko, 2010; Davies, 2014).

As an ideology and model of politics, neoliberalism pioneers free-market competition. The basic principles of neoliberal thought and practice have been discussed in different ways; and it might be said that laissez-faire economics can best explain neoliberalism (Bleiklie, 2018). As underlined by Lynch (2014), with the

emergence of neoliberalism as a system of values, there has been an inclination to reduce the costs in education, health, and civil services mostly on the governments' side. Moreover, the ideology of neoliberalism has encouraged governments to privatize public services which can be done for profit, including higher education.

When literature is reviewed, it is seen that the relation between neoliberalism and new public management (NPM) is highly discussed (Lynch, 2014; Clarke et al., 2000; Kai, 2009; Olssen & Peters, 2007). New public management is a reform method claiming that the productivity of the public service must be enhanced through the introduction of managerial methods and procedures coming mostly from the private sector. It is a form of governance created to fulfill the neoliberal approach through the institutionalization of market values in the management of organizations.

As stated by Clarke et al. (2000), new managerialism is a form of management associated with neoliberalism. As a management strategy, its goal is to institutionalize market principles in the management of all organizations including higher education. According to Kai (2009), in line with NPM, the role of the governments should be given to market mechanisms through decentralization. Public institutions should be run without the interventionist approaches of the governments.

The rise of neoliberalism and new public management since the 1970s has caused a radical shift in the way universities have been described in terms of their functions and existence. Instead of academic and scholarly questioning rooted in conventions, performance and productivity have been given a higher priority as documented through strategic outlining, performance indicators, assessments, and audits (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

With the penetration of neoliberalism along with a new public management vision into the education field, universities have adopted market values and practices on their agenda by focusing on results calculated via performance indicators and league tables. They have internalized the neoliberal concepts in an economy such as efficiency and performance (Dougherty & Natow, 2015). Focusing on project-based employment among their personnel, they have promoted the decentralization of their budgets and financial planning (Clarke & Newman, 1997).

Moreover, managerialism in line with neoliberalism was a reaction to the call for boosting efficiency and perfectionism in HE. Therefore, it generated alterations in how government-funded organizations were directed. Among many things, it resulted in a change in the funding of HE from relying mostly on governments to getting income from tuition fees and giving guidance services. The change has been a crucial peculiarity of the marketization of HE. The link between universities, government, and the public has shifted from government monitored to accelerated control by the market (Deem, 1998). Following the worldwide monetarist approach of cuts in state expenses, reductions in university funding have become indispensable.

Furthermore, with the introduction of the performance management paradigm in the public sphere (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000), the new managerial concepts of competition and value have continually invaded traditional higher education systems (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Hence, national, and regional quality assurance bodies that measure quality in HE has gained popularity and have been established across the world. This way, governments in different countries have begun to inspect their higher education systems; and these governments have demanded these bodies to be more accountable for the results with the supplies they are provided with. Thus,

accountability has become the prevalent reason for quality evaluation since the 1990s (Westerheijden et al., 2014; Latchem, 2015).

One prominent impact of neoliberalism along with new public management is that accountability has gained importance in HE. As highlighted by Stensaker et al. (2011), the implementation of accountability perspective has been on the rise in HE independent of geographical regions. As expressed by Huisman (2018), along with the massification of HE and the need to regulate the diversified higher education institutions, the neoliberal policies have become one main rationale for the emergence of accountability in universities. Governments, the funders of HE in many cases, have needed to balance investments in the system like in other sectors, such as compulsory education, health, social welfare, and so on. Also, the growth of massified systems has become difficult to be monitored through detailed regulation. Thus, instead of strict regulations, governments have preferred to give more power to HEIs. While doing so, they have asked institutions to account for their activities through reports on a variety of activities. Thus, about the impact of neoliberal ideologies, performance standards were thought to be operational tools for controlling many sectors including universities.

While giving more independence to HEIs, one way to monitor the actions of a university has been to put accountability onto the agenda of universities. As a widely used concept in administration since the 1980s, accountability is described as the explanation of an action; it is associated with the liability for the results of those actions. Accountability in higher education systems is a term, considered closely linked to performance and evaluation. HEIs are demanded to achieve their premediated objectives by indicating the results and performance evaluations. Accountability is an invitation for universities to indicate that they have reached the



preplanned outcomes and performance. Accountability is a call for proving that resources are effectively allocated and used. In tertiary education, accountability and QA are connected. Quality assurance is one side and accountability is the other side of the coin (Kai, 2014).

In addition to the stress on accountability policies, governments have demanded HEIs to indicate more openly their quality and efficiency. Documentation necessities, performance indicators, and site visits by evaluation teams have become common practices. Plus, a lot of new agencies have been founded to apply the new ways of control. Currently, many agencies, both state and private that serve as quality assurance organizations, have been founded in many countries (El-Khawas, 2006).

#### 2.3.5. Marketization and Privatization

With the introduction of market values into university campuses since the late 1970s, traditional academic practices have been gradually transformed and no matter what the costs and benefits are, marketization has become one core issue that academicians are to deal with (Furedi, 2011). As underlined by Williams (1995), in universities, there is an ongoing trend towards the integration of values encouraged by marketization. In line with the marketization of universities, there have been common practices among universities. For example, universities have become dependent on tuition fees which means students need to pay for the educational services they receive. Institutional rankings have been given priority because of harsh competition for more enrolment of students. Plus, universities have allocated their resources and motivation to marketing and branding strategies (Hemsley & Brown, 2011).

Defined as an “epidemic” (p.187) by Natale and Doran (2012), private higher education has drastically expanded across the world for various reasons such as the increasing expenses of managing educational institutions, cuts in state financial support, and the dissolution of the welfare state (Kaneko, 2004). Moreover, the dominant economic doctrines, market capitalism, and neo-liberal economics have given rise to the marketization of universities and the rise of private universities across the world. Chevaillier and Eicher (2002) underline that the main driving factors for the marketization of HE includes the rise in the figures of students in HE, the implementation of the economic market, the global financial crisis paving the way to increasing expenses, the stress on managing the sources efficiently and the expansion of a global market for education and research.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that proponents of marketization suggest that through marketization, HEIs have become more flexible and efficient places. This way, students and parents have a say as the main beneficiaries of educational services because HEIs have been more responsive to the expectations of a variety of stakeholders including employers in the market and students and parents (Furedi, 2011). As suggested by Olssen (2016), students going to private universities are regarded as rational investors who can make informed decisions as the consumers of educational services.

Marketization is considered an action to step away from state-provided education. Avoiding centralized way of management by the governments, through private higher education, choices of parents and students, diversification of educational institutions have been given priority (Newman & Jahdi, 2009; Whitty & Power, 2000). As underlined by Kaneko (2004), traditional discourse of universities, home to purely intellectual inquiry, was not something very understandable for

people from different walks of life in society. Although universities were highly respected institutions, as the burden on society was too much, its functions and existence began to be questioned by different stakeholders on the ground of efficiency.

It can be stated the traditional position of universities has been challenged by the ideology of marketization in the eyes of society. Originally, universities have been regarded as places that lead to intellectual development. They have been places where knowledge is produced by great scholars and academicians and disseminated to society. However, with the introduction of marketization into the field of higher education, universities are now allocating their time and effort more on marketization through appealing advertising campaigns and eye-catching slogans to be able to reach out to a lot of students (Shahnaz & Qadir, 2019).

The marketization of HE, for sure, brings about the question of quality in the literature. As explained by Cave et al. (1992), a common belief among the proponents of marketization is that quality is safeguarded automatically because students as consumers of the services have the freedom to choose the product that fits their needs and desires. This way, higher education institutions that do not respond to updated trends run the risk of going out of business. Likewise, as claimed by Tomlinson and Watermeyer (2020), for those who see the marketization of higher education as a beneficial improvement, marketization stresses the importance of the value for money approach and students can receive an education that enables them to be well prepared for future professional lives.

On the other hand, private universities cause a huge amount of concern, as well. As underscored by Furedi (2011), marketization is closely linked to the commodification of academic knowledge:

Specifically, it is oriented towards the transformation of what is an abstract, intangible, non-material, and relational experience into a visible, quantifiable, and instrumentally driven process. The various rituals of commodification, such as quality control, auditing and ranking performance, quantifying the experience of students, and constructing league tables, are essentially performative accomplishments. (p.2)

Furthermore, the trend towards marketization in higher education is harshly criticized as it is believed to lower the quality of education. The criticisms revolve around the fact that societal needs differ from market interests. To illustrate, pharmaceutical firms are eager to support research on cancer or diabetes. However, they may not be that much motivated to support projects for which there is not any market benefit (Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2020).

Under the influence of these quality debates, the managerial vocabulary of marketization has penetrated the field of higher education (Miscamble, 2006). Neoliberal and managerialist ideologies hand in hand with marketization have caused the evaluation of universities for quality and efficiency (Lock & Lorenz, 2007), which has caused the proliferation of QA practices in the field across the world.

#### 2.3.6 Global competition and rankings

Today, university rankings have become popular among institutions, the public, governments, and other stakeholders who want to get easily interpretable information about the institutional stance. University rankings have been an important indicator of institutional performance for policymakers all over the world. The Anglo-Saxon world has been familiar with national and regional university rankings for several decades and the most popular one among many others is the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University Rankings. On the other hand, in recent years, the international rankings have emerged in other regional and national higher

education systems like the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking and like the QS Arab Region University Rankings (Aguillo et al., 2010).

Many factors have played a role in the emergence of international university rankings. Among these factors are the effect of globalization on HE mechanisms, the reduction, and cuts in funds for universities, the competition of universities in finding resources and students, and the increase in academic and student mobility (Marginson & van Der Wende, 2007; Harvey, 2008). Furthermore, these rankings, sometimes known as league tables and scorecards, have become of utmost importance because HEIs have started to care for them to increase their dwindling resources. They have enabled universities to compare themselves with others in increasingly competitive higher education systems (Federkeil, 2008; Harvey, 2008). Plus, students have seen them as proof of superior quality and means of transparency (Chalmers & Johnson, 2012). These and many other factors have made international university rankings a common phenomenon. In response to the challenge for excellence in the worldwide competitive environment, ranking awareness has increased significantly (Hazelkorn, 2013). According to Badat (2010), international university rankings are an important result of the new managerial perspective towards HE and represent the neoliberal ethics of market competitiveness. Neoliberal policies, which had an impact all over the world after the 1980s, have had a crucial role in the emergence of global university rankings. Indeed, the rankings are perceived as productions of a market-oriented culture in higher education.

One more reason why ranking has gained popularity is the expansion of knowledge-based economies. Knowledge is the main factor for the financial and social improvement of societies. Higher education, which is seen as a main catalyst of creating knowledge and innovation, has been given priority in many countries. Its

efficiency and quality have become vital indicators of competitiveness among nations. Moreover, investment in research and development by higher education institutions is now widely recognized as crucial because it is believed that investment in these fields provides the knowledge base which is necessary for economic growth in a highly competitive atmosphere. Nations have been investing hugely especially in biosciences and technology as they are motivated to make the greatest gains. Thus, the changing dynamics of the world economy, the status of university-based research to become competitive have resulted in the expansion of rankings (Hazelkorn, 2013).

To remain competitive, one main agenda of countries has been to focus on high-skilled immigration including international students. Internationally high-skilled students are thought to contribute highly to host countries in different ways. They, for instance, participate in research and development activities (Hazelkorn, 2008). Some countries get huge amounts of income from them. They are seen as a sign of status and reputation (Harvey, 2008). Moreover, the quality of universities is crucial for students whose tuition fees are increasing gradually. Thanks to the comparative information provided by the rankings, students can distinguish between different disciplines and programs. They can make more conscious choices about where and what to study (Hazelkorn, 2013).

Just like students, higher education institutions follow the rankings carefully. As Badran and Muwalla (2019) point out, rankings are important for universities because depending on where they are placed in the league tables, universities may have the opportunity to make different investments and numerous partnerships. The rankings are functional for universities because they are thought to give objective data on the performance of HEIS. Moreover, governments use rankings when determining their policies regarding higher education and making decisions on this

matter (Hazelkorn, 2007). Governments use rankings as a benchmarking or quality assurance tool to be strategically informed, to clearly define national or institutional goals and strategies, when setting decision-making processes (Sheil & Hazelkorn, 2012).

Rankings have been a disputed subject in higher education, and it has been criticized in many circles. For instance, it is highlighted by Chalmers and Johnston (2012) that ignoring teaching and learning activities, rankings mainly focus on research performance and reputation. Likewise, Harvey (2008) expressed technical and philosophical concerns about rankings. Also, differences in the techniques used to compile the index may cause a significant bias in ranking results. An important criticism of international rankings is that they have become influential because of the broader neoliberal agenda on higher education (Badat, 2010). In a relatively shorter time, international university rankings have become the institution's benchmarks for policymakers around the world. With scientific objectivity, these categorization systems addressed the hegemonic style of higher education - the aristocratic, Anglo-Saxon higher education institutions. Bowden (2000) highlights that those institutions are largely arbitrarily and deliberately under great pressure to comply with Anglocentric performance indicators.

As a result, the rankings have had enormous effects on elements of higher education such as nations, institutions, and individual scholars. In that sense, the confrontation of tertiary education systems with them has led them to question themselves. In a global market, game-changing rankings have formed the basis for a fundamental transformation. International comparisons have become inevitable for competing universities. Ranking results and performance metrics have become part of the discourse. In this context, the rankings further sparked discussions on quality

and placed the concept of QA in a broad comparative and global framework (Hazelkorn, 2014).

From the perspective of market competition and consumer choice, rankings have become important parameters for measuring the quality of HE. As Anderson (2006) underlines, when rankings are viewed as a quality assurance mechanism, they have a great influence on how institutions define quality. Discussions on the strong and weak points of the institutions in terms of quality assurance have been conducted around the rankings. Rankings have become a powerful mechanism as universities determine the direction of their development. Yingqiang and Yongjian (2016), referring to rankings as quality assurance technologies, underscore that these technologies have become the intermediary methodologies of higher education quality assurance ideology.

#### 2.3.7 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and expectations

A generation is described as a group of people who are born in the same years and share the same important life events. People who grew up in the same period are thought to have similar beliefs, judgments, attitudes, and expectations (Glass, 2007). There are currently four generations. They are “Baby Boomers”, “Generation X”, “the Millennials”, and “Generation Z” (Dimock, 2019, p.4). All four differ from each other in terms of their characteristics and values which may cause a generation gap. Among these four generations, the millennials are the kids of the 1990s who were born roughly between 1980 and 2000. Because of the improvements in technology, they have been exposed to smartphones, laptops, and other gadgets since their early childhood. Generation Z is a term that refers to people who were born between 1997



and 2012. Generation Z is seen as the extension of the millennials because they both have an intimate relationship with technology (Mendez, 2008).

As stated by Houle and Cobb (2011), those who belong to millennials and generation Z considerably differ from their predecessors. As in many cases, these two generations of people differ from their predecessors in terms of education. Regarding education, Shih and Allen (2007) emphasize that the learners belonging to generation Y differ in terms of their expectations and qualifications. People belonging to this generation have different learning backgrounds, experiences, preferences, and skills than they did before. Therefore, these students need to be approached in different ways in terms of pedagogy. Different teaching strategies and updated learning environments should be provided to them. At the same time, with the impact of some dramatic changes brought about by the age of technology, these masses of students in the 21st century learn under more diverse conditions than ever before. If it is necessary to elaborate, these people are into studying differently. For instance, they may prefer to have a flexible schedule. They may prefer working for a company face-to-face or working from home. This leads to the creation of an informal curriculum that supports the student experience, both changing and increasingly diverse (Bridges, 2000).

Interactive assignments, hands-on experience, teamwork, and collaborative presentations should be integrated into the curriculum, and the 21st-century curriculum needs to concentrate on building knowledge. As students acquire new skills, they should be encouraged to produce information that makes sense to them (Lombardi, 2007). Moreover, according to Jonas-Dwyer and Pospisil (2004), some of the important elements to enhance learning are technology and entertainment. These two important points should be included in the learning process. The

curriculum should be flexible and customizable, as well as closely related to the real world. Jacobsen (2001) underlines that using technology in the education process provides opportunities for students to increase their creativity and to acquire new skills. Similarly, new digital technologies have a significant impact on young people's cognitive development, thinking styles, lifestyles, and educational expectations, according to a study about the 21st-century skills of students in the OECD region. According to the study, young people should be equipped with new skills and competencies which will lead them to actively contribute to economic prosperity in the light of social and economic developments by taking advantage of new forms of socialization through higher education and internalizing the system in which knowledge is the main asset (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009).

The speed of technological developments has been effective in the emergence of 21st-century skills. Technological developments that have rapidly become a part of our lives have affected higher education in different ways. Different stakeholders have different expectations from universities. Students are at the top of these stakeholders. Gauntlett (2005) highlights that students criticize the learning experiences that they receive at universities. For example, old-style pedagogical approaches, traditional perspectives on teaching English, and the gap between real life and the curriculum are frequently mentioned by students. In addition, large changes are observed in student populations enrolled in higher education institutions. Students who focus solely on their university experience no longer study traditionally. Many are among the few in their family to have higher education. They are people who work full time, raise children, have a family to support, and have financial problems rather than having full-time student status. These are people who face difficulties with technology, enough time to learn, , and unfamiliar corporate

systems. Such a difference in the student profile, in addition to the emergence of 21st-century skills produced by technological advances, necessitates a different perspective on education (Andrade, 2016).

Information has become the most important element in the development adventure of many states. In this context, according to Nigavekar (2006), there are three skills that young people should acquire to deal with the difficulties they experience. These are learning, changing, and analyzing. Since the twenty-first century symbolizes change, young people need to have appropriate qualifications to quickly adapt to rapid changes.

In the light of all these discussions, it can be said that higher education failing to respond to 21st century needs is now outdated (Bellance & Brandt, 2010). This proves the idea that the expectations of the new generations from high education have differentiated a lot. It is now commonly believed that a well-grounded curriculum connected to the real world is more likely to prepare students for adult life by increasing their motivation to learn (Lombardi, 2007). All these differentiated expectations caused the questioning of the quality of tertiary education. Nowadays, more and more students criticize the irrelevance of the materials used by academicians who depend on traditional education methods in crowded classrooms. Being aware of this change, both parents and employers ask for high-quality education that can meet the demands of 21<sup>st</sup>-century students. Questioning the quality of university education, various stakeholders expect alternative methods to be used instead of traditional ones. The fact that different stakeholders question the quality of university education in HEIs is one of the causes of the expansion in QA systems.

## 2.4 The main criticisms against quality assurance

According to Liu et al. (2015), QA provides many advantages to higher education institutions such as becoming a well-known university, receiving more funding for its projects and activities, having an impact factor in the field. It is believed that its benefits are diverse. To give an example, it can lead to an increase in the salary of faculty members. It can enhance the influence of a unit in an organization or the status of an institution in comparison to its counterparts. It can also have a moral element, promoting productivity and efficiency, both among personnel and students. On the other hand, although its existence is thought to be legitimate, quality assurance, in general, can cause the opposite of these advantages when an institution receives a poor evaluation decision (Liu et al., 2015).

The effects of quality assurance have been researched in many circles. The studies indicate that such practices receive a lot of criticism from different aspects. Contrary to expectations, quality assurance seems to cause extra financial and personnel costs. The burden of evaluations and the lack of evaluative results in quality assurance practices are among the complaints regarding the process (Hanft, 2003, as cited in Bornmann et al., 2006). In most cases, there is not enough public funding for such services. It is thought that high evaluation costs lower funding given to HEIs for education. Such processes are criticized in that they are often used by political authorities when they need to make decisions for cost-cutting purposes and expose academics to external control (Brinck, 2003, as cited in Bornmann et al., 2006).

One main criticism against quality assurance is that these evaluations are seen as a burden on the shoulders of academics because it is believed that academics may not allocate enough time to their academic studies such as doing research and

teaching. QA may sometimes be thought of as an extra burden on top of the main duties of academics. One of the studies by Stensaker (2003), among many others focusing on the effect of quality assurance on learning and teaching, reveals certain negative effects of QA in HE. With this study, he evaluates the impacts of external quality assurance (EQA) on education, organizational and academic leadership in European universities. According to the research, it has been determined that the effect of QA on education is quite varied. In addition to its beneficial results, such as greater institutional interest in teaching and learning, and raised discussions, it has been revealed that quality assurance also leads to some negative emotions such as the feeling of scrutiny and supervision of academics. In terms of the influence on organizations and administration, it has been pointed out that institutional decisions are more focused and so HEIs become more legislative.

Furthermore, quality assurance is thought to focus more on bureaucratic obligations. It is sometimes seen as coercive government intervention. Such interventions can also prevent universities from focusing on their core activities. In addition, defining quality assurance from an institutional perspective is seen as difficult because the structure of HEIs is already quite complex (Lomas, 2003). The rough managerial rhetoric of the quality debate hinders the creation of an effective educational environment (Badley, 1993). From this perspective, it is important to evaluate the quality of services and to question whether quantifying higher education services constitutes a true measure of quality standards (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007). In other words, quality assurance can, unfortunately, be instrumentalized to legitimize differences in sectoral pattern and finance and reduce the power of universities (Lomas, 2003). This criticism against quality assurance is also voiced by Yingqiang and Yongjian (2016). Analyzing QA, they point out that QA is an

ideology. In researchers' view, the accountability schemes have harmed "traditional professional autonomy and confidence in higher education institutions" (p.19). Thus, receiving legitimacy from the outside world, universities have lost their logic.

*Curbing university autonomy and academic freedom* by Dang & Kamibeppu (2020) is also enlightening. Highlighted by the authors, universities have been implementing different practices that have negative impacts on academic freedom. Classroom observations both in undergrad and grad programs have been a common practice in several HEIs. Moreover, academics have found themselves justifying why they have given a low grade to a student, to a variety of stakeholders including their faculty managers. This reality in combination with course evaluation surveys has triggered grade inflation because academicians have felt the pressure that jeopardizes academic freedom in certain ways. These examples imply that the degree of control imposed by the governments on HEIs has been increased. Because of this pressure, academics find themselves giving more and more explanations under the guise of accountability and quality assurance (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009).

In addition to this, various stakeholders, including administrative staff and academics, can see quality assurance as a bureaucratic burden. Thus, quality assurance is seen as an illegitimate intervention of a central government to discipline faculty members. This is one major criticism of QA (Seyfriend & Pohlenz, 2018). As a result, quality assurance does not appear to be directly about the main problems of HE, which is good education (Seyfriend & Pohlenz, 2018). It should be emphasized that quality assurance is seen as an external control tool rather than improving education and training. It is thought that quality assurance does not focus much on educational processes, educational theory, and student learning. Accordingly, the improvement or development is accepted as incidental (Bogue, 1998). Similarly, it is

argued that QA is not suitable for the nature of academic education. This view argues that it is not possible to divide learning into measurable units. According to this view, it is not an easy task to demonstrate the impact of teachers on learning elsewhere in the cause-effect relationship. All these criticisms of quality assurance mean that the consequences for its assurance are not really and somehow reflected in teaching (Shevlin et al., 2000).

Another common criticism is that QA is seen as a political reaction to spreading worries about the necessity to handle risk in current communities. It is thought that governments tend to control intellectual activity through quality assurance rather than encouraging them. These processes are more generally seen as a mechanism of control or management of education (Ozga, 2009). A study by Morley (2003) may be enlightening in this respect. Working with over seventy academic and administrative staff in the UK, he examines the power relationships involved in higher education quality assessment. He explores how quality assurance affects cultures, relationships, subjectivities, and identities in academia. According to the results of the study, QA mechanisms may become the means of suppression. With the effect of quality assurance processes, reduced inspiration and a less meaningful teaching and learning environment may occur. In some cases, the prevalence of quality regimes leads to close observation, leading to a decrease in confidence in power relations within the organization.

Another criticism against quality assurance is that there are various interests and perceptions of quality between different parties. To illustrate, one difference results from their approaches of the government and the universities. In other words, while governments adopt a summative approach, higher education institutions internalize formative evaluations. Similarly, Vroeijenstijn (1995b) highlights those

political authorities, which are focused on accountability because they aim to show to the society that they justify their educational policies, e.g., allocation of funding or termination of programs. It is stated by the author that HEIs concentrate on improvement rather than accountability. They are often concerned with offering better quality education in line with the conditions determined by the government and persuading society that they do their best in terms of educational quality. For universities, what matters is to find out strong and weak points and to formulate suggestions for further improvement. Thus, different stakeholders have difficulty in applying QA practices because of the differences in their perceptions. As underlined by Watty (2003), academic personnel, one of the main stakeholders, show a variety of attitudes towards QA practices. It is argued that there is not much proof that academic personnel welcome quality-change actions. One explanation for this is how they perceive quality may not be similar to that of other stakeholders including governments, higher education institutions, or even students. Thus, it is somehow inevitable to experience potential conflicts of interest in line with QA practices.

Although quality assurance is an inevitable consequence of multiple events in higher education, it has been emphasized that quality assurance is more of a burden than an opportunity (Hämäläinen et al., 2004). Because of this perspective on quality assurance, there has been resistance and criticism against the process (Anderson, 2008). To be more specific, QA officials who implement quality assurance constantly need to explain their approaches and methods. They need to constantly state their reasons for such methods. This effort of QA practitioners can cause quality assurance implementation tools to become more complex. However, these situations, which make the process more complex, are often unwelcome. They are highly criticized as they seem time-consuming and complicated. Besides negative value



judgments about quality assurance, QA officers are criticized by academic and administrative staff if they are inexperienced and unable to manage the process competently. One main reason for these criticisms is the fact that different stakeholders have almost no common understanding of the goals of quality assurance. In addition, when the values attributed to quality assurance practices differ in a wide range, the lack of quality culture becomes a problem in any institution. All people in an organization should have a similar vision of quality. It is necessary to decide on a common administration model to enhance quality and keep on-going development. Otherwise, quality assurance will be regarded as a burden, not an opportunity (Lomas, 2003).

Moreover, it is stated that quality is problematic in terms of measurement. It is emphasized that result-oriented evaluation is carried out using generally agreed qualitative criteria or quantitative measurements. According to Brooks (2005), it should be emphasized that QA practices must be methodologically trustworthy because measuring the quality of education is open to discussion. It is a necessity to have sound assessment practices to determine better education (Jones & Darshi de Saram, 2005). Over the years, evaluation results are considered not to reflect the quality of teaching reliably and validly. For this reason, it is considered that quality assurance results must not be applied as a ground for administrative decisions, especially for budgetary issues (Seyfriend & Pohlenz, 2018).

Adding more to this criticism, the study focusing on the relationship between quality assurance and learning by Wang (2017) also sheds light. In detail, he conducts a study on higher institutions in Beijing from 2008 to 2012. He holds meetings with academic and administrative members on quality assurance

mechanisms. One of the responses given by a faculty member gives us clues on the quality assurance and learning perceptions of some academics:

It seems to me that what we do for the evaluation is mainly to prepare documentation to tick the boxes. If they really care about students' learning experience, they should streamline the process and not distract us from preparing to teach (Fieldwork in Hangzhou, 2012, p.258 as cited in Wang, 2017).

The researcher highlights that a big number of the participants have negative feelings towards quality assurance processes and their impacts on teaching. They hold the idea that quality assurance is a bureaucratic process causing academics to distract from effective teaching as such processes kill their preparation time for the classes. Plus, academics criticize quality assurance processes most of the time excluding the opinions of students in terms of their learning. Thus, they may not end up with beneficial evaluations for students.

All in all, in modern times, universities sit oddly between two narratives of quality assurance, as the criticism suggests, there are concerns that universities are moving away from freedom of thought and academic freedom through quality assurance (Westerheijden et al., 2007). Although quality assurance seems to hold a mirror for universities as a means of self-assessment, it is also perceived as an external intervention. It is underlined that with the effect of this intervention, universities are directed towards much more standardization. On some critical issues, it is thought to be disturbingly instrumentalized in the hands of governments (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002).

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that being aware of such criticisms against QA is crucial so that challenges encountered during QA processes can be handled more effectively. A better understanding of the criticisms against QA surely enables QA practices to be carried out more efficiently by QA authorities. QA

authorities, being more aware of the possible issues, can ameliorate QA practices, which result in more constructive results on higher education institutions' side. This dissertation considers the integration of QA into HE systems as a crucial step as QA creates a better academic environment for a variety of stakeholders. In this respect, the section below discusses the history and evolution of QA in the world and Europe. Important occurrences that lead to QA, the current trends in QA are explained following the occurrences in global HE systems and Europe.

## 2.5 The emergence of quality assurance in quality education in the world

Since the establishment of the first QA institutions, quality assurance has been one of the main agenda items for governments. It has turned into a critical practice guiding universities worldwide. In the last decades, QA has become an indispensable element for international higher education. A lot of countries have set up national QA bodies. The formation of quality assurance mechanisms in most countries has been influenced by the changing relationship between governments and institutional spheres and has been shaped by the influence of political events affecting higher education (Van Damme, 2002; Kells, 1992). All over the world, for whatever reason, you will find that administrators of HEIs today are pondering how to apply appropriate QA mechanisms. Important higher education stakeholders, such as bureaucrats and employers, are increasingly concerned about the quality of outcomes of universities (Harman, 1998).

As discussed in detail in the rationales section of the dissertation, the emergence of quality assurance mechanisms is affected by various reasons. As listed by Singh (2010), among the factors for the rise of QA mechanisms is the goal of maintaining quality in massive and diverse tertiary education systems; providing

accountability to stakeholders; to legitimize the money allocated by the public for HE, to show the efficiency of outputs; to raise the quality to add optimum value to educational processes; to protect students from local and international degree mills; to inform people to facilitate the consumer preferences; to prove equivalence in the quality of the service for the mobility of academicians and students. Moreover, competitiveness in the face of increasing mobility of the professional workforce, concerns about the spread of private HE, and expectations from bosses to make university courses more relevant to work has increased the demand for quality assurance systems worldwide (Neave, 1997).

Due to the aforementioned reasons, quality assurance has spread geographically around the world both in prosperous and under-developed countries. QA has been perceived as a reform and development initiative in higher education. For instance, quality assurance has found an important place in OECD templates, UNESCO programs, and World Bank projects. It has achieved global visibility and presence under the influence of knowledge sharing and developmental activities in higher education. QA organizations and various local QA connections have been formed in many regions around the world. They have expanded the activities of professional associations and quality assurance practices (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). Quality assurance has become one of the regional geopolitical targets by HE systems with the effect of international higher education (Singh, 2010).

In the light of all these reasons, many QA systems have been formed in many areas of the world over the years. In this part of the thesis, the U.S., which established the QA system first in the world; Asia Region, which has a big effect on tertiary education trends, and the Arab Region, which has set a goal to advance its

universities in the following years, and QA structures of these countries and regions will be explained in detail.

#### 2.5.1 The Emergence of quality assurance in the USA

Worldwide, the history of modern QA is not short, particularly in the form of accreditation. In terms of accreditation, which is seen as one of the tools of QA systems, the USA is known as the country with the oldest tradition. Worldwide, various higher education systems adopt many transnational policy transfers to enhance quality assurance mechanisms. HE mechanisms largely duplicate the QA models that exist in developed countries. In this context, many countries, especially some developing countries, have established similar accreditation models, taking American accreditation as a role model. Plus, in many borrower countries, accreditation has become a state-run activity managed by dependent or semi-autonomous institutions (Finkin, 1995).

In the U.S., where there are more than 7000 HEIs, there are approximately 4100 accredited higher education institutions offering degree programs. It is known that almost 1100 of these institutions are state community colleges that provide two-year or associate degree education. More than 2300 independent institutions offer baccalaureate education. To give details, 77% of these institutions are private while only 23% are state-owned (Ewell, 2007). When the HE sector is reviewed, it is seen that it has a rich variety with different educational institutions from big state research organizations to small religious organizations, from the ones that are literally on the web to non-profit institutions. Recognizing this huge difference in higher education institutions, the government has adopted a flexible attitude towards the regulation of HE in the U.S. In some cases, HEIs are generally free and flexible to identify their

goals. They can choose their method of achieving them, even if some states have adopted stricter rules, particularly about the functioning of state HEIs (Brown et al., 2017).

Policy development on quality assurance is a difficult issue due to the large and diverse range of higher education institutions in the United States. There is no national public higher education system; there are many independent colleges and universities. As a result, quality assurance is both decentralized and dispersed. From one state to another, the way quality is defined varies, and approaches to determining quality differ; but still, each state is responsible for financing and managing public institutions in its territory. The obligation to ensure quality directly for all institutions has been transferred to many non-governmental accreditation bodies that are diverse and independent. These accreditation bodies work in line with the regulatory patronage of the federal government. The resulting variety complicates efforts to identify the dynamics of quality assurance in the US higher education (Turlington, n.d.; Ewell, 2007).

Even if the situation is described regarding the variety of systems in the US, there are some reasons to analyze the US HE in terms of quality assurance. First, the United States of America is one of the countries that have formed the QA mechanism many years ago. The clear interest in reviewing institutional quality as a requirement of public policy dates back to the 1980s. When this date is compared with the quality processes developed in Europe in the 1990s, the experience and knowledge of the USA in this field cannot be denied. Secondly, the decentralized, differentiation-based higher education systems in the USA offer many examples from which to learn. Finally, many countries try to make their higher education look like those of the U.S. For example, the figure of independent and registered institutions increases in many

countries. HE systems are becoming massive as in the USA, and market forces have started to have a big role in HE mechanisms. In the light of all these, it can be said that the US experiences are valuable in terms of quality in higher education (Ewell, 2007).

### 2.5.2 The emergence of quality assurance in Asia

It is thought that Asia has gained great momentum in terms of HE in the last years, and it has been rewarding. There are several reasons for this success. For instance, higher education can receive substantial state support. Bureaucrats and leaders in education are aware of the critical role tertiary education has in financial and social improvement. There, the importance of market globalization, the interdependence of economic systems, the impact of innovation, and the need for highly skilled professionals are recognized. They realize that modern economies can only be guided by the masses of higher education. Because of this awareness of tertiary education, participation in HE has greatly expanded in the region. New universities have joined the system. HEIs have begun to experience new forms of teaching delivery (Higher Education Across Asia: Overview of Issues and Strategies, 2011).

However, despite the formation of such awareness about higher education, Asian countries are struggling with important problems in tertiary education. To illustrate, as Arain et al. (2014) have stated, the fragile state of the economy, the underdeveloped human capital pool, the existence of poor productivity of HEIs due to the low quality of education are some of these difficulties. Such challenges have a profound impact on the process of change in the region, with many countries not prepared enough to solve these problems in higher education. They must struggle a lot to deal with challenging problems. To illustrate, educational organizations in

South Asia constantly try to answer the economic, social, and political questions at the local and global arena where education is carried out (Rizvi et al., 2005).

It is important to underline this again. Prosperous countries in the Asia-Pacific have long recognized the importance of higher education nationally and globally. For instance, the number of students enrolled in HEIs in Asia has risen sharply. However, the growth rate in this decade does not mean that the development levels of all countries in the region are the same. The geographical regions appear to differ greatly in terms of the progress of HE. Wide regional differences are observed between countries in sub-regions and even within each country (Tilak, 2003).

In terms of the problems, one major agenda item for higher education is the quality concept because productive use of resources heavily relies on QA practices. For the obvious benefits of the emergence of QA practices, in Asia, quality systems are improving fast although they are affected by several factors. These factors include dominant pressures stemming from occurrences in neighboring countries, changing government policies regarding higher education, increase in student involvement, elevated mobility of students, dependence on new private stakeholders, and the construction of local connections (Shah & Quyen, 2017). All have an impact on the progress of QA in the region. Therefore, the region has still a long way to go for an effective transition period in terms of quality assurance.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, a lot of HEIs in the region have adopted the QA pathway to ameliorate the quality of their activities. They are modeling their counterparts in developed countries (Arain et al., 2014). In this sense, many institutions have been opened to spread the culture of quality in the region. One of the most important examples is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). More specifically, as Umemiya (2008) emphasizes, QA processes in the



region are supported by the ASEAN University Network (AUN). The AUN was created under the ASEAN. The organization was established by the Ministers of 10 ASEAN countries that were involved in higher education in 1995. It is one of the major organizations in charge of higher education. To harmonize higher education among the member universities of the network, the AUN has created quality assurance guidelines and carried out pilot evaluation activities. It operates as an academic network to encourage cooperation between academic staff and students. It also carries out activities with dialog partners such as China, the European Union, and South Korea.

Another initiative promoting quality culture in the region is APQN, formed in 2003. APQN, with a total of 222 members from 41 different countries and regions, is an independent, non-profit initiative established to promote quality in higher education. APQN, which has become one of the most influential international organizations in the region, has provided important services in the development of the QA system, sharing experiences, and making the necessary collaborations. To conclude, it is possible to argue that these networks established on a regional basis aim to create and spread the quality culture in tertiary education in the region. Thanks to the collaborations they have established, they have served the maturation of quality assurance by exchanging knowledge and experience, sharing good practices among member institutions, creating guidelines for QA.

### 2.5.3 The emergence of quality assurance in the Arab world

Higher education began to spread in the Arab world after the middle of the twentieth century. When the higher education literature is examined, it is seen that until the 1950s, only three universities were opened in the Arab world, namely the Syrian

University, the Egyptian State University, and the Farouk I University (Althbyta, 2000). Progress in HE in the Arab world has been slow for years. But the 1980s and 1990s experienced significant advances in HE. Lots of universities have been opened and many students have enrolled in these universities (Issa et al., 2012). This shows that with the increase of opportunities and diversity in the Arab world, a competitive environment has been created (Issa et al., 2012). To be able to place increasing numbers of students at universities, undergraduate and postgraduate programs, technical and professional degrees, community colleges, and distance education programs were opened by governments. Moreover, although there are large differences in demographic pressures and resources between countries in the region, many countries have experienced rapid growth in the past decade in private institutions, foreign universities with local campuses, virtual higher institutions, and partnerships between local and international universities (Wilkens, 2011).

As noted by Badran et al. (2019), the Arab HE mechanism can be best regarded as dynamic in different ways. The system has been experiencing a long-term enlargement, often in many respects. The thing is HE mechanism in the region is comparatively young and most of the universities were founded in the 1970s, and over a third of these universities have opened only after the 1990s. Because of this dynamic and young system, HE policies in the Arab countries have been a top political priority in the last decades.

One of the crucial agenda items in the region is quality assurance policies. Quality assurance is well recognized in many HEIs in Arab countries. There have been some developments in Arab countries that have popularized the quality of higher education. In 1998, a conference was held in Beirut (Martin, 2011). In that conference, Arab ministers wanted the foundation of a system to ensure quality and

accreditation. After 1998, conferences continued to be held regarding quality assurance. In 2005, many Arab countries organized a conference in Yemen to discuss the quality issue in their own countries. After the conference, the first decision was to form a network. The second decision was to set up an NGO for quality assurance, and the third was to launch QA and accreditation activities in Arab higher institutions.

Two years after the conference, an Arab network, called the Arab Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE), was set up. With over 190 HEI members in the Arab world, ANQAHE is now an autonomous non-governmental organization. ANQAHE works in conjunction with AArU. It works in cooperation with Arab universities, providing services on issues such as information exchange and dissemination and improving the professional experience of national quality assurance agencies. Also, it cooperates with similar quality assurance organizations in numerous countries to serve as a common platform (Memorandum of Cooperation, 2017).

Although all Arab countries are not a member, the organization influences QA practices in the region. The major objectives of the body include developing guidelines to found new quality assurance agencies or supporting the current ones, disseminating exemplary practice in QA and strengthening the connection between QA organizations in various countries (Badran et al., 2019). When the objectives are analyzed, it is seen that the organization creates a system among countries to share experience and knowledge about QA. The ANQAHE works towards achieving a meaningful and consistent connection between HEIs in Arab countries. To this end, many promising developments have occurred. One of its partner institutions is AARU, which has similar purposes. However, not all the universities in the Arab

region are a member of it, either. ANQAHE cooperates with the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, as well.

Based on all these explanations, it is possible to argue that many countries in the region have currently been establishing their local bodies to promote quality assurance. Many Arab countries, with the help of international organizations, are taking concrete steps to develop a real QA system. But it needs to be stressed that quality assurance practices are still in various stages of development. Despite the efforts of Arab countries, there are many obstacles to the spread of quality culture, most importantly bureaucracy (Badran et al., 2019).

## 2.6 The quality assurance in Europe

Higher education in Europe has experienced different phases. After the War in 1945, the two regions, western Europe and central and eastern Europe, took different paths in many areas, including education (Rozsnyai, 2003). However, after the Soviet Union collapsed, higher education was redesigned in central and eastern countries. Many radical changes took place in this design process. The number of institutions offering different services in higher education has gradually gone up. Today, because of the growing private sector, specialized universities, semi-industrial monotechnic institutions, private universities with higher entrepreneurship have an important role in the higher education system of the region (Scott, 2002).

When the higher education systems in the region are examined in terms of quality assurance during the Soviet regime, there were no independent institutions for quality assurance. During this period, the issue of quality was handled by the ministries of education with a central, top-down management style. Various decisions regarding resources, academic programs, and the number of students were

taken centrally from top to bottom (Temple & Billing, 2003). During the Soviet regime, quality assurance was completely under state control, and did not develop much. Therefore, QA in transforming HE in the region was launched from scratch after the integration of western and central and eastern Europe. Because of the post-regime atmosphere, quality assurance initiatives gained momentum. During this period, universities set themselves the goal of being more comparable to western European higher education (Rozsnyai, 2003). As can be understood, in time, quality assurance has progressed rapidly in the countries of the region. It started to look like those of other countries in the western part of Europe. Higher education has accepted consultancy, and guidance by independent foreign counselors and organizations such as the World Bank, OECD, the EU. These bodies gave financial aid to those countries which try to make institutional reforms. These organizations accelerated the reform movement in the region (Westerheijden & Sorensen, 1999).

On the other hand, the HE mechanism in other countries in Europe has been much more liberal with the impact of technological developments and student movements in the 1960s (Rozsnyai, 2003). In this region, France and the Netherlands led the way among countries that first took the issue of quality assurance seriously. QA activities in these countries started in the mid-1980s. Later, after Denmark began to care for QA in the early 1990s, the quality movement started to spread rapidly in western Europe (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004).

One of the most critical steps in the improvement of quality culture in western Europe is the European Union Pilot Project, which started in 1994 (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004). Influenced by the project, the Council of the European Union suggested establishing regional cooperation in quality assurance and ENQA was established by the EU member states in 2000. The European Union Pilot Project

was perceived as an educational reform on a continental scale because it became a cornerstone on the road to the Bologna Declaration. In line with the steps taken to ensure accountable HE, regional networks were established. With the effect of communication-based research and information exchange, it was aimed to provide borderless high-quality education for university students (Jezierska, 2009).

Networks created by quality agencies are of great importance for the spread of QA in the area. Among these networks, the ENQA established after the Pilot Project should be particularly mentioned. The ENQA is an umbrella organization that is entitled to represent the QA institutions in the EHEA. The major goal of the organization is to develop European cooperation to enhance the quality of HE. In line with this goal, there is effective communication which includes information sharing and good practices among stakeholders (<https://enqa.eu/>). One of the most important implementations of the ENQA was to establish QA standards called European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Woodhouse, 2004). For improving these quality assurance standards, the European University Association (EUA), the European National Student Association (ESIB), and the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) came together. This partnership resulted in the ESG being accepted by the European education ministers in Bergen in 2005 (Woodhouse, 2004). This document, which guides countries in establishing QA in their higher education systems, is accepted as a reference paper for internal and external QA.

Moreover, for the establishment of the ENQA, another step taken for the widespread use of QA in the region is the establishment of the European Higher Education Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) by ENQA, ESU, EUA, and EURASHE. In most European countries, quality agents evaluate HEIs regularly.

EQAR registers such institutions and lists those who prove that these institutions comply with the ESG guidelines and shares them with the public

(<https://www.eqar.eu/about/introduction/>). Moreover, four quality assurance stakeholders, called the E4 group, organize forums in the context of QA.

Representatives of many QA bodies and HEIs participate in this forum to talk about European higher education trends, best quality assurance practices in the region ([www.eua.be](http://www.eua.be)).

As can be seen, the emergence and widespread use of quality assurance systems in eastern, central, and western Europe have occurred in different ways. However, to establish an EHEA, one of the main objectives of the Bologna Declaration is to make higher education systems more comparable to both western, central, and eastern European countries. With the Bologna Declaration over the years, the signatory countries, which have been involved in this movement, insist on the goal of creating a higher quality EHEA based on mutual knowledge sharing.

#### 2.6.1 The European higher education area

Since the 1990s, the rate of change has accelerated to unprecedented levels, largely on the shoulders of two European political key agendas: the Bologna Process, whose objectives are to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to make European higher education more competitive and attractive in a globalizing world, and the European Union's growth and innovation strategies, which seek to reform the continent's higher education and research systems into a more powerful motor for the European knowledge economy (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014, p. 167).

As stated by Enders and Westerheijden (2014), the Bologna Process paved the way for the creation of the EHEA. In Bologna, the education ministers of 29 countries concluded a similar mental image of EHEA in 1999. They agreed that this vision is politically necessary for their countries. Ten years after the declaration, with other signatory countries participating in Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference, the

number of EHEA member countries reached 47. This conference, held in 2010, is considered the official opening of the EHEA because the declaration's goal of establishing a common European framework for higher education is considered to be largely realized in this period. In the last decade, European HE has evolved into a more attractive system that can compete on a world scale. Through a mechanism based on undergraduate and postgraduate studies, with simply readable programs and degrees, student mobility and employability have increased significantly. Thanks to a series of practices on quality assurance, quality culture has become widespread in European systems.

The 1999 Bologna Conference is recognized as the beginning of the progress of the EHEA. Since this date, the EHEA has concentrated on the harmonization of HE systems; increasing its economic competitiveness in the world; and creating a common European identity (Teichler, 2012). In line with these goals, the signatory countries have agreed on the basic principles through voluntary convergence and an intergovernmental approach.

It can be said that there are two main core issues in line with the Bologna Declaration. One of them is to set up an EHEA and the other one is to ensure quality assurance in the educational scope in Europe (Klemenčič, 2019; Süngü & Bayrakçı, 2010; Rozsnyai, 2003). It can be said that the steps taken to form a common European HE have a critical influence on the success of the EHEA. Although not every country is equally quick to implement structural reforms, in general, there has been momentum in developing standards for qualification frameworks. A common Register of QA agencies has been established. Main principles have been set for the development of student-centered learning by adopting a set of common tools. Countries have integrated the three-stage degree principle into their systems.



Transparency tools such as the recognition of qualifications, the Diploma Supplement, a common credit system (ECTS) have been used effectively (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, pp.50-56). Despite criticism from some circles, it should be underlined that a higher education system without the EHEA would be much more chaotic. The EHEA has succeeded in bringing together public authorities, higher education stakeholders, civil society to create a higher quality education. The EHEA shows with its 48 members over the years that many European countries do want to stay away from this dynamic structure (Bergan & Deca, 2018).

#### 2.6.2 The Bologna Declaration (1999)

It was inevitable for European countries that globalizing higher education systems are to become more compatible with each other. Using the mutual advantage of cultural heterogeneity, making higher education systems more harmonious, graduating students with recognized diplomas, increasing student and employee mobility, and enhancing the quality of HE have become crucial goals of the globalized HE systems. Working in harmony in line with these common goals has become a necessity (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). Moreover, by investing heavily in research and education in a region of about five hundred million people ([www.etc.europa.eu](http://www.etc.europa.eu)), European countries have been keen to be the most powerful knowledge-based region. Bologna Process stands out among the major steps taken towards this goal. As stated by Horn and Dunagan (2018), the Bologna Process should be seen as a harmonious “pan-European response” (p.19) to profound social, economic, and political changes worldwide.

The declaration is a cornerstone in establishing quality and competitive higher education systems with a common framework by improving comparative

rubrics and techniques (Schwartz & Westerheijden, 2004). In addition, the declaration, considered one of the most fundamental reforms in Europe, has taken important steps to ensure QA in HE in a European context by developing a common educational framework (Floud & Nielsen, 2007). The rapid development of local QA mechanisms because of the borderless education approach has increased the mobility of students and academicians worldwide. As Foley (2007) points out, higher education in the world has been defined once again. HEIs, which are part of the process, have been making important reforms since 1999 to be more recognizable and understandable not only in Europe and on other continents.

#### 2.6.2.1 The history and evolution of the Bologna Process

The emergence of the Bologna Process at the beginning of the new millennium cannot be explained entirely by chance. The pressure on HE systems to face the demands of the societies was greatly increasing in the recent decades of the 20th century. The figure for students increased significantly both in Europe and other regions. This period also witnessed the emergence of knowledge economies. Educated and qualified people had become the most important element of growth. With the effect of developing information technologies and globalization, goods and services moved across borders more rapidly (Enders et al., 2011).

In the globalizing world, the idea that the countries that will survive will be those with knowledge-based economies has gained importance. One of the most important steps in the transition to knowledge-based economies has been seen as the HE system. Knowledge has been regarded as a catalyst for a competitive economy, and the main job of HE was the production and transfer of knowledge. The inexorable rise of knowledge has completely changed the viewpoint of traditional

HEIs. Universities have been accused of being outside of social and political reality. Societies have expected from HEIs to take more important steps in national competitiveness and modernization (Crosier & Parveva, 2013). It was a common expectation that graduates are to be capable of meeting the needs of the new worldwide labor market. At a time when countries were confronted with such trends and challenges, it was inevitable that they wanted a harmonious European region (Enders et al., 2011).

Although the Bologna Process is perceived at first glance as the result of regular meetings of ministers in charge of HE, it is an important reform movement in which many other stakeholders and international organizations play a role beyond the ministerial level. Indeed, the Bologna Process would not have been successful, and it would not have created such a profound change if it had not involved higher education stakeholders with different representations. Seven ministerial conferences, dating back to one year before the declaration was signed, were held. They set out short and medium-term goals and assessed whether these goals were implemented. These conferences were in Sorbonne, Bologna, Prague, Berlin, Bergen, London, Leuven, and Bucharest, respectively (Barrett, 2017). The Bologna Declaration originates from the Sorbonne Declaration on Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System (1998) by several education ministers. This declaration covers international recognition of programs within a common qualification, the increasing student and faculty movement, and the integration into the labor market. Also, the design of a common degree mechanism for BA, MA, and Ph.D. is one of the aspects of the declaration. Since the Sorbonne Declaration, all activities within this framework have started a cooperative, intergovernmental process that profoundly affects higher education. The reforms carried out influenced

countries inside and outside Europe, and the figure of countries increased to 48 with the participation of Belarus in 2015 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020.)

#### 2.6.2.2 Countries that signed the Bologna Declaration from 1999 to 2015:

Twenty-nine countries participating in the Bologna Process at the Bologna Conference on 19 June 1999 were as follows:

- Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and Ireland.

Thirty-three countries participated in the Bologna Process at the Prague Ministerial Conference on 19 May 2001:

- Croatia, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, and Turkey.

The number of members increased to 40 at the Berlin Ministerial Conference on 19 September 2003:

- Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vatican Republic, Russian Federation, Serbia-Montenegro, and Macedonia.

The number of countries involved in the process reached 45 at the 18-19 May 2005 Bergen Ministerial Conference:

- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and the Ukraine.

With the decision taken at the London Ministerial Conference held in 2007 after Montenegro declared its independence in 2006, the number of member countries

increased to 46 with the inclusion of Montenegro in the process. With the inclusion of Kazakhstan in the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Meeting held on 11-12 March 2010, the Bologna Process has spread to a wide area where 47 countries are members. With the inclusion of Belarus in the Yerevan Communiqué in 2015, the Bologna Process has spread to a wide area where 48 countries are members ([http://www.ehea.info/page-full\\_members](http://www.ehea.info/page-full_members)).

#### 2.6.2.3 International organizations that are members of the Bologna Process:

Organizations other than the European Commission have the right to vote in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). They are official advisory members of the BFUG (<http://www.ehea.info/pagina-bfug-partners>).

- European Commission
- Council of Europe (CoE)
- European University Association (EUA)
- European Association Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
- Center for Higher Education (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - Higher Education Center) (UNESCO-CEPES)
- European Students' Union (ESU)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (European Association for Higher Education Quality Assurance) (ENQA)
- Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations) (ETUCE)
- EI (Education International)

#### 2.6.2.4 The Bologna Process timeline

The ministerial-level meetings held from the Bologna Process to 2018 have been outlined by the European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2020). The timeline shows the important decisions taken in these meetings. When the table is examined carefully, it will be seen that the important themes that were underlined with the Bologna Process have led to radical changes. These main themes include student and academic mobility, joint degree system, social aspect, continuous learning, a European credit system, enhancement of QA in the region, and its appeal to the world. Also, with the Yerevan Declaration, education and continuous improvement have been added as current priorities. With the Paris Declaration, digitalization has been accepted as another theme that needs to be highlighted (EHEA / 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report; [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/ bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en))

Table 3. The Bologna Process Timeline

**The Bologna Process: from Sorbonne, 1998 to Paris, 2018**

<b>14</b>	<b>Mobility of students and teachers</b>	Mobility also for researchers and administrative staff	Social dimension of mobility	Portability of loans and grants	Attention to visa and work permits	Attention also to pension systems and recognition	Target: 20 % graduate mobility by 2020	Explore path to automatic recognition of academic qualifications		Student digital data exchange
	<b>A common two-cycle degree system</b>	Easily readable and comparable degrees	Fair recognition Development of joint degrees	Inclusion of doctoral level as third cycle	QF-EHEA adopted National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) launched	NQFs by 2010	NQFs by 2012	Roadmaps for countries without NQF	Implementation of key commitments	Short cycle as a stand-alone qualification level Revised Diploma Supplement
			<b>Social dimension</b>	Equal access	Reinforcement of the social dimension	National action plans	National targets for the social dimension to be measured by 2020	Widening access and completion rates	Social inclusion	Inclusion of under-represented and vulnerable groups
			<b>Lifelong learning (LLL)</b>	Alignment of national LLL policies Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Flexible learning paths	Partnerships to improve employability	LLL as a public responsibility Focus on employability	Enhance employability, LLL and entrepreneurial skills through cooperation with employers	Employability	Combine academic and work-based learning
	<b>Use of credits</b>	A system of credits (ECTS)	ECTS and Diploma Supplement (DS)	ECTS for credit accumulation		Coherent use of tools and recognition practices	Implementation of Bologna tools	Ensure that Bologna tools are based on learning outcomes	Adoption of ECTS Users Guide	
	<b>European cooperation in quality assurance (QA)</b>	Cooperation between QA and recognition professionals	QA at institutional, national and European level	European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) adopted	Creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)	Quality as an overarching focus for EHEA	Allow EQAR registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA	Adoption of revised ESG and European Approach to QA of joint programmes	Ensure compliance with ESG 2015 Promote European Approach for QA of joint programmes	
	<b>Europe of Knowledge</b>	European dimensions in higher education	Attractiveness of the EHEA	Links between higher education and research areas	International cooperation on the basis of values and sustainable development	Strategy to improve the global dimension of the Bologna Process adopted	Enhance global policy dialogue through Bologna Policy Fora	Evaluate implementation of 2007 global dimension strategy		Develop synergies between EHEA – ERA
									<b>Learning and Teaching</b> Relevance and quality	Innovation and Inclusion in Learning and Teaching Digitalisation and digital skills
									Sustainable Development	Support to UNSDGs
	<b>1998 Sorbonne Declaration</b>	<b>1999 Bologna Declaration</b>	<b>2001 Prague Communiqué</b>	<b>2003 Berlin Communiqué</b>	<b>2005 Bergen Communiqué</b>	<b>2007 London Communiqué</b>	<b>2009 Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué</b>	<b>2012 Bucharest Communiqué</b>	<b>2015 Yerevan Communiqué</b>	<b>2018 Paris Communiqué</b>

Source: [Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2020, p.14]

## 2.7 The Importance of the Bologna Declaration in terms of quality assurance

Europe experienced difficulties in competing with the world in the early 2000s. European HE was extremely heterogeneous at that time. This heterogeneous structure impaired its strength. Many European countries were not considered desirable destinations for further education. Europe had to implement radical decisions to have a say in the global market (Wächter, 2004). According to a study by Haug (1999), there was a demand for higher education systems to converge. At the time, extreme diversity created chaos. Mobility between countries with extremely different systems was very difficult. Based on the results of the study, it was a requirement to set comparable minimum standards. Accreditation as a quality assurance tool was seen as a way of guaranteeing such minimum quality standards (Erichsen, 1998).

Quality assurance has also been perceived as an important approach to modernizing higher education conditions for a stronger Europe in the competitive world order. QA has been perceived as an important approach to modernizing higher education conditions for a stronger Europe in the competitive world order. In that sense, Bologna Process was a critical milestone for European HE. Issues such as knowledge economy and international competition have had a profound effect on HE discourse. In the light of these discussions, the quality assurance of higher education systems has become more questionable. Bologna Process has sparked initiatives for standardization in HE in Europe. As a result, QA, as part of the Bologna Process, has evolved into an impressive process in European higher education (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014).

Quality assurance in HE involves the systematic and comprehensive evaluation of institutional activities such as education, research, and administrative



services. The stakeholders that are part of the declaration, all are in charge of establishing transparent QA systems that aim to develop and maintain quality. These stakeholders also need to promote cooperation and networking for QA in HE ([www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)). The Bologna Process is an important window opening to the European aspect of quality policy. The goals of the Bologna process on quality are determined by international debates, background reports, and political processes. The reason behind these quality studies is to facilitate the recognition and comparison of higher education systems. The Bologna process is therefore a milestone in the internationalization of European HE and quality policy in general. The process is regarded as an indicator of convergence in HE systems in Europe (Saarinen, 2005).

At the beginning of the Bologna Process, very few HE mechanisms had a recognizable QA system. Therefore, the enhancement of QA in HE has been a striking improvement over the past twenty years. QA mechanisms have become the main factor of change in HEIs in Europe. After two decades of the Bologna Reform, nearly all countries have set up internal and external QA mechanisms (European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2020; [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en)).

### 2.7.1 Quality assurance as a key action line in the Bologna Process

QA in HE has gained speed with the Bologna Process. The years between 1999 and 2007, which can be described as the first wave of Communiqués, have resulted in setting the agenda about the main quality assurance practices in the EHEA. The years between 2007 and 2012, which constitute a second wave, can be described as the consolidation period for the quality assurance practices in the region. The next wave

is important for the improvement of a general quality framework, and stronger integration of quality assurance with other relevant aspects. Thanks to QA practices, European HEIs have taken on a dynamic structure. With the Bologna Process, almost all countries have acted to establish internal and external QA systems. The Bologna Process has succeeded in spreading a multi-level, multi-actor governance culture among countries. This has increased the efficiency of quality assurance systems (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020; <https://www.esu-online.org/quality-assurance-bologna/>)

High-quality service on the way to increasing the appeal of European HE has been one of the goals. Ministerial meetings within the Bologna Process have emphasized many times that strong quality assurance systems should be established to further increase the trust between systems. In this context, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was founded in 2000. In addition, the Prague Declaration of European education ministers (2001) adopted quality as an important issue in deciding the appeal of European HE. This communiqué has impacted the European quality assurance framework together with Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven / Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) and Bucharest (2012), Yerevan (2015), Paris (2018) communiqués (<https://ehea.info/page-ministerial-declarations-and-communicues>).

With the Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were accepted. Formed by ENQA in coordination with EUA, ESU, and EURASHE, many EHEA countries have adopted and applied the ESG, introducing radical actions within their countries. Another step was the idea of a European Quality Assurance Forum suggested in 2003. Holding a regular European event bringing all actors

together to discuss quality assurance issues was an important opportunity to examine international quality assurance trends. This forum was first held in 2006 and has been repeated 12 times since then. In 2015, the European Standards and Guidelines were reviewed and accepted. Then, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was accepted as a policy measure. The last Communiqué, in Paris in 2018, underlines the progress in the national and institutional implementation of ESG in most countries, and undertakes to remove barriers to the application of ESG in national legislation. The most up-to-date initiative regarding quality assurance is the establishment of the Peer Support group to support the implementation of core commitments (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020; EQAR Report of the Expert Panel, 2011 [https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/Report\\_Expert-panel\\_Final.pdf](https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/Report_Expert-panel_Final.pdf)).

Table 4 Key Milestones in the Bologna Process Regarding Quality Assurance

Key milestones in the Bologna Process regarding quality assurance	
Quality Assurance:	One action line in the Bologna Process
2001	evaluation and accreditation mechanisms were reciprocally accepted, and the role of quality assurance was realized. With the Prague Communiqué, the role of stakeholders was more clearly defined.
2003	The ministers encouraged the E4 to form common guidelines on QA.
2005	ESG was proposed by the E4 Group.
2006	European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) was first launched.
2008	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education was formed.
2015	Proposed by the E4 Group, the revised ESG 2015 was adopted.

Source: [European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2020, pp. 64-72].

### 2.7.2 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in higher education:

ESG is a crucial document for HEIs in Europe. The document, by setting the context and guidelines of QA, becomes a pathfinder contextually. To form this document, the signatory states in the Bologna Declaration invited ENQA to establish standards on QA in the 2003 Berlin statement (Prisacariu, 2014). The proposal was prepared by ENQA with the contribution of ESU, EURASHE, and EUA. Two years later, in 2005, the ESG was accepted at the Bergen Ministerial Conference. Ten years later, in 2015, at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference, it was revised again upon feedback from various stakeholders.

As a pan-European initiative by the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe, the ESG consists of three main sets of standards for QA in HE. First, internal QA within HEIs; the second is the external QA for HEIs; and the third is external QA for quality organizations (Kohoutek et al., 2018; <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>; [https://enqa.eu/download/papers-and-reports/associated-reports/EQUIP\\_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf](https://enqa.eu/download/papers-and-reports/associated-reports/EQUIP_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf)). ESG works on the principle of the Open Coordination Method. In other words, ESG is a recommendation for institutions and agencies. The practices are not legally enforceable. Although the ESG is not interpreted as compelling, it is seen as the most important document that is taken as a reference and sets the agenda on the European dimension of quality assurance.

When the document is analyzed, it is seen that three major sets of quality assurance areas exist in the ESG. One of them is standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance.

Table 5 Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Policy for quality assurance,</li> <li>2. Design and approval of programs,</li> <li>3. Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment,</li> <li>4. Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification,</li> <li>5. Teaching staff,</li> <li>6. Learning resources and student support,</li> <li>7. Information management,</li> <li>8. Public information,</li> <li>9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs,</li> <li>10. Cyclical external quality assurance</li> </ol>

Source: [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015, pp. 11-15].

The second one is standards and guidelines for external quality assurance.

Table 6 Standards and Guidelines for External Quality Assurance

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consideration of internal quality assurance,</li> <li>2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose,</li> <li>3. Implementing processes,</li> <li>4. Peer-review experts,</li> <li>5. Criteria for outcomes,</li> <li>6. Reporting,</li> <li>7. Complaints and appeals</li> </ol>

Source: [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015, pp. 8-20].

The third one is standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies.

Table 7 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Activities, policy, and processes for quality assurance,</li> <li>2. Official status,</li> <li>3. Independence,</li> <li>4. Thematic analysis,</li> <li>5. Resources,</li> <li>6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct,</li> <li>7. Cyclical external review of agencies</li> </ol>

Source: [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015, pp. 22-27].

### 2.7.3 Making sense of the ESG in terms of quality assurance

Based on the explanations above, it can be argued that ESG offers a detailed set of standards for QA in HE. In this way, the document provides a common reference for institutions and agencies, encouraging them to initiate their own QA systems. The contribution of ESG is to initiate countries in developing their own quality assurance culture. ESG is a tool for HEIs, students, employers, and other stakeholders to better understand higher education and provide them with information on quality processes (Huisman & Westerheijden, 2010).

ESG is an important development because it guides in solving problems encountered in internationalization, transparency, and accountability. In addition, the ESG informs various stakeholders while recognizing the national characteristics and responsibilities of countries. One of the main functions of the ESG is to form standards that provide a common understanding of how quality assurance in countries may be carried out to achieve quality (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). ESG is a significant achievement towards comparability and compatibility. The ESG contributes to reaching a consensus on good practice regarding quality assurance mechanisms. Thus, some transparency can be provided, as it will be clear which institutions are reliable (Huisman & Westerheijden, 2010). The ESG is applied by organizations and QA bodies as an official paper for internal and external QA mechanisms in tertiary education. They are also implemented by EQAR, in charge of the registration of QA bodies compliant with ESG. The new ESG centers on QA in education, including the instructional atmosphere and networks for research. Moreover, organizations form processes to develop the quality of activities like research and governance (Prisacariu, 2014). Avoiding regionalism, ESG contributes to a common understanding of quality assurance across borders. ESG influences the

initiation of national and institutional QA systems in cross-border coordination. Participation in QA practices, especially external ones, helps to enhance bi-directional trust and to gain recognition of qualifications, programs, and other provisions (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010).

In the light of all these discussions, it should be emphasized that although the development processes are different, QA systems have gained importance all over the world. In the light of internationalization, governments aim to establish their quality assurance systems by attaching importance to universal values. Assurance systems established in the world show some similarities and differences. Similarly, Turkey has taken important steps on quality assurance in its timeline. The traces of the Ottoman Empire and the reform movements in the first years of the Turkish Republic have greatly influenced the quality assurance policies in the country. Moreover, with the effect of the recent involvement in the Bologna Process, Turkey has designed its quality assurance system, which is like that of those in EHEA. In the following chapter of the dissertation, the QA in the Ottoman Empire, and the following occurrences in quality assurance in higher education since the establishment of the country will be explained in detail.

## 2.8 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, an extensive discussion about the definition of quality assurance has been presented. To this end, the main approaches towards quality assurance, the rationales for quality assurance, the main criticisms, the historical background, and current trends in quality assurance in the world have been detailed. The last section of this chapter has elaborated on the main steps taken in Europe including Bologna Process and EHEA concerning quality assurance have been discussed.

## CHAPTER 3

### QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY

#### 3.1 A brief history of the Turkish Higher Education System

In this chapter, the evolution of Turkish higher education from the Ottoman Empire to the present day is explained concerning quality assurance. To better understand the steps taken in the context of QA, the structure of the higher education in the Empire and its current situation is described, albeit briefly. Since the focus of this dissertation is QA in tertiary education in Turkey, it is appropriate to examine the past and present structure of HE in the country. The second part discusses the rationale for the emergence of QA in HE in Turkey. Next, as in the rest of the world, the legitimate reasons that push HE to quality assurance practices are elaborated before and after the Bologna Declaration, in the light of the important developments in this context.

##### 3.1.1 Higher education in the Ottoman period

When reviewing the history of Turkish HE, it is valuable to examine the context of tertiary education in the Ottoman Empire to understand the current situation better.

In this respect, madrasas appear as the first HEIs in our history<sup>2</sup>. Madrasas were opened to meet the needs of society. Although religious sciences were mainly taught in madrasas, science was also taught from time to time. The financing and management of such educational institutions were not done by the state. The functioning of madrasas was completely provided by foundations. In addition,

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<sup>2</sup> There are other sources stating that madrasahs are not the beginning of modern universities in today's understanding. For more information on the madrasahs and the modern university debate, see Dölen, E. (2010). Türkiye Üniversite Tarihi 1-2-3-4-5 (Turkish University History 1-2-3-4-5).



everyone could attend madrasas free of charge. It is thought that the success of the Ottoman Empire in the period of its rise was achieved through advanced madrasas. However, it had negative effects on the development of the state during the period of decline. The deterioration in these institutions was one of the most important factors that prepared the collapse of the empire (Kılıç, 1999; Kaymakçı & Çakır, 2008).

Higher education institutions that would be regarded as universities in the Ottoman Empire in their contemporary sense began to open in the 18th century. In this context, the first higher education institution, Mühendishâne-i Bahrî-i Hümayûn [Imperial Military Engineering School] was established. Currently, this school is regarded as the forerunner of the Istanbul Technical University (Taştekin, 2019; Yükseköğretim Kurulu [Higher Education Council], 2019). In the following years, education was considered a public duty. Besides military colleges, schools such as Mekteb-i Mülkiye [Civil Service School], Tıbbiye-i Mülkiye [Civil Medicine School], Mekteb-i Hukuk-u Şâhâne [Faculty of Law] were opened. In addition, considering the need for teachers, Darülmualimin Teacher Training School for Boys] and Darulmuallimat [Teacher Training School for Girls] were opened. Today, some of these schools continue to exist by changing their names and locations (<https://istanbultarihi.ist/474-health-in-istanbul>; Koyuncu, 2012; Kılıç, 1999).

It must be underlined that the Republic of Turkey has taken over some educational institutions from the Ottoman Empire. The most important of these is Darülfünun. Founded in 1863, in addition to military and civilian schools, Darülfünun can be seen as the first university established in the western sense. The main reason for the establishment of Darülfünun is the corruption of madrasas, which have a deep-rooted past and tradition. The reasons for the deterioration of madrasas are cited as the abandonment of the understanding of research education, the

proliferation of unqualified professors, the corruption of foundations, and the opposition of the professors to innovations in educational activities (Saydam, 1999). Founded in Istanbul, Darülfünun has been the subject of some regulations since the time of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, this institution was transformed into Istanbul University with the 1933 reform (Kaymakçı & Çakır, 2008).

In the context of quality practices, the Ottoman Empire first realized that it was behind Europe in the technical field. Thus, it sent some professors and students to the developed countries of Europe to compensate for this. Later, the Ottoman Empire tried to fill this gap by employing European experts in its schools. During the Tanzimat Period, radical reforms were initiated in the education system (Bozan, 2019). As underlined by Başkan & Çay (2019), this is considered a new era in the modernization process of the Ottoman Empire in different ways including the education system. Some of the reforms in this period included the beginning of compulsory education other than madrasas, the opening of secondary, vocational schools, and technical-based schools, and the beginning of high schools and universities for girls for the first time. Furthermore, new schools were opened outside the capital. The innovation in education spread throughout the country, which signified a period in which institutionalization and schooling began in the field of education.

Although the Ottoman Empire went to all this structuring in education during the Tanzimat period, the types and degrees of educational institutions were not sufficient for the spread of education and innovation in education (Başkan & Çay, 2019). Moreover, as stated by Bozarslan and Çokoğullar (2015), the main purpose of the modernization efforts of the empire was the concern of restoring the state to its former power by reviving the religious-traditional parameters that provided the

security and continuity of the social-political order of the empire. Taking the west as an example, new schools were opened. The schooling ratio was to be increased. However, the extremely resistant pattern of the traditional structure caused many reforms to be met with a reaction. Hence, the reforms did not lead to great success in the betterment of the education system. Plus, because of the chaotic periods in its history, e.g., the Balkan Wars and the National Struggle to preserve its independence, the education issue in the country did not develop properly (Bozan, 2019).

To conclude, it should be underlined that in the Ottoman Period, there have been some efforts to modernize education at all levels including HE. To this end, the west has been the role model as it has been regarded as more accomplished. Important steps have been taken to westernize education at all levels including HE. The west has been seen as the symbol of success and quality. However, it is not possible to talk about systematic quality assurance practices in the Ottoman Empire in today's sense.

### 3.1.2 Higher education in the republican period (1923-1980)

The Republic of Turkey inherited from the Ottoman Empire an educational system that was extremely scattered. The 1930s were the years when paramount advances were initiated in HE. The biggest factor for that was, depending on the policy of statism, the state support focused on tertiary education. It is observed that the number of universities increased in the 1930s. For example, the Graduate School of Agriculture (1933), Faculty of Language, History, and Geography (1935), and Political Science (1936) were opened (<http://dhgm.meb.gov.tr>; Erdem, 2012). In this process, another important development in HE was the 1933 Higher Education Reform. With the acceptance of the reform, radical changes happened in universities.

The university was given an autonomous structure, and an inter-university board was established to ensure coordination between the universities themselves and with the Ministry of National Education. In addition, various decisions were taken regarding the university administrators, academic staff, administrative and financial structure (Vurgun & Ateş, 2018; Kılıç, 1999).

In the following years, Hacettepe University (1967), Boğaziçi University (1971), Dicle University (1973), İnönü University (1975), Anadolu University (1982), Akdeniz University (1982), Dokuz Eylül University (1982), Trakya University (1982), and Yüzüncü Yıl University (1982) were opened. In the 1970-80 decade, the opening of universities in provinces such as Diyarbakır, Adana, Sivas, and Bursa despite many difficulties on the road to the Military Coup, is an indication of the expansion of tertiary education in Anatolia. Opening universities in different regions can be regarded as a major HE policy in the republican era (Vurgun & Ateş, 2018; Sargın, 2007; Yükseköğretim Kurulu [Higher Education Council], 2019).

Between the 1970s and 1980s, a chaotic situation emerged in the tertiary education system. Because of the ineffective central planning for all levels of tertiary education, especially in the sixties and seventies, HEIs did not work effectively. The main factors affecting the efficiency of the system were the fast increase in the numbers of students and the diversity in student profiles and HEIs. In addition to these, the country suffered from political, social, and economic problems in those years. Thus, a profound reform was necessary for the late 1970s. Afterwards, the reform of 1981 was put into effect, which caused the establishment of the Higher Education Council (HEC) (Kılıç, 1999; Çetinsaya, 2014).

With its foundation, higher education has begun a restructuring period regarding academic, institutional, and managerial aspects. All HEIs changed under

the umbrella of the Higher Education Council. Academies changed into universities. Institutes turned into education faculties and conservatories. Vocational schools became partners with universities. The Higher Education Council has become the only organization in charge of all higher education activities (Günay & Günay, 2011; Taştekin, 2019; Yükseköğretim Kurulu [Higher Education Council], 2019; <https://www.yok.gov.tr/kurumsal/tarihce>).

From only one university established in 1933, today, Turkish higher education has been growing with the number of 207 universities, both private and public ones ([www.yok.gov.tr](http://www.yok.gov.tr)). With the number of 7,940,133 students who are enrolled in tertiary education, Turkish HE has become one of the largest systems in Europe ([istatistik.yok.gov.tr](http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr); Akar, 2010). Turkey has undoubtedly been influenced by the continuous developments and trends in higher education systems on the face of the earth. Many obvious factors including the demographic pressure, the boom in a knowledge-based economy, the changes in student profile and expectations, the need for qualified people in the workforce, among many others have influenced HE in Turkey in different ways and will continue to do so.

### 3.2 The rationales for quality assurance practices in Turkish higher education

Above, the evolution of tertiary education in Turkey and the important occurrences regarding the system have been discussed. In this part, the reasons that push HE to improve policies on quality assurance will be explained. Developments in the context of tertiary education have necessitated the foundation of QA systems at the national level, like in the whole world. A variety of trends constantly force HEIs to innovate and increase capacity. In the face of these difficulties, the development of quality assurance systems has become inevitable (Kurt & Gümüş, 2015). In this respect,

massification, internationalization, private higher education, competition, rankings, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the local context will be mentioned in detail.

### 3.2.1 Massification

Turkish higher education has experienced a great change with the effect of many national, regional, and international developments from the 1980s to the present. One crucial reason for the change in the Turkish higher education system is the rapid increase in the number of students. In the last few decades, the interest in HE has grown and the pressures on higher education have paved the way for massification (Akbulut-Yıldırımış & Seggie, 2018). In particular, the rapid increase in the young population and secondary education enrollment has caused great pressure on higher education (Çelik & Gür, 2013).

Table 8. Number of Students Enrolled in Higher Education between the 1980s and 2010s

Year	Associate degree	Undergraduate	Graduate	Formal education total	Open education and distance education	Total numbers of registered students
1984-1985	45,642	287,087	19,156	351,885	65,456	417,341
1989-1990	62,671	353,869	40,665	457,205	228,295	685,500
1994-1995	127,922	502,083	66,979	696,984	477,315	1,174,299
1999-2000	218,099	713,259	84,054	1,015,452	488,569	1,503,981
2004-2005	402,404	871,091	137,265	1,410,760	695,591	2,106,351
2009-2010	613,077	1,152,265	206,775	1,972,117	1,557,217	3,529,334
2014-2015	896,692	1,897,692	406,817	3,200,540	2,862,346	6,062,886

Source: [Gürüz, 2003, p. 325]

As can be seen from the table, the Turkish higher education system, which served 417,341 students in the 1984-85 academic year, exceeded 1 million in the 1994-1995 academic year. Ten years later, in the 2014-2015 academic year, it reached 6 million (Gürüz, 2003). Currently, this number is about to reach 8 million (<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>). It is possible to argue that this need for tertiary education will go on increasing in the future.

As mentioned above, higher education has become massified especially due to the growth in the number of students that demand to study at universities (Akbulut-Yıldırımış & Seggie, 2015). In addition to this, it is necessary to state that there has been an increase in the figures of HEIs. As stated by Gür (2016), at the beginning of the millennium, out of 1.4 million high school students who sat the national university entrance exam, only about 400,000 could be accepted to university. The fact that so many students were deprived of university education necessitated the opening of new universities. This, in turn, has been effective in massing the higher education system.

Regarding the number of universities in the world, Turkey is among the top 25 countries as of June 2020 (Statista, 2020). It is crucial to emphasize the higher education policies of the Justice and Development Party at this point. In the light of the party's educational policy, many new public universities have been opened with new legislations (Gür, 2016). To ensure a balanced distribution of higher education in the country, 16 in 2006, 21 in 2007, 15 in 2008, 10 in 2009, 17 in 2010, 11 in 2011, 3 in 2012, and 1 in 2013, 93 new universities in total have been established (Günay & Günay, 2011; Doğan, 2017).

It is a common belief that there are certain advantages of massified higher education. According to Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004), higher education offers

special benefits to individuals. There is a positive connection between tertiary education and income level. It is observed that young people completing higher education generally have more opportunities for upward mobility. Furthermore, Prudence and Li-Tien (2012) state that expansion of universities enhances civilian educational opportunities and narrows the unfair gap between various social groups for access to tertiary education.

However, massified higher education systems bring about certain problems, as well. As mentioned by Prudence and Li-Tien (2012), after the fast expansion of HE, for instance, as there is not enough room for financial and structural adjustments, it is not easy to accommodate so many people with relevant skills and capabilities. Thereafter, this enlargement leads to a rising issue of highly unemployed people with a good education. Plus, as HE significantly expands, its government funding is weakened. As a result, this enlargement of tertiary education threatens educational quality because of restrictions of inadequate allocation of educational funds.

In this respect, although the tendency to become massive in higher education in Turkey is seen as a necessary step in terms of supply and demand balance, it has also received significant criticism. This increase in the number of universities has brought the problem of teaching staff and infrastructure in higher education institutions. This situation has led to a decrease in the quality of education, training, research, and social service expected from universities. There has been serious damage to the quality of HEIs (Karakütük & Özdemir, 2011). Specifically, the numerical increase in universities in the last decades caused concerns in terms of qualified faculty members (Günay & Günay, 2011). By making a comparison between Turkey and other OECD countries, Çetinsaya (2014) emphasizes that



qualified faculty members are not enough and highlights that when open education programs are excluded, Turkey needs at least 45,000 academics to catch up with the OECD average for the number of students per faculty (Çetinsaya, 2014).

Moreover, examining the challenges of massification faced by universities opened with the support of the state in the 2000s, Özoğlu et al. (2016) reveal that because of the state-sponsored enlargement strategy, problems such as a limited number of trained administrative employees, inefficient distribution of public money, some unfavorable program quotas, and growing pressure of local organizations have been experienced in these universities. Moreover, Arap (2010) states that these universities were established without solving the problems of the existing established universities. The city borders in which these universities will be established have not been sufficiently discussed. Adequate planning has not been made. It is underlined that opening a lot of HEIs with a lack of sufficient infrastructure causes a quality problem. It should not be overlooked that these universities may experience important academic, financial, and administrative problems. As can be seen, the emergence of many universities and the participation of students in a system that is not ready may turn into an important problem for the current system. Important issues such as the lack of qualified academicians, restricted infrastructure and facilities bring along discussions on quality.

All in all, the massification of Turkish HE in the last decades has enlarged opportunities for the citizens. However, it has caused certain concerns about the planning and monitoring of resources (Tekneci, 2016). In a system that is not fully prepared for such fast growth, it is possible to argue that reaching minimum standards in terms of quality is not an easy task. That is why the steps taken by HEC

and THEQC are of utmost importance to provide quality assurance practices that enable standardization and transparency among higher education institutions.

### 3.2.2 Private higher education

One important aspect of expanded higher education systems is the foundation of private universities. In the local context, as mentioned before, in addition to the universities established by the state itself, private universities have gone up in number. After legal arrangements for the opening of foundation universities were made in 1982, the Higher Education Council took the lead for independent organizations to open universities. Since the establishment of Bilkent University (1984), which is the first private university, a lot of private universities have opened in the 1990s and the 2000s. There has been an increase in the number of foundation universities ([istatistik.yok.gov.tr](http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr)). As Dündar and Lewis (1999) underline, Turkish tertiary education has experienced a modest but rising interest in the expansion of private HE.

The figure shows that a lot of foundation universities have been established at regular intervals every year since 1984.

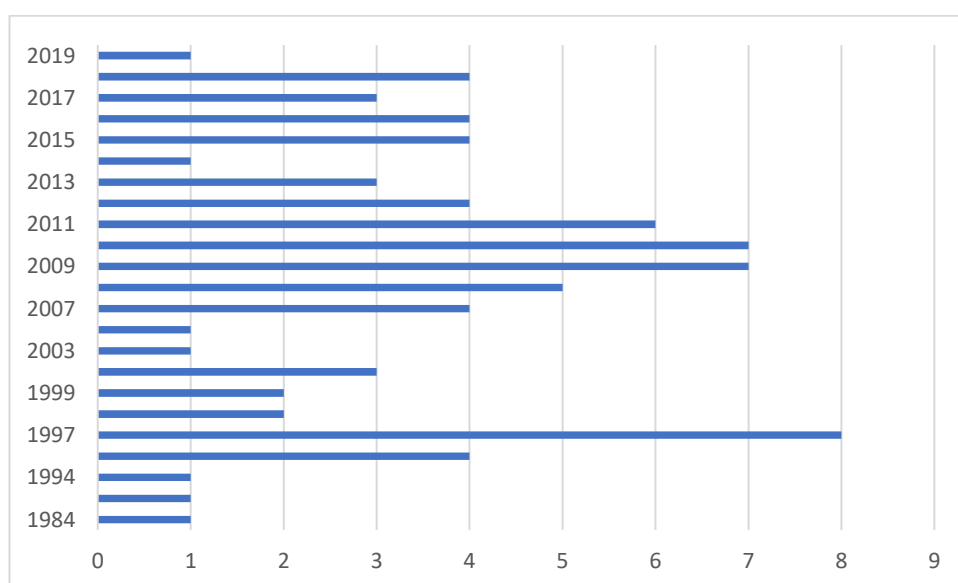


Figure 4 Number of foundation universities established between 1984 and 2019  
Source: [istatistik.gov.tr, 2021].

The figure below demonstrates that out of the 207 universities available today, 74 of them are foundation universities.

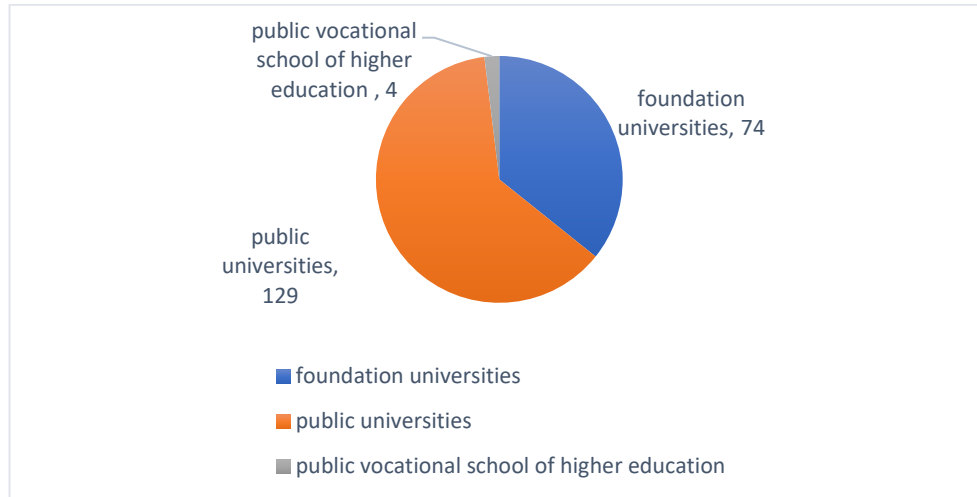


Figure 5 Number of foundation universities in accordance with their types  
Source: [istatistik.gov.tr, 2021].

One important issue to pinpoint is that foundation universities have had a huge impact on the Turkish higher education system both in positive and negative ways. One qualitative study conducted by Erguvan (2013) reveals that private universities lead to job opportunities, encourage students to stay in the country instead of going abroad, remove the financial responsibility of the public and enhance quality overall as a result of competitive atmosphere. Plus, as private universities have close relations with international institutions, they can enhance the quality of the whole system in Turkey. Moreover, as stated by Gürüz (<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/the-others/yok-baskani-guruz-universitelerimizde-rekabet-var-5353815>), one positive impact of private higher education is that it has enhanced entrepreneurial environment in academic life. A growing number of students would like to study at foundation universities because of some positive qualities such as student-centered service, quality teaching faculty members, academic opportunities, better campus

conditions, hands-on education, partnership with the business sector, and fast adaptation to innovations, language education, communication between students and faculty members (Cehver, n.d.; Fidancıoğlu, 2018).

However, some criticize private universities in certain ways. One of the main criticisms regarding quality in private universities is that because of the sudden increase in the number of universities and students, both private and state HEIs have not met the minimum standards; and the desired quality in academia could not be achieved (Şenses, 2007). Moreover, Erguvan's study (2013) indicates that private higher institutions have been criticized for only opening trendy programs with high job prospects to attract more students, and for accepting students who are not academically successful in comparison to those who study in state universities. Similarly, Şen (1997) criticizes that except for some foundation universities that have proven their quality and receive students with the same score as state universities, many of them accept students with lower scores in comparison to public universities. Furthermore, some high-rated programs, where many students have difficulty getting accepted, are offered to students with money; and so these universities caused a decrease in educational quality (Şen, 1997).

In this respect, the book called *Ne Ders Olsa Veririz [We will teach anything]* can be striking in terms of the examples given by academics who work in foundation universities in Turkey. In their study, Vatansever & Gezici-Yalçın (2015) include harsh comments on the students in private universities, on the working conditions of academics, and the academic environment in private universities. To illustrate, they emphasize that there are not enough laboratories and libraries in some foundation universities. Most of the existing universities are neither suited to develop people's potential in terms of content nor to enable the generation of knowledge. Because of

the quality of education, any diploma obtained from these places does not provide an advantage in the employment market. Making their criticism even harder, they state that they think that more than half of the foundation universities should be closed because of the low quality of education.

These heated debates about private higher education raise the problem of quality education in these institutions. As Hallak and Poisson (2005) state, it would not be the right decision to leave higher education only to the initiative of market forces, and governments should be careful about this. An unregulated free market economy in higher education can negatively impact the interests of the end consumers because, in an unregulated higher education system, poor quality providers invest more in the sector. Numerous examples of this can be given. For example, there have been cases where entry rules were loosened, the evaluation process has been broken, and fraudulent practices have come to light where exams are fake in different ways. As Bjarnason et al. (2009) emphasize, creating a new university by name alone is not difficult, and there are a lot of uninformed and naive potential students who want to study at a university. They can enroll in a private institution even if they do not know the credentials and quality of the institution.

However, it is also argued that private universities are not such bad institutions, they increase competition by increasing diversity in the higher education system. Since most of the private universities have just been established, they do not have a long history. They should be given a chance to position themselves firmly in higher education. Whether these universities will turn into well-established and high-quality universities can be evaluated over the years (Gözükar, 2015). In this context, foundation universities in Turkey should be inspected effectively to maintain their quality and whether their institutions are for-profit should be investigated

thoroughly; and whether their financial resources, human resources, physical capacities, and other facilities are sufficient should be determined. In addition, quality assurance practices by THEQC and the supervision of HEC are very functional to increase the quality of these institutions. Such institutions must be constantly accredited in terms of their academic activities (Yaşar, 2007). In this context, quality assurance practices have gained momentum in the Turkish higher education system to meet an important need.

### 3.2.3 Internationalization

It is important to note that Turkey has begun the process of internationalization of higher education with modernization efforts as a public policy. In the 1950s, the establishment of western-style universities and the reform efforts of foreign academics came to the fore. Universities based on the American model were established (Küçükcan & Gür, 2009; Yılmaz, 2016). Once again, after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s, internationalization in Turkish higher education has become a heated issue. In those years, there were exchange programs between Turkey and relative communities. Through internationalization, political and cultural cooperation with the countries in the region became important (Çalıkoglu & Arslan, 2018). In the 2000s, Turkey pursued a more active policy with the EU full membership perspective. It was accepted as a member of the Bologna Process in 2001. Turkish universities especially showed great interest in the Erasmus Program. With the Bologna Declaration, it has been a crucial goal for Turkish universities to take part in a common platform with European universities (Yağcı, 2010). In recent years, because of regional developments, fast rise in the figures of universities and capacities, and growing international student demand,

internationalization is considered a strategic tool in Turkish Higher Education both for the state and universities due to its political, academic, socio-cultural and economic dimensions (Çetinsaya, 2014; Selvitopu & Aydın, 2016).

Having a strategic role in the amelioration of HEIs, internationalization has become crucial for the country; and Turkey has become one of those countries which have been influenced by the internationalization trend of higher education systems. In general, student mobility is from underdeveloped countries to prosperous ones. On the other hand, relatively less developed countries have also started to participate in these processes, which means they are preferred by international students for different reasons. In this sense, Turkey has been sending students to developed countries for many years. Also, located in a developing region, it receives students from neighboring countries. Since the 1990s, through international agreements, the Balkans and the Central Asian countries have shown their interest in Turkish universities (Ünal, 2019). Furthermore, in a study by Fındık (2016), international student profiles in Turkish universities are analyzed. The study reveals that students from mostly Asian countries prefer Turkey for higher education. On the other hand, European students rarely prefer to study in Turkey.

Based on Ünal and Fındıkçı's studies, it is possible to argue that as one of the developing countries, Turkey can attract international students. However, the reasons for foreign students to choose to study in Turkey are more cultural. It stems from having a common heritage and common history. Similarly, according to Kondakçı et al. (2016), the most important reason for foreign students from Balkan countries coming to study in Turkey is socio-cultural proximity. Although academic and economic reasons are important, they do not affect foreign student preferences as much as cultural affinity. To attract students from countries in the west and

especially from European countries, where the Turkish higher education system has turned its face with the Bologna Declaration, it is crucial to improve the conditions and increase the quality in the universities, whose number has increased rapidly in recent years. Internationalization creates a win-win situation for higher education systems. First, foreign students gain many advantages through internationalization. According to Ergin (2017), international distance education is beneficial for students for social-cultural, academic, and psychological reasons. The social-cultural benefit of internationalization is international socialization and intercultural exchange. In terms of psychology, students state that international distance programs positively affect their moods and that they are more hopeful about life. Furthermore, Özer (2012) highlights that those international students contribute to the system greatly. For example, international students and faculty members positively affect education and research capacity. In addition, HEIs transform into multinational and multicultural campuses with the influence of international students and faculty they host. Furthermore, Selvitopu and Aydın (2018), based on their qualitative study, reveal the main reasons for the internationalization of Turkish universities. These include providing an international environment, academic staff and student mobility, increasing the quality, achieving international academic standards, and being in the top group in international rankings. In addition, as Seggie and Ergin (2018) state in their comprehensive study of internationalization, there is no consensus on the reasons for internationalization, but internationalization has become one of the aims of the tertiary education ecosystems of countries in academic, economic, cultural-social, and political motivations.

Turkey, one of the countries involved in the Bologna Declaration, has realized the importance of internationalization. It has acted in this regard. Perhaps



because of these steps, Turkey has tried to be a center of attraction for students from abroad. According to UNESCO 2018 data, Turkey succeeded in being one of the top 10 countries in the world in terms of the number of students(<https://apnnic.net/country-profile/turkey/mobility/>).

Table 9. Top Ten Countries Attracting International Students in the World

1.	The USA	987,314
2.	ENGLAND	452,079
3.	AUSTRALIA	444,514
4.	GERMANY	311,738
5.	RUSSIA	262,416
6.	FRANCE	229,623
7.	CANADA	224,548
8.	JAPAN	182,748
9.	CHINA	178,271
10.	TURKEY	125,138

Source: [<https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2020/hedef-odakli-uluslararasilasma.aspx>, 2021]

According to UNESCO 2018 data, 987,000,314 out of 5,571,000, 402 international students in the world study at higher education institutions in America. America is followed by England with 452,000,079 students and Australia with 444,000,514 students. When the economic and political development of the countries on the list are taken into consideration, it is an important step for Turkey to be preferred by a lot of international students.

In this context, the internationalization of HE is an important agenda item for Turkey. Local studies on internationalization will shed light on the subject in this

context. For example, Beltekin and Radmard (2013) conducted a study at Ankara University on the ideas of international students towards the university. According to the results of the research, students have some negative opinions about faculty members. Similarly, students stated that the university was inadequate in certain ways. Another study conducted by Vural-Yılmaz (2016) is also important for our understanding of the subject better. According to the research, the regulated pattern of higher education makes the system cumbersome. The system, which cannot rapidly adapt to global developments and the conditions of the age, falls short because of rapid quantitative growth. This causes infrastructure and quality problems in universities. The competitive power of the Turkish higher education system in the international arena, thus, decreases. The study shows that most universities in Turkey need to go through the maturation process for internationalization. In the light of local studies, it can be said that although internationalization is an important agenda item, there are important problems to be overcome. It is necessary to focus on these problems by focusing on quality assurance.

In this respect, it has become inevitable to question quality in universities and to have thorough quality assurance systems. Because of the rise in mobility in academia, alternative techniques are used to enhance quality in HEIs in the internationalization process (Tezsürücü & Bursalıoğlu, 2013). Turkey's higher education system, which is one of those with the capacity to attract many international students, has set quality as a goal to reach today's modern education standards. Quality assurance systems have undertaken a crucial function in terms of not only transparency but also accountability. To realize internationalization in HE, QA has become inevitable for all universities in Turkish Higher Education (Çetinsaya, 2014).

### 3.2.4 Competition and rankings

As a result of the transformation of higher education into a global marketplace, a new competitive environment has emerged where universities are faced with harsh competition. This formation, which generally manifests itself with success rankings, has become a gradually spreading phenomenon in the increasingly competitive environment in higher education. The phenomenon of ranking HEIs has become a part of the lives of students, academics, and bureaucrats in the last decades. This situation has enabled HEIs to become more transparent by evaluating the performances of educational institutions (Federkeil, 2008).

The need for data on the academic quality of universities in many countries around the world is constantly increasing. The quality of education provided in universities, which is the most important field where knowledge is produced, has begun to be questioned all over the world. The tight relationship between knowledge and competition has become the focus of quality-based discussions. The demand for quality in higher education has enabled the improvement of university ranking and criteria tables. International research on ranking systems has led to the development of HEIs in the international market, as well. Thus, criteria tables that allow universities to compare themselves with other universities provide information to students and politicians as an efficient tool (Dill & Soo, 2005).

Another important point about rankings is that although most rankings are made on a national or regional scale, there is a growing consensus on the idea that they show how to measure academic quality (Damar et al., 2020). In this context, university rankings have become a tool used by HEIs as an indicator of academic quality. Although the rankings should be approached with caution, it is not possible

to completely ignore the rankings in terms of performance measurement, and consequently, quality (Emil, 2019). As Sinağ (2020) states, higher education is no longer an input-oriented but an output-oriented competitive process. In this process, criteria such as how soon graduates can find a job, whether a student-oriented learning strategy has been adopted, whether the research results are transformed into high value-added products, and the impact value of the journals in which the scientific studies are published determine the quality of the universities, and such performance indicators are in compliance with criteria of the rankings.

In line with high quality education debates, how Turkish universities are ranked has also been the subject of curiosity for higher education stakeholders. So much so that in the university entrance preference guide shared with university students in recent years, the accreditation information of universities is also shared with students (<https://www.osym.gov.tr/TR,20845/2021-yuksekokretim-kurumlari-sinavi-yks-kilavuzu.html>). Furthermore, the most important development is the URAP Research Laboratory founded in 2009 within the Informatics Institute of the Middle East Technical University. URAP develops scientific methods to evaluate higher education institutions in line with their success and shares the results with society. The purpose of URAP is to support universities to contrast their performance with other HEIs with the data obtained as a result of the studies and to realize their development according to the determined indicators (<https://newtr.urapcenter.org/>).

Not only regional ranking lists but also global lists are followed by Turkish higher education stakeholders. One of the most important of these lists is the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) by ShanghaiRanking Consultancy. Starting from 2003, ARWU has been sharing the most successful HEIs every year under a set of objective criteria and third-party information. ARWU in

2020 reveals that there are 11 universities that entered the top 1000 universities in Turkey. In addition, there is only one Turkish university among the top 500 universities. No Turkish university is among the top 100 or 250 (<http://www.shanghairanking.com/World-University-Rankings-2019/Turkey.html>).

Table 10. Academic Ranking of World Universities 2020

COUNRTY RANK	INSTITUTION	WORLD RANK
1	Istanbul University	401-500
2-3	Hacettepe University	601-700
2-3	Istanbul Technical University	601-700
4-5	Dokuz Eylul University	701-800
4-5	Ege University	701-800
6-8	Ankara University	801-900
6-8	Bilkent University	801-900
6-8	Middle East Technical University	801-900
9-11	Erciyes University	901-1000
9-11	Gazi University	901-1000
9-11	Marmara University	901-1000

Source: [<http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2020.html>, 2021]

As a result, it should be underlined that today, for Turkish HEIs, being at the top of the rankings has become a more important goal. HEIs in Turkey have started to give more importance to QA studies because they want to rise in the rankings. Rising high

in the rankings, that is, proving to be a quality university, means attracting outstanding students, research funds, government, and public support. Turkey has realized the importance of being at the forefront of the rankings, as in the rest of the world (Konan & Yılmaz, 2017). In this context, quality assurance systems have become an important part of our HE system, as they mirror the strengths and weaknesses of universities. In the light of all these developments, it has become inevitable for universities to participate in QA processes where they can compare themselves with others in the ecosystem.

### 3.2.5 Twenty-first-century skills and expectations

A skill-oriented struggle for existence is observed in all the processes of our century. Having a set of skills is one of the important features of our age. Although there are unique skillsets for each period, the skills of the 21st century differ in that they offer a much more complex structure than the skills of the previous centuries. What causes this complexity is the continuous variability and fluidity seen in all aspects of an individual's life with digitalization (Hamarat, 2019).

Likewise, higher education in the 21st century has faced many unprecedented challenges. The expanded landscape of higher education is changing visibly with the increase in new types of education providers, the growth in the number of students with different characteristics, the rapid change in political power balances, and the acceleration of communication technologies. Accordingly, it is imperative to develop new approaches to ensure quality in education that can more effectively respond to the necessities of students, employers, and the public (Wolff & Booth, 2018). In addition, knowledge has increasingly become the main aspect of improvement for most countries. Nigavekar (2006) underlines that the 21st century represents change

and the youth now need these new skills - the skills of learning, changing, and analyzing – to adapt to today's conditions and find solutions to the challenges they face. Thus, young people are to gain appropriate capabilities to be adaptable to changes.

In this sense, one of the most important expectations of various stakeholders is to receive high-quality education to meet the difficulties of knowledge societies. As is known, higher education has an active role in the improvement of HR. One major purpose of it is to train a professional workforce specialized in professions that creates a need for practical and theoretical talents. It must be noted that individuals want to acquire 21st-century skills because these skills enable individuals to lead a qualified life, solve problems easily, develop different perspectives on the events around them; and they need to succeed in their careers and social lives (Aygün et al., 2016). Therefore, governments need to concentrate on the improvement of HEIs, both in terms of quantity and quality. Quality assurance systems open a way to HEIs in that they are allowed to reflect on their education.

The 21st century makes it compulsory to equip young people with skills that were not available in past centuries. Considering that a large number of people with different characteristics are included in the massive higher education system, it is obvious that traditional education methods cannot keep up with the times. Parlar (2012), in his article called *Bilgi Toplumu, Değişim ve Yeni Eğitim Paradigması* [Information Society, Change and the New Education Paradigm], stresses that teachers of this century must be innovative, and see change and development in a timely manner. The next generation of teachers needs to encourage competencies such as creative and scientific thinking; concepts such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. They should motivate students to gain sets of talents such as the ability to

communicate and teamwork. Otherwise, the students would not be prepared for the complexities of their professional and personal lives. From this perspective, QA practices have been pushing academics to question their teaching methodologies and adapting and even changing them in line with the expectations of the stakeholders.

In this sense, a study by Erten (2020) touches upon the perceptions of teachers on the acquisition of 21st-century skills. According to the study, teacher candidates consider that information, media, and tech skills are of utmost importance. They think that the lessons should include activities that will enable students to gain these skills. They consider such skills essential to respond to changing conditions, to use the strength of technology to produce knowledge, and to increase human capability and efficiency. As can be seen, because of the important developments in ICT together with the global economic race based on knowledge, traditional education approaches have lost their importance. Higher education institutions, where different stakeholders come together, must train young people to keep up with the conditions of the day.

From this perspective, HE in Turkey is indispensable to meet different needs. QA processes have acted as a catalyst in this sense so that university education can meet the needs. To elaborate, Turkey, which is part of the EHEA region, takes the ESG standards into account. ESG is a reference document frequently used in quality assurance processes; and it prioritizes student-centered learning and teaching. To elaborate, some of the ESG external and internal quality assurance standards for student-centered learning and teaching are as follows:

- students' needs and differences should be satisfied through flexible learning channels
- different and effective teaching styles should be used



- various pedagogical methods should be implemented flexibly
- pedagogical methods should be regularly monitored, and adaptations should be made in these methods to make teaching effective (ESG, 2015, p. 12).

As can be seen, QA processes do not ignore the student-centered learning and teaching process. Whether or not academic environments are created in which 21st-century skills can be acquired is an important agenda item of quality assurance processes. If academic environments need revision for all the courses, and if activities require design particularly for the provision of the mentioned 21st century skills, they are evaluated in QA processes. QA practices give guidance to universities on how to create such educational environments that are in line with 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and educate students in such environments (Ağaoğlu & Demir, 2020).

### 3.3 Quality assurance in Turkish higher education area

In this section, the main occurrences concerning quality assurance in Turkish HE will be touched upon following the development before and after the Bologna Process.

#### 3.3.1 Before the Bologna Process

In the last ten years, occurrences such as the fast increase in the number of HEIs, the inclusion of private universities into the system, and the expansion of the autonomy of public universities have caused countries to focus on QA in HE. International student mobility, cross-border HEIs, and free movement have led QA to gain national and international aspects. Diplomas have started to be recognized through accreditation. Accreditation has become crucial in bilateral or multilateral

networking (TC Yükseköğretim Kurulu [TC Higher Education Council], 2007; Mok, 2000; Nobarian & Abdi, 2007).

Considering the factors that make QA necessary, HEIs, with their more complex structures, have needed to develop proactive strategies. HEIs in Turkey have clearly felt the need for a systematic approach in education, research, and other services in terms of QA. Dissemination of quality culture for better education and research services has been one of the strategic approaches. In this respect, Turkey has acted seriously to improve QA in HE (Yılmaz, 2019). The purpose of these steps has been to ensure that quality culture is internalized by all HEIs so that quality assurance activities will be taken seriously, and they will lead to more fundamental changes (Bolonya Süreci'nin Türkiye'de Uygulanması, Bolonya Uzmanları Ulusal Takım Projesi Sonuç Raporu [Application of Bologna Process in Turkey, Report by Bologna Experts National Team Project, 2007-2008]).

The history of QA in Turkey goes back to the mid-1990s. With the inclusion of Turkey in the Bologna Process in 2001, QA has become important for all universities in Turkey (Kavak et al., 2015). In the last 20 years, HE in Turkey has gained significant momentum in this field of QA. However, there has been no quality assurance strategy defined within a specific national system, except for the faculty, department, and program opening criteria applied by CoHE (Işık & Beykoz, 2018). In the process of being a signatory country in the Bologna Process, some important steps have been taken in QA in years. These developments can be summarized as follows.

- In 1997, the Turkish University Quality Assessment Project was carried out as a pilot project. Workshops, research tours, and pilot evaluations were done within the scope of the project. The project aimed to build a quality assurance

system with performance assessment. In line with the project, another aim was to work on internal evaluation, expert supervision, and the accreditation of institutions. However, this project could not be implemented effectively (TC Yükseköğretim Kurulu [TC Higher Education Council], 2007).

- As of the 1998-99 academic year, education faculties were restructured by CoHE (Öztürk, 2012). Within this context, teacher training undergraduate programs were re-arranged. Accreditation of teacher education and quality-enhancing regulations were made in this framework (Aslan, 2009). However, these studies have not been implemented conclusively. These studies have been criticized in that the high authority inspection understanding of CoHE and the accreditation, which is expected as a voluntary process, has been combined (Özer et al., 2010; Bolonya Süreci'nin Türkiye'de Uygulanması, Bolonya Uzmanları Ulusal Takım Projesi Sonuç Raporu [Application of Bologna Process in Turkey, Report by Bologna Experts National Team Project, 2007-2008], 2007-2008).
- Accreditation in Turkey started with the accreditation process of engineering programs by ABET. Between 1994 and 2004, a total of 33 engineering programs in four universities (METU, Boğaziçi, Bilkent, ITU) received ABET equivalence certificates (Aslan, 2009; Öztürk, 2012). Today, various engineering programs in six different Turkish universities have been accredited by ABET (<https://universkop.com/abet-nedir-abet-akredite-universiteler/>; <https://www.abet.org/>).
- The process of cooperation with ABET for engineering programs in Turkey has brought about a discussion to create a similar national quality assurance system. Thus, MÜDEK started to work as a council of engineering deans in

2002. Then, because of its influential activities regarding QA, CoHE granted program accreditation authority to MÜDEK in 2007 (Aslan, 2009; Öztürk, 2012). MÜDEK, which is included in the Engineering European Accreditation Program (EUR-ACE), evaluated 44 engineering undergraduate programs in 14 different disciplines until 2007 (Aslan, 2009). MÜDEK continues its activities as an independent organization contributing to engineering education (<http://www.mudek.org.tr/tr/ana/ilk.shtm> ; [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/quality-assurance-higher-education-86\\_tr](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/quality-assurance-higher-education-86_tr)).

- In 2002, universities started to receive an institutional evaluation from the European University Association (EUA) (Öztürk, 2012). The EUA represents more than 800 universities in 48 European countries. 46 universities in Turkey are a member of this association (<https://eua.eu/about/who-we-are.html>; [https://www.turkcebilgi.com/avrupa\\_%C3%BCniversiteler\\_birli%C4%9Fi](https://www.turkcebilgi.com/avrupa_%C3%BCniversiteler_birli%C4%9Fi)).
- In 2005, Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education (YÖDEK) was founded, and its regulation was published (Öztürk, 2012). The regulation led to some formal changes in HEIs. Stipulating the establishment of boards for academic evaluation and quality improvement in universities, it determined some principles for quality improvement. For example, quality-related boards were established within universities. But still, according to Özer et al. (2010), it is not possible to say that these changes cause a serious transformation in institutional culture and quality.

- In 2006, the Public Financial Management and Control Law No. 5018 introduced the provision of strategic planning. The procedures and principles regarding strategic planning in higher education were regulated (Öztürk, 2012).
- In 2006, YÖDEK produced the Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Guide (Aslan, 2009).
- Another accreditation practice accepted in Turkish universities is the International Accreditation Joint Commission for hospitals. The International Accreditation Joint Commission aims to improve quality assurance practices in universities that have a medical faculty and a university hospital (Bolonya Süreci'nin Türkiye'de Uygulanması, Bolonya Uzmanları Ulusal Takım Projesi Sonuç Raporu [Application of Bologna process in Turkey, Report by Bologna Experts National Team Project, 2007-2008]).
- In 2011, some changes were made with the Act 6111, and necessary legal changes were made, particularly in the Bologna Process (Öztürk, 2012).
- In 2010, CoHE authorized new institutions for program accreditation. Organizations authorized for accreditation were the Turkish Psychologists Association, and Science, Literature, Science and Literature Faculties, Faculties of Language, History, and Geography Curriculum Evaluation and Accreditation Association (<http://fedek.org.tr/?page=2>).
- In 2011, CoHE authorized Medical Education Programs Evaluation and Accreditation Association (TEPDAD) (<http://www.tepdad.org.tr/>).
- The establishment of the Higher Education Evaluation and Quality Evaluation Association, which would make an institutional evaluation, was accepted by CoHE (Öztürk, 2012).

- In 2012, the Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Institutions and Programs of Veterinary Medicine (VEDEK) was authorized by CoHE (<http://www.vedek.org.tr/>).
- In 2015, Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation gave way to the foundation of the Higher Education Quality Board (Elmas, 2019).

As summarized above, HEIs in Turkey, especially accelerating quality practices with the Bologna Process, have gained significant knowledge and experience in this regard. However, a national quality assurance system following international developments could only be established in 2005. The first important activity in eliminating the deficiency in QA was achieved with the Regulation for Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions in the Official Gazette in 2005. The Regulation sets out the common rules about the evaluation of education, training and research, and managerial services of HEIs. (Bolonya Süreci'nin Türkiye'de Uygulanması, Bolonya Uzmanları Ulusal Takım Projesi Sonuç Raporu [Application of Bologna process in Turkey, Report by Bologna Experts National Team Project, 2007-2008]). The second important activity is the establishment of THEQC in 2015 which will be detailed below in 2.6.4.

### 3.3.2 After the Bologna Process

Before the Bologna Process, several important developments led to the emergence of this process in Europe. Since the 1970s, there has been a noticeable growth in student mobility. Students took advantage of the opportunities that came their way to study abroad and gain experience. In addition, internationalization and mobility have opened a door for states to improve economically, socially, and culturally (Huisman et al., 2012). In addition, problems such as the low employment rate among

university students in Europe and the transformation of HE into an even more expensive service made it necessary to take a large-scale education reform to stop the bad course (Coşar & Ergül, 2014). In this respect, the Bologna Process, considered a comprehensive reform initiative, has had a worldwide impact. This impact has affected both European and non-European geographies (Esen et al., 2012).

Similarly, as stated in the rationale section of this chapter, many problems faced by the Turkish higher education system in years have not been different from those experienced by HEIs in Europe. The rise in the number of universities and students over the years, the worldwide competitive atmosphere, the relations and partnerships established with the countries in the nearby regions, and many other factors have influenced the Turkish higher education system (Lucin & Samarzija 2011). In addition, the quick advances in technology and the awareness of the advantages gained by the information societies in the world have caused Turkish universities to access the process of restructuring (Yükseköğretimde Yeniden Yapılanma: 66 Soruda Bologna Süreci Uygulamaları [Restructuring in Higher Education Bologna Practices in 66 Questions, 2010, Higher Education Board, 2008]). Thus, it was inevitable for Turkey to be affected by the Bologna Process. Moreover, with a long-standing candidacy for membership to the EU, Turkey has been eager to share the European vision of HE.

Considering Turkey as a potential EU member, it cannot be expected from the country to remain outside the developments going on in European higher education. By participating in the Bologna Process in 2001, Turkey has been involved in the transformation process in EHEA. It has gone through a multidimensional transformation to be compatible with the university systems in the region. This process, which is in the maturation phase after 20 years, has deeply

affected the Turkish higher education system (Esen et al., 2012). As expressed by Furuzan (2012), the Bologna Process is the most far-reaching initiative in the last few decades within the context of the Turkish Higher Education Area.

### 3.4 Restructuring Turkish higher education in the Bologna Process

European universities aimed to create a common language of higher education by realizing structural changes (Furuzan, 2011). To this end, those countries have acted seriously concerning the process. In this respect, after becoming a member of the declaration, Turkey followed the necessary steps for the re-organization process of its national higher education system. According to Elmas (2012), overall, Turkey was successful in terms of the implementations regarding the two main cycle systems, and the student exchange issues. HEC, National Agency, and Bologna experts have given significant support for the adoption of the process by providing intensive information. Universities have made successful applications for diploma supplements and ECTS for recognition.

One of the main issues in the European reform movement was to form a comparable three-tier system for undergrad, MA, and Ph.D. degrees. The three-step system was already implemented in Turkey and the process to integrate it into the system was not seen as that difficult:

The three-tier system, excluding fields such as medicine, dentistry (a two-stage system), is already implemented in the Turkish system. Therefore, there is no need to make a structural change in the definition of these degrees (Korkut & Mızıkacı, 2008).

But still, within the Bologna Process, efforts for forming National Qualifications Framework began in 2005. With these efforts, higher education



qualifications were determined in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels (Korkut & Mızıkacı, 2008). Within the same framework, since 2005, diploma supplement and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) information package have become compulsory in all higher education institutions. Diploma Supplement is a document developed by the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and UNESCO / CEPES. It is given by HEIs in addition to the diploma. This way, it is possible to understand the obtained degrees easily (Yükseköğretimde Yeniden Yapılanma: 66 Soruda Bologna Süreci Uygulamaları [Restructuring in Higher Education Bologna Practices in 66 Questions], 2008). Moreover, ECTS is a student-centered credit system. It is following the workload of the student. It has become an important implementation with the Bologna Process. ECTS is a value that corresponds to all the work regarding a course students must do in order not to fail. In this context, ECTS coordinators who are responsible for the implementation of ECTS have been determined in Turkish universities (Elmas, 2012).

Another point in the Bologna Declaration is increasing mobility in academia. The initial step for the promotion of mobility started with the Erasmus Program, in 2003-2004 with the involvement of pilot universities in Turkey (Penbek et al., 2011). Youth programs (Erasmus +) and the realization of short-term student exchanges have found their way into the Turkish higher education and gained momentum (Demirçelik & Sipahioğlu, 2020). For example, 599 students and 55 faculty members went abroad between 2003-2005. 200 students and two faculty members came to Turkish universities (Bologna Ulusal Raporu [Bologna National Report], 2005). In time, more and more students have benefited from student exchange programs.

In the table below, there are student mobility figures for 2019-2020 with the Farabi, Mevlana, and Erasmus programs.

Table 11. Student Mobility in Turkey and Abroad

Student Mobility	Students studying in Turkey	Students studying in other countries	Total
Farabi	3276	1748	5024
Mevlana	382	76	458
Erasmus	3443	4210	7653

Source: [<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, 2021]

As can be seen, according to the latest updated information, a total of 13,135 students experienced academic mobility through various programs. Over the years, HEIs have improved themselves in terms of student mobility. However, as Mızıkacı (2005) emphasized, some problems may be encountered in the implementation of such programs. For example, reasons such as visa applications for outgoing students, lack of additional financial resources, language problems, the mobility program not being known to the masses yet, lack of recognition of Turkish universities in Europe, and the implementation of some incomplete applications can slow down the academic mobility process.

#### 3.4.1 Quality assurance focus in Turkish universities: Quality assurance between 2005 and 2015

Quality assurance has been a critical action line in the Bologna Process. To this end, several steps have been taken. In 2001, the role of quality assurance was recognized and the role of stakeholders in quality assurance was more clearly defined. It was decided that the countries would accept evaluation and accreditation mechanisms mutually. In 2003, it was decided to form standards and guidelines regarding quality assurance. In 2005, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) were proposed by the E4 Group. In 2006, the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)

was first launched. In 2008, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was formed. In 2015, the revised ESG 2015 was adopted (Kelo & Loukkola, 2018; the European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2020). Turkey as a member of the Bologna Process has followed the improvements about quality assurance in the region closely. It has also taken steps to improve quality assurance practices in its universities.

To this end, in 2005, a regulation titled Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions was published. With this regulation, YÖDEK was established (<http://www.yodek.org.tr/>). YÖDEK has made significant progress in quality. It published the first version of the Guide for Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions in 2006, and the second version in 2007. In addition, YÖDEK's membership application to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (Associate Status) was submitted on 15 June 2007. It was accepted by the ENQA Board (Ayvaz et al., 2016). While YÖDEK foresaw continuous improvement efforts in service by creating its strategic plans because of the internal evaluation studies of the institutions every year. It took the quality evaluation and development processes into account. Also, universities were required to be subject to an external evaluation process every five years (Tezsürücü & Bursalıoğlu, n.d.). YÖDEK survived until 2015 (Bakioğlu & Baltacı, 2010). It carried out important activities on quality assurance and encouraged the development of quality culture in universities. Since the Turkish higher education system has already Anglo-Saxon characteristics, it has not been difficult to internalize some of the goals set by the Bologna Process. Therefore, the implementation of radical transformations in many areas has not been necessary. However, quality assurance, in this process of change, has been seen as

the point where Turkey is the weakest. For example, the discussions on external quality assurance focused on questioning the structure of YÖDEK acting as a national quality body. YÖDEK has been deemed to be against external quality assurance principles, which should be independent, as it has broad authority over universities (Erdoğan, 2013).

In this context, Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Boards (ADEK) were formed at universities. The main duties of ADEK are in the relevant higher education institution in line with the strategic plan and objectives of the institution. Furthermore, in the context of quality studies, Public Financial Management and Control Law No. 5018 and Strategic Planning Principles and Principles in Public Administrations were regulated in 2006. Also, new evaluation and accreditation organizations specific to various programs have also been established since 2009. Moreover, in 2010, the Higher Education Qualifications Framework was designed for the development and approval of Higher Education. In 2011, a new law article numbered 6111 was added to the Higher Education Law No.2547, and changes regarding quality assurance activities in higher education institutions were specified (Gür & Küçükcan, 2010; <http://tyyc.yok.gov.tr/>).

In addition to the developments stated above, one of the most important quality assurance operations in Turkish higher education is the Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation published in the Official Gazette numbered 29423 in 2015. The aforementioned regulation is a reform that obliges all HEIs to meet the quality assurance mechanisms. With the regulation, the Higher Education Quality Board was established within the body of YÖK, which regulates the quality assessment and assurance activities of universities and the execution of accreditation procedures (Işık & Beykoz, 2018).

### 3.4.2 The Higher Education Quality Council

The Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC) was established in accordance with the Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation, dated 23 July 2015 and numbered 29423. With the Council being opened, quality assurance studies in higher education have gained momentum and become more organized. It can be said that the activities of the council regarding quality assurance have gained momentum in time; and THEQC led Turkey to deal with quality assurance more systematically. Important steps that carry the Turkish higher education system from the national dimension to the international dimension have been taken thanks to THEQC. With the foundation of THEQC in the Turkish higher education, which has taken the steps of transforming itself into a more accountable structure with the Bologna Process, quality assurance processes have gained more importance than ever before.

#### 3.4.2.1 The Higher Education Quality Council: Its historical background

Founded in 2015, THEQC coordinates all issues under the title of quality, considering the managerial and operational structure and activities in CoHE. It is envisaged that THEQC leads the policies and actions on quality by directing national and international developments in higher education restructuring (Can, 2019). Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation 42 was later rearranged following the provisions of Additional Article 35 added to the Higher Education Law No. 2547 and with the Amendment of Certain Laws and Decrees for the Development of Industry and Support of Production with the Law No. 7033. Through this re-organization in 2017, THEQC has become an independent organization with economic and managerial autonomy (Elmas, 2019). There are thirteen members of the Council.

These people have experience and success in their fields of expertise

(<https://yokak.gov.tr/hakkinda>, 2021). Under the Higher Education Quality

Assurance Regulation, dated 23 July 2015 and numbered 29423, the qualities of

THEQC members are specified as follows:

Members are elected by the General Assembly and the Interuniversity Board to represent HEIs; From among the faculty members from different fields, including social, science, engineering, health, and fine arts, each of them working in different higher education institutions, experienced in the structure, functioning and management of higher education and quality assessment and development practices, having worked in higher education institutions for at least ten years, members are selected. There are representatives of the Ministry of Science, Industry, and Technology, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Health, Turkish Academy of Sciences, Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, Presidency of Turkish Health Institutes, Vocational Qualifications Authority, Turkish Accreditation Agency and Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey. They are requested from the ministries with which these institutions are affiliated or related. The student representative is determined within the principles and principles to be determined by the Higher Education Quality Board. ([resmigazete.gov.tr](http://resmigazete.gov.tr)).

THEQC carries out extensive activities in line with its duties and responsibilities and its vision to make the national quality assurance more systematic and to make the Turkish higher education system more competitive with the Bologna Process. These activities, each of which is an important cornerstone of Quality Assurance, will be explained in detail below.

#### 3.4.2.2 The Higher Education Quality Council: Its main responsibilities regarding quality assurance

##### *Institutional self-evaluation*

During Institutional Self-Evaluation (ISE), institutions purposefully gather data about themselves. To do so, an institution runs an evaluation of its activities referring to its stated goals to identify weaknesses. Identification of discrepancies helps institutions

to decide what action needs to be taken. These decisions encourage them to reflect on their activities and result in corrective measures (Bitzer, 1993). To Podgornik & Mažgon (2015) through ISE, institutions have the chance to think about their education and can assess what they have been doing. Through institutional self-evaluation, an educational institution gives constant attention to the quality of its work. ISE is a means of removing weak points and keeping the achievements through data gathering. Thus, it is a key component for institutional quality improvement and maintenance (Podgornik & Mažgon, 2015).

In most cases, QA procedures are set up and run by the government or a national agency to meet the needs as determined on a system level (Verkleji, 2000). In this context, ISE, which is the first stage of the Institutional External Evaluation, is one of the important methods applied in QA processes. In this respect, the Council attaches importance to ISE. Universities submit their annual self-evaluation reports to the council as the first step of institutional external evaluation (yokak.gov.tr).

Through these reports, THEQC tries to understand the strengths and developmental aspects of universities. The writing process of these reports turns into an opportunity for universities involved in quality assurance programs to evaluate themselves correctly. As stated in Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu – Kurum İç Değerlendirme Raporu Hazırlama Kılavuzu [Higher Education Council- Institutional Self-Evaluation Preparation Guide], (2019), ISE aims to enable the institution to recognize its strengths and to contribute to the points open to development. The preparation process of the report provides the highest level of benefit from the institutional evaluation processes. To this end, THEQC gives guidance to universities with training and publications during the writing process of the self-evaluation report, which is a very important pillar of institutional external evaluation.

### *Program accreditation*

Program accreditation is a QA process that revises a program in terms of main aspects. It is a tool to demonstrate the quality of programs and organizations to external stakeholders (Lubinescu et al., 2001). In terms of program accreditation, two dimensions are crucial. First, some proof is needed in that the programs have obvious objectives and the lessons to reach these goals.

Second, the process is to show that the roles and duties associated with the specified objectives are implemented (Ewell, 1987). In program accreditation, there is a long-term vision that is committed to excellence. It is an answer for key aspects like the qualities of the faculty members and graduates (Espinoza & Gonzales, 2012).

Accreditation is to realize two aspects of quality. Firstly, there must be proof that the programs have obvious objectives and courses of action to reach those. Next, the process is to indicate that tasks concerning the objectives are applied (Ewell, 1987). As for the activities of THEQC in terms of program accreditation, the Council oversees the empowerment and recognition of accreditation bodies. The principles formed by the council determine which accreditation bodies will be authorized and recognized in the country (<http://yokak.gov.tr/akreditasyon-kuruluslari/akreditasyon-kuruluslari-yetkilendirme-taninma>).

### *Institutional accreditation program*

During Institutional Accreditation Program (IAP), external quality revision is formed and applied by HE to supervise HEIs, and programs for the development of quality (Ewell, 2008). Instead of the accreditation of specific programs, IAP has a holistic approach which gives way to accreditation at the institutional level. IAP does not



prove that each unit of an institution is of equal quality. However, it underlines the fact that none of the units are weakened to impair the educational efficiency of the institution and its services (Blauch, 1959).

As for the activities of THEQC in terms of institutional accreditation, IAP is done by the evaluation teams formed by the IAP Higher Education Quality Council within the scope of Institutional External Evaluation and Accreditation Criteria and Institutional External Evaluation and Accreditation Guide. Higher education institutions that will participate in IAP every year are decided by the council; and evaluation teams are formed following the structure of these HEIs. Two visits (preliminary visit and site visit) are made to the relevant HEIs by the said evaluation teams.

As a result of these visits, Institutional Accreditation Reports (IAR) are prepared by the evaluation teams, and the accreditation decision is made by THEQC by considering these reports.

The following decisions are made by THEQC within the scope of IAP:

- Full accreditation (for five years)
- Conditional accreditation (for two years)

IAP is one of the most important means of quality assurance that supports HEIs in the context of QA applications.

#### *Institutional external evaluation*

Institutional external evaluation has become a popular evaluation process in the last twenty years. In almost all OECD countries, and expanding to other countries as well, it has been introduced because of many factors. Some of the factors include indirect government pressure, a direct governmental initiative, or renewal in the

higher education sector. Plus, this trend can be seen as a chance for feedback that encourages HEIs to reflect on their educational activities thoroughly in terms of quality concerns.

More specifically, Billing (2004) identifies the rationale for institutional external evaluation to be common in higher education. Through IEE, different stakeholders can learn about quality standards at universities, which serves for accountability. As for THEQC, IEE is one of the programs carried out by the council. On the official webpage of THEQC, under the title ‘What is Institutional External Evaluation Program’, the program is explained in detail. The purpose of IEE is to evaluate procedures about education and research-development and managerial systems of universities in line with the institutional external evaluation criteria (<https://yokak.gov.tr/degerlendirme-sureci/kurumsal-degerlendirme-programi-nedir>).

In the process of institutional external evaluation, universities are expected to participate in the program at least once every five years. As a part of the program, self-evaluation reports are filled out and shared with THEQC. After the universities selected that will participate in the program, the evaluation team is formed from the evaluator pool. Throughout the program, the institution is visited twice: one pre-visit and one site visit. Following the visits, an institutional feedback report is written and made publicly available by the THEQC.

As stated above, the main duties of the council are to make the external evaluation of HEIs, to carry out the processes of authorization and recognition of accreditation bodies, and to ensure the adoption and dissemination of quality assurance culture in HEIs. With the foundation of THEQC, quality assurance processes have gained more importance than ever before. In the process of becoming

a more systematic structure with the Bologna Process, fundamental steps have been taken in terms of quality assurance in HEIs.

#### 3.4.2.3 International quality assurance networks of THEQC

Among many definitions of internationalization, one of the most quoted ones is by De Wit et al. (2015):

Internationalization is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (p. 29)

This definition, as it is seen, relates quality to internationalization. Likewise, according to Brennan (1997), the inner world of tertiary education is connected to the wider social, economic, and political forces that give way to the occurrences in the forms and structures of HEIs. Hence, it is a truism that internationalization is a means of contributing to the quality of education and research.

In this respect, it is not surprising that THEQC has determined internationalization as one of the core topics on the way to QA. To this end, many important steps that carry HE in Turkey from the national dimension to the international dimension were taken thanks to THEQC. In this respect, the council has set its target for the recognition of Turkish HE in the world by cooperating with higher education QA unions in Europe and various regions of the world. In line with this goal, as announced on the official web page of the council, international networks have been initiated. These networks are as follows:

- The council's full membership was accepted to ENQA on April 28, 2020.
- The council successfully completed the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) full membership application process as of April 15, 2020.

- The council has been accepted as a member of the International Quality Group (CIQG) for the terms 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 by the American Higher Education Accreditation Board (CHEA).
- The council successfully completed the INQAAHE full membership application process as of May, 2020.
- The council completed the process for full membership to IQA on 9, February 2021 (<https://yokak.gov.tr/Uluslararasıilasma/uyelikler>).

As can be seen, THEQC carries out a wide variety of activities in the context of QA.

It develops universities on quality assurance by guiding them through quality assurance activities in a national context. In the international context, it takes the issue of quality assurance out of the local context and brings it to the international one by networking with quality assurance organizations in various parts of the world. All these activities by THEQC bring about the creation and the spread of quality culture. In tertiary education where quality culture is not internalized, the activities carried out in the context of quality assurance cannot go beyond being mechanical. Therefore, as mentioned in one of the objectives of THEQC, to encourage the diffusion of quality culture and to establish collaborative relationships among all stakeholders is of utmost importance to the council (<https://yokak.gov.tr/hakkinda>, 2020).

#### 3.4.2.4 Why THEQC matters for the Turkish higher education

Quality assurance mechanisms allow information to be collected and disseminated by members of the public for decision-making. The thing is the growing academic mobility causes a globally recognized set of criteria to be more crucial for nations.

Quite naturally, beneficiaries of education demand the institutions in which they study (Altbach et al., 2009).

Another important point is that if there is a regulatory system through quality assurance, there is likely to be the right balance between protecting the public and encouraging providers to invest. With a lot of recent institutions offering university education, it is usually hard to differentiate legitimate universities from degree mills making credentials for the sake of profit (Altbach et al., 2009). Quality assurance systems weed out unreliable HEIs by implementing a quality control measure. Thus, a huge number of poor-quality suppliers can be prevented (Bjarnason et al., 2009).

In this respect, all countries must establish quality assurance systems. As stated by Erguvan (2013), what needs to be done is to create appropriate quality assurance mechanisms that will evaluate HEIs, which are increasing day by day. Here comes the main task of THEQC in Turkish higher education. THEQC combines the reality of the ever-changing higher education system and quality. The knowledge of quality culture and its internationalization by universities become operational at this point. Because the internalization of quality culture by universities will increase the overall quality of the HE system in Turkey. The importance of the dissemination of quality culture in HEIs is voiced by THEQC President Mr. Elmas in the opening speech of 2021 Evaluator Training. “Institutional external evaluation in HEIs is going to lead to the improvement of the internal quality assurance system and the spread of the quality knowledge” (<https://yokak.gov.tr/2021-yili-degerlendirici-egitimi-gerceklestirildi-198>).

As underlined by Elmas, quality assurance mechanisms encourage universities to internalize quality culture in their institutions. This way, universities carry out quality activities in a more systematic way. Such mechanisms function as a

map for the adoption of QA strategies by HEIs. Leading to new policies in compliance with quality standards, such mechanisms contribute to the overall quality of the higher education system. In Turkey's case, it is the THEQC, which is an independent national quality body acting in accordance with the strategies that lead to quality in tertiary education.

### 3.5 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the evolution of the Turkish higher education from the Ottoman Empire to the present day is explained concerning quality assurance. Since the focus of this dissertation is quality assurance in higher education in Turkey, the past and present structure of HE in the country has been discussed. Moreover, the rationale for the emergence of quality assurance in higher education in Turkey has been presented. Next, the legitimate reasons that push higher education to quality assurance practices have been elaborated before and after the Bologna Declaration, in light of the important developments in this context.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter gives an account of the research methods and procedures undertaken in this study. First, it presents the adopted research approach by elaborating on the theoretical perspective and strategy of inquiry that informs the study. Second, it explains the research design. After that, the sample is discussed. Fourth, it presents the data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, it provides information about ethical assurances, sensitivity vs. objectivity, and the position of the researcher.

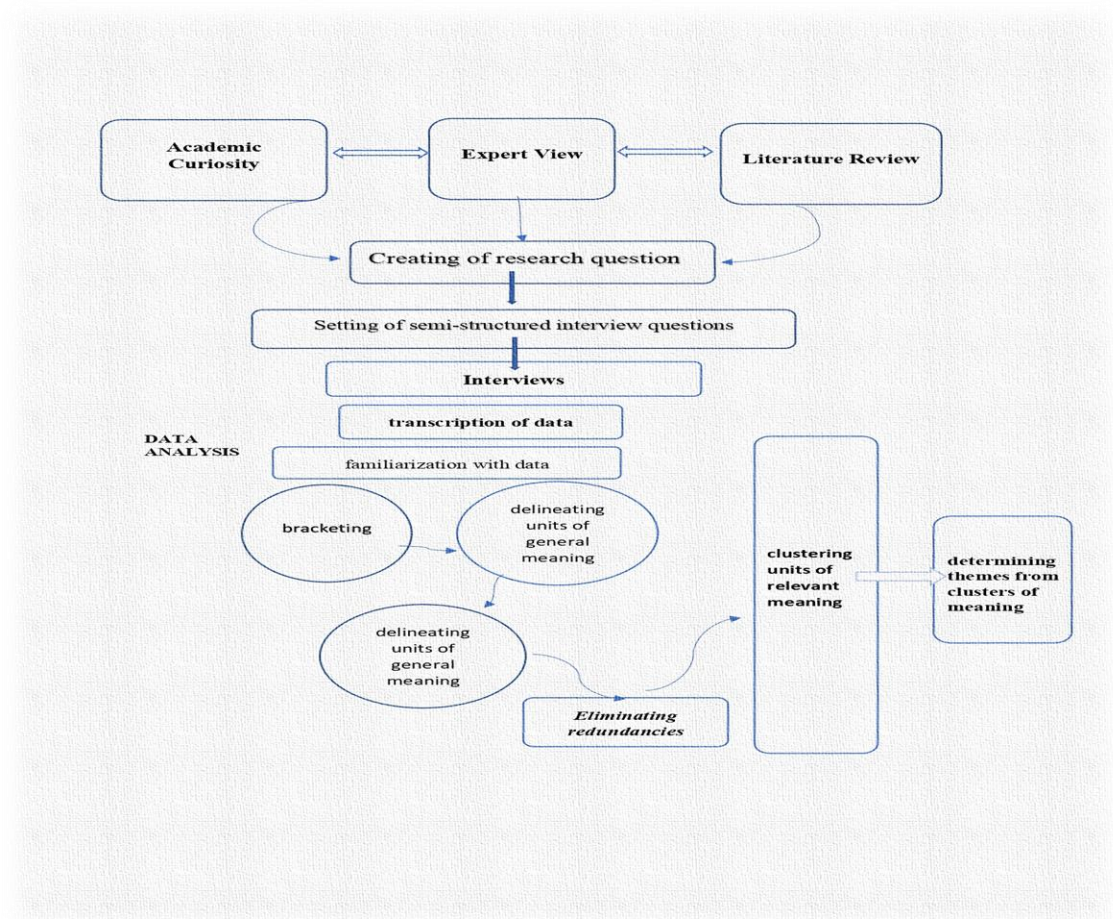


Figure 6 Flowchart for phenomenological research in practice

#### 4.1 The research approach

This section provides background information about the theoretical perspective and strategy of inquiry in this study.

##### 4.1.1 Theoretical perspective

As with all research endeavors, choosing the method that is best suited to the line of inquiry is vital to obtaining the desired results. A judicious choice of method guides the research toward the intended aims and helps ensure that its products are useful and well-received (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1372).

This study focuses on QA in tertiary education which forces universities to go beyond the ordinary. To do so, it employs qualitative research. The reason for employing qualitative research is the research topic and the research question of the study. This study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach to investigate how quality assurance operates through external institutional evaluation according to the perceptions of rectors or vice-rectors, THEQC members, and team leaders. It specifically aims to answer how the national quality assurance body works and how the interplay is between this body and HEIs to ensure quality in terms of processes included. This dissertation also aims to explore the advantages and the challenges of quality assurance through external institutional evaluation.

After considering the predispositions of qualitative research designs in the light of the purposes of the study, the researcher decided to embrace a qualitative research paradigm to explore the perceptions of the research participants considering that a qualitative inquiry would help (1) to understand how quality assurance functions at a deeper level in HEIs, which constitute Turkish higher education ecosystem, (2) to find out the similarities and differences between the participants' understandings and experiences of quality assurance, (3) to explore how quality



assurance is experienced by the stakeholders who are the subjects and the objects of the issue, and (4) to provide richer and detailed interpretations of the operation of the national quality assurance system.

The theoretical perspective the researcher takes in this dissertation is the qualitative method as this method aims to understand several aspects such as “beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions” (Pathak et al., 2013, p. 192). The qualitative method stresses the importance of transparency and reflexivity in the research process which is so critical. The qualitative method intends to seek multiple truths. In the process of exploration of multiple perspectives, a researcher is bound to benefit from the notion of transparency and reflexivity as these two guide a researcher during the research process. Instead of assuming a single reality, this type of knowledge aims to search for complexities in ideas and experiences. The purpose of research is to have access to the various perspectives of the participants utilizing interactions that are debated in social and historical contexts (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the researcher in this study strived to explore the experiences of the participants about the operation of QA in Turkish tertiary education through interviews which led her to build meaning from largely descriptive narratives of the participants.

#### 4.1.2 Strategy of inquiry: Phenomenology

As it is known, qualitative research includes many different strategies.

Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and discourse analysis are among the frequently used qualitative research methods. Since these strategies of inquiry are included in qualitative research, researchers follow similar steps at certain points,

while at some points they differ from each other during the research (Tekindal & Uğuz Arsu, 2020).

In this respect, in the light of the research question of this dissertation, the strategy of inquiry is phenomenology. Phenomenology aims to understand human experience (van Manen, 2007). This method leads people to express emotions and experiences about a certain phenomenon. In this research method, people try to describe how they experience a phenomenon (Rose et al., 1995). The responsibility of a researcher who uses this method is to try to catch the meaning and general aspects of a phenomenon. Phenomenology revolves around phenomena that people know but cannot understand in detail. These cases can be events, experiences, perceptions, and situations that may frequently appear. However, this does not mean that people fully understand the phenomena they encounter. Therefore, phenomenology constitutes a suitable research ground for understanding a phenomenon that is frequently encountered but whose meaning is not fully understood (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

At this point, it would be appropriate to refer to Starks and Trinidad (2007) to better position phenomenology among other qualitative research methods. As the authors underline, in phenomenology, the goal is to explain the meanings of the experiences. Sampling is done based on people having lived the specific phenomenon. Interviewing strategy is that participants describe what they have been through and the interviewer probes for details. In the analysis section, descriptions of the phenomenon are identified, they are clustered into discrete categories through coding and specifying themes, their connection to each other, and drawing results from the narratives of the participants.

Likewise, this study tries to identify people's experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding a phenomenon by categorizing them into certain themes. The phenomenon of this thesis is quality assurance. The researcher seeks to understand how the relevant stakeholders experience this phenomenon through institutional external evaluation. The researcher strives to explore the feelings and thoughts of the participants experiencing the phenomenon through the procedures in the phenomenology method. The researcher tries to understand what the phenomenon means to the participants by identifying the themes that emerged in the light of the data obtained through the interviews.

## 4.2 Research design

### 4.2.1 An overview

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach. The study is exploratory in nature because, to the researcher's knowledge, a limited study has put together the operation of institutional external evaluation, its advantages, challenges, impacts through the perceptions of the key stakeholders regarding quality assurance in the Turkish higher education. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this dissertation includes THEQC members, team leaders, rectors and vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. The study was conducted with nine THEQC members, seven team leaders, eleven rectors and vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. The qualitative research focused on interpretation and analysis of the perceptions and understandings of these key stakeholders in terms of their roles as regards the operation of quality assurance in the Turkish higher education. Also, it aimed to identify the main issues and variations in the reasoning of quality assurance within the context of the Turkish

higher education by focusing on the reasons, challenges, and influences of institutional external evaluation.

#### 4.2.2 Research sites

The research sites for this study include THEQC and universities.

##### *The Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC)*

THEQC is the first research setting for this study. The council was established with the 35th Supplementary Article with the Higher Education Law No. 2547

([https://yokak.gov.tr/Common/Docs/Site\\_Mevzuat/Eng/ek35.pdf](https://yokak.gov.tr/Common/Docs/Site_Mevzuat/Eng/ek35.pdf)). THEQC holds a

central position within the system in terms of ensuring quality assurance, so it is selected as one of the research sites for the study. That is why the members of this council are among the participants of this study. The council is located in Ankara.

The researcher had the opportunity to be in the central building once during data collection. The building is next to the CoHE in the same area. For the first setting, the researcher found a gatekeeper during the process. This gatekeeper is a member of THEQC. She helped the researcher to go to Ankara and visit THEQC. This way, the researcher had the opportunity to see the body, in charge of QA in the national context. Moreover, she could make observations there and meet the President of the Council for the interview. The researcher did the first interview with the gatekeeper online on the 11th of November 2020. After the interview, on the 18th of November, she went to Ankara and had a face-to-face interview with the President on that day.

The remaining five interviews were conducted online between November 20 and November 30, 2020. The two remaining interviews were done in January 2021. The researcher finalized the interviews with the THEQC members over a period of three months.

## *Universities*

Universities are the second setting for this study. As of 2021, Turkish higher education consists of two hundred seven universities. One hundred twenty-nine of them are state, seventy-four of them are non-profit foundations, and five of them are post-secondary vocational schools. These higher education institutions are coordinated by CoHE according to Higher Education Law (Law No. 2547), enacted in 1981. The number of students in HEIs is currently 7,940,133. And 4,538,926 of these students are undergraduate; 3,002,964 of them are associate degree students; 297,001 of them pursue an M.A. degree; and 101,242 of them are Ph.D. students (Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi [Higher Education Information Management System], n.d.).

As can be seen, Turkish higher education is a huge system in terms of both the number of universities and the number of students. In the second chapter of the dissertation, as detailed in the section titled Turkish Higher Education in Focus, many factors directly or indirectly have affected the quality of the universities regardless of being public or private. For this reason, the researcher chose both public and private universities as research sites. In this respect, eleven interviews were held with rectors, vice-rectors, quality commission leaders working in private or public universities. All the interviews were online, and they were conducted between December 2020 and August 2021.

## 4.3 Sample

### 4.3.1 Criteria for selecting the participants

The study aimed to reach three groups of participants. They are shown in Figure 7.

Participants		
THEQC members	team leaders	rectors & vice-rectors & quality commission leaders

Figure 7 General overview of the participants

#### *THEQC members*

For the selection of THEQC members, the researcher's purpose was to reach all the members of THEQC to be able to gather as much data as possible. The researcher could interview nine of the thirteen THEQC members. Information about the participants interviewed is shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Overview of THEQC Members

Participation ID	Sex	Field of Expertise
1	Female	Marketing
2	Male	Medicine
3	Female	Medicine
4	Female	Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation
5	Male	Civil Engineering
6	Male	Medicine
7	Female	Educational Sciences
8	Female	Communication
9	Female	Chemical Engineering

Table 12 shows that three of THEQC members are male, and six are female. Next, these members have a great deal of expertise in quality assurance. They come from different institutions. Their fields of expertise include marketing, medicine, physical therapy and rehabilitation, civil engineering, educational sciences, chemical engineering, and communication.

#### *Team leaders*

For the selection of the participants who got involved in the institutional external evaluation, the researcher had a look at the feedback reports from 2016-2019, which

are shared on the THEQC official website. On the first pages of the reports, the names of the team leaders and team members who contributed to the evaluation are written. The number of evaluators and team leaders contributing to the institutional external evaluation process is quite high. However, since one of the aims of this study is to examine whether there is a difference in the quality assurance process in public and private universities, the researcher categorized the evaluators depending on specific criteria:

Criteria 1: The evaluator is supposed to work as a team leader.

Criteria 2: The evaluator is supposed to get involved in at least one public and one private university evaluation process.

Thus, the researcher prepared a list of team leaders' names and identified team leaders who were involved in the institutional external evaluation process at both public and private universities among these team leaders by cross-checking the reports between 2016 and 2019.

As a result, a list of twenty-one people was formed. Since the two names on this list are already members of THEQC, and they were in the first group interviewed, the target number to be interviewed in the research event is nineteen. The researcher interviewed seven of them.

The other possible participants did not attend the interviews for different reasons such as having a busy schedule, family, and health issues, or not responding to the researcher's calls or emails. Information about the participants interviewed is shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Overview of Team Leaders

Participation ID	Sex	Field of Expertise
1	Male	Mechanical Engineering
2	Male	Educational Sciences

3	Male	Political Sciences
4	Male	Mechanical Engineering
5	Male	Chemistry
6	Male	Material Science and Engineering
7	Female	Accountancy

Table 13 shows that the second group of participants are team leaders who have worked in institutional external evaluation both in public and private universities, which has enabled them to compare different types of universities. In addition to working as team leaders, these participants work in different work environments such as public and private universities and /or other institutions as faculty members or experts. Six of the participants are male, and one of them is female. Their fields of expertise include mechanical engineering, educational sciences, political sciences, mechanical engineering, chemistry, material science, engineering, and accountancy.

*Rectors, vice-rectors, quality commission leaders*

In this study, eleven rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders are included as the third group of the participants. The researcher had specific criteria for deciding which participants to be interviewed. These participants have been determined based on the URAP Public University Rankings, 2019, and the URAP Private University Rankings, 2019.

Universities are ranked based on their scores in the URAP Rankings. While choosing the university administrator to be interviewed, a balanced selection has been made among the universities that are located at the bottom, middle and top. The researcher had eleven interviews.

The researcher could not have interviews with other possible target rectors or vice-rectors for different reasons such as not having responded to her calls or emails,



not volunteering to be a part of the study, not having enough time for an interview.

Information about the participants interviewed is shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Overview of Rectors, Vice-rectors and Quality Commission Leaders

Participation ID	Sex	Administrative Position	Field of Expertise	University Type
1	Male	Vice-rector	Chemistry	Public
2	Male	Vice-rector	Mathematics	Private
3	Female	Vice-rector	Management & Computer Engineering	Private
4	Male	Vice-rector	Theology	Private
5	Female	Quality Commission Leader	Business Administration and Strategy	Private
6	Male	Rector	Cinema and Television	Private
7	Male	Quality Commission Leader	Architecture	Public
8	Male	Vice-rector	Statistics	Private
9	Male	Vice-rector	Economics	Private
10	Male	Quality Commission Leader	Educational Sciences	Public
11	Male	Quality Commission Leader	Math & Literature	Private

Table 14 shows that the third group of participants are the rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders of both private and public universities. One of the participants is a rector and six of the participants are vice-rectors. Four of the participants are quality commission leaders. Nine of the participants are male and two are female. Their fields of expertise include chemistry, mathematics, management & computer engineering, theology, business administration and strategy, cinema and television, architecture, statistics, economics, educational sciences, and math & literature.

To conclude, the participants of the study included the groups of THEQC members, team leaders, rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. All of them have been involved in quality assurance from different angles. Therefore, this diversity in the participants would help the researcher explore and compare quality assurance in higher education from different perspectives.

#### 4.3.2 Recruitment of participants

After the researcher completed the pilot study in the last months of 2019, she started selecting participants for the actual study. As stated by Palinkas et al. (2013), the reason for choosing participants is closely related to the purpose of the study under investigation. In this respect, the researcher had the very same questions in the recruitment of participants.

First, for recruiting participants for the actual study during the pilot study, she did not attempt to make contacts because the process of recruitment of participants for the pilot study taught her that the individuals she wanted to conduct interviews with were difficult to reach. They were quite busy, part of an institutional structure, and had a very tight schedule, which might not allow for another interview day. That's why she decided to wait for starting the recruitment of participants for the actual study until she completed the pilot interviews.

As detailed in the research settings section, one research setting was THEQC located in Ankara. The researcher's initial plan was to visit and stay in Ankara for a couple of days to be able to finish all the interviews in a short period. The other setting was universities located in different cities of Turkey. Because of this, she intended to take some days off from work and meet team leaders, rectors, and vice-

rectors in their offices scattered in different cities of Turkey. For the pilot process, as detailed in the section of the pilot study, she focused on convenience sampling.

In *convenience sampling*, a researcher seeks participants convenient to him or her. The researcher tries to contact members of the target population meeting some practical criteria. The criteria are being accessible, proximate, available, or motivated to be involved in the study (Galloway, 2005). This was the first criterion for the researcher for the pilot study: to be able to reach the individuals at her convenience. Thus, in the process of the pilot study, she chose universities in Istanbul where she lives and works. She went to two universities in İstanbul. Other than that, her second criterion was to make contacts with individuals who are knowledgeable about quality assurance, which is an important criterion of purposeful sampling. As for this study, they were the (1) THEQC members, (2) faculty members involved in the institutional external evaluation, and (3) rectors and vice-rectors and quality commission leaders experiencing this process in their institutions. However, with the pandemic, unlike the pilot phase, the actual interviews except for one of them took place online, regardless of the setting.

Once the pilot study period was over, the researcher engaged herself in the recruitment of participants for the actual study. In the recruitment process, she used purposeful sampling. It is important to note that homogeneity of participants is necessary for the phenomenological framework (Creswell, 2007). Thus, participants need to experience the same phenomenon. Participants in the study need to have meaningful experiences about the phenomenon that is under investigation (Creswell, 2007). That is why purposeful sampling is usually carried out in qualitative research because it involves the researcher choosing the participants deliberately as the phenomenon can be understood. Moreover, Bernard (2002) highlights that eagerness

to take part in and the ability to communicate experiences is important in purposeful sampling.

The researcher's purposeful strategy was snowballing. This meant that she identified "cases of interest from sampling people who know people that generally have similar characteristics who, in turn, know people also with similar characteristics" (Palinkas et al., 2013, p. 17). In this respect, first, for the group of THEQC members, she was through her academic networks - academics who were in touch with the participants she contacted for an interview put the researcher in contact with people who could help her recruit participants for her study. In this process, she explained the purpose of her study and shared the criteria for the selection of the participants with these people on the phone or face-to-face. Thanks to them, she was able to reach potential research participants from THEQC members, nine of whom agreed to take part in the study after the initial contact. She made the initial contact with these potential research participants via e-mail or phone. She either e-mailed or talked to the potential participant or the person in charge of scheduling their program. In the e-mail or on the phone, she briefly introduced herself, explained the purpose of her study, and requested the potential research participant's involvement in the study. She attached the informed consent, the approval by SOBETİK, and her curriculum vitae to the e-mail. Phone calls were also followed by an e-mail.

The researcher utilized purposeful sampling in that through one participant leading to another, she could reach another possible participant. This strategy especially helped her to establish contact with team leaders because team leaders are in a community in which they happen to have regular meetings and work together regarding quality assurance. At the end of the interviews, some research participants

asked her if she needed to reach more participants. Moreover, one of the jury members in her study was helpful acting as a gatekeeper at some critical points. Through the strategy of one participant leading to another, thanks to her research participants, she reached six research participants who all agreed to participate in the study. She made the initial contact with these potential research participants via e-mail or phone and followed the same procedures she mentioned above.

For the third group of the participants, she followed similar steps which meant that she went through her academic network, or she reached them through one participant leading to another. The most challenging part for her was to have access to rectors or vice-rectors as they had a very tight schedule or were not approachable. For this, the researcher, based on the decision in the regular meeting with the jury members, decided to contact quality commission leaders, too. Till the end of the data gathering process, she could reach eleven rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders through purposeful sampling strategies.

Last but not least, one more important question for the researcher was when to end the data gathering process. The answer to this question was echoed in Miles and Huberman's work. They highlight that in qualitative methods, there is an emphasis on saturation. This means that a researcher needs to continue to gather data till new substantive information is acquired. This is where a researcher needs to put an end to gathering data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### 4.4 Interview protocol and data collection

##### 4.4.1 Description of the interview protocols

To finalize the first draft of the interview protocols, the researcher received the advice of three defense committee members of this dissertation. One of the committee members is an expert in qualitative research. The other two are experienced professionals in quality assurance. Besides, one colleague of mine proofread the first draft of the questions.

The interview protocol for rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders includes fourteen questions. The questions are grouped in terms of relevance to each other. The questions in category one aim to explore rectors' and vice-rectors' perceptions about higher education and quality assurance. The questions in the next category examine attitudes of academic and administrative personnel on quality assurance. The questions in the third category focus on activities conducted before and after institutional external evaluation. The question in the following category aims to reveal the benefits and challenges of quality assurance through institutional external evaluation. Those in the last one are related to suggestions of university administrators for the betterment of quality assurance (see Appendix C).

Next, the interview protocol for team leaders has thirteen questions. The questions in category one try to explore team leaders' perceptions about higher education and quality assurance. The questions in the second category focus on activities conducted before and after institutional external evaluation. The questions in the next category examine attitude change among academic and administrative personnel on quality assurance. In another category, the questions aim to reveal feedback received from universities on quality assurance through institutional external evaluation. The last grouping is related to public-private differences in terms of quality assurance (see Appendix B).

The interview protocol for THEQC members has nine questions. The questions in category one try to explore members' perceptions about the higher education system and quality assurance. The questions in the second category focus on activities conducted to ensure quality. The question in the next category examines the challenges encountered by universities and team leaders in institutional external evaluation, and they also focus on actions taken by THEQC to overcome these challenges. Through the following questions, perceptions of the participants regarding accreditation are to be revealed. The last question focuses on the current and future agenda of THEQC (see Appendix A).

Having completed the steps of the preparation phase for the interview protocols, the researcher was ready for applying to the ethics committee, which is detailed in the section of ethical assurances.

#### 4.4.2 Data collection procedures

##### 4.4.2.1 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

The data collection instrument is performing interviews. Having a conversation with people is one of the best methods of collecting information (Longhurst, 2003). The researcher has decided to adopt interviews in this research for two reasons. First, she had the experience of interviewing. In her M.A. thesis, she interviewed a group of individuals including female and male faculty members on higher education. Also, she had the opportunity to interview university students for an journal article regarding the perceptions of university students on higher education (Kısabacak, 2011; Kısabacak-Başgürboğa & Açar, 2019). Second, she decided to interview in-depth because such interviews are a way to explore behaviors, thoughts, and feelings,

and a way to learn about a variety of experiences. As expressed by Longhurst (2009), interviews do not offer researchers a path to the 'truth' but a pathway for partial insight into what people are doing and what they think. In this sense, as a researcher in higher education for over fifteen years, she felt the need to explore what professionals and practitioners think of quality assurance and what they do to ensure it in the context of higher education.

In a qualitative study, there are a few types of interviews. These are unstructured, semi-structured, and structured ones. However, structured ones might narrow the topics mentioned in an interview; and it could negatively influence the variety of concepts to be determined. Unstructured ones, on the other hand, are usually used in doing long-term fieldwork and encourage the participants to talk in their own way and speed (Corbin & Morse, 2003). For this reason, the researcher decided to employ semi-structured in-depth interviewing. In semi-structured interviews, the respondents answer open-ended questions. Researchers commonly use them in different fields, and they can be used with an individual or a group. They involve a set of previously planned questions, and it requires a preparation phase (Akmehmet-Şekerler, 2015). For the preparation phase, the first thing the researcher needed to do was to review the literature so that she would get familiar with the conceptual framework, historical background, current situation, practices, and future of quality assurance. At the end of this review process, she prepared a set of questions for each group of participants including THEQC members, team leaders, rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. She added probing questions and revisited the questions after piloting them through a suggestion of pilot interview participants and committee members.



In this study, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews developed through an open-ended approach over a period between November 2020 and August 2021. The pilot study was conducted between October 2019 and December 2019. For the actual study, the researcher conducted the first interview on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 and the last interview on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. The interviews aimed to explore the operation of the current quality assurance system in Turkish higher education, the processes, its advantages, and its challenges from the perspectives and understandings of the three groups of participants. All interviews were conducted in Turkish and lasted around 40-90 minutes in length. The shortest interview took approximately 40 minutes in length, and the longest interview was around 90 minutes. The researcher recorded the interviews by a recorder and took notes during the interviews. Two of the participants did not volunteer for their voice recorded. Of the twenty-seven interviews, all of them except for one were completed on the interview day in one session. One of the interviews was face-to-face at THEQC. The rest was all online. During data collection, the researcher traveled to another city once.

#### 4.4.2.2 Pilot study

The researcher got approval from Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu (SOBETİK) at Boğaziçi University in October 2019 (see Appendix D). Before the actual data collection process, conducting a pilot study was necessary to foresee the possible challenges and to plan the actual data collection procedure more efficiently.

As a first step, the researcher grouped the participants into three categories elaborated in the sample section. Later, she decided to go for the first group of

participants, who are the team members or team leaders involved in the institutional external evaluation. She sent e-mails to some of these professionals for the pilot study in October 2019. In the e-mail, she briefly introduced herself, explained the purpose of the study, clarified her piloting intention, stated that she wanted to learn about her interview questions, and requested help for piloting the study. She attached the informed consent for the team leaders (see Appendix), the approval by SOBETIK, and her curriculum vitae to the e-mail as she wanted to build trust (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

To her attempt, she could reach two professionals who got involved in the institutional evaluation process. One of them had worked as a team member and the other one had worked as both a team member and a team leader. Incidentally, they worked in the same university, so she decided to have the pilot interviews on the same day at different hours. One day before the first interview, she made sure she decided on what to wear on the day, for she wanted to convey her respect and gratitude to the participants for their time and contribution to the study and she wanted to build trust in herself, as well. On the pilot interview day, first, she went to the university campus to meet the experienced team leader in her office. The researcher was there on time as they had already decided in the e-mail one day before. However, the participant called the researcher and said she would be late for the meeting because of traffic. For this, the researcher felt a little bit worried because there was only one hour gap between the two pilot interviews. That is why she called the second person to see if they could make a change in the scheduled time. She was very tolerant and said that they could start their meeting one or two hours later as she would be at work all day. Based on this experience, the researcher's first decision

was not to have two interviews on the very same day in the actual data gathering as there might be delays in the programs due to different reasons.

The team leader got half an hour late and kindly stated why she was late. The researcher thanked her for accepting the interview despite her busy schedule. Right at the beginning of the pilot study, the researcher introduced herself briefly, explained the purpose of the study, and shared that she wanted to learn about the research process and the interview questions and revise her questions through feedback from the pilot study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). She then presented the approval by SOBETİK and went over the informed consent which also covered the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The participant signed the informed consent. The interview was conducted in Turkish, and the researcher recorded her answers by hand. The participant preferred to reflect on the interview questions during the interview and provided the researcher with feedback and went over the questions again. The overall length of the interview was around 60 minutes, and the interview, in general, ran smoothly.

After the first interview, the researcher went to the second participant's room, located on the lower floor of the same building. She greeted the researcher kindly. As in the first meeting, the researcher introduced herself and explained why she needed a pilot study. After showing the approval by SOBETİK, she went over the informed consent, and it was signed by the participant. As for the second interviewee, she recorded her voice. However, when the researcher checked it at home, she noticed that the voice was not clear enough in some parts. Therefore, she decided to take notes even though she would record the interviews. The second participant reflected on the interview questions after the interview. However, this meeting was not as enlightening and guiding as the first one. Therefore, after the pilot study, the

researcher decided that it was more appropriate to interview only the team leaders and not include the team members in the study, after consulting the faculty members on the thesis committee.

The second group of participants was the rector, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. To reach them, the researcher sent an e-mail to the rectors and vice-rectors of several universities. However, despite waiting for too long, she could not get a response from any of them. For this reason, she called the assistant of the rector of the university where she worked at that time and asked for an appointment for a pilot study. He accepted the researcher's request and made her an appointment. She visited him on the day and time of the meeting. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, clarified her piloting intention, stated that she wanted to learn about her interview questions, and requested help for piloting the study. She attached the informed consent for the rectors / vice-rectors (see Appendix C), and the approval by SOBETİK. The interview lasted for 120 minutes. This was much longer than the researcher expected. The reason was that the office phone rang several times, and the rector's assistant entered the room several times to ask questions or provide information. In each case, the researcher asked if she should leave the room as she decided at these moments that she had to respect not only the privacy of the participants but also the privacy of the context (Shaw, 2003). The participant told her that there was no need for her to leave the room, so she waited in the room, checked her notes, and tried to organize the rest of the interview. Since the interview took a long time, the researcher decided that she had to be very flexible in the days and times of her meetings, especially with the rectors or vice-rectors. After the interviews she would have with them, she tried to

make sure that she did not have a very important daily job or that she did not have a teaching program on those days.

Although she had pilot interviews with the participants from two groups, she did not have a pilot interview with a THEQC member because the total number of them is thirteen and the researcher needed the data to emerge in the interviews for the actual study. That is why she went over the interview questions with one of the members of her defense jury, as she is highly experienced in external institutional evaluation. She is aware of the possible obstacles that may emerge during the interviews. As a result of the pilot study, which took around one hour, the member in her defense jury emphasized that prompts are needed so that the interview questions can be answered in more detail by the participants. The same jury member with the assistant went over the interview questions for the other two groups, as well. During the interview, the researcher listened to her carefully and took notes. Accordingly, she decided to examine the interview questions prepared for each group one by one and add prompts. Moreover, at the end of the first interview with a THEQC member, the researcher asked her opinion about the questions if they were clear enough for the interviewee to understand. Based on her feedback, she made a few minor changes such as changing the order of the questions and adding some more prompts for certain questions.

One more thing regarding the pilot study is that although the researcher has benefited a lot from the pilot interviews for the effectiveness of following the actual interviews, because of the pandemic issue, the actual interviews have been done online, except for one of them. That is why the researcher had to make certain decisions after starting the interviews as well. For example, after the first online interview with a team leader, the researcher decided to contact the participants in a

place that has a stronger internet connection. In addition, due to some health problems, being a mother in this process and the pandemic that deeply shook the whole world, the researcher had to give a long break between pilot studies and actual interviews. Although the pilot studies were conducted in October and November 2019 after the approval by SOBETİK, the main interviews took place between the end of 2020 and the middle of 2021 because of the pandemic. The researcher had to postpone data collection due to the chaotic situation caused by the pandemic. Universities abandoned face-to-face instruction and switched to online education, and in this process, the researcher had difficulty reaching the rector or vice-rectors to be able to interview them.

#### 4.4.3. Interviews

##### 4.4.3.1. *Interviews with THEQC*

The procedures for interviewing each group of participants will be detailed. The main source of data in this study was semi-structured in-depth interviews with THEQC members. The interviews with THEQC members were conducted between November 2020 and January 2021 over a period of three months. The shortest of these interviews lasted 60 minutes and the longest one was about 90 minutes. All of them except for one were online. The access to THEQC members, to the researcher's surprise, was convenient. She was impressed by how approachable and helpful they were. Their attitude made her feel that they do really care about their profession and have internalized quality culture in their own lives, as well. Their e-mail addresses and contact information are shared on the official webpage of the council. That is why she could send them e-mails and they responded to her. Moreover, she had two

gatekeepers to reach them. One of them is one faculty member in the committee of this dissertation. As she is a professional who works in coordination with THEQC, she encouraged the researcher to contact the THEQC members directly and it worked well. Also, the president and the vice president of the council responded to her e-mails nicely and they invited her to have a face-to-face interview in Ankara. That was a great chance for the researcher for two reasons. The first one is that she had the chance to do observations about the council on the spot. The second one is that she could gather efficient data from these face-to-face contacts. In total, she could interview nine of the members out of thirteen. However, she did not have the opportunity to have interviews with four members of the council as they had a very tight schedule or as she did not get a response from them.

#### *4.4.3.2. Interviews with team leaders*

The second group of participants is team leaders who are involved in the institutional external evaluation. Seven interviews were conducted with team leaders. The interviews with team leaders were conducted in February 2021 and April 2021. The shortest of these interviews lasted 60 minutes, and the longest one was about 90 minutes. All of them were online. To determine the target group, the first step has been to examine the institutional feedback reports (2016-2019) to see the team members and the universities which have undergone evaluation. The second step has been to identify the team leaders who have been involved in institutional evaluation both in public and private universities. The third step has been to form a list of the relevant people. The researcher came up with a list of twenty-three people at the end of the process. She had already interviewed two of these participants as they are

currently THEQC members. That is why she intended to interview the rest of the names on the list, which is 21.

To reach them, she followed two steps. The first one was to e-mail all of them to have an online interview as she has been doing the study during the pandemic. Six of them got back to her e-mails, and she could have online interviews, which lasted about one hour with each one. The second step was to call their workplaces to be able to contact them. However, because of flexible working time or lockdown during the pandemic, many worked from home; and there was no way for the researcher to contact some of them. The last step was to ask for help from the gatekeeper, the faculty member in this dissertation jury. As a result of different attempts stated, the researcher had the opportunity to have online interviews with seven participants. The rest of the target group did not participate in the study for a variety of reasons (e.g., health issues, hectic schedule, or no response).

#### *4.4.3.3. Interviews with rectors, vice-rectors, and commission leaders*

The last group of participants is the rectors or vice-rectors who work in public or private universities. The interviews were conducted between December 2020 and August 2021. The shortest of these interviews lasted 60 minutes, and the longest one was about 90 minutes. All of them were online. The target list has been set by examining the 2019-2020 Public Universities URAP Rankings and the 2019-2020 Foundation Universities URAP Rankings. The former list has 109 universities, and the latter list has fifty-seven universities. First, the universities at the top, in the middle, and at the bottom in both lists have been identified by the researcher. After that, she sent e-mails to the rectors and vice-rectors both in public and private universities. Her first attempt was not successful. As she could get responses from



only three vice-rectors. That is why she called the assistants of the rectors or vice-rectors by phone as they are shared with people on the official websites of the universities. She could get in touch with vice-rectors this way. Thus, her initial attempts helped her to interview five rectors or vice-rectors in total. After that, she realized that she needed gatekeepers to be able to contact the rest of the participants. The vice-rector of her workplace and one of her colleagues working in another university has been her gatekeepers. With their support, she could have more interviews. As of August 2021, the researcher could interview eleven rectors, vice-rectors, quality commission leaders.

The online interview process has been convenient and effective. The reasons for this are that she has had a pre-set procedure for the online interviews. First of all, all the online meetings were held on the Zoom platform, which is easy to use and gives you the option of recording. The thing is if we were not going through the pandemic, the researcher would do the interviews face to face because people were not used to having online meetings before the pandemic. However, currently, people from all walks of life conduct their meetings online and work online, which has given the researcher the chance of offering online interviews. Before each interview, she asked them for an appointment via e-mail. In these emails, she attached the consent form and an informative summary of the study, which helped the participants to understand the main idea of the study. Moreover, at the beginning of each interview, she asked for permission to record. Most of the participants let them record their voices. Some of them preferred the notes to be taken by the researcher.

#### 4.5 Credibility of the data

While collecting data, the researcher attached special importance to the credibility of the data. Therefore, she asked the participants to check if she collected the data correctly. For this, she sent the transcriptions of the interviews to each interviewee and asked them to let her know if they had anything to correct or add so that she could crosscheck the data with the help of the participants (Seggie, 2011). Moreover, she asked for the approval of the transcriptions. That is if she could use the interviewees' responses in the study or not.

#### 4.6 Data analysis

After data were collected, the analysis of textual data was split into two stages: (a) data organization, (b) coding and categorization. The researcher made use of MAXQDA 2020, which is an analysis software that is used for coding and categorization. The software helped the researcher to work with the data more rigorously and systematically.

For the first stage, the researcher organized and cleaned the data. Each research participant was assigned an ID number after the completion of each interview session. Accordingly, she read the gathered data to familiarize herself with the hand-recorded notes, made some initial notes on the records, and finally translated the data into English.

For the second stage, which is coding and categorization, the researcher followed the main steps to be taken by a researcher who has adopted phenomenology (Marton, 1986). The first step was the transcriptions of the interviews. The researcher transcribed all the recorded interviews literally. Plus, for those who were reluctant to have voice recordings, the researcher had taken notes during the interviews and transcribed them as well. After the transcription of the data, the researcher sent them

to the participants and asked if there were any misunderstandings or anything to be changed or added. Following the transcription, the next step was bracketing. The researcher had experience in conducting qualitative studies, she had more confidence when she worked on the data in this study. Without her experience, it would be harder for her to manage the bracketing stage. The following step was listening to or reading the interview for a sense of unity. After bracketing his/her interpretations and meanings as much as possible, a researcher needs to get a sense of the whole interview. To this end, as the researcher of this study, I listened to the interviews and read them as many times as possible to be able to understand the original meaning as much as possible (Hycner, 1985). After this stage comes delineating units of general meaning, which is a rigorous process of going over every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph in the interviews. The meticulous process of unit descriptions is followed by delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question. After establishing the relationships between the units of meaning and the research questions, the following step is eliminating redundancies which means cleaning raw data and getting rid of vague expressions (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The main purpose of this step is to omit the irrelevant and redundant parts and consequently discover the main elements of the responses. For this, the researcher chose extracts that were meaningful for this study. After excluding irrelevant extracts, chunking the components, the researcher thematizes them (Moustakas, 1994). For this, the researcher tried to emphasize the essence of units and differentiate features between them. In the final stage, all the clusters of meaning are identified to see whether more core themes express the heart of these clusters.

#### 4.7 Ethical assurances

In the current study, the researcher had ethical concerns before, during, and after the study. She will respectively discuss each of them.

#### 4.7.1 Before the study

Before the researcher started the study, she spent a few months planning the study. During this period, she had ethical considerations in certain ways. That is why, before she started to conduct this study, she did some literature review regarding qualitative approaches and ethical considerations. Plus, she had taken a course on research methodologies while doing an M.A. in Educational Sciences. One focus of this course was ethical considerations a researcher needs to bear in mind. She went over her class notes and projects that she carried out while taking that specific course. Moreover, she has had some experience in qualitative studies as she wrote two articles by conducting interviews. She felt the need to refresh theoretical and practical knowledge on qualitative methodologies and their relation to ethical considerations before starting this study.

Second, she applied to the Ethics Committee for Master's and Ph.D. Theses in Social Sciences and Humanities (SOBETİK) for an institutional evaluation of the research plan. SOBETİK carries out an ethical review of research related to graduate theses within the Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences. In the application process, a researcher needs to follow certain steps. In this sense, the researcher provided the committee with detailed information about the aims, literature review, selection of the participants, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of the results in written form. They asked her to ask probe questions in the interviews and add the expected duration of each interview on consent forms. She made all these corrections and received ethical approval from the SOBETİK (see Appendix D).

Third, she received another ethical approval from THEQC. She was approved to conduct interviews with the council members (see Appendix E).

#### 4.7.2 During the study

The researcher had ethical considerations during the study as well. She achieved to assure ethical issues in two ways. First, she provided the participants with consent forms before each interview. This way, they had written information about the aim of the study, duration of the interview, their rights, and contact information of her dissertation advisor and the SOBETİK in case they needed it. The researcher started the interviews when they read and confirmed that they agreed to participate in the study. Secondly, she interviewed the participants when they were alone. This way, they felt comfortable and could easily talk. Most of the interviews were online, as the participants were in different places during the interviews including home, library, and workplace. She asked them to be alone and use a headphone so that she could help them speak comfortably as well.

#### 4.7.3 After the study

Furthermore, the researcher has concerns even after she collected data. She wrote interview transcriptions on her laptop computer. Then, she destroyed the handwritten notes with a paper shredder. She saved the digital copies on her computer in a folder. She encrypted the folder with the AxCrypt encryption program. She did not share the password with anybody, which means no one could reach the documents except her. After her dissertation defense, she will permanently destroy the folder with a program called Eraser 6.0.10. As a final remark, she is planning to publish articles

and make academic presentations at international conferences using extracts of this study. She will keep the confidentiality of the participants in further publications.

#### 4.8 Sensitivity vs. objectivity

According to the objectivist approach, truth exists regardless of any observation. The researcher needs to find out this fact without affecting it. This approach, ie., to discover truth without any influence- is usually rejected, particularly in social sciences. In qualitative research, a realistic purpose is to remain neutral to the result of the research, to express your conceptions, and to act in a way that your values do not have an impact on the results (AQR, <https://www.aqr.org.uk/glossary/objectivity>). It is accepted in qualitative studies that the researcher is intimately subjective, and this quality is somehow part of the scientific research. Subjectivity influences anything from subject selection to forming hypotheses, to choosing techniques, and evaluating data. In qualitative studies, the values the researcher reflects on the research are welcome (Berger, 2013).

Sensitivity towards the studied phenomenon can be acquired in several ways. One of the ways of acquiring sensitivity is having knowledge about the topic. If a researcher is knowledgeable enough about the topic of the study, he/she is more likely to be careful while collecting data and working on it. Before the researcher started collecting and analyzing data in this study, she reviewed the literature on quality assurance in HE both in the local and the global context. Thus, she was prepared for understanding what she observed in the research setting, for reading the documents, and for hearing from the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The second way of developing sensitivity is experienced in conducting qualitative

studies. Before the current study, the researcher had conducted qualitative studies including participants who were faculty members and university students in Turkey. This made her feel more confident when she worked on the data in this study. Without her experience, it would be harder for her to manage this process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Lastly, sensitivity can develop during the analysis. In other words, as a researcher works on data to determine concepts and integrate them, he/she can get more familiar with the data. This way, he/she could decide what pieces of data are important to focus on, what pieces should be integrated, and how a core category should be reached. This cannot be acquired overnight. Rather, it takes an extended period to manage data. She did not hurry up to analyze the data in this study. On the contrary, she extended the analysis over a period to make sure about how to integrate the emerging concepts to the current ones and when to integrate categories around a core category (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

#### 4.9 Position of the researcher

Berger (2013) underlines that positioning means how a researcher sees him/herself in connection to the research and the way he/she sees him/herself while creating knowledge. In this sense, this study touches upon the topic of quality assurance. As the researcher in this study, it is worth mentioning my experiences regarding quality assurance. I have been working at private universities as a faculty member since 2005. I have had the opportunity to observe the developments and trends occurring in higher education in Turkey for years. For instance, when I first started to work at a university, there were not many international students in my classes, but in time, the number of students from other countries has considerably increased. Another example is that in the first years of my career, there were not many private

universities and taking the National Entrance Exam to study at a university was a big deal. But in time, the number of universities has gone up and students could have easy access to universities. One more example can be given in this sense. In time, I have had a wide range of students from different backgrounds such as judges who have to learn English for their professions, housewives who want to continue their education they had to quit after giving birth, or grandparents who would like to learn English to go abroad to see their grandchildren. What I am trying to say is that the student profile of the university has changed considerably. Universities are not only for those who are aged between 17-23 anymore. There are a lot of mature students who want to go on with their education. For 15 years working at universities, I have had the opportunity to make observations happening around me. These observations got me thinking about the quality of education at universities. As an experienced faculty member, I have questioned the relationship between quality and the occurrences in the Turkish higher education. This question has paved the way to do research on quality assurance and higher education. My motivation to touch upon this topic has been my concerns and questions regarding the issue as an experienced faculty member. Moreover, in my current workplace, I am a member of the Quality Committee. We meet other committee members regularly to discuss certain topics regarding quality assurance in our workplace. These discussions make me realize that quality culture has not been internalized fully among administrative and academic personnel in many universities. As a faculty member who believes in the importance of quality culture, I have chosen this topic as my research focus so that I may contribute to the literature in this respect.



#### 4.10 Summary of the chapter

This chapter gave an account of the research methods and procedures undertaken in this study. It presented the adopted research approach, and the strategy of inquiry explained the research design by describing the research sites, the sample, and the instrument. It presented the data collection and analysis procedures. Lastly, it provided concerns about sensitivity and ethical assurances and background information about the researcher relating to her identity and position in the research.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

#### 5.1. Introduction

This study is an attempt to understand policies and practices about quality assurance of tertiary education institutions in Turkey. Given the fact that the Turkish higher education ecosystem is affected by concurrent developments both locally and globally, the study aims to identify the conveniences, the advantages, the challenges, and the influences of institutional external evaluation (IEE), which is one of the efficient tools of quality assurance practices. To this end, the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding institutional external quality assurance practices in Turkish higher education are examined. The theoretical perspective the researcher takes in this study is the qualitative method. In this respect, in the light of the research question, the strategy of inquiry is phenomenology. The unit of analysis in this dissertation includes THEQC members, team leaders, rectors and vice-rectors, and quality assurance leaders.

This chapter presents the findings of the study gathered from the semi-structured interviews from these three groups of participants. The study was conducted with nine THEQC members, seven team leaders, eleven rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. The qualitative research has focused on the interpretation and analysis of the perceptions and understandings of these key stakeholders as regards the operation of quality assurance in Turkish higher education. A comprehensive analysis of the semi-structured interviews has been provided. These findings have evolved through the analysis of textual data which has been split into two stages: (a) data organization, (b) coding and categorization. The

researcher made use of the qualitative data analysis tool MAXQDA 2020 during the organization, coding, and categorization stages.

The findings are presented within three categories as the interviews have been conducted with three groups of key stakeholders regarding institutional external evaluation (IEE). The first group of the findings gathered from THEQC members is provided under three main themes, which are rationales for THEQC, challenges of IEE, and influences of IEE. The second group of the findings gathered from team members is provided under four main themes, which are rationales for quality assurance, challenges of IEE, influences of IEE, and ownership of quality culture. The third group of the findings gathered from rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders are provided under three main themes which are rationales for IEE, challenges of IEE, and influences of IEE. In addition to the findings presented in three groups, concerning the interviews conducted with the participants, one more main theme has emerged, which can be called suggestions for the enhancement of the quality assurance system.

## 5.2. Group one: Interviews with THEQC members

In this group, there are three main themes, which are rationales for THEQC, challenges of IEE, and influences of IEE. Under the main theme of the rationales for THEQC, the emerging sub-themes are the dissemination of quality culture, internationalization, basic standards, and competition. Under the main theme of the challenges of IEE, the sub-themes are institutional differences, resistance, and lack of common understanding. Under the main theme of influences of IEE, the sub-themes are institutional check-ups and peer learning.

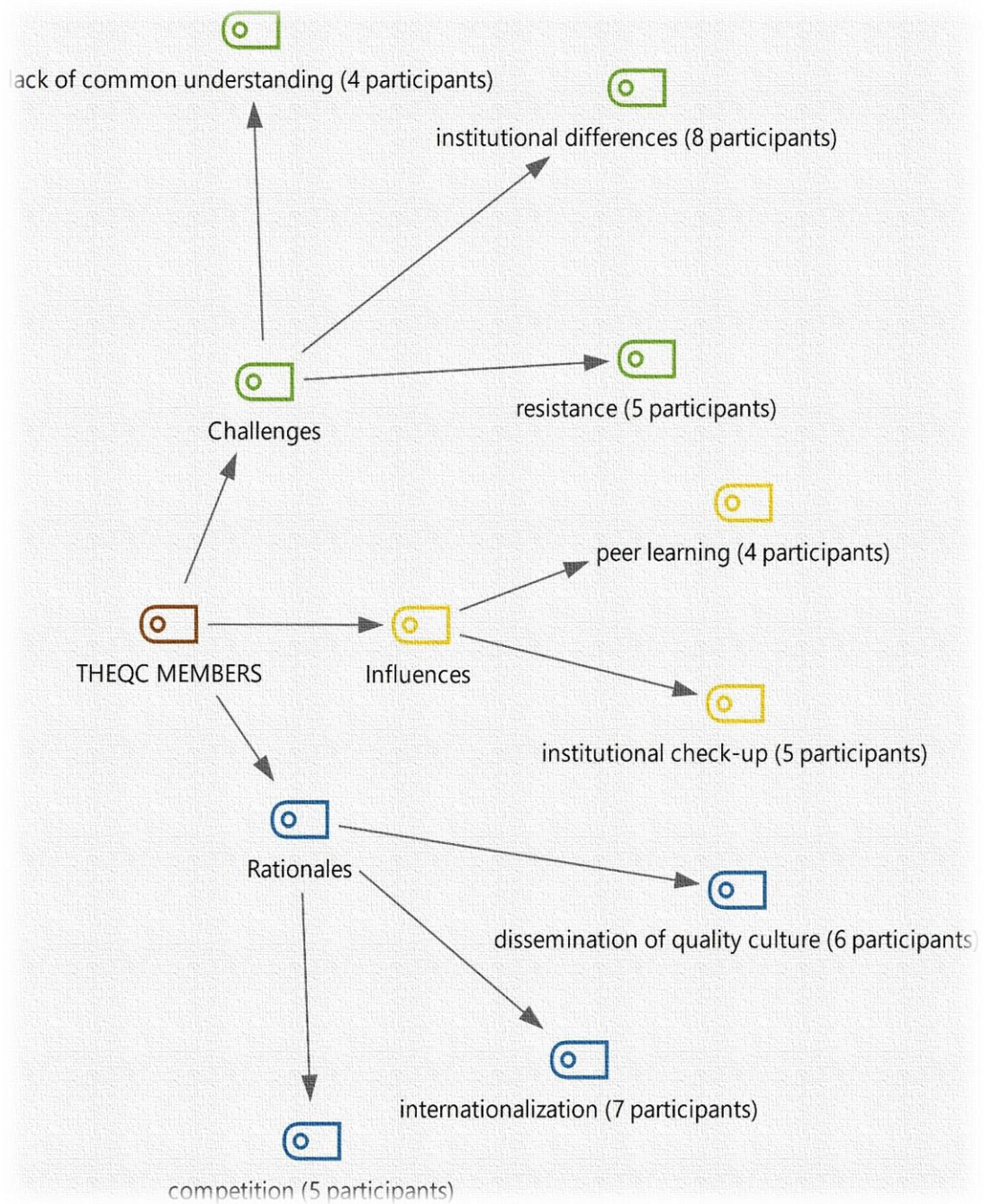


Figure 8 Main themes and sub-themes from THEQC members

### 5.2.1 Main theme one: The rationales for THEQC

It has been revealed that there are important rationales for the emergence of quality assurance in Turkish higher education in line with the quality practices conducted by THEQC.

Perceptions of the nine THEQC members interviewed reveal that four main rationales have made the existence of the council operational. These are the dissemination of quality culture, internationalization, basic standards, and competition. The first factor stated by THEQC members is the dissemination of quality culture.

#### *Dissemination of quality culture*

One sub-theme following the rationales for the THEQC is the dissemination of quality culture encouraged by the THEQC. The findings of the study point out that the establishment of THEQC has paved the way to the dissemination of quality culture in the Turkish higher education system and that there has been a lack of a systematic approach before the activities of this national quality assurance body.

Thus, the spread of quality culture has emerged as a common sub-theme stated by six participants concerning the interview questions. For instance, participant 6 voices that there was not a systematic approach to quality assurance in higher education in Turkey before THEQC:

Turkey fell behind in this regard. There was no systematic approach. As a whole, an awareness of quality assurance has been created. How does THEQC do this? Of course, training activities are carried out to establish a quality culture. It helps establish quality assurance commissions at universities. We have a mission to publish newsletters, share progress reports, and run as a mentorship body (Appendix F, 1).

Following the same argument with participant 6, participant 7 mentions that with the establishment of THEQC, an important deficiency in the higher education system has been eliminated, and that one crucial mission of the council has expanded quality assurance culture:

In other words, it is an extremely important contribution that universities will undergo an external evaluation. Thus, the awareness of universities on quality has increased. We have an important mission in

terms of the dissemination of quality culture. We guide universities through institutional evaluation, institutional accreditation, and program accreditations. In this sense, we guide Turkish higher education institutions. (Appendix F, 2)

Similarly, participant 4, stressing the different functions of THEQC, elaborates that the spread of the quality assurance culture is their most valuable responsibility:

The establishment of a national quality assurance system. Supporting internal quality assurance processes in universities and external evaluation of this process. You don't just do the evaluation and stop there. You also contribute to the development of the system. Our second task is to authorize institutions providing accreditation services. Thirdly, and most importantly, if you ask me which one of these roles is more valuable, in my opinion, it is the spread of quality assurance culture because if there is no quality culture, these efforts will remain very formal, and won't be internalized, adopted, or sustainable within the system (Appendix F, 3).

Furthermore, participant 3, expressing her criticism about the lack of awareness of quality assurance in universities before THEQC, highlights the crucial role of THEQC in raising awareness about quality culture:

You know, these activities in Turkey, quality in higher education, and accreditation have gained momentum in recent years. Previously, there were very few organizations operating in Turkey about quality. Some universities, some programs were accredited by foreign institutions. There were too many universities and programs that had no awareness of this issue. Of course, THEQC plays a role to this end, and it holds regular meetings to increase this awareness (Appendix F, 4).

The second sub-theme about the rationales of THEQC is that quality assurance practices have promoted the internationalization of Turkish higher education. The findings of the study have put forth that quality assurance practices have contributed to different aspects of internationalization.

To elaborate, mobility of students and academics has accelerated, recognition of diplomas has become a common application, national higher education systems have gone beyond the local dimension and have become more connected with each other.

### *Internationalization*

There is a common belief by seven participants that THEQC leads Turkish higher education to go beyond local and become more international through a wide range of activities carried out under the roof of THEQC. Participant 6 explains the contribution of THEQC to internationalization through academic mobility, one of the most important dimensions of the concept:

The establishment of THEQC is a turning point in terms of representation, and recognition. It opens very important doors for both student and academic mobility. Turkey lagged in this regard before. There was no systematic approach. There was no independent agency with national recognition before. That is, there was no autonomous institution (Appendix F, 5).

Similarly, participant 1 asserts that the existence of THEQC highlights the recognition of diplomas and the academic mobility dimension of the concept of internationalization:

There are different benefits for different stakeholders. Faculty members also get ahead in mobility, students' graduations are recognized in the international arena. The rate of finding resources and getting funding in projects increases thanks to evaluation processes. It opens the way for mutual agreements. That is also another advantage (Appendix F, 6).

Participant 3 heralds that Turkish higher education goes beyond the local dimension, thanks to THEQC. To him, through quality assurance practices, the exchange of knowledge among higher education systems around the world has increased:

It is necessary to be able to look at this event within the same framework with the organizations that have been doing this business for years in the world and Europe, more precisely. It is necessary to ensure that the organizations contribute to each other. It is not enough to say that I have accredited this university in our own country and that I carry out quality activities (Appendix F, 7).

Likewise, participant 9 argues that THEQC opens the doors of knowledge and experience sharing in the international arena. In this way, those relatively new to

quality assurance systems have been able to benefit from the experience of their peers:

From this point of view, of course, the dimension of internationalization is important for all institutions and organizations. During the pandemic, we have experienced this fact differently. On the one hand, following the international conjuncture is important and valuable. The more you expand your limits in terms of sharing experience, the more up-to-date your work will be to the stakeholders. We have to learn from the experiences of countries that started these processes from east to west long ago (Appendix F, 8).

Another sub-theme concerning the rationales of THEQC is the realization of basic standards in quality assurance among universities. The perceptions of the participants have indicated that quality assurance systems are needed for the increasing diversity in higher education to meet certain standards, to eliminate the educational differences between universities, and to set national higher education standards as an attainable target by all universities in the ecosystem.

#### *Basic standards*

A crucial issue pointed out by five THEQC members is that the Council has initiated standardization among universities in terms of services and activities. To them, this has been a need for the calibration of the system as a result of the occurrences in higher education in recent years.

According to participant 3, the opening of many universities in recent years requires the issue of standardization in education to be taken more seriously. THEQC is also in a very critical position in this regard:

Yes, as you know, standardization in higher education is very important in the world... There are many universities in our country. Especially in recent years, many universities have been established. But rather than establishing these institutions, the quality of their education and the areas in which they differ are very important. It is very difficult to expect that the education of students who study in the same departments in universities in every part of the country will be the same. However,



they can at least get closer to each other. It is unlikely to be the same anywhere in the world. However, I think THEQC has a very important task, at least to make sure that it is above a certain standard and to bring universities closer in terms of standards (Appendix F, 9).

Participant 8, who agrees with participant 3, claims that the activities of THEQC reduce the educational gap in universities in different regions:

Here, the difference is reduced as much as possible in terms of giving a course in a school in America, a school in India, a university in Anatolia, and the efficiency is ensured permanently and healthily. It provides the opportunity to develop themselves continuously with regulatory activities (Appendix F, 10).

Participant 3 and participant 8 are not alone in their opinions on this matter. Participant 9 also believes that the activities of THEQC contribute to the realization of education following national standards:

Education, teaching, research, and social contribution. and while fulfilling these important services and functions, of course, certain standards are important and valuable to be carried out under national standards (Appendix F, 11).

The last sub-theme concerning the rationales for THEQC is competition. Five of the participants agree that the institutional external evaluation has accelerated the competition among universities both nationally and internationally.

### *Competition*

Participant 1, emphasizing that each stakeholder in higher education is affected by the conditions of competitive atmosphere, points to the expectations of the key stakeholders, who are parents, students, and employers:

When choosing a university, parents want their children to have the competencies of their future professions. Business world and corporate companies want to reach graduates who are integrated into the international world, and who achieve competitive advantage and achieve successful jobs (Appendix F, 12).

Participant 2 adds more to the observations of participant 1 by giving a specific example about the impact of accreditation on student preferences:

Now we know which programs of which universities are accredited and are included in the student preference guides. As a result, I think accredited universities gain value as a criterion in student preferences to be the reason for preferability. And of course, especially at state universities, being a research university and taking advantage of more opportunities, accreditation, and things like that are needed (Appendix F, 13).

Participant 3, on the other hand, examines the issue of competition from another perspective and claims that university systems are in a global race:

The fact that THEQC, which recognizes and authorizes the institutions and organizations operating in Turkey, is evaluated by an international umbrella is crucial. Of course, it will carry the representation of its stakeholders in the Turkish higher education system to a higher league. Doing just this, regulating the quality standards and accrediting institutions within your country, through THEQC, to me, is not enough. I think that determining the rules alone is not very meaningful. Because we are in a system that competes with other universities and other educational institutions in a global world (Appendix F, 14).

Participant 8, who has similar ideas with participant 3, adds more by pointing out that THEQC is a tool to show the competitive power of Turkish higher education:

Let me tell you, I think that strengthening the quality infrastructure is a very important issue. In this context, the future of our education system needs to raise the quality of education through a council. I see this as an indispensable step. I consider the function of THEQC very important. Now, Turkey needs to certify that it has a quality that can compete with the world in the field of higher education. Of course, it is also very important to apply the models in the world here in Turkey (Appendix F, 15).

Participant 6 looks at the issue of competition from another angle. According to him, quality assurance systems increase the competition between universities, especially between foundation universities.

Foundation universities are influenced by quality assurance practices in different ways. To really have a say, they take quality evaluations seriously. For example, such evaluations may be beneficial for them in opening

programs in some fields. Also, they would like to prove that they are good and competitive, and to prove it, they think that evaluation and accreditation processes are an opportunity (Appendix F, 16).

The findings concerning the main theme, which is rationales for THEQC, have been discussed in this part. Another main theme, which is the challenges of IEE, will be touched upon below.

### 5.2.2 Main theme two: Challenges of IEE

It has been revealed that IEE, which is one of the most important services by THEQC, is not free of challenges. Perceptions of the interviewed participants reveal that there are three main challenges under the main theme. These are institutional differences, resistance, and lack of common understanding. The first sub-theme is the institutional one.

#### *Institutional differences*

Eight team members have highlighted that they may be exposed to several challenges because of the peculiarities of the universities they have been evaluating. These peculiarities can be linked to the management style of a university, the qualities of the university personnel, and the organizational culture.

To illustrate, participant 9 underscores that the managerial approach towards quality at a particular university seriously shapes the institutional external evaluation process:

There may be some challenges due to the differences in the leadership perspective of the top management of the institution; or in terms of the local perspectives of higher education institutions, there may be some challenges; or due to different perspectives, maturity levels may progress faster or slower. (Appendix F, 17)

Participant 2 does not think differently from participant 9 on this issue. To him, managerial point of view matters more than anything to minimize problems that get in the way:

What matters is people. And of course, the most important thing is the rector. In other words, if the rector knows, adopts, internalizes, and emphasizes this job very well, he/she must guide and convince his/her university accordingly. So, you see the type of a university is not that influential. The important thing is university culture, and this culture is obviously reflected in the actions of the rectors (Appendix F, 18).

Likewise, participant 2 notes that their job becomes more difficult if quality assurance is not internalized in a particular institution by university personnel:

But there is still a matter of internalization. Including the staff from the top to the lowest level in the evaluation process is very crucial. They need to know and internalize what this job is, what it does, why it is necessary, what its results will bring to the university (Appendix F, 19).

Adding more on the comments of participant 2, participant 1 points out that the fact that the employees at a university have incomplete knowledge about quality assurance makes the process even more difficult:

We may have trouble due to lack of knowledge. They can confuse us with other agencies. We are an umbrella organization above them. Another problem is lack of awareness. All key stakeholders should be included in the institutional external evaluation. The administrative staff is also part of the whole. They contribute to the system. However, you see that the administrative staff is not prepared. Administrative staff may not speak a foreign language. Do you have an English-speaking employee in your international office? It is necessary to find solutions to such problems. These problems should be solved with in-service training (Appendix F, 20).

Participant 3, like participant 1, believes that inadequate knowledge of the employees negatively affects the institutional external evaluation process:

As THEQC, one of the main problems that we face in these organizations is the problem of awareness. In fact, this problem is experienced in many areas of accreditation. Not just in higher education. Organizations need to do their self-assessment properly and involve all stakeholders in the process. The more stakeholders are involved in the system, the more awareness will increase. Both

universities and THEQC will solve these problems more easily (Appendix F, 21).

In addition, the study reveals that institutional challenges not only stem from a lack of awareness of the people working for the institution. Evaluators may experience challenges because of physical features such as the size of a university in terms of faculties, and its location and the region. For example, participant 4 states that Turkey is a large country and the difference in development between its regions negatively affects the institutional external evaluation process:

With this variety of input, it is not easy to bring things to the same level. In a department with a high quota, there may be less room for quality education. This is not always in the hands of the individuals or faculty members. Or the physical infrastructure of the institution or the number of instructors. Many things will affect the quality itself. Therefore, as you try to spread this culture, you encounter institutional resistance. For example, there are some larger-scale geographic features. There have been some universities that have not been able to write reports in recent years, because of terrorist incidents or earthquakes (Appendix F, 22).

Similarly, participant 7 emphasizes the differences between universities in Turkey. She affirms that the size or smallness of universities has an impact on the institutional external evaluation process with the following words:

We constantly renewed ourselves in terms of institutional external evaluation. Our documentation strategy, priorities, site visits can vary depending on the size of the university. First, we have created a little more detailed site visit program. We diversified our criteria. These have always been based on some of the problems we encountered in the evaluation process. Sometimes, if the site visit is for a very large university, you cannot see the whole of it, so you know, you need to evaluate the university's point of view. There are large universities in terms of visits or there are some which are small (Appendix F, 23).

Another sub-theme that has emerged under the main theme of challenges of IEE can be called the challenge of resistance. This sub-theme has been discussed by five team leaders during the interviews.

### *Resistance*

In line with the perceptions of the participants, it can be said that the resistance manifests itself in a variety of ways. Quality assurance processes are perceived as a workload by university personnel. They are considered an interruption that disrupts the comfort of daily life.

They are believed to be the cause of mental fatigue because of leading to innovations in HEIs. According to participant 5, some universities show a certain level of resistance to such processes in terms of institutional external evaluation. They may see quality assurance processes as a kind of bureaucratic workload:

For example, there are program accreditations. Foreign organizations are coming. Turkey has also other organizations. They are all trying to do the same. How do you achieve your targeted student output? It is different in engineering, you have a laboratory, you have a project. It is different in sociology. Foreign Languages are also different. But the aim of all is the same, their purpose is to provide appropriate outputs. Therefore, when it is perceived as an invention, something different, there is resistance in universities because academics do not like evaluation processes. They don't like bureaucracy (Appendix F, 24).

Then, participant 2 attracts our attention to the reluctance among academia too. He suggests that people who are out of their comfort zone agree to be involved in the process but with reluctance:

So, people who used to live comfortably without any supervision are now forced into many things. They have to adapt to many things. They must fulfill many things. That's why there is resistance at the beginning. But now that resistance is disappearing. So, at the end of a year or two, the resistance has gradually decreased. Everyone has understood the value of this work. They have realized that it has to be done (Appendix F, 25).

Participant 2 is not alone in his opinions in this regard. Participant 3 conveys that she has observed resistance among faculty members regarding the issue:

There is also something like this. Higher education quality and accreditation activities in recent years, as I said, are popular in Turkey. Faculty members are working for our universities, currently or in

previous years; we can also experience the same thing in young faculty members. There can be resistance in this regard (Appendix F, 26).

Participant 4 relates with the stakeholders who feel resistant with quality assurance by underlying the fact that change is usually met with resistance:

Now there are different levels of difficulties here. If we talk about the difficulty at the individual level, there is mental resistance. There is resistance when you try to bring something that might come up in the integration of many new things into the institution. Evaluators may have to say things like that: The assessment and evaluation approach should be diversified; you need to change it. Some faculty members show resistance to such points (Appendix F, 27).

Another challenge that has emerged under this main theme is the lack of common understanding. The perceptions of the THEQC members demonstrate that both institutional external evaluation teams and universities should make a significant effort to find common ground in terms of language and behavior.

#### *Lack of common understanding*

The parties must come together and exchange ideas to reveal the differences that lead to the disconnection in communication. It is stated by four THEQC members that it may be hard at times to establish a unity of language and behavior between team members. Participant 9 holds the idea that there may be difficulty in enabling team evaluators to look at the process from the same or similar perspectives:

Waiting for all evaluators to approach the process with the same point of view is a matter that requires the maturity level to increase over time. For this reason, of course, there may be some differences in score ratings, viewpoints, and evaluations (Appendix F, 28).

Agreeing with participant 9, participant 7 supports the idea that training is of utmost importance to overcome the problem of lack of unity of language among team members:

There are large universities in terms of visits, there are small universities. Therefore, we noticed that there is a difference here from time to time. Of course, we need to train the evaluators very well. We attach great importance to this issue. You explain to the evaluators several points in training from behavioral dimension to evaluation criteria, from being objective to an ethical statement. There may be problems with this issue from time to time (Appendix F, 29).

The words of participant 7 regarding training are strengthened by the example given by participant 6. Touching upon the 360-degree feedback meetings, participant 6 maintains that communicative problems can be overcome through feedback sessions:

There are some common problems. You send an outside team to the institution. In addition, the training of team leaders, ensuring standardization, establishing language unity, ensuring the reliability of the reports, conducting ethical behavior, operation of the procedures, all these are challenging points although very, very rarely, there are times when some of the teammates cannot fully get prepared for the reports published by the institutions. 360-degree, multi-directional feedback meetings are held every year to continuously improve the process, to increase satisfaction and efficiency (Appendix F, 30).

Furthermore, participant 2 points out that a lack of common understanding can also happen between evaluators and university staff. He says that such challenges between university staff and evaluators, for instance, may stem from the writing process of self-evaluation reports:

Evaluation reports are coming. It is looked at the completion of what has been done compared to the previous year. So, this work is taken seriously. Universities that do not complete these reports are warned. Almost all universities, in one way or another, prepare an evaluation report, whether it conforms to the standards requested by THEQC or not. But when making these evaluation reports, they sometimes exaggerate or make it look better than it is, to show themselves better (Appendix F, 31).

The data gathered has been revealed concerning the main theme which is the challenges of IEE in this part. Below, another main theme which is transformative influences of IEE, and its sub-themes will be touched upon.



### 5.2.3 Main theme three: Influences of IEE

Another main theme that emerged is the influence of IEE. Perceptions of the nine THEQC members interviewed reveal that universities have undergone fundamental changes because of institutional external evaluations in the pre-, during and post-stages of the process. These are institutional check-ups and peer learning.

The findings of the study have shown that the institutional external evaluation process provides a picture of higher education institutions in which they can take a closer look at themselves. Higher education institutions could closely examine not only themselves but also their peers in this picture. One sub-theme the study has revealed is institutional check-ups impacted by institutional external evaluations.

#### *Institutional check-up*

Institutional external evaluations lead to crucial changes occurring within universities because they function as a diagnostic tool for universities. Five of the members have underscored that universities experience a wide range of changes within their institutions because of institutional external evaluations. Participant 3 states that the report writing process is an important guide for universities in identifying their strengths and weaknesses:

These reports are a guide for institutions on their own. In other words, they convey very well in that which areas universities have deficiencies and in which areas they need to get prepared better. These reports are actually a very serious step to the development of institutions without doing anything else (Appendix F, 32).

Likewise, participant 1 argues that while universities are in the process of writing a self-evaluation report, they have an opportunity to shed light on their institution:

They prepare their self-evaluation reports. Universities make inferences after the site visits. They see their strengths and aspects that are open to improvement and how they have been developing. Reports take x-rays and show how institutions are perceived from the outside. You think you do it well, but are you up to date? Are you compatible with the world? Are the resources used effectively? It is important to identify the problems correctly, an outside eye has to tell you (Appendix F, 33).

Participant 7 points out the informative effect of sharing the feedback reports written by the evaluators after the institutional external evaluation on the universities:

After the institutional external evaluations, you surely know that we publish our reports transparently... So, a change from the past to the present has been observed. I think this is incredible data. Therefore, in this sense, to take measures, we then publish all these. In a sense, there is feedback. I can say that it has made such a contribution, and these reports have helped the institutions to develop because they improve themselves by looking at those reports all the time (Appendix F, 34).

As institutional external evaluations function as institutional check-ups, universities go through a process that results in organizational change in their structures. THEQC members highlight that institutional external evaluations play a big role in organizational transformation. Participant 2, for instance, tries to explain the developmental effect of institutional external evaluation not through the report writing process, but through the trainings spreading throughout the university:

What is not done! So, THEQC tries hard. First, evaluators help universities establish a quality assurance system. Rectors are informed. Rectors form quality boards in their institutions. Changes occur from top to the lowest units. Then, THEQC carries out the training of all quality-related staff of universities and units. (Appendix F, 35).

Similarly, participant 9 emphasizes the comprehensive nature of the institutional external evaluation process. She states that educational activities through institutional external evaluation transform the university:

Higher education institutions in the external evaluation process have met a significant number of evaluators since its first implementation. Of course, to make this external evaluation process more effective, it is important to

provide education for all parties involved in the process to increase their maturity levels. These are, of course, the senior management of higher education institutions, quality commissions, evaluators, our team chairs. In fact, feedback is received after many sittings of training, workshops, and information activities (Appendix F, 36).

Another sub-theme emerging under this theme is peer learning. According to the perceptions of the participants, the informative impact of institutional external evaluations goes beyond the institutions themselves.

Since institutional external evaluation is a transparent process, various stakeholders of higher education, such as parents and students, can obtain information about higher education institutions. Institutional external evaluation, which is an instructive process for higher education institutions itself, turns into an experience where peers also learn from each other. This sub-theme is discussed by four participants.

#### *Peer learning*

The key stakeholders of higher education such as universities, parents, and students have a more comprehensive perspective about the quality of the system. This transparency encourages universities to make a wide range of changes. Participant 1 argues that institutional external evaluation is an informative process not only for the university itself but also for other stakeholders:

Publishing reports is also important for conscious parents and students. They go to the HEC website and look for information about the features of universities. Parents and students ask many questions before registering for a university. Universities need to get ready for this. This is important in terms of attracting students. If universities don't improve, students easily realize this (Appendix F, 37).

Participant 9 clarifies that the institutional external evaluation does not remain only as an activity within the evaluated institution, but turns into a process of learning and transformation from each other:

It is important in terms of taking the general picture because aspects of these reports that are open to improvement are also reported to the institutions. For this reason, some policies are developed by evaluating the general situation in higher education institutions or evaluating the most problematic or the best ones in terms of producing policies within the higher education system. Now, of course, the publication of the reports is an important situation, you know. It is also pleasing to see that this is accepted over time. Of course, it is important for peer learning (Appendix F, 38).

Participant 4 explains with a specific example that institutional external evaluation has evolved into learning processes from each other:

Last year, we gave all state universities software so that they can watch their programs. The software will improve the resources of this country. We, first, identify such problems. Then, we inform universities. The first years they were saying they couldn't do this. They asked where they would find this information And if this was really a serious obstacle. Yes. Now, as THEQC, we're trying to find a way to help them, for example, or how to do it. We aim to develop and improve our institutions. For this, you have to not only evaluate it but feed it with know-how, which is our guiding dimension. We try to make good practices visible because the process of learning from each other is very important (Appendix F, 39).

Likewise, participant 7 underscores how the institutional external evaluation contributes to peer learning with the following words:

To take measures in this sense, we publish all these. We also share them in meetings. We share the important results of all these with universities, whether in informative meetings or workshops. This way, higher education institutions take evaluation reports and sittings of training into account (Appendix F, 40).

The data gathered has been revealed concerning the main theme influences of IEE in this part. The first group of the findings, which is related to the data gathered from THEQC members has been revealed under three main themes: Rationales for

THEQC, challenges of IEE, and influences of IEE. The second group of the findings will be revealed under the four main themes below.

### 5.3. Group two: Interviews with team leaders

After the data analysis of the team leaders' interviews, in answer to the research question, four major themes have emerged. These are rationales for quality assurance, challenges of IEE, influences, and ownership of quality. Under the main theme of rationales for quality assurance, the emerging sub-themes are massification, internationalization, and constructive feedback. Under the main theme of challenges of IEE, the emerging sub-themes are lack of common understanding, the difficulty of teamwork, and problematic process of report writing. The sub-themes that have emerged under the main theme of influences are institutional check-up, the establishment of an assurance system, and competition. The last main theme is ownership of quality culture. Under this main theme, the sub-themes are in-service sittings of training and qualities of the team involved.

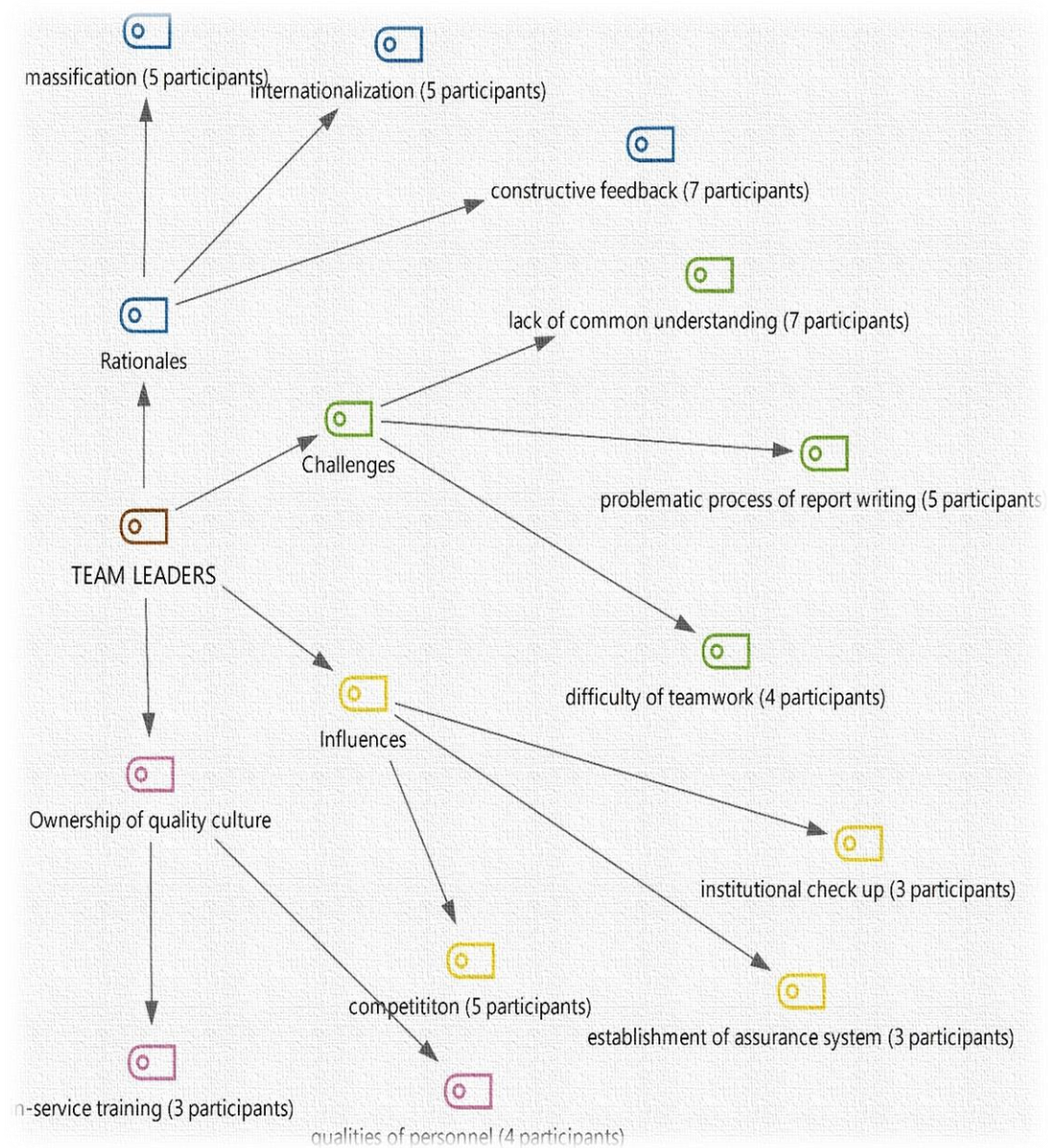


Figure 9 Main themes and sub-themes from team leaders

### 5.3.1 Main theme one: Rationales for quality assurance

It has been revealed that there are important rationales for the emergence of quality assurance in Turkish higher education. Perceptions of the team members reveal that there are three main rationales for IEE. These are massification, internationalization, and constructive feedback. The first sub-theme is massification.

### *Massification*

The interviewed five team leaders underscore that the increase in the number of universities for years has given way to the quality debate in the Turkish higher education system. In this sense, by comparing the number of universities in Turkey with the number of universities in neighboring countries, participant 4 states that this high increase in Turkey has made quality assurance a necessity:

Over the years, the number of universities has grown in our higher education system. Turkey is one of the countries that has the most university students in the area. Of course, from my perspective, this trend will continue in the future in a sense (Appendix F, 41).

Participant 2, who has the same opinion as participant 4, underlines that the increase in the number of universities is uneven and argues that this situation reveals the importance of the quality issue in higher education:

There has been rapid and uneven growth in this field in our country. The highest gross enrollment rate is in Turkey. Of course, open education also affects this. In recent years, there have been complaints about the quotas that are not filled. In this case, there has been a need for a quality higher education. This way, awareness of competition will develop and the need for certification mechanisms will increase. Institutions that remain insensitive to quality will fall. (Appendix F, 42).

Participant 3 emphasizes that there are many reasons for the emergence of quality assurance in higher education, and one of these reasons is the need to evaluate such a large number of universities:

I think there are many reasons for quality assurance. For example, quality assurance procedures help universities to improve themselves. Also, many universities have opened in the last few years. Quality assurance procedures help us to understand what these universities do and how much quality they have (Appendix F, 43).

Participant 5 also states that the importance of quality assurance can be related to the change in the perspective on higher education and that the high number of universities increases the diversity in the ecosystem:

Universities have been taking on an output-oriented structure. In the past, we talked about whether the research wave turned into publications. At present, the function of universities has changed. Universities are now more output oriented. There are more than two hundred universities in Turkey. Some of these universities are young, some are well-established, some are medium-sized. There is a mosaic when you look at it (Appendix F, 44).

In line with the findings of the study, another sub-theme concerning rationales for IEE is internationalization. There is a common belief by five participants that higher education in Turkey has become more international through a wide range of quality assurance practices.

### *Internationalization*

The participants have highlighted that Turkey should design its higher education system in parallel with the occurrences of world higher education systems. In this sense, participant 5 emphasizes the importance of quality assurance while addressing issues such as mobility and the compatibility of curricula, which are the main issues of internationalization:

The developments in the world have made this necessary in a sense. Issues such as globalization and student and academic mobility have made it necessary to ensure that systems and programs are compatible, and their quality is assured. In addition to the Bologna Process, studies initiated in the process of harmonization with the EU, Turkey has also tried to model the total quality philosophy of Europe (Appendix F, 45).

Participant 3 believes that quality assurance mechanisms contribute to local universities to have a global dimension and that such mechanisms are a necessity for all universities that are unwilling to be out of the competition:

It is important for universities to compete not only locally, but also internationally. Universities want to be preferable. In this case, they do not seem to have a choice but to improve their systems. In addition, the race is not only between local universities, but there are also very advanced higher education systems around the world. They are also in this race (Appendix F, 46).



Similarly, participant 4 underlines that quality assurance is essential to increase mobility, which is an important element of internationalization, and to be among the most favored universities:

It is important to be a preferable system. Potential students are looking for accreditation. Stakeholders have become more aware of this issue. Parents and students value such issues. A necessary thing for mobility in the university is a quality assurance system that is of good quality and conforms to standards in the world (Appendix F, 47).

After emphasizing that massification in higher education brings with it the quality debate, participant 2 explains that in this process, Turkey has closely followed the developments in the world and shaped the quality assurance with the Bologna

Process:

Higher education has a history starting from the 1980s in Turkey. There weren't many universities in those years. Over time, with the 1990s, there were policies such as increasing the number of universities and expanding higher education. This rapid growth also started quality discussions. There were pilot studies in the search for quality. There was a search for a mechanism and this situation in our country went parallel with the world and an overlap has occurred. Of course, Bologna is an important step in this regard (Appendix F, 48).

Participant 1, while describing the development of quality assurance in Turkey, looks from a more global perspective and states that the mechanisms established in the world higher education systems should be parallel:

I will make a critique on the developments of quality assurance in the Turkish higher education system. One of the latest countries to establish the National Agency is in Turkey. In my opinion, every country should establish a quality assurance system as a routine. I think there is a need for this, that is, the existence of institutions that talk to each other on a global scale (Appendix F, 49).

The last sub-theme concerning the rationales for quality assurance is the constructive feedback received through IEE.

### *Constructive feedback*

The interviewed seven team leaders agree that IEE is necessary because it leads to the betterment of HEIs through the identification of areas open to improvement and the strengths of the institutions.

According to participant 2, for instance, IEE enables universities to observe themselves and identify their areas of improvement. To him, IEE requires universities to review their policies and take more action. This function of IEE makes it a must for the ecosystem:

Quality processes are essentially a milestone. Universities are starting to recover in this way. They are reviewing their policies. The documentation mechanism is established. There is a movement happening in universities. They take other institutions as an example. Recovery begins in them. Areas that are open for improvement are identified. But no interference. Let's underline this (Appendix F, 50).

Underlining that quality assurance drives universities forward in many areas, participant 3 says that IEE acts as a kind of mirror that allows universities to see themselves:

Quality assurance is of great importance. It matters in many ways. For example, there is information sharing about the university with the outside, with the stakeholders. In addition, we can say that it is a mirror of the university. An opportunity for recovery (Appendix F, 51).

Participant 1 also emphasizes that evaluation teams receive feedback from universities during institutional external evaluation processes and that universities see IEE as a mirror that helps them to observe themselves more closely:

Of course, we receive different types of feedback from universities in the process and at the end. For example, they say that while we are dealing with urgent and daily tasks, we can postpone the important work. We may not be able to devote time to important work. You become an outer eye. It's like we see ourselves better in the mirror. In other words, it also has the function of improving universities (Appendix F, 52).

Adding more on the perceptions of the participants, participant 4 states that IEE is turning into a learning process as it ends in constructive feedback. To him, for

instance, the rectors, who are the most important administrators in universities, have learned a lot during the IEE process. IEE, in this sense, has influenced how universities have been managed by rectors:

I can say that this process also sheds light on the rector. In other words, he is the most important contact person for quality. His leadership is important. This has worked in my experience as well. Seeing some problems inside, knowing what they have been doing helped the rectors a lot in the way to quality assurance (Appendix F, 53).

Similarly, participant 5 lists that the IEE process is effective in providing feedback in many aspects, ranging from the vision of universities to the sense of belonging in universities:

It enables the institution to reach its vision more quickly. The sense of belonging in the organization increases. The quality of the student increases. Accreditation is an important parameter for the incoming students. Being accredited increases the status of preference in many areas. The quality process is the feedback process. It provides transparency. It allows the institution to open its assets to the public. It allows managing these assets (Appendix F, 54).

Participant 6 also states that IEE is a pioneer in spreading the awareness of quality assurance, and this process guides universities in achieving a standard:

THEQC gives direction to universities by making some evaluations and I think it is very important that this awareness is gradually formed in universities because a standard regarding quality should be established in all higher education institutions (Appendix F, 55).

Moreover, participant 7 asserts that thanks to constructive feedback provided during IEE, several changes occur in the organizational structure of universities:

Deficiencies are quickly filled by universities. For example, many universities did not have research coordinators before. Currently, a research coordinating unit has been established in all universities and joint decisions have been taken by these coordinating units and stakeholders (Appendix F, 56).

The data gathered from team members have been evaluated concerning the main theme called the rationales for quality assurance in this part. Below, another main theme which is the challenges of IEE and its sub-themes will be touched upon.

### 5.3.2 Main theme two: Challenges of IEE

It has been revealed that institutional external evaluation, which is one of the most important services by THEQC, is not free of challenges. Accordingly, participants state that they face several challenges, which can be sub-categorized as lack of common understanding, difficulty in teamwork, and the problematic process of report writing. The first sub-theme is a lack of common understanding.

#### *Lack of common understanding*

It is believed by seven participants that the difference between evaluation and inspection is unknown by HEIs, and lack of knowledge about this issue leads to anxiety among academic and administrative personnel. However, participant 2 emphasizes that IEE is a process between peers. It is not an inspection from outside:

One common problem in universities in Turkey is that we are perceived as inspectors. But, in fact, institutional external evaluation is a peer visit. We call it evaluation. We do not use the word control or inspection as a term (Appendix F, 57).

Likewise, participant 2 underlines that the perception of inspection is a common problem in universities about IEE:

In my opinion, an important problem is the perception of inspection in universities. Universities may see the institutional external evaluation process as an inspection rather than an evaluation. You can feel their concerns during site visits and even the writing process of self-evaluation reports (Appendix F, 58).

Participant 5 thinks that lack of common understanding about IEE may cause resentment among employees toward the evaluation team and that quality culture is to be internalized to minimize such issues:

At the first evaluation visits, there was a perception of supervision and uneasiness. THEQC meetings with rectors and in-service training have changed this significantly. In some universities, there may be some resentment while conveying the aspects of the institution that are open to

development in the exit meeting. Some institutions may perceive the feedback process as a scorecard for themselves (Appendix F, 59).

Underlining that a defensive approach is displayed as a result of the misperception among academic and administrative personnel, participant 1 states that the culture of self-evaluation is still not fully established in the academic world:

In some cases, we may encounter a defensive approach. As far as I have noticed, some institutions do not have a culture of self-evaluation and self-criticism. There is no such habit. Measuring what you do is a new culture. It is a culture that needs to be developed in our academia (Appendix F, 60).

Participant 3, in a similar way, thinks that misperception of IEE sometimes blocks the way for universities to display a transparent attitude:

Quality processes are not a bureaucratic control. Making mistakes and sharing your problems voluntarily should actually be seen as a helping hand. However, some institutions are closed in such situations. They hesitate to reveal themselves (Appendix F, 61).

According to participant 5, lack of common understanding of quality assurance can cause this work to be seen as a burden and to be owned by only a few people:

I think that in both cases, it is perceived as one of the additional administrative tasks given to the academic staff, by the rector, the dean, or the head of the department. Quality is generally perceived as an additional administrative task carried out under the responsibility of the faculty members of the Quality Commission and its sub-committees. It is not thought that everyone in a university is responsible for quality (Appendix F, 62).

Participant 5 also thinks that not internalizing the vision of quality assurance by university personnel may cause some difficulties during field visits such as not fully understanding the quality assurance mechanism by team members:

Sometimes the quality assurance systems of universities can be very complex. This needs simplification. For example, when you ask an academic or administrative staff what quality assurance at the university is and how it works, you sound as if you are asking the most difficult question in the world. Therefore, one of the biggest difficulties we face is not internalizing the quality assurance system (Appendix F, 63).

Similarly, participant 5 thinks that there is a negative understanding of quality assurance both in public and private universities. He underscores that neither public nor private universities welcome quality assurance that much because they do not have a clear understanding of what quality is:

If I put it very generally, state universities see this process as a necessity arising from the legislation. Foundation universities perceive it as a threat to competition. In time, when it is understood that the main purpose of the process is to create a quality culture, and when this perception becomes widespread, I think that they will understand that the process is for their benefit (Appendix F, 64).

Furthermore, while touching upon different types of challenges, some of the participants have highlighted that there may be certain challenges within the team that is doing the institutional external evaluation at times. This has been named the difficulty of teamwork.

#### *Difficulty of teamwork*

The difficulty of teamwork has been touched upon by four participants. Participant 2 mentions that IEE is a long and multi-layered process that may sometimes result in ups and downs:

Institutional external evaluation is a troublesome issue for teams. Wherever you look, the process can take 4-5 months to complete. That takes time. You have to stay in interaction all this time. During this time, reports come and go. You are communicating as a group. There may not always be active participation or contribution (Appendix F, 65).

Similarly, Participant 5 gives a few examples of the difficulties that can be encountered during IEE among team members as follows:

I can't say I have a big problem. I am trying to be a team leader by honoring the knowledge, talents, and competencies of my teammates. In my experience so far, the habit of being late in the morning, the wish to end team meetings early in the evening, etc. have been the problems. I had minor problems with adapting to the time and schedule (Appendix F, 66).

Participant 1 focuses on the different phases of IEE by emphasizing the challenge of establishing a common understanding with team leaders:

It is at times hard to agree with people about some aspects regarding the university that you have been evaluating. It is important to understand whether what we understand is similar. As the team leader, we remind the team members to read self-evaluation reports carefully, examine the strategic plan attentively, and look at the web page. Coming to a common agreement can be challenging at times. During the preliminary visit and the main visit, I try to guide the team as accurately as I can (Appendix F, 67).

According to participant 6, THEQC tries to minimize the challenges among team leaders and team members through several practices, one of which is the survey:

A university is given to us on a yearly basis. In this process, team members are determined. THEQC does this: a survey. For example, it determines the personal characteristics of people from the survey. One person might be very romantic, for example, while another might be analytical and mindful of fine details. A team is formed taking into account their personalities. This is important, I think. In other words, the people who make up the team are people who do not know each other, with different personalities (Appendix F, 68).

Another sub-theme emerging under this main theme is related to the reports in IEE. This sub-theme has been named the problematic process of report writing.

#### *Problematic process of report writing*

It is highlighted by five team members that the preparation of institutional self-evaluation reports cannot be handled effectively by some universities. This may cause several challenges between these two parties. Participant 2 voices that the policies and activities of universities may not be reflected in self-evaluation reports openly:

Institutions sometimes do not fully reflect what they do. They sometimes do not keep the reports short and tell the essence. The information presented in the report as evidence may not be fully understood. However, seeing some of the practices that were not fully expressed in the report during the field visit positively changes our assessment (Appendix F, 69).

Likewise, participant 1 explains that the writing process of the reports may lack critical awareness, which leads to the non-existence of weak points of universities:

If the culture of quality is not widespread, reports may not be written critically. I have encountered a situation where it is more like promoting or advertising the university. In some cases, it happens that the weak points are not written. What is shared as evidence may not have the feature of evidence. Reports should be short, concise, and critical. This is an opportunity, but some universities may overlook it (Appendix F, 70).

Furthermore, participant 3 affirms that the preparation of institutional self-evaluation reports is a substantial contribution to universities. Yet, this fact may not be realized by some universities:

Failure to properly manage the institution's internal evaluation reports is also a problem. Writing the internal evaluation report is an achievement. You need to be able to notice this. The authors of this report should not be the only members of the quality commission. However, this is not done in many institutions. Quality commissions seem to come together from year to year just to write the institutional internal evaluation report. In my opinion, if the institution does not write the institutional internal evaluation report well, it cannot recognize the areas which are open to improvement (Appendix F, 71).

It is also announced by participant 6 that some changes can be left to the report writing stage, which is a little bit late in some cases. In such cases, teams may not be able to fully evaluate the development processes of universities during IEE:

Sometimes, universities leave their criteria to the last minute and present them to us as last-minute changes. But the concept you call quality requires continuity. For example, there is a question of whether you get opinions from stakeholders while establishing the ecosystem. According to them, the answer is yes. But this has been done in the last six months. When you look at the five-year process, it has not been done. We do not see continuity in this way (Appendix F, 72).

The data gathered by team members have been revealed about the main theme called the challenges of IEE in this part. Below, another main theme which is the influences of IEE, and its sub-themes will be touched upon.



### 5.3.3 Main theme three: Influences of IEE

It is announced by team leaders that IEE causes several changes in universities at different points because its practice leads to the identification of the university's aspects that are open to development. Under this main theme, the sub-categories are institutional check-up, the establishment of an assurance system, and competition. The first sub-theme that emerges is institutional check-up.

#### *Institutional check-up*

Three of the participants have underscored that universities experience a wide range of changes within their institutions because of institutional external evaluations. Participant 5 likens IEE practice to magnetic resonance imaging. According to him, both reveal elements that need healing:

We are trying to get to know the institution thoroughly. We take pictures. What has the institution done in this area till the next evaluation period? Has it made improvements in areas that are open to development? We reveal such issues through evaluation (Appendix F, 73).

In the same vein, participant 2 underlines that IEE practice is a kind of guidance, and explains that universities can better observe what they lack thanks to this practice:

In this way, universities find the opportunity to review themselves. Evaluation is a consultancy and guidance service. It is a guiding movement. I can say that it is a very valuable process in terms of identifying areas that are open to improvement (Appendix F, 74).

Participant 3, on the other hand, underlines that the university's administrative and academic staff see the quality process outside of their daily routines, but at the end of the day, IEE is considered necessary by the universities, even if it causes some concerns:

In fact, with the institutional external evaluation processes, daily life is distorted in a sense. There is a kind of reaction in this case. However, at the end of the process, they find this work useful and state that they see their shortcomings from another perspective (Appendix F, 75).

The second sub-theme emerging under the category of influences of IEE is the establishment of an assurance system. It has been noted that before quality assurance practices, many universities have not adopted a systematic approach towards data gathering and managing, which is of utmost importance in establishing a quality assurance mechanism.

#### *Establishment of assurance system*

Three participants emphasized that documentation is very important for the continuity of quality assurance, but since most universities do not document their activities, they have difficulties in ensuring this continuity. For instance, an important point revealed by participant 6 is that universities tend to be negligent in recording their activities in the pre-IEE process:

Taking minutes was very rare in universities. In other words, the documentation for recording the meetings was almost always missing. These have matured within the institutional external evaluation. Some universities have even set up units for documentation. These units also have begun collecting information from different units of universities (Appendix F, 76).

Participant 5, who has similar ideas with Participant 6, explains that universities have had difficulties in managing their data before IEE practice:

As far as I have observed, universities cannot manage their data. This is a big shortcoming. If you can't measure, you can't manage. The institutional external evaluation has allowed them to understand to some extent the importance of documentation (Appendix F, 77).

Underlining that IEE has a transformative effect on many points, participant 2 also thinks that IEE implementation has caused universities to give more importance to documenting their activities:

In this way, institutions recover themselves. This process has an impact on all dimensions. Internal quality assurance systems are established. The establishment of centers on different subjects is accelerating. Universities are reconsidering their conditions. They are starting to take other institutions as

an example. There is a movement happening inside the university. Documentation mechanisms are starting to work. For example, archiving what they do more systematically and regularly has become a matter of importance for universities (Appendix F, 78).

In addition to institutional check-ups and the establishment of an assurance system, another sub-theme is the influence of IEE on the competition. Universities have had the opportunity to know themselves and their competitors better, thanks to the reports written in the context of institutional external evaluation. This situation has greatly fueled the competition between universities.

### *Competition*

It is believed by five participants that the institutional external evaluation process creates a kind of competitive perception because it allows institutions to analyze themselves and shows the place of universities in the higher education system.

Participant 4 states that the formative aspect of the IEE process contributes to the competition between universities:

This process also increases competition as it allows universities to recover. Reports from other universities are under review, I mean they are shared with the public. Good ones can be taken as examples. Thus, the institutional external evaluation process explains how they can be a more preferable university in comparison to other universities (Appendix F, 79).

Similarly, participant 2 explains that institutional self-evaluation reports can be used by universities to push themselves forward in the competition among universities:

The most important thing for universities is a feedback report. In a sense, it shows that if universities do what they do properly, they will become higher quality and more successful universities. In other words, we present our opinions in these reports we have prepared for the institutions. This process may sound scary at first for universities. However, universities may want to share and use such reports in the context of competition, especially the ones, where the strengths outweigh the weaknesses (Appendix F, 80).

Participant 3 also expresses that IEE enables universities to see other universities' strengths and areas open to development. This way, universities can take action accordingly:

In the institutional external evaluation process, they see not only themselves, but all universities, whether public or private. I think this increases the competition between them in a sense. (Appendix F, 81)

According to participant 1, universities, both public and private, want to be financially successful and this leads universities to be more sensitive to quality assurance:

In other words, I see foundation universities as a source of diversity within the system. Diversity is good. In my opinion, since there is a profit-oriented situation in foundation universities, doing things well, doing things differently comes to the fore in these institutions. They have motivation for this. Student demands are important because attracting students is important. Therefore, in order to be a different alternative, they adopt a different management system (Appendix F, 82).

Participant 6 expresses that universities follow the processes such as IEE and accreditation more closely to increase their brand values, which is an important trend for universities in a very competitive atmosphere:

In a way, I can say in particular, foundation universities that have newly been opened are starting accreditation processes in at least a few departments. They take institutional external evaluation seriously and try to stand out. I can say that I have such an observation (Appendix F, 83).

The data gathered from team leaders have been revealed concerning the main theme called the influences of IEE in this part. Below, another main theme and its sub-themes will be discussed.

### 5.3.5 Main theme three: Ownership of quality culture

Under this main theme, all the participants have discussed the importance of ownership regarding quality assurance. Two sub-themes that have emerged are in-

service training and qualities of employees. In the light of the perceptions of the participants, it has been emphasized that regular in-service training would increase the interest and curiosity among the employees and increase the commitment to the quality culture. In addition, it has been stated that the adoption of a quality culture would be realized more effectively with willing and knowledgeable employees. The first one is in-service training.

### *In-service training*

It is a common belief by three participants that quality can be best assured through training conducted for both academic and administrative personnel. Participant 6 states that quality assurance can be provided by the quality of both administrative and academic personnel. To this end, one main thing to be done by universities is to conduct in-service training regularly:

This is not an easy matter. So, when you look at it, the personnel issue is very important. However, the quality of administrative staff is neglected by universities. Their quality is very important. Faculty quality is very important. When you do in-service training regularly, you can definitely get results after a long time. In-service training is very important. Many universities neglect this. In-service training of administrative staff and in-service training of academic staff are very important. The university means people above all else. People have to be invested in (Appendix F, 84).

Similarly, participant 2 voices the function of in-service training to motivate university personnel:

Quality is a matter of mentality. Since this understanding is still not settled in some institutions, formal regulations are not effective. But still, I see a big movement. Sensitivity and willingness on this issue are increasing day by day. I think training have helped universities a lot in this sense. There have been more and more training regarding quality assurance. To improve quality in higher education, the number of people who believe in this work should increase, apart from the formal and superficial changes. In-service training have this influence, I believe (Appendix F, 85).

Participant 3 also places an important value on in-service training because he holds the idea that quality is teamwork and in-service training may help people to be actively involved in internalizing quality values:

There is no end to quality work. This job is about constantly improving and improving. For this, know-how and R&D culture are very important. Team spirit is one of the most important factors that determine the course of this process. Team spirit can be created through in-service training and regular meetings on quality. I mean people have an opportunity to come together and focus on quality issues (Appendix F, 86).

The last sub-theme concerning the ownership of quality culture is the qualities of employees. Four participants have focused on the importance of the qualities of the teams involved in quality processes.

#### *Qualities of employees*

While mentioning that quality assurance can be provided with different elements, participant 5 underlines that the quality process should be carried out with a team full of motivation and knowledge:

An internal quality system should be established for a quality higher education. All stakeholders should also participate in this process and quality terminology should be disseminated. How can you manage this? Well, team spirit is very important. You need to include people who have a spirit of quality culture in the team you will work with. This is problematic at many of the universities I've visited during my field visit so far (Appendix F, 87).

Participant 1, similarly, emphasizes that a successful higher education system is possible with quality processes carried out with merit and transparency, and states that people who own the quality culture are needed:

It is necessary to establish a working quality assurance. In general, there can be an ambiguous structuring because the culture of quality is not established. A culture of quality needs to be developed. We need people who own this process. Many things will be re-arranged when there is an effective quality system. A good competitive environment can only be created with people with high motivation (Appendix F, 88).

Participant 3 emphasizes the importance of qualified and informed people for the establishment of successful quality assurance systems in higher education:

It is very important to have people who know certain processes well. However, in my experience, unfortunately, I sometimes interact with people who do not know much about the concept of quality culture (Appendix F, 89).

The second group of the findings related to the data gathered from team leaders has been revealed under five main themes, which are rationales for THEQC, challenges of IEE, transformative influences of IEE, and public & private universities and ownership of quality culture. The third group of the findings will be revealed under the three main themes below.

#### 5.4. Group Three: Interviews with rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders

After the data analysis of the findings from the rectors, vice-rectors, quality commission leaders, in answer to the research question, several major themes have emerged. These major themes have been formed as rationales for IEE, challenges of IEE, and influences of IEE. Under the category of the rationales, the emerging sub-categories are the dissemination of quality culture, stakeholders' engagement, competition, and internationalization. Under the main theme of the challenges of IEE, the sub-themes that have emerged are lack of common understanding, and resistance towards IEE. Under the main theme of the influences of IEE, the sub-themes that have emerged are institutional check-ups, institutional changes, and disappearance of resistance.

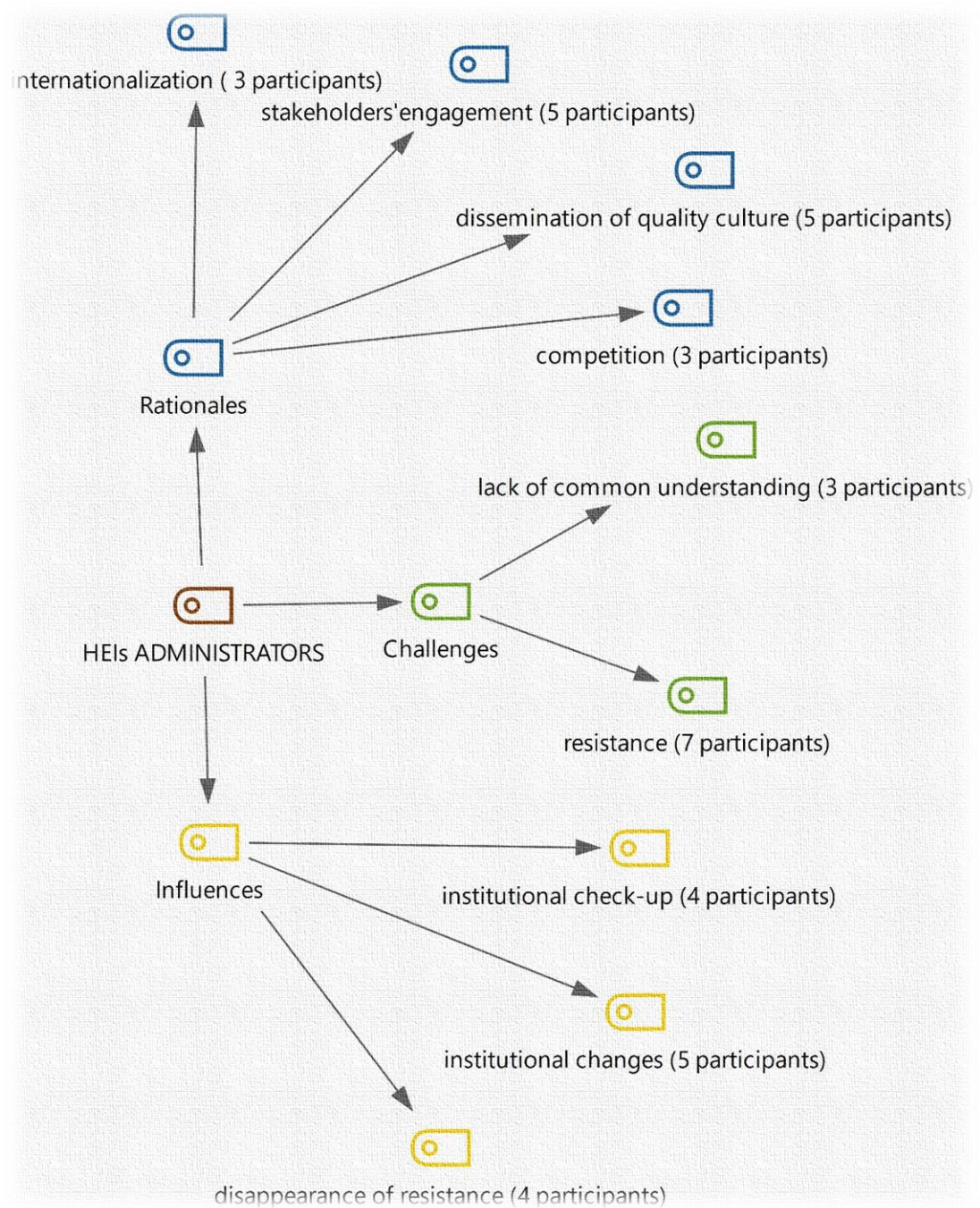


Figure 10 Main themes and sub-themes from rectors, vice-rectors, and QC leaders

#### 5.4.1 Main theme one: Rationales for IEE

Under the main theme of the rationales for THEQC, there are four emerging sub-themes. These are the dissemination of quality culture, stakeholders' engagement,



competition, and internationalization. Below, the sub-theme, which is the dissemination of quality culture is discussed.

### *Dissemination of quality culture*

Five participants have mentioned that IEE has led universities to consider quality issues. Participant 6 claims that the understanding of quality did not exist in universities in previous years and that quality came onto the agenda of universities thanks to quality evaluation processes:

Universities begin to prepare themselves for such an evaluation process. First of all, the concept of quality is placed on the agenda of the university administration. In earlier years, we were never faced with such concepts in the universities we worked at (Appendix F, 90).

Participant 2 also thinks that the activities of THEQC on quality create awareness and motivation in institutions in the higher education system:

Nice initiative. Great service. Through training, awareness about quality is created. Both academic and administrative personnel start to take initiatives and act in accordance with quality principles in universities. I definitely think that such a roof organization was needed in our higher education system (Appendix F, 91).

Participant 3 also draws attention to the effective role of THEQC in understanding and adopting the quality culture of all units at universities:

As I have just emphasized, I think it is a very important process in order to be able to make a self-evaluation of the studies carried out in line with the vision of universities and to disseminate them to all units in the institutional quality assurance system, from A to Z, not only academic but also administrative units. (Appendix F, 92)

To give an example, participant 6 states that considering the PCDA cycle, which is an important reference point for quality assurance, universities have begun to establish quality-related units with the institutional external evaluation:

This is a need in every institution, whether private or public. After all, it has a cycle, you know. Complementing with the cycle of planning, implementation, control, and prevention. This cycle should be everywhere. Every institution

should plan, implement, measure, and correct the mistakes made. When the Quality Council was first established, they shared the documents they had prepared. For example, we did not have a Quality Commission. It was established later. Now we have structured it accordingly (Appendix F, 93).

Participant 7 also states that the institutional external evaluation provides institutional discipline and that setting attainable targets at universities and the pursuit of achieving these targets is further understood by institutional external evaluation:

I am more inclined to hold an institutional perspective. This is my opinion, but I think evaluation contributes to the establishment of institutional discipline. In other words, setting a goal, working for it, achieving it, and proving it, institutional external evaluation has taught us this (Appendix F, 94).

Another sub-theme concerning the rationales of quality assurance is the awareness of different stakeholders. It has been revealed by the perceptions of the participants that the institutional external evaluation process increases communication with both internal and external stakeholders and the importance of external stakeholder participation in land mechanisms is understood.

#### *Stakeholders' engagement*

Five participants have mentioned that IEE has led universities to consider different stakeholders. Participant 9 emphasizes that institutional external evaluation is an important tool to involve external stakeholders in the quality processes with the following words:

Before the evaluator team has arrived, we have held meetings with the faculty advisory boards. In these meetings, the necessity of meeting with the external stakeholders with whom the faculties were in contact emerged. We also reviewed academic, administrative, and student surveys at that time. Thus, we tried to get ideas about university activities of different groups (Appendix F, 95).

Participant 10 also underlines that institutional external evaluation is the catalyst for stakeholder engagement:

In institutional external evaluation, we seemed to falter in the beginning. We reviewed ourselves. While doing this, we saw that we especially ignored the ideas of the university students on some issues, and we thought about how we could include them in the decision-making processes. In other words, evaluation forced us to think about it (Appendix F, 96).

Similarly, participant 8 explains that the determination of external evaluation criteria by an external institution, not by themselves, creates awareness about external stakeholder views:

Together with THEQC, a photo is taken from a different angle. In other words, universities that want to be included in this system could evaluate themselves in a way within the framework of the criteria presented by external stakeholders (Appendix F, 97).

Participant 6 states that stakeholder participation in the decision-making process is important in the university where they work, but in the institutional external evaluation, the issue of stakeholder participation takes on a more institutional structure for the university:

The other thing is the active participation of external stakeholders in this process. There, too, it caused a different excitement. We had a certain level of relationship with our external stakeholders, but this quality evaluation process allowed our relations with external stakeholders to become more institutionalized and more defined. This further strengthened relations with external stakeholders (Appendix F, 98).

Participant 2 also shares similar ideas with the other participants and states that they had the opportunity to explain themselves to their students thanks to the institutional external evaluation:

Institutional external evaluation has many functions. Let me tell you the first thing that comes to mind. Monitoring the performance indicators of THEQC, including them in the self-evaluation report, sharing the activities with the public in that format, all these are guiding us. Also, accredited programs are included in the higher education preference guide. Therefore, when students make a choice, they look at the position of a university in comparison to others. In a way, it paves the way for expressing ourselves to our students. This enables students to learn about our university (Appendix F, 99).

Another sub-theme following the rationales for the external institutional evaluations is competition.

### *Competition*

As a result of the interviews, three participants state that processes such as institutional external evaluation are a product of competition between universities. For example, participant 7 underlines that such mechanisms are used to attract more students:

Some faculty members approach this event with a critical point of view. They see later how important it is. They see how useful it is. Over time, they realize that it is necessary for the good of their departments, for the good of their fields, for the departments to attract students. Of course, not only to attract students, but also good academics want to work in successful universities. They somehow realize that everything depends on it (Appendix F, 100).

Participant 10 perceives institutional external evaluation from a similar perspective and conveys this with the following words:

Because you know quality means continuous improvement of the quality of service. It's the same for the higher education community, you know. With the increase in the potential of higher education in Turkey and with the increase in the number of universities, a competitive environment is created. Again, there is competition among all of these foundation universities and state universities. Institutional external evaluation, accreditation, and such practices are important in this competitive environment (Appendix F, 101).

Moreover, participant 6 emphasizes that universities need to be more student-centered in a competitive environment:

Students are now conscious. There was no such thing in our time. Now, in a lesson, an instructor does something, right on Twitter. You have to be student oriented. Sometimes they exaggerate. Students now know which university is accredited and which program is not. We can attribute this to institutional external evaluation. It is the previous step of accreditation after all (Appendix F, 102).

The last sub-theme under the rationales for the external institutional evaluation is internationalization. The participants have touched upon different aspects of

internationalization such as the emergence of national quality assurance bodies across the world, the legal changes are done in higher education systems, the spread of quality assurance practices in many regions.

### *Internationalization*

As a result of the interviews, three participants associate institutional external evaluation with internationalization in higher education. For example, participant 2 states that institutions such as THEQC have become widespread all over the world:

Quality assurance in higher education is a very good initiative. Establishment of a structure with financial autonomy by law as the Higher Education Quality Council. It was one of the greatest services to be made to Turkish higher education. Turkey needed such an umbrella institution. It exists all over the world. We should have too. This institution has now turned into an international evaluation institution. Not only inside, but also outside (Appendix F, 103).

Participant 6 also approaches IEE with a global perspective, stating that with international connections, national higher education systems have made changes in their legislations.

Every university has had to worry about quality. First, they have found themselves subject to such quality processes in Turkish higher education. Then, over the years, of course, this has become a process that has become stronger with international integrations. Universities have had to add quality processes to the legislation. The concern about quality has not remained local, now there are international rankings. What is your place in the Middle East, what is your place in Europe? You have to act accordingly (Appendix F, 104).

Similarly, participant 7 explains that quality processes in the world have become widespread with the following words:

I think it is a response to the pursuit of quality in universities. THEQC guides universities on what they should do better. There are many institutions equivalent to THEQC in the world. I mean, this is a general approach, not a local one. We are following this process closely (Appendix F, 105).

The data gathered has been evaluated concerning the main theme called rationales for THEQC above. In the following section, the main theme, which is the challenges of institutional external evaluation will be discussed.

#### 5.4.2 Main theme two: Challenges of institutional external evaluation

In line with the interviews with rectors, vice-rectors, and commission leaders, another main theme is the challenges of IEE. Under this main theme, the emerging sub-themes are a lack of common understanding and resistance. The perceptions of the participants reveal that the main problem is that neither administrative nor academic personnel know much about evaluation and quality assurance processes. The first sub-theme is the lack of common understanding about IEE, and it will be discussed below.

##### *Lack of common understanding*

All participants hold the idea that the university staff, whether academic or administrative, don't have enough information about the process. Not knowing what IEE is may prevent university personnel from making a real distinction between evaluation and inspection. Three participants have mentioned that lack of common understanding has caused university personnel to get confused about inspection and evaluation. Participant 1, for example, underlines that they have held several meetings to help their team understand the differences between inspection and evaluation:

Of course, the most important problem is that the inspection process dominates the quality evaluation process. Our people inevitably prepared themselves as if they were preparing for an inspection. Of course, by informing our friends at the meetings we organized, we tried to explain that this is a different process from inspection, that we should leave aside the

concerns, and that we should prepare for the question of what we do and how much, from a quality perspective (Appendix F, 106).

Similarly, participant 7 state that THEQC meetings are a response to the inspection anxiety of academic staff:

Speaking from the point of view of our university, we have attended THEQC seminars before. We constantly went to Ankara, attended meetings, and so on. There, we were told that this would not be like an inspection. This is not an inspection, it's an evaluation. So, things were said that made us feel relatively comfortable (Appendix F, 107).

Participant 1 also underlines that the staff at the university have more experience in inspection and states that this poses some difficulties:

Now quality turns into a somewhat troublesome and time-consuming process. For example, we entered the external evaluation process this year, and our biggest challenge was to prepare our units for this process because the units have such experience. They have always prepared themselves for the inspection. They inevitably perceive and position the quality process as similar to the inspection (Appendix F, 108).

Moreover, the interviews have revealed that IEE may lead university personnel to be reluctant towards the process. This has emerged as the sub-theme of resistance towards IEE.

### *Resistance*

Seven participants have highlighted that people may have a negative attitude or prejudice against IEE, especially before the process. For example, participant 8, after underlining that he observed neither negative nor positive attitude towards IEE in his institution, generalizes and states that the evaluation processes are seen as a workload:

In general, they are not sympathetic to such processes, to external evaluation. This negative attitude can sometimes be common not only among administrative staff but also among academicians. Such processes are viewed as workloads. There was no apparent resistance or sympathy at our university (Appendix F, 109).

Participant 2 voices that there has been a negative attitude adopted towards IEE as it has been seen as a process that is not necessary that much:

In our institution, I have observed that there is a negative approach to the institutional external evaluation process, especially among the administrative staff. In other words, it was thought that it was not necessary by some. It was thought that there was a lot of work to be done. There was a sense of where it came from (Appendix F, 110).

Similarly, participant 7 explains that IEE is not considered necessary by some with the following words:

What if we do? What happens if you do, what happens if you don't? We're already doing our job. People had such questions in their minds. But it's not like that. In other words, they hardly understand the benefit without experiencing the good (Appendix F, 111).

Likewise, participant 8 states that institutional external evaluation is seen as a workload for some academic staff:

It depends on your perspective about evaluation. I believe it is necessary. But some people may look at it as a waste of time. Some people think that there are other important things to be done and that such practices hinder their real work (Appendix F, 112).

Agreeing with participant 8, participant 3 states that this process is seen as an intervention by some academic and administrative personnel:

There may be some resistance. It can be perceived as an interference with freedom. People think that it brings extra obligations to both administrative and academic staff. Quality is a difficult concept. There may be opponents. It is also a little difficult to adapt to (Appendix F, 113).

Particularly, participant 4 states that the professors who have been in the academy for many years tend to show resistance because they have certain habits which are difficult to break:

Before the institutional external evaluation, there is an unavoidable rush, an effort to make up for the deficiencies. Some lecturers have difficulties in giving up their old habits and adapting to new conditions (Appendix F, 114).



The main theme has been discussed in this part following two sub-themes, which are lack of common understanding and resistance towards IEE. Below, another main theme, which is the influences of IEE will be explained.

#### 5.4.3 Main theme three: Influences of IEE

The interviews have revealed that there have been dramatic changes concerning the process of IEE at universities. The main theme has been categorized under three sub-themes which are institutional check-up, institutional changes, and disappearance of resistance. The first sub-theme, in this sense, is institutional check-up.

##### *Institutional check-up*

There is a common belief by four participants that institutional external evaluations conducted by THEQC are an opportunity for higher institutions to ameliorate themselves through guidance and observations. According to participant 8, institutional external evaluation is an opportunity to photograph the aspects of institutions that are open to improvement:

I am a person who has adopted quality management. I find this positive in every sector. It's not perfect, but it optimally ensures continuous improvement. It contributes to the development of each unit, big or small. It allows you to take your photo. It reveals strengths and weaknesses (Appendix F, 115).

Participant 4 whose opinions are in line with participant 8, emphasizes the role of objective analysis of external evaluation in universities:

The institutional external evaluation aims to make improvements by seeing institutions from the outside with a more objective eye. It objectively observes and guides all processes of the university. In this respect, I believe that it is beneficial for all universities to undergo such an evaluation every five years (Appendix F, 116).

Participant 1 is also in agreement with the other participants. He states that IEE ensures order in institutions and encourages the continuation of quality sustainably:

Very important. It puts the university in order. What I mean is that especially academic personnel tend to do their business in a more organized way when they experience such evaluation processes. Such processes guide people. It is also important for sustainability (Appendix F, 117).

Expressing that institutional external evaluation has a structure that overlaps with the quality activities in the world, especially in Europe, participant 3 emphasizes that IEE takes a picture of its strengths and points that need improvement:

It is a system like the one by European University Association. It's pretty similar to their self-assessment process. There are very similar forms and workflows. In this sense, it was convenient for us because we have been a member of the European University Association since 2013, roughly. We entered the institutional self-assessment process, which is one of the activities of the association. They also came to visit us. We prepare a self-evaluation report similar to this model initiated by the Quality Board. In that sense, THEQC is taking a picture. Processes help us realize our weak and strong points within the framework of our vision (Appendix F, 118).

In line with the main theme, the second sub-theme concerning developmental influences is institutional influences. This implies that in addition to the common problems stemming from quality assurance practices by nature, the specific qualities of universities may cause universities to adopt different strategies while dealing with the practices.

### *Institutional changes*

Five participants state that all universities that have gone through this process have taken different actions depending on the nature of the institutional points that are open to change. For example, participant 9 states the transformative power of the IEE process on institutional goals and strategic plans:

We have received feedback on the closure of the PCDA cycle. It increased the awareness of quality in the institution. We updated our strategic plan. It allowed us to review our goals and evaluate whether the goals of universities

and units are in harmony. For example, we worked on external stakeholder engagement (Appendix F, 119).

Participants 5 lists the effects of the IEE process in many areas including technology at the university as follows:

We lacked a Technology Transfer Office. Our website was not user-friendly. We changed it. We also received advice on this matter. The Quality Manual was not fully mature. We reviewed the flowchart. We received an Information Security Certificate to strengthen our information security mechanisms (Appendix F, 120).

Participant 8 also states that they have taken steps to improve the information system after the IEE process:

We had problems with the Student Information System. As a result of the feedback, we received after the institutional external evaluation, we made the information system more integrated. Also, we carried out studies to review the outputs of the faculty programs. We made updates on the website (Appendix F, 121).

Participant 1 states that they have started to conduct more student-oriented studies with the IEE process:

Although it is difficult during the pandemic, we think about maximizing sports, culture, and art activities after the process. We will ask for a budget to improve our facilities such as cafes and dining halls (Appendix F, 122).

Participant 4 reports that this process has resulted in the opening of new units within the university and the recruitment of more employees:

For example, we increased the number of Research Centers. We supported the recruitment of personnel to the R&D unit. We created sports fields. Evaluation studies enabled us to eliminate some of our shortcomings. For example, the instructors corrected the deficiencies in the course catalog and made updates (Appendix F, 123).

In addition to institutional check-ups and institutional changes, the last sub-theme is the disappearance of resistance, which comes out during and at the end of a typical institutional external evaluation process.

#### *Disappearance of resistance*

The perceptions of the participants reveal that the integration of quality assurance practices into universities is a challenging process. However, through experience, university personnel learn more about quality and adopt its principles. This leads to the disappearance of resistance among university personnel. This has been discussed by four participants. In line with this sub-theme, to give an example, participant 6 states that the negative attitudes towards the IEE process have changed greatly after the process has been completed:

We saw that it taught us a lot in the process and at the end of the process, unlike auditing, it introduced new concepts to us. Second, it guided us on how to do what we do better. We received feedback. It was informative. Our academicians, who were a little distant, started to show interest more excitedly (Appendix F, 124).

Participant 8, who has the same ideas as participant 6, underlines that the IEE evaluation team has contributed to the positive adoption of the process:

There was no apparent resistance or sympathy in our institution before the evaluation. After the evaluation, I have observed satisfaction among administrative and academic staff. The appreciation of their units has increased motivation. The feeling of sympathy has increased after the process. I think the attitude of the evaluation team has been very effective in this. Employees have warmed up to the process (Appendix F, 125).

Similarly, participant 5 underlines the importance of the evaluator team in eliminating negative thoughts among people in the IEE process:

There was great awareness after the process. The evaluation team showed what the concept meant to both the academic staff and the administrative staff. Everyone started to pay more attention to quality processes. Key points were further agreed upon (Appendix F, 126).

Participant 2 adds that among those who question the necessity of this process in their institutions, there has been a positive transformation at the end of the evaluation process:

We were willing. We did it willingly. But there were also comments that it was not necessary, that it was a lot of work. As a result of the process, the perception of where it came from disappeared. The evaluation team had a

great impact on the perceptions of people in a positive way (Appendix F, 127).

The main theme with its sub-themes has been presented in this section. Below, another main theme that has emerged concerning the responses of the participants will be discussed. This theme has been named suggestions by the key stakeholders for the enhancement of the quality assurance system in that the participants while touching upon the rationales, challenges, and influences of IEE, they have come up with certain suggestions that they believe the quality assurance system will function more efficiently.

#### 5.5. Suggestions by the key stakeholders for the enhancement of the quality assurance system

The participants have highlighted that more actions can be taken in line with external institutional evaluations on the condition that THEQC takes some more steps and makes some improvements to the process. This has resulted in several suggestions by HEIs administrators. In that sense, five participants have mentioned their suggestions regarding IEE. The suggestions, for sure, are directly linked to the specific experiences of the participants who have undergone this process.

To illustrate, participant 4 states that institutional external evaluation carried out by THEQC is very standard; and this may create a problem in revealing the characteristics of universities:

Although what they do today is useful, the opportunities and conditions of each university are different. The common template does not fit. They should create special models according to the structure of universities (Appendix F, 128).

Participant 5 emphasizes that for universities to benefit from institutional external evaluation more effectively, THEQC needs to come together more often with higher education institutions:

However, I think that some institutions need more information. In my opinion, the meetings of THEQC should be much more, especially for those who need it. I know that THEQC is also so busy. But still, if they are more available for universities through meetings or even visits, universities will take this job more seriously (Appendix F, 129).

Participant 2 makes recommendations such as appointing mentors to universities, encouraging successful universities and academics working on this issue:

The pool of evaluators can be expanded to allow the system to evolve faster. Mentors can be appointed to universities. For accredited universities, their budgets can be supported by awarding them as in TÜBİTAK projects by HEC or THEQC. The expenses of the instructors who devote time to such activities may be covered (Appendix F, 130).

Participant 1 underlines that the detailed institutional external evaluation of THEQC may cause some difficulties for institutions. These difficulties may be related to the complex nature of the evaluation process itself.

It is a well-intentioned approach, but it is not good for the process to be this detailed. It can do more harm than good. They should focus on improving the existing rather than detailing the process. THEQC can be very demanding sometimes. It is necessary not to miss the essence of the work, not to complicate it (Appendix F, 131).

Furthermore, team leaders, which is another group of the participants in this study have made some suggestions regarding the nature of quality assurance practices. *It is believed by two participants* that the existence of sanctions can serve the good of higher education systems. These sanctions may include cuts in the budget of the institution, not granting a student quota to some programs, limiting the allocation of academics, and so on.

To illustrate, participant 5 believes that there are cases in which sanctions are imposed on universities in other regions of the world, which implies that imposing sanctions is not a new implementation:

Here we publish the performance indicators of an institution. We publish the results of the monitoring. But as I said, some legal obligations need to come here. Now Turkey is at that point. Whether a university is accredited, or not, there must be a difference between the two. More precisely, what is done in the world, we have to do similar things according to the conditions of our country. There are radical decisions in the world. For example, if they are not accredited, students are not given to that institution. Their resources are cut off. Resources seem to be given accordingly (Appendix F, 132).

Participant 5 is not alone in his opinions in terms of sanctions. Participant 2 thinks highly of the existence of sanctions. However, he underlines those sanctions should, by their nature, seek to encourage rather than harm.

I cannot make the sanctions accepted in THEQC. There should be some sanctions. I do not know, for example, there may be certain restrictions in the allocation of staff to that university. Maybe the financial support of that university may decrease. Some sanctions will not upset them, will not harm them too much but will force them (Appendix F, 133).

On the other hand, four of THEQC members argue that the higher education system is not yet ready for the sanction process for certain reasons. Participant 3 highlights that although the accreditation process has positive aspects, it is necessary to be sensitive and careful about its implementation:

Some countries in the world do it compulsorily. Frankly, I do not want to comment much on this subject because accreditation is a voluntary working system. It is the same in other areas. But I believe that the necessity of this will raise the level of efficiency. It may be necessary over time. I think it's too early. I think it is too early for the obligation because accreditation activities require very serious preparation processes (Appendix F, 134).

Participant 9, like participant 3, discusses that the issue of sanctions should be approached with caution with the following words:

Institutional evaluations are made by THEQC. When you say accreditation, the most important difference is that it includes decisions because there is an evaluation on a scale, it is about the level of meeting the standards. As a result, the low or good level of meeting these standards is a decision, a result.

The issue of accreditation can be said yes or no to by looking at certain dynamics, conjuncture, and readiness levels. Some countries do this. I cannot state the answer to the question of whether or not we have reached that stage in our country yet (Appendix F, 135).

Participant 4 has similar concerns with participant 9 because of the solid decisions forced by accreditation processes. The participant states that taking decisions with very effective results means positioning an institution in the eyes of the society:

You, as an evaluative institution, accredit all institutions. Accreditation is this. We say that this institution has established a quality assurance system in the eyes of the public, or we say that it has not established a quality assurance system. Until we say this, everything we do must be reliable. It has to be a solid decision. This is a very dangerous thing. This is even reflected in university preferences. Now, these are the aspects that I can call the biggest risk of this business. In other words, stakeholders can now distinguish when they are informed, they can choose by saying that there is this faculty member here, there are many programs accredited in this university (Appendix F, 136).

Likewise, holding the idea that time is needed for the accreditation to become effective, participant 6 approaches the issue of sanctions with sensitivity and hesitation:

As a result of the institutional external evaluation, there is no sanctioning power, program opening, closing, etc. The authority to direct higher education is in HEC. We also support it. We are holding a mirror. We enable universities to create quality processes over time. We share it with the community. In a time that will leave the place of evaluation to accreditation. However, it is not ready yet. If a criterion is missing, there is no answer to what happens (Appendix F, 137).

To conclude, this section has presented the suggestions by team leaders and HEI administrators for the betterment of quality assurance practices in Turkish higher education.

## 5.6 Summary of the findings

This section will present a summary of the findings.



### 5.6.1 Summary of the findings for THEQC members

The section below includes the findings regarding THEQC members.

#### 5.6.1.1 Rationales for a national quality assurance body

First, the perceptions of THEQC members reveal that quality assurance practices, specifically institutional external evaluation is a crucial need for a functioning higher education system. THEQC members had the idea that institutional external evaluation leads higher education institutions to internalize quality culture. This way, the process results in the dissemination of quality culture as it enables universities to get familiar with quality culture through experience. The findings have highlighted that before an independent national body for quality assurance, there was no systematic approach towards quality in higher education institutions.

Moreover, the main rationale behind quality assurance practices for THEQC members is internalization. The participants agreed that internationalization leads to the growing trends for quality assurance in that it has paved the way to academic mobility, recognition of local diplomas in the international arena, and the establishment of connections among quality assurance bodies and higher education institutions. Next, for THEQC members, another reason for the increase in quality assurance practices is both local and global competition among universities.

One main reason for this is that through quality assurance practices, different stakeholders of higher education including students, parents, and employers have learned more about their rights, and have started to expect more from higher education institutions as an impact of transparency and accountability of quality assurance practices.

Furthermore, THEQC members assure that quality assurance is a need for the standardization of higher education institutions. From their perspective, it can be underlined that quality assurance has been a need for the calibration of higher education systems in response to the occurrences in higher education in recent years. The findings have put forth that quality assurance practices have contributed to the realization of higher education following national standards and that such practices have reduced the educational gap in universities in different regions.

#### 5.6.1.2 Challenges of institutional external evaluation

The second theme that emerged in group one is the challenges of institutional external evaluation. THEQC members agreed that the common challenge is a lack of understanding about institutional external evaluation.

It is stated by THEQC members that it may be hard at times to establish a unity of language and behavior between team members because team evaluators may look at the process from different perspectives because of their different backgrounds and expertise. Lack of common understanding may also arise between universities and evaluation teams. Such challenges between university staff and evaluation teams may stem from the writing process of self-evaluation reports.

Furthermore, in line with lack of knowledge, the participants confirmed that there is a resistance towards quality assurance practices among university personnel. Resistance displays itself in different ways. Institutional quality assurance practices can be perceived as a workload by university personnel as they may feel that their comfort zone is threatened by the process.

This may cause reluctance towards the process. However, the participants highlight that resistance towards quality assurance decreases after the experience of institutional external evaluation. Furthermore, THEQC members pointed out that

institutional external evaluation teams are exposed to peculiar challenges directly related to the institution that is in the process of evaluation.

These peculiarities can be linked to the region where a university is established, the size of a university in terms of faculties and physical features, the management styles of a university, and the qualities of the university personnel.

#### 5.6.1.3 Influences of institutional external evaluation

The third theme that emerged in group one is the influence of institutional external evaluation. The participants agreed that institutional external evaluation is a means to determine the strengths of universities and to identify points that are open to improvement.

The findings in that sense reveal that institutional external evaluation functions as a mirror that reflects the reality of higher education institutions. THEQC members also agreed that institutional external evaluation is a chance for universities as it encourages peer learning. Learning stems from two main points, one of which is publishing the reports after institutional external evaluation. This way, higher education institutions can have access to the reports of the other universities, and peer learning occurs.

The second point is that the key stakeholders of higher education such as parents and students have a more comprehensive perspective about the quality of the system. This transparency encourages universities to make a wide range of changes. What is more, while discussing the influence of institutional external evaluation, THEQC members have questioned the existence of sanctions upon universities that receive below-average scores from quality assurance practices in general. From their

perspective, the existence of sanctions can serve the good of higher education systems.

These sanctions may include cuts in the budget of the institution, not granting student quota to some programs, limiting the allocation of academics, and so on. However, it is highly important to underline that it is necessary to be sensitive and careful about its implementation as universities in the Turkish higher education system are not that ready for such implementations.

### 5.6.2 Summary of the findings for team leaders

This section below includes the findings from the team leaders.

#### 5.6.2.1 Rationales for a national quality assurance body

First, the perceptions of team members reveal that quality assurance practices, specifically institutional external evaluation, have been operational for several reasons, one of which is massification. The increase in the number of universities in years has given way to quality debate both in the Turkish higher education system and in the world because this growth has been uneven and led to diversified systems, that need to be examined through quality assurance practices. Another important reason for the emergence of quality assurance practices is internationalization in that quality assurance is essential to increase academic mobility, which is an important element of internationalization. Team members highlight that academic mobility is given utmost importance by universities as there has been a competitive atmosphere both nationally and internationally. In that sense, from the perspective of team leaders, Turkey has focused on the developments in the world in the field of higher education, specifically in Europe. Thus, it has adopted a more global perspective through Bologna Process and has taken internationalization seriously. One more

reason for the spread of quality assurance practices is that universities receive constructive feedback through institutional external evaluation. IEE requires universities to review their policies and take more action. This function of IEE makes it a must for the ecosystem. The findings of this study in line with group two are that quality assurance drives universities forward in many areas as IEE acts as a kind of mirror that allows universities to see themselves. Plus, evaluation teams receive feedback from universities during institutional external evaluation processes, and IEE is a pioneer in spreading the awareness of quality assurance; and this process guides universities in achieving a standard.

#### 5.6.2.2 Challenges of institutional external evaluation

The second theme that emerged in group two is the challenges of institutional external evaluation. Team members agreed that the common challenge is a lack of understanding about institutional external evaluation. It is stated by participants that the difference between evaluation and inspection is unknown by HEIs, and lack of knowledge about this issue leads to anxiety among academic and administrative personnel. Moreover, the perceptions of team leaders reveal that a lack of common understanding about IEE may cause resentment among employees toward the evaluation team and that quality culture is to be internalized to minimize such issues. It is also underlined that a defensive approach is displayed as a result of the misperception among academic and administrative personnel and that misperception of IEE sometimes blocks the way for universities to display a transparent attitude during institutional external evaluation. This may result in the fact that the policies and activities of universities may not be reflected in self-evaluation reports openly. Or writing process of the reports may lack critical awareness, which leads to the non-

existence of weak points of universities in reports. What is more, not internalizing the perception of quality assurance by university personnel may cause some difficulties during field visits such as not fully understanding the quality assurance mechanism by team members. Another challenge to point out is that there may arise certain problems among team members. What causes such problems is that IEE is a long and multi-layered process which may sometimes result in ups and downs. The participants highlight that THEQC tries to minimize the challenges among team leaders and team members through several practices, one of which is a survey and informative meetings regularly.

#### 5.6.2.3 Influences of institutional external evaluation

It is announced by team leaders that IEE functions as an institutional check-up for universities. It causes several changes in universities at different points because its practice leads to the identification of the university's aspects that are open to development. It is highlighted by the participants is that universities experience a wide range of changes within their institutions because of institutional external evaluations and that IEE practice is a kind of guidance and explains that universities can better observe what they lack thanks to this practice. Another influence is that before IEE, most universities have had difficulty in establishing assurance systems and in ensuring continuity of their systems. This has caused universities to be negligent in recording their activities and in managing their data before IEE practice. On the other hand, IEE has enabled universities to give more importance to documenting their activities. Another influence of IEE, according to team members, is that universities have had the opportunity to know themselves and their competitors better, thanks to the reports written in the context of institutional external

evaluation. This situation has greatly fueled the competition between universities. Universities have realized other universities' strengths and areas open to development. This way, they have acted accordingly. To explain the influences of IEE, team leaders have also discussed the multidimensional aspect of the process. The findings have revealed that the IEE process has been effective in many aspects, ranging from the vision of universities to the sense of belonging in universities. The rectors, who are the most important administrators in universities, have learned a lot during the IEE process. IEE, in this sense, has influenced how universities have been managed by rectors. Moreover, IEE has led to changes in the organizational structure of universities such as the establishment of new units and the recruitment of new personnel for the betterment of academic activities.

#### 5.6.2.4 Ownership of quality culture

In the light of the perceptions of the team leaders, the importance of ownership regarding quality assurance has been discussed. It has been emphasized that regular in-service training would increase the interest and curiosity among the employees and increase commitment to the quality culture. The rationale behind this is that in-service training would function to motivate university personnel about quality culture. Through in-service training, academic and administrative personnel would actively be involved in internalizing quality values. Another means for the ownership of quality culture, from the perspectives of team members, is the qualities of the employees. It has been stated that the adoption of a quality culture would be realized more effectively with willing and knowledgeable employees. On condition that universities can form quality teams full of motivation and knowledge, the spirit of quality culture will be internalized, and quality assurance processes would be more

effective in all units of higher education institutions. That is why what needs to be done is to work with people who own quality culture to the end to establish successful quality assurance systems in higher education.

### 5.6.3 Summary of the findings for rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders

This section below includes the findings for rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders.

#### 5.6.3.1 Rationales for institutional external evaluation

The perceptions of the participants reveal that one main rationale behind the emergence of quality assurance practices is the dissemination of quality culture. The participants draw attention to the effective role of THEQC in understanding and adopting quality culture at universities. From their perspective, the activities of THEQC on quality have created awareness and motivation at those institutions. They hold the idea that institutional external evaluation provides institutional discipline because universities set more attainable goals and pursue those through institutional external evaluation. Another rationale discussed by the participants is awareness of different stakeholders. The participants have mentioned that IEE has led universities to consider different stakeholders. Being the catalyst for stakeholder engagement, institutional external evaluation has become an important tool to involve external stakeholders in the quality processes. The participants pinpoint that the issue of stakeholder participation has impacted the decision-making process and universities have had the opportunity to explain themselves to key stakeholders including students through IEE. Moreover, in line with the findings of the study, competition



has been promoted more with the emergence and spread of quality assurance practices. It is believed by the participants that processes such as institutional external evaluation are influenced by competition between universities as such mechanisms are used to attract more students by universities. Thus, a more student-centered competitive environment has become a common vision for HEIs. Next, the participants have mentioned that there is a strong connection between internationalization and quality assurance practices. The participants approach IEE with a global perspective, stating that, with international connections, national higher education systems have made changes in their legislations and have become more international.

#### 5.6.3.2 Challenges for institutional external evaluation

In line with the interviews with rectors, vice-rectors, and commission leaders, another main theme is the challenges of IEE. The perceptions of the participants reveal that the main challenge during IEE is that neither administrative nor academic personnel know much about evaluation and quality assurance processes. It is claimed that not knowing what exactly IEE is may prevent university personnel from making a real distinction between evaluation and inspection. The participants have mentioned that a lack of common understanding among university personnel can be overcome via THEQC meetings. Another challenge, from their point of view, is resistance. The participants have highlighted that people may have a negative attitude or prejudice against IEE, especially before the process. The process can also be perceived as not necessary by those who do not know the concept that much. Thus, this may result in the fact that institutional external evaluation is seen as a workload or as an intervention by some academic and administrative personnel. Plus, it is

stated by the participants that IEE causes people to get out of their comfort zone; and faculty members who have been in the academy for many years tend to show resistance because they have certain habits which are difficult to break. Another point that has been highlighted by the participants is that the integration of quality assurance practices into universities is a challenging process. However, through experience, university personnel learn more about quality and adopt its principles. The negative perspective towards institutional external evaluation disappears when the process is completed.

#### 5.6.3.3 Influences of IEE

The interviews have revealed that there have been dramatic changes concerning the process of IEE at universities. The participants, in this sense, have discussed institutional check-ups as a function of IEE. There is a common belief by the participants that institutional external evaluations conducted by THEQC are an opportunity for higher education institutions to ameliorate themselves through guidance and observations. By discussing the role of objective analysis of external evaluation, the participants state that IEE ensures order in institutions and encourages the continuation of quality sustainably. Moreover, concerning transformative influences, the participants have put forth that IEE leads to institutional influences. Every university experiences changes in line with its aspects that are open to development. In line with the main theme, the second sub-theme concerning influences is institutional differences. This implies that in addition to the common problems stemming from quality assurance practices by nature, the specific qualities of universities may cause universities to adopt different strategies while dealing with the practices. The participants list the effects of the IEE process in many areas

including technology, information systems, more student-oriented decisions, the establishment of new units within the university, and the recruitment of more employees for quality processes. Furthermore, the participants have highlighted that they can take more actions in line with external institutional evaluations on the condition that THEQC takes some more steps and makes some improvements to the process. This has resulted in the last sub-theme which is called suggestions by HEIs administrators. The suggestions, for sure, are directly linked to the specific experiences of the participants who have undergone this process. Some of the main suggestions include that institutional external evaluation has a standardized flow, which may create a problem in revealing the characteristics of specific universities. Conducting more meetings with HEIs would contribute more to quality culture; and allocation of mentors to universities would encourage university personnel to internalize a more positive attitude towards quality principles.

#### 5.6.4 Similarities of the themes among the groups following the findings

This study has focused on the perceptions of the key stakeholders about institutional external evaluation. In line with the interview questions, there have been three main themes that have emerged among three groups. The first common theme across the groups is rationales for the emergence and the spread of quality assurance practices. All the group members, under this theme, have discussed the strong link between internationalization and quality assurance practices. Although they refer to different aspects of internationalization, what they stress is that internationalization has paved the way to raise awareness about quality assurance practices. Under the main theme of rationales, another common sub-theme the participants have underlined is competition. Group one, THEQC members and group three, rectors, vice-rectors, and

quality commission leaders, have pointed out that the ongoing competitive atmosphere has accelerated the quality assurance practices across the world including higher education in Turkey. Furthermore, while discussing the rationales of quality assurance practices, another common sub-theme that group one and group three have mentioned is the dissemination of quality culture. The perceptions of these two groups reveal that radical changes in the higher education system necessitated the spread of quality culture and the adoption of quality culture practices.

The second common theme across the groups is the challenges of institutional external evaluation. All the group members, under this theme, have discussed the challenges of quality assurance practices. In terms of the challenges, all the groups have mentioned that there is a lack of common understanding in higher education institutions, which leads to several challenges such as anxiety, reluctance, and indifference. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that lack of common understanding causes resistance towards quality assurance practices. However, all the groups highlight the fact that lack of common understanding can be minimized through the experience of institutional external evaluation. They have also observed that there has been a transformation in the negative perceptions at universities as they get familiar with quality assurance practices and as they adopt the quality culture.

The third common theme across the groups is the influences of institutional external evaluation. All the group members, under this theme, have agreed that institutional external evaluation functions as an institutional check-up, which means the process takes a picture of higher education institutions and enables them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, under this main theme, group two and group three have stressed the multidimensional aspect of institutional external evaluation. From their perspective, due to the nature of institutional external

evaluation, each institution undergoes changes in line with its own needs and requirements, as IEE evaluates the situation according to the characteristics of each institution.

#### 5.6.5 Differences in terms of the themes among the groups following the findings

This study has focused on the perceptions of the key stakeholders about institutional external evaluation. In line with the interview questions, three common themes have emerged among three groups. However, the sub-themes have varied from each other in certain cases. In terms of rationales for quality assurance practices, which is the first of the main themes, different groups also touched on different issues apart from the common themes mentioned above. In this context, in terms of rationales, group one has linked the emergence of quality assurance to the need to achieve basic standards in higher education systems that face different problems every day. Team leaders, on the other hand, emphasized that they see quality assurance practices as a solution for the problems, especially in the mass higher education systems. While emphasizing this, they emphasized that the problems in higher education institutions can be solved through quality assurance practices and underlined that these practices are a guidance service for universities. Group three, on the other hand, stated that the changes in the expectations of families, students, and employers, who are the stakeholders of higher education, increased the interest in quality assurance. They attributed this to the accountability and transparency feature of quality assurance systems.

The second main theme that emerged as a result of this study is the challenges of quality assurance. Under this theme, apart from the common sub-themes summarized in the section above, different points emerged in different groups. The

members of THEQC emphasized the problems specific to those universities depending on the characteristics of the universities during the institutional external evaluation process. On the other hand, group two addressed several points that could arise within the team because team leaders are implementers of the process, and between universities and evaluation teams.

The third main theme that emerged because of this study is the influence of quality assurance. In addition to the common sub-themes outlined above under this main theme, different themes emerged. Group one, namely THEQC members, emphasized that the institutional external evaluation process is a transformative process in which universities also learn from each other. They also underlined that institutional external evaluation does not include sanctions. When asked whether these processes would be more effective if sanctions were imposed at the end of quality assurance processes such as institutional external evaluation, some participants emphasized the importance of sanctions, while others abstained from this issue and stated that we do not have a higher education system ready for sanctions yet. Team leaders, on the other hand, stated that with the process of institutional external evaluation, universities began to systematically document what they did, and thus they were able to establish a more sustainable assurance system. They also stated that the institutional external evaluation process stimulated the competition between universities, and thus this process became more effective. The HEIs managers, who constitute the third group, made some suggestions for the institutional external evaluation to be more effective. Among these suggestions are making the process less complicated and determining the criteria that allow the universities to be evaluated according to their characteristics.

In addition to the common sub-themes outlined above, another emerging theme is ownership of quality culture. This theme emerged after interviews with team leaders. According to the participants, what needs to be done in universities for stronger quality assurance systems is to prioritize in-service training and to work with employees who adopt a quality culture and who are knowledgeable about this issue.

Below is the table that shows the similarities and differences in terms of the main and sub-themes.

Table 15. Comparison of the Main and Sub-themes Among the Groups

	<b>THEQC MEMBERS</b>	<b>TEAM LEADERS</b>	<b>HEI ADMINISTRATORS</b>
<b>MAIN THEME ONE: RATIONALES</b>			
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>			
basic standards	+		
<b>internationalization</b>	+	+	+
dissemination of quality culture	+		+
competition	+		+
massification		+	
constructive feedback		+	
stakeholders' engagement			+
<b>MAIN THEME TWO: CHALLENGES</b>			
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>			
<b>lack of common understanding</b>	+	+	+
institutional differences	+		
<b>resistance</b>	+	+	+
difficulty in teamwork		+	
problematic process of report writing		+	
<b>MAIN THEME THREE: INFLUENCES</b>			
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>			
competition		+	
<b>institutional check-up</b>	+	+	+

establishment of assurance system		+	
institutional changes			+
<b>disappearance of resistance</b>	+	+	+
peer learning	+		

Below is the word cloud that shows the main and sub-themes that emerged in the study.

Table 16. Word Cloud of the Main and Sub-themes



In the following chapter, the discussion of the findings will be detailed concerning the literature review.



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the first section, the findings are discussed. In the second section, the main components of the quality assurance system in Turkey are presented. The next section presents the conclusion. After the conclusion, the implications of the study, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for further research are presented accordingly.

#### 6.1 Discussion of the findings

The section below includes a discussion of the findings.

##### 6.1.1. Rationalization of quality assurance

When literature on quality assurance is reviewed, it is seen that there are many reasons why quality assurance has gained importance in HE systems. It is seen that challenges such as globalization, massification, internationalization, the use of new technologies, and the entrance of the market forces into higher education have affected the nature of HE systems (Hallak & Poisson, 2013). These concerns have resulted in the proliferation of QA practices. In this context, this thesis evaluated the causes of the prevalence of QA in tertiary education systems. As a result, several sub-themes emerged following the rationalization of quality assurance.

##### 6.1.1.1 Internationalization

One of the reasons put forward by the participants is internationalization. The participants evaluated the existence of quality assurance practices in the light of the

internationalization of HE. Considering the establishment of an independent national quality assurance body as an important step, the participants have mentioned that quality assurance practices have emerged to create a higher education system that does not stay local and speaks to the world with internationalization. In this context, the findings of this study are in line with the literature. Many countries have founded national QA systems that lead to a need to create a quality culture for globalization purposes (Nobarian & Abdi, 2007). Turkey is one of these countries. After the Soviet Union collapsed at the beginning of the 1990s, internationalization in Turkey has become a crucial agenda item. Through internationalization, political and cultural cooperation with the countries in the region became important (Çalıköğlu & Arslan, 2018). In the 2000s, Turkey pursued a more active policy with the EU full membership perspective. Turkey signed Bologna Process in 2001. Turkish universities especially showed great interest in the Erasmus Program and the Bologna Process. With the Bologna Process, it has been a critical goal for Turkish universities to take part in a common platform with European universities (Yağcı, 2010). In recent years, due to regional occurrences, rapid increase in the number of HEIs, and growing international student demand, internationalization has been regarded as a strategic tool in Turkey due to its political, academic, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions (Çetinsaya, 2014).

From the perspectives of the participants of this study, it is revealed that quality assurance practices, specifically external institutional evaluation, are a crucial need for a functioning Turkish higher education system. Referring to different aspects of internationalization, what the participants stress is that internationalization has paved the way to raise awareness about quality assurance practices. From their perspective, quality assurance is essential to increase academic mobility, an

important aspect of internationalization. Adding more to the perceptions of the participants, I feel that internationalization, which enables academic mobility to become widespread, is a serious catalyst for HEIs to offer higher quality and competitive education. In my opinion, it is not possible to train academics and students who will leave their mark on the global world with a local system.

Similarly, it is highlighted that there is a great contribution of academic mobility to the system in that higher education institutions transform into multinational and multicultural campuses with the influence of international students and faculty members (Özer, 2012). Internationalization provides an international environment, increasing the quality and achieving international academic standards (Selvitopu & Aydın, 2018). Based on the obvious advantages of a more international higher education, the participants of this study highlight that Turkey has focused on the occurrences in the world in the field of higher education, specifically in Europe. Thus, Turkey has adopted a more global perspective through Bologna Process and has taken internationalization seriously.

This positive approach to internationalization has also enabled significant achievements in this regard in Turkish higher education. One of these achievements is that according to UNESCO 2018 data, Turkey succeeded in being one of the top ten countries in terms of the figure of foreign students (<https://apnnic.net/country-profile/turkey/mobility/>). In this respect, it has become inevitable to question quality in universities and to have thorough quality assurance systems. Because of the growing mobility, different methods have been used for quality improvement in the internationalization process (Tezsürücü & Bursalıoğlu, 2013). Turkey's higher education system, which is one of those with the capacity to attract many international students, has set quality as a goal to reach today's modern education

standards. Quality assurance systems have undertaken a crucial function in terms of both transparency and accountability. To realize internationalization in HE, QA has become inevitable for all universities in Turkish Higher Education (Çetinsaya, 2014). This dissertation has also revealed that the important role of internationalization in Turkish higher education has been recognized and given importance by key stakeholders who are THEQC members, team leaders, rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders.

#### 6.1.1.2 Competition

Another point revealed by this study is that competition among universities has increased quality assurance practices like institutional external evaluation. Quality assurance is considered important by universities, especially to influence student preferences due to the increasing competition. Many studies other than this study show that universities, whose numbers are increasing day by day, compare themselves with other universities to get a share of the pie. In this context, they adopt quality assurance processes such as accreditation to show that they are of high quality. As underlined by Williams (1995), in HEIs, there has been an ongoing trend towards the integration of values encouraged by marketization. Institutional rankings have been given priority because of harsh competition for more enrolment of students. Universities have become dependent on tuition fees which means students need to pay for the educational services they receive. Moreover, more and more universities have allocated their resources and motivation to marketing and branding strategies, one of which is getting accredited or assured by a quality assurance body (Hemsley & Brown, 2011).

It is important to note that quality assurance practices such as accreditation, evaluation, and rankings are now perceived as branding strategies by HEIs. There is a growing consensus on the idea that they show how to measure academic quality (Damar et al., 2020). They have become a tool applied by HEIs as an indicator of academic quality. Although they should be approached with caution, it is not possible to completely ignore these tools in terms of performance measurement and, consequently, quality (Emil, 2019). As Sinağ (2020) states, higher education is no longer an input-oriented but an output-oriented competitive process. In this process, criteria such as how soon graduates can find a job, whether a student-oriented learning strategy has been adopted, whether the research results are transformed into high value-added products, and the impact value of the journals in which the scientific studies are published determine the quality of the universities, and such performance indicators are actually in compliance with criteria of quality assurance practices. As for the perceptions of the participants regarding competition and the impact of quality assurance practices on this growing competition, it can be mentioned that there seems to be a need for more student-centered academia as opposed to the conventional ones that are more teacher-centered. To Weimer (2002), almost all decisions about any course regarding the content, the schedule, the attendance policies, and evaluation processes are made by the instructors. However, it is a must to empower students in today's higher education systems. There are many reasons why students need to be empowered in terms of the education they receive, one of which is to attract more students. To attract more students, higher education systems are to show that they provide high-quality education. To this end, in line with the findings of the study, it is important to note that universities have gotten involved in the harsh competition, which has led to the emergence and expansion of

quality assurance practices. Moreover, competition among universities has led important stakeholders such as students, parents, and bosses to be involved in the decision-making process. Through quality assurance practices, different stakeholders of higher education have learned more about their rights and have started to expect more from HEIs as an impact of transparency and accountability of quality assurance practices. Furthermore, universities have had the opportunity to explain themselves to key stakeholders through quality assurance practices. As it is seen, universities are aware of this tough competition, and they aim to benefit from quality assurance practices to this end. This situation is also seen by the interviewees as one of the reasons for the emergence of quality assurance.

#### 6.1.1.3 Massification

Another reason why quality assurance practices have become proliferated is massification. The perceptions of the participants reveal that the growth in the number of universities in Turkey lately has led to diversity and that quality assurance practices are required to standardize this diversity and to establish minimum standards. From my perspective, as a country with such a high young population, increasing the number of universities in Turkey is a necessary step for educating students and academics from different social classes. Despite the difficulties it will cause, to underline in general terms, an educated population is in any case directly proportional to the socio-economic progress of the country. Regarding the number of universities in the world, Turkey is among the top 25 countries as of June 2020 (Statista, 2020). Studies on the rapid massification of the tertiary education system in Turkey reveal that universities opened without adequate infrastructure have given

birth to problems such as the preparation, organization, planning of sources, and supporting the system financially (Arap, 2010).

This increase in the number of universities has brought the problem of teaching staff and infrastructure in higher education institutions onto the agenda. This situation has led to a decrease in the quality of education, training, research, and social service expected from universities. There has been serious damage to the quality of HEIs (Karakütük & Özdemir, 2011). Specifically, the numerical increase in universities in the last decades has caused concerns in terms of qualified faculty members (Günay & Günay, 2011). By making a comparison between Turkey and other OECD countries, Çetinsaya (2014) emphasizes that there is a lack of qualified academics and highlights that when open education programs are excluded, Turkey needs at least 45,000 academics to catch up with the OECD average for the number of students per faculty. Moreover, examining the challenges of massification faced by universities opened with the support of the state in the 2000s, Özoğlu et al. (2016) reveal that because of the state-sponsored enlargement strategy, problems such as limited trained managerial employees, inefficient distribution of state funds, unfavorable quotas, and pressure from regional institutions have been experienced in these universities. Furthermore, Arap (2010) states that these universities were established without solving the problems of the existing established universities. The city borders in which these universities will be established have not been sufficiently discussed. Adequate planning has not been made.

In this respect, although the tendency to become massive in higher education in Turkey is seen as a necessary step in terms of supply and demand balance, one main criticism about current higher education in Turkey is that massification has caused the opening of diploma mills. Diploma mills receive harsh criticism in terms

of their education standards. That is, they tend to graduate students with a lack of qualifications needed in their careers. To exemplify, attending the lessons is not compulsory. Students have little or no homework. Graduating from a program is not that difficult. Students' relevant papers are not documented efficiently (Eaton & Uvalic-Trumbic, n.d.). In this sense, the perceptions of the participants in this study reveal that quality assurance practices are of utmost importance to identify such institutions that cause public suspicion.

In the light of the main criticisms against massification, in this study, the participants have agreed that quality assurance should become a center of attention in higher education systems. They have underlined that quality assurance is needed to guarantee minimum standards among universities concerning massification. In their view, in a system that is not fully prepared for such fast growth, it is possible to argue that reaching minimum standards in terms of quality is not an easy task. That is why the steps taken by Higher Education Council and Higher Education Quality Council are of utmost importance to provide quality assurance practices that enable standardization and transparency among higher education institutions.

#### 6.1.1.4 Stakeholders' engagement

Based on the perceptions of the participants, another rationale discussed concerning the emergence of quality assurance practices by the participants is the engagement of stakeholders. This study has revealed that key stakeholders of higher education students, parents, academia, and bosses, care for the quality of university education and they are now more aware of their rights. They would like to influence the decisions about the services that they get from higher education institutions. It is important to highlight that literature about the impact of stakeholders on higher



education is presently a debated issue. It is mentioned that there exists a social contract between state and universities mainly because universities get government funds and many more opportunities (Neave, 2006). This social contract is now putting more emphasis on higher education institutions' responsibilities towards a broader range of stakeholders.

In this context, it is pointed out that the quality of higher education is questioned by a variety of stakeholders including students. Students' tuition fees are increasing gradually, and this issue has led them to evaluate the services they get. At this point, thanks to the comparative information provided by the rankings, students can distinguish between different disciplines and programs. They can make more conscious choices about where and what to study (Hazelkorn, 2013). In line with this reality, this study also reveals that stakeholders, especially parents and students, now know more about the academic quality of universities. An example for this is that as referred by some of the participants, regular reports are published by Higher Education Council, and the universities whose programs have been accredited are published in student preference lists of national examinations.

Another important issue that needs to be touched upon concerning stakeholders' awareness stems from the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Technological developments that have rapidly become a part of lives have affected higher education in different ways in this century. Stakeholders of higher education have become more cognizant of the alternatives and opportunities that they may have. Thus, different stakeholders have started to have different expectations from universities. Students have begun to criticize the nature of the education they receive at universities. For example, old-style pedagogical approaches, traditional perspectives on teaching, and

the gap between real life and the curriculum are frequently criticized by students (Gauntlett, 2005).

In the light of the points mentioned here, in this study, the participants have agreed that raising awareness among stakeholders has resulted in the proliferation of quality assurance practices because various stakeholders have started to expect to receive high-quality education to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. Therefore, governments have felt the need to place great emphasis on high-quality higher education systems and they have prioritized quality assurance practices across the world.

#### 6.1.2 Challenges of quality assurance

When literature on quality assurance is reviewed, it is seen that there are many challenges of quality assurance practices including institutional external evaluation. These challenges stem from different aspects of quality assurance practices. Quality assurance practices, for instance, are criticized as it is thought that there is no room for democracy (Harvey, 2005), and that it gives way to bureaucracy to enter in HE (Vlasceanu et al., 2007). Others suggest that quality assurance is related to evaluating certain aspects of education such as teaching. However, it is not possible to break teaching into measurable units or for instance, quality assurance aims to indicate the relation between teaching and student learning, but it is again not possible to show such a direct cause & effect relationship (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018).

Including many other reasons why quality assurance is a challenging period is that it is closely about accountability. Quality assurance and accountability are used interchangeably by many colleagues and institutions in the field (Williams, 2016). Accountability is a key concern in higher education because HEIs are held

responsible for their stakeholders in terms of funding. Higher education institutions get funding from public bodies such as governments or from private stakeholders such as students and parents. Thus, concerning the quality of education within the borders of their campuses, universities need to inform a variety of stakeholders about the decisions they make. As underlined by Aithal et al. (2015), quality assurance operates as an accountability and monitoring mechanism. Likewise, Tapper and Filippakou (2008) support the idea that quality has a contested agenda which symbolizes the battle between governments and the interest of higher education in terms of identifying the roles and governance.

All these criticisms highlight that quality assurance practices are not free of challenges. Thus, this study has focused on the challenges of quality assurance practices, specifically institutional external evaluation. This study has put forth that lack of understanding about institutional external evaluation is a common problem for the operation of quality assurance practices. Based on the findings, it should be stated that there is a lack of knowledge about the difference between evaluation and inspection among universities. To be more specific, QA officials who implement quality assurance constantly need to explain their approaches and methods. They need to constantly state their reasons for such methods. This effort of QA practitioners can cause quality assurance implementation tools to become more complex. However, these situations, which make the process more complex, are often unwelcome (Anderson, 2008). Besides negative value judgments about quality assurance, QA officers are criticized by academic and administrative staff if they are inexperienced and unable to manage the process competently. One main reason for these criticisms is the fact that different stakeholders do not have a general perception of the goals of quality assurance (Lomas, 2003). In parallel with the

literature, this study has found out that the lack of knowledge can be a problem as university personnel does not share a common vision of what quality is.

In line with lack of knowledge, this study brought into the open that there is a resistance towards quality assurance practices among both academic and administrative personnel. Quality assurance practices are perceived as a kind of bureaucratic workload or even unnecessary in some cases (Wang, 2017; Anderson, 2008). Academic personnel, one of the main stakeholders, show a variety of attitudes towards QA practices. It is argued that there is not much proof that many academic personnel welcome changes initiated by quality practices (Watty, 2003). One possible reason for the negative perception of quality assurance is that universities move away from freedom of thought and academic freedom through quality assurance (Westerheijden et al., 2007). Another one is that it is perceived as an external intervention and thought to be disturbingly instrumentalized in the hands of governments (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002). As for the findings of this study, quality assurance practices lead to reluctance among university personnel for some reasons such as being considered as an intervention, as a challenge changing the routine and habits of academics, as a kind of bureaucratic workload, which is time-consuming.

Furthermore, this study has concluded that psychological barriers towards IEE cause the process to be tough at times. To be more precise, the preparation of institutional self-evaluation reports cannot be handled effectively by some universities. The writing process of the reports may lack critical awareness, which leads to the non-existence of weak points of universities. Plus, the institutional changes can be left to the report writing stage which is a little bit late in some cases. However, it is crucial to highlight that these challenges are overcome in the process of IEE. The reluctance among university staff generally turns positive during and

after the institutional external evaluation process. What is more, IEE is a long and multi-layered process that may sometimes result in ups and downs among evaluators. Evaluators may at times have difficulty in coming to the common grounds in terms of the university in evaluation. They may experience certain challenges because of the differences in personality traits and professional background in the process of IEE. However, such challenges are overcome with certain strategies such as conducting surveys while forming evaluation teams and holding feedback meetings regularly.

Finally, the findings of this study have presented that institutional external evaluation teams are exposed to peculiar challenges directly related to the institution evaluated. To be more precise, the approach towards quality at a particular university seriously shapes the process. If quality culture is not internalized in a university that is evaluated, and if the employees at a university have incomplete knowledge about quality assurance, the process is negatively affected. In addition, the study reveals that institutional challenges not only stem from a lack of awareness of the people working for the institution but also from the physical features and location of these institutions.

#### 6.1.3. Influences of quality assurance

In addition to the rationales and the challenges of quality assurance practices, this study has also focused on transformative influences. Underlining the transformative power of quality assurance, this study has put forth that quality assurance practices cause radical changes in many different areas in higher education institutions. In this context, studies in literature, while defining quality, frequently mention that quality is transformative. Harvey & Green (1993), one of the most cited authors on quality,

also use the concept of “transformation” (p. 24) when describing quality. To them, this perspective towards quality is closely related to the concept of the basic change in form. Just “as ice turns into water and eventually steam if it experiences an increase in temperature” (p.24), quality has a transformative power both on physical and cognitive aspects on higher education institutions.

In this sense, one of the findings of this study is that IEE leads to changes in higher education institutions as due diligence which means procedures during IEE turn into a diagnostic tool. More specifically, the diagnostic tools of IEE are self-evaluation reports, site visits by evaluators, feedback reports written by evaluators after the institutional external evaluation on the universities. Self-evaluation reports function as institutional check-ups because higher education institutions evaluate themselves in terms of five main sets of criteria, which are the QA system, teaching and learning, R&D, social benefit, and administrative system. Through these criteria, as stated in the KIDR Preparation Guide, institutions can recognize their strengths and areas of development (2021). Not only self-evaluation reports but also site visits and feedback reports written by evaluators function as due diligence because, with field visits, the evaluators make an analysis of the institution and share their analysis with the institutions in the report at the end of the process, guiding them towards the improvement of the institutions.

In the light of the findings of this study, it can be said that IEE contributes to the improvement of universities as it creates an environment for peer learning. Bringing the employees of higher education institutions together at the informative meetings held by THEQC on the IEE process, providing information about good practices in such meetings, and sharing the reports with all stakeholders and presenting them to the society allow institutions to learn from each other

(yokak.gov.tr). In the light of these exchanges, IEE turns into an informative process for many stakeholders such as higher education institution employees, students, families, and employers. When other studies on quality assurance are examined, it is seen that being accountable for quality is a very important point. Approaches dealing with quality from the perceptions of different stakeholders suggest that quality can be achieved utilizing public accountability. They highlight that quality should be seen as a catalyzer for a change for both instructors and students in that it serves as a mechanism that leads to changes (Dicker et al., 2019; Harvey & Knight, 1996). At this point, it would be appropriate to refer to the work of Schindler et al. (2015), which has also been cited a lot in quality assurance literature. To them, the classification of quality is “purposeful, exceptional, transformative and accountable” (p.7). Thus, the findings of this study are in harmony with those in the literature because it can be said in the light of the interviews that transparency and sharing in the IEE process turn into an informative process and increase accountability.

Another finding of this study is that documentation mechanisms in higher education institutions have started to be taken more seriously because of IEE. This has caused the foundation of assurance systems. The study has revealed that most universities have not been documenting their activities before. Thus, they have been having difficulties in ensuring continuity and in managing their data before IEE practices. However, documentation of activities and managing them effectively enable universities to have a more organized system and in turn leads to the establishment of a high-quality assurance system. At this point, it is worth referring to Dill (2000), who comes with an organizational learning-oriented framework for universities that are successful in quality assurance. This framework has five important features. These can be listed as “a culture of evidence” (p.149); “improved

coordination of teaching units” (p. 149), “learning from others” (p. 150); “university-wide coordination of learning” (p.150), and “transfer knowledge (p.150). As it can be seen, the findings of this study are parallel in that this study has shown that universities having undergone the institutional external evaluation process have succeeded in adopting the culture of evidence.

One of the results of this study regarding the transformative effects of IEE is the increase in competitiveness among universities that have gone through this process. It should be noted that the institutional external evaluation process creates a kind of competitive perception because it allows institutions to analyze themselves and shows the place of universities both in local and global higher education systems. Studies emphasize that competition between universities has increased due to quality assurance practices both locally and globally. For example, according to Mok and Welch (2003), educational quality is not an internal issue anymore. It is not limited to regional thresholds since it has larger geographical land to address worldwide standards about education. Furthermore, this study highlights that institutional self-evaluation reports can be used by universities to push themselves forward in the competition among universities because IEE enables universities to see other universities' strengths and areas open to development. This feature of IEE reports may resemble rankings that evaluate higher education institutions based on certain criteria. These rankings, sometimes known as league tables and scorecards, have become of utmost importance in higher education because they have enabled universities to compare themselves with others in increasingly competitive higher education systems (Federkeil, 2008). In this respect, the confrontation of higher education systems with quality assurance practices has led them to question themselves. In a global market, game-changing quality assurance practices such as



accreditation, evaluation schemes, and rankings have formed the basis for a fundamental transformation. International comparisons have become inevitable for competing universities. Ranking results and performance metrics have become part of the discourse (Hazelkorn, 2014).

Another point that this study investigates is, although IEE is sanction-free by nature, how the idea of imposing a sanction on HEIs would be perceived by the participants. At this point, the participants have expressed their opinions on the two important pillars of quality assurance, which are evaluation and accreditation. Although they believe that the existence of sanctions can serve the good of the higher education system, all have pointed out that the issue of sanctions needs to be approached with hesitation and that it is necessary to be sensitive about its implementation. It is a truism that there are accreditation bodies that impose sanctions on HEIs in line with accreditation procedures. To illustrate, sanctions may be imposed on institutions in which programs do not demonstrate sufficient quality as defined in a set of aspects laid down by an agency. Such sanctions may involve the loss of the right to award a degree in the program (Wahlén, 2004). Or imposing sanctions in terms of national budgetary support for regular budgets can be an option (Kells, 1999). However, IEE conducted by THEQC implements no sanctions on HEIs. THEQC has recently started to launch the Institutional Accreditation Program, which is not within the scope of this study, (<https://yokak.gov.tr/degerlendirme-sureci/kurumsal-akreditasyon-programi-nedir>). From my perspective, in the establishment phase of universities, the criteria are to be clear and the number of students a university is to accept and which programs it can open should be determined from the beginning in line with its mission. Not keeping this process tight, providing a certain degree of flexibility, and then applying some sanctions will

create disappointment for those who benefit from these institutions. In this context, it is necessary to closely follow the steps of THEQC on accreditation.

While this study tries to reveal the influences of IEE on HEIs, it has also questioned how these influences could be more profound. As a result of this query, HEI administrators and QC leaders have touched upon certain issues which will make the impacts of IEE more powerful on the higher education system. In this context, because of this study, it was revealed that there should be an evaluation framework that addresses the unique nature of universities instead of completely standard criteria, that the IEE process should avoid such a detailed evaluation and focus on the essence of the process, and that THEQC should hold informative meetings with stakeholders much more frequently.

#### 6.1.4 Ownership of quality culture

In addition to the four main issues, which are the rationales, the challenges, the influences, and the differentiation of public and foundation universities, one last issue to be discussed in the light of the findings of this study is the ownership of quality culture. This study revealed that there is not a positive stance towards QA practices, especially at the beginning. From my perspective, one of the most important reasons for this is the lack of information on this subject. As a faculty member who is involved in quality assurance practices, I have been observing that neither academic nor administrative personnel are well-informed about the rationale behind quality assurance practices. I feel that quality assurance is commonly regarded as an intervention by governments that end with punishment or warning. Many studies in the literature have also revealed similar results. Although quality assurance is an inevitable consequence of multiple events in higher education, it has

been emphasized that quality assurance is seen as more of a burden than an opportunity (Hämäläinen et al., 2004). Because of this perspective on quality assurance, there has been resistance and criticism against the process (Anderson, 2008).

The contribution of this study is the suggestions offered by the participants to eliminate this negative attitude. One of the suggested solutions is that quality can be best assured through training conducted for both academic and administrative personnel. To this end, one main thing to be done by universities is to conduct in-service training regularly. It is voiced in this study that the function of in-service training is to motivate university personnel towards a quality culture. Quality is teamwork and in-service training may help people to be actively involved in internalizing quality values. To add to the perceptions of the participants, I hold the idea that in-service training should be done by emphasizing the philosophy of QA. Thus, these training will cease to be repetitive meetings where people participate out of necessity and will end with a more meaningful learning process.

According to this study, another point at least as important as in-service training is the qualities of employees. It is claimed that quality process should be carried out with a team full of motivation and knowledge. People who are qualified and informed are means of establishing successful quality assurance systems in higher education because people who own the quality culture are needed. One main reason for these criticisms is the fact that different stakeholders have almost no common understanding of the goals of quality assurance. In addition, when the values attributed to quality assurance practices differ in a wide range, the lack of quality culture becomes a problem in any institution. All people in an organization must share a similar vision about quality. It is necessary to decide on a common

administrative pattern to enhance quality and keep on-going development.

Otherwise, quality assurance will be considered a burden, not an opportunity (Lomas, 2003).

In this section, the findings of the study have been discussed concerning the literature review. In the following section, the main components of the quality assurance process in higher education in Turkey will be shared based on the findings of this study and literature review.

## 6.2 General model of quality assurance

The themes discussed above reveal the main components of the quality assurance system in Turkey. These components are schematized as a framework in the light of the findings of this study. One of the key elements of this scheme matches the “general model of quality assessment in higher education” (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994, p. 355). Other components are context-bound. That is, it is expected to differ from country to country. Before the main components of the quality assurance process in higher education in Turkey are discussed, the model by Vught & Westerheijden (1994) will be discussed in terms of the contributions it has made to the framework developed in this study.

Before introducing the components of the framework of this study, one important issue to highlight is that in addition to the analysis of the findings, in the formation of the framework, the general model of quality assurance was a source of inspiration. This model formalizes quality assurance over five main elements that are common in many countries seeking to establish quality assurance systems in their higher educations. These are i) “the managing agent (or agents) of the quality

assessment system” (p.365); ii) “self-evaluation” (p.366), iii); “mechanism of peer review” (p.366); iv) “reporting the results of and experience with the methods used” (p. 367); v) “the possible relationship between the outcomes of a quality review system, and the (governmental) decisions about the funding of higher education activities” (p.368) (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994).

The first element, which is a national coordinating body, is the monitoring body of the QA mechanism. This body needs to be autonomous and in charge of administering at a meta-level. It should coordinate QA practices. It should take action free from the policies. However, the agent should not force the institutions towards one direction confirmed by the state. The next component is institutional self-evaluation. It is mentioned that the researchers’ evaluations of different quality assurance systems in various north American and western-European experiences include the aspect of a self-assessment in which HEIs reflect on the main activities carried out regarding the pillars of education. The next one is peer review and one or more site visits by external experts. They underline that these professionals need to have a specific background and be considered objective professionals. A fourth component is the reporting of the results. About this component, firstly, reporting the results of the peer review team is beneficial. But a report like this must not judge or compare the institutions or programs with others. The aim should be to encourage the institutions to enhance organizational quality. The last component is the link between the results of a QA system and the financial decisions about higher education activities taken by governments. These components create the essence of a general model of higher education quality assessment (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994).

As can be seen, the model by Van Vught & Westerheijden (1994) outlines how the institutional external evaluation process operates. As will be explained

below, institutional external evaluation in Turkish higher education mainly includes the elements in this model. For this reason, the model referred to is thought to be a lighthouse in searching for answers to the research question. Within the context of this thesis, institutional external evaluation, which is an important aspect of quality assurance practices conducted by THEQC, has been researched. When the national quality assurance system carried out under the supervision of THEQC is analyzed, it is seen that although the last element of the model is not an aspect of the quality assurance system in higher education in Turkey, for the time being, the Turkish quality assurance system has the other four core elements that are included in Van Vught and Westerheijden's model. These are i) a national coordinating body; ii) institutional self-evaluation; iii) mechanism of peer review; and iv) published reports. The use of the model is relevant for addressing the research question because it shows deviations or similarities while revealing the operation of THEQC in ensuring QA in tertiary education in Turkey.

In the following section, the main components of quality assurance in higher education in Turkey and its relationship with the model explained above will be explained.

6.3 The main components of the quality assurance in higher education in Turkey

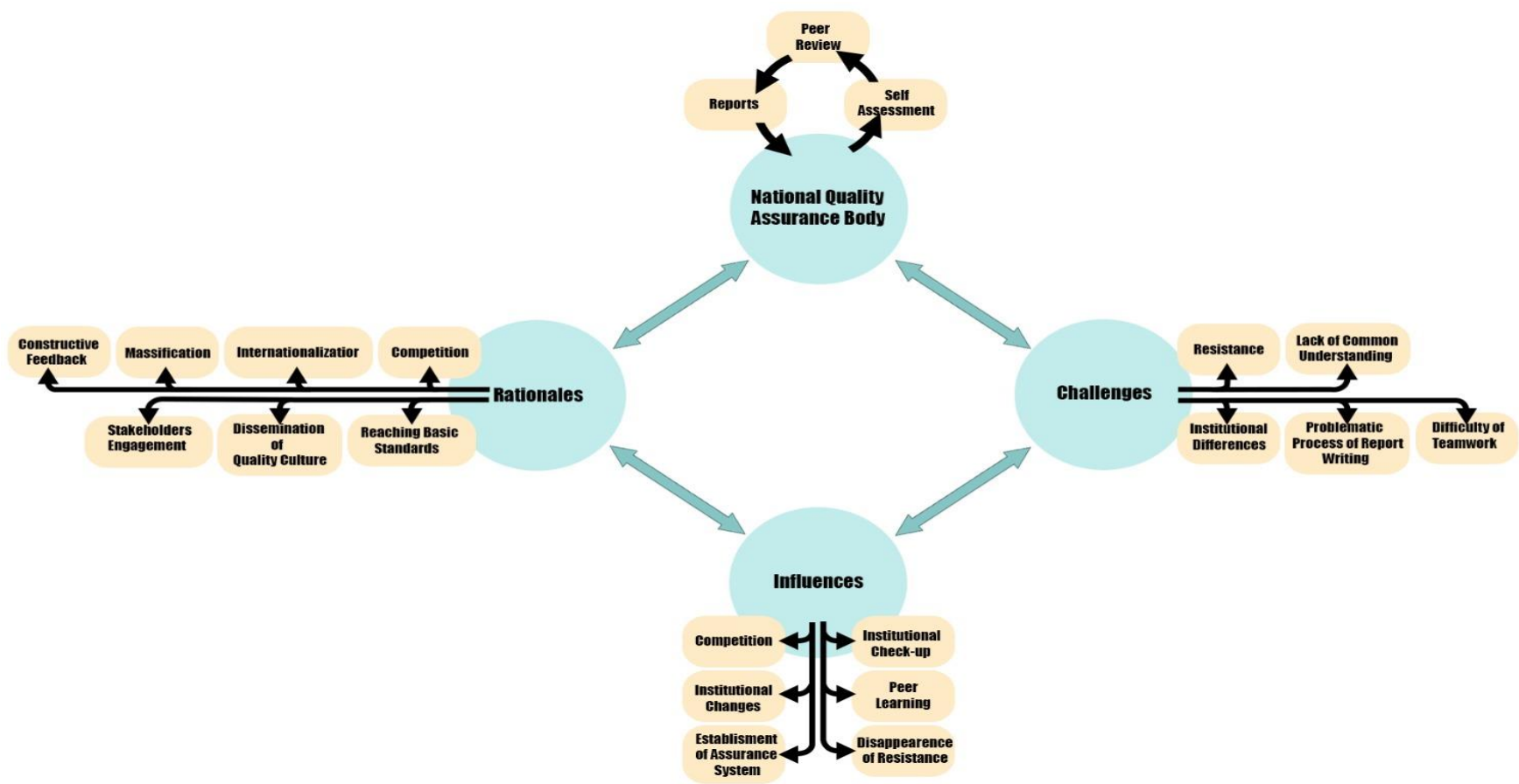


Figure 11. The main components of the quality assurance in higher education in Turkey

### *A national quality assurance body*

As mentioned in the section above, the framework formed in this study referred to the general model of quality assurance model as a guide. In line with this model, in this study, the existence of a quality assurance body, the Quality Assurance Quality Council, was examined. The practice of institutional external evaluation, which is one of the important practices of this council, was at the center of the study. The researcher interviewed members of the council and practitioners of the practice of institutional external evaluation, and administrators of universities that have undergone institutional external evaluation. Thus, the existence of an independent national institution has been included in the quality assurance framework, which was created depending on these steps taken in the direction of the study.

### *Institutional self-evaluation*

The second element of Van Vught & Westerheijden's model has found its place in the scheme presented in this study. This is primarily because higher education institutions, which have undergone the institutional external evaluation process, evaluate themselves and write a report about their strengths and areas that are open to improvement. Secondly, self-evaluation of institutions is a common practice in the implementation of quality assurance approaches.

### *Mechanism of peer review*

The third element of the general model of quality assurance has been added to the scheme presented in this study. The first reason for this is that the evaluation of higher education institutions is conducted through field visits during the institutional



external evaluation process. Second, such forms of evaluations are common practice in the practice of quality assurance approaches.

#### *Published reports*

The fourth element of the general model of quality assurance has been added to the scheme presented in this study. First, the evaluation reports of universities that have undergone the institutional external evaluation process are shared openly with the higher education stakeholders. Second, the use of transparency tools is common practice in the implementation of quality assurance approaches.

#### *A possible relationship between the outcomes of a quality review system and the (governmental) decisions about the funding of higher education*

The fifth element of the model by Van Vught & Westerheijden (1994) is not included in the scheme presented in this study. The reason for this is that no sanctions are applied against the institutions that have undergone institutional external evaluation process. If a study is carried out on accreditation, which is another quality assurance practice on the agenda of the Higher Education Quality Council, this element may be included as a result of another research. However, adding this element in line with the limitations of this study would not be a correct practice.

#### *Rationales*

The model presented by Van Vught & Westerheijden (1994) is a very explanatory guide for the functioning of quality assurance. However, this study also provides an important guideline for key points that their model does not include. In this context,

this study is valuable in terms of shedding light on the emergence and spread of quality assurance. In this context, the rationales of quality assurance have been added to the framework in line with this study.

### *Challenges*

This study presents important findings regarding the challenges of quality assurance practices. In this context, it would be a good decision to add the challenges of quality assurance to the scheme.

### *Influences*

This study is important in terms of shedding light on what kind of changes occur in higher education institutions because of quality assurance practices. In this context, adding elements that reveal the influences of quality assurance on HEIs will make the scheme more explanatory.

## 6.4 The relations between the main components of the quality assurance in higher education in Turkey

When the framework is examined, as can be seen, there exists an independent and national body that performs the quality assurance practices. Three important tools that this body uses while carrying out its quality assurance processes, namely institutional self-evaluation, mechanism of peer review, and published reports are shown in circles. Arrows are used to show the flow between these quality assurance processes. The reason for this is that these three tools are the legs that enable the quality assurance process to be run effectively.

When the scheme is examined, another point is that the reasons for the emergence of QA mechanisms, the challenges of QA systems, and the influences created by the quality assurance in higher education institutions are included. This is because this study examines how quality assurance processes operate from a broader perspective. Since it would be an incomplete approach to evaluate how quality assurance systems operate by ignoring the reasons for their emergence, the challenges experienced and the impacts they have created, this has been added to the scheme. When the scheme is examined more closely, it is realized that there are two-sided arrows between these three components. These arrows are placed to highlight the bi-directional relationships between these aspects.

In addition, the circle describing the operation of the quality assurance body with the flow of institutional self-evaluation, mechanism of peer review and published reports, and the two-way arrows between the rationales, challenges, and influences draw attention. The reason for this is that the quality assurance systems do not consist of a linear direction. They are circular and bi-directionally affected and interact with each other during the whole process while operating.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of key stakeholders about quality assurance, specifically institutional external evaluation. To this end, the participants were asked questions to reveal the operation, rationales, challenges, and influences of institutional external evaluation. Institutional external evaluation, which is one of the quality assurance methods, has been evaluated within the general framework of quality assurance practices. In this context, while higher education systems were associated with quality, a literature search was conducted on both the Turkish higher

education system locally and higher education systems globally. The literature research was also associated with the themes that emerged through semi-structured interviews.

Some conclusions emerged because of this study. One such conclusion that has emerged in the findings and is discussed in the discussion chapter is that the Turkish higher education system is directly affected by global changes like the other global higher education systems in the world. Developments such as internationalization, massification, technological developments, rapidly diversifying student profile, regional and global competition, and rankings in the context of globalization cause higher education systems to reshape themselves. Similarly, the findings of this study highlight that these occurrences have heavily affected the Turkish higher education system. The system has also questioned itself to keep up with these occurrences and it has taken important steps to eliminate the negative effects of such issues on quality assurance practices. To reiterate a few important steps that were evaluated in detail throughout this study, Turkey's Bologna Process Journey, Turkey's being one of the EHEA countries, the establishment of a national and independent council for quality assurance over the years, and the activities that this council took place should be counted.

Another result of the study is that quality assurance systems, despite their worldwide popularity, have various challenges. One of these challenges is the lack of knowledge about quality assurance. This lack of knowledge leads to negative attitudes towards the subject. Quality assurance can be perceived as a burden or interference with freedom. In addition, during the implementation of quality assurance practices, problems such as not being able to establish a unity of language between different or same parties and not having the same point of view may come

to the fore. Furthermore, since quality assurance practices evaluate different institutions in higher education systems, problems specific to the characteristics of institutions can often be experienced.

Another result of this study is related to the effects of quality assurance systems. First, whatever quality assurance approach is used, it should be underlined that quality assurance processes function as an institutional check-up. Thanks to this feature of quality assurance processes, institutions can evaluate themselves from a different perspective. In the light of the study, it can be said that these processes have enabled institutions to get to know not only themselves but also other institutions in the ecosystem. They function as a means of peer learning. Moreover, institutions can perceive their position in the ecosystem with the effect of these processes, and this fuels competition among institutions. It should be stated that quality assurance systems inform different stakeholders of higher education due to their transparency. Sharing this information with different stakeholders also affects the competition in higher education. In addition, it should be stated that quality assurance approaches have made documentation and management widespread in higher education institutions depending on the evidence-oriented approach. Finally, since quality assurance practices evaluate different institutions existing in higher education systems, they lead to different transformations specific to the characteristics of those institutions.

It is necessary to underline that the study was conducted with a limited number of participants. The findings must not be generalized to the whole higher education community. Also, while important, one study is not considered to be enough to reflect the growing complexity of QA practices in higher education systems.

## 6.6 Implications of the study

This study examines how quality assurance is perceived by key stakeholders in the higher education system in terms of the operation of the process, the reasons for the process, the difficulties of the process, and the effects of the process. In this context, this study is inclusive in terms of conveying the perceptions and experiences of the different groups involved in this process. Thus, the study allows the perceptions of key groups who experience the process in different ways to be revealed and compared. In this context, this study presents some implications for policymakers, quality assurance practitioners, quality assurance evaluators, and groups affected by quality assurance practices.

First, it would be appropriate to emphasize the importance and contribution of this study for policymakers. The findings of this study imply that the Turkish higher education system is affected by the experiences of globalizing higher education systems to the same extent, and in some cases even more. For this reason, while trying to establish a local system for quality assurance or making changes in the system, the world-accepted quality assurance approaches should be considered. To be more specific, internationalization, massification, technological developments that directly and deeply affect higher education systems, innovations that cause the information society to gain more importance, expectations of higher education stakeholders that are changing in profile -families and employers in this group as well as students included- should be considered. However, while doing so, it is critical to adopt glocalization (Robertson, 1995). This means that while considering the changes in higher education systems on a global scale, it is important to realize that acting solely on policy borrowing will not improve the existing system. It is

necessary to analyze the internal dynamics of Turkish higher education as carefully as the important events occurring in the world and to update the quality assurance system from this perspective.

Secondly, it would be appropriate to emphasize the importance and contribution of this study for those evaluating quality assurance practices. In the light of the findings of this study, it can be said that although quality assurance is an area that has gained importance and is followed carefully in the world, it is valuable to reveal the points where quality assurance systems are criticized for a healthier functioning system. The findings of this study show that one of the most important ways to overcome the difficulties arising from the nature of quality assurance practices is to explain why the existence of quality assurance systems is important for higher education systems.

The findings of the study imply that a significant part of the difficulties experienced in the quality assurance process is due to widespread prejudices and incomplete information on the subject. In addition, even if the concept is positively received by higher education institutions, the problems that institutions experience in many aspects (managerial approach, regional expectations, financial concerns, etc.) can cause difficulties in the implementation of quality assurance practices. This study is important for those who evaluate quality assurance practices, as it evaluates the difficulties that arise in the quality assurance process with its context in the higher education system.

Third, it would be appropriate to emphasize the importance and contribution of this study for those who implement quality assurance practices. When it comes to practitioners of quality assurance practices, a broad segment comes to mind. This group includes administrators of higher education institutions, academic and

administrative staff working in higher education institutions. The findings of this study show that quality assurance practices should be implemented regularly for the higher education system to work effectively.

The implementation of these practices also goes through the internalization of the quality culture, from the highest-level manager to the personnel working in the lower units. Another contribution of this study is that it reveals that the system fails when quality is perceived only as of the task of a unit or a manager.

Finally, although this study is considered local because it evaluates the functioning of the institutional external evaluation in Turkey, it contributes especially to countries establishing their quality assurance systems or want to make their existing quality assurance systems more efficient.

Because the study through its findings provides feedback and paves the way for peer learning in terms of revealing the difficulties that arise in the functioning of quality assurance, what kind of changes quality assurance has led to in higher education institutions, the mechanisms in the emergence of quality assurance from the eyes of different stakeholders.

#### 6.7 Recommendations specific actions

Considering the findings of this study, in line with the implications expressed in the above section, I would like to make some recommendations.

There are several recommendations for policymakers based on this study. One is that policymakers should closely follow developments globally while making decisions regarding quality assurance systems in Turkey. It should not be forgotten that the Turkish higher education system with 207 universities and 4,937,169 million



students is a massive one with its pros and cons. Such a large system needs to establish international networking and strengthen existing networks. It is important to cooperate with HEIs in the Middle Eastern, Far East and Central Asian, and European countries to expand the vision of Turkish higher education.

Next, although there has been a significant quality improvement, albeit relatively, by incorporating quality assurance systems into the higher education system, more support should be provided to those who implement quality assurance practices. This support is possible by increasing the number of organizations based on the information and sharing and in some cases making them more inclusive and including not only senior staff but also personnel working in other units of the institutions in such organizations. It should be underlined that the culture of quality can be implemented more effectively under the leadership of the leader of an institution with the help of academic and managerial staff who know and own this concept with all its units.

In addition, academic and administrative personnel in institutions and experts who implement the evaluation process should be supported financially. This financial support will increase the number of projects, research, and practices put forward on this subject and will diversify their quality and make them better quality.

Furthermore, there are several recommendations based on this study for higher education professionals who implement quality assurance practices. Rectors and vice-rectors, who are the highest-level managers of HEIs, need to embrace quality assurance even more. Through quality assurance systems, quality assurance evaluators render a valuable service to these institutions. Strong points and areas open to the improvement of institutions are evaluated objectively by experts. Some higher education institutions are aware of this support and receive guidance services

from external independent quality assurance institutions for a fee. In this case, senior managers must support in-service training to spread the quality culture in their institutions and to encourage cooperation with different higher education institutions to put forward projects that will increase the sharing of experience and knowledge.

One of the findings of this study is the reluctance towards quality assurance practices in academic and administrative staff. Quality assurance practices are sometimes perceived as a workload. However, it should not be forgotten that this process, which is seen as a workload at the beginning, turns into an advantage that makes things easier when the system is installed and ensures that the system functions properly. For this reason, it is another suggestion presented in this study that academic and administrative personnel, independently of the management, take steps to be informed about quality assurance, especially its causes, effects, and consequences, as per their job descriptions.

Another recommendation that can be made in line with the findings of this study concerns all parties involved in quality assurance in the higher education ecosystem. This study shows that quality assurance is a process. It is not a one-time action. With an approach that is constantly fed by the exchange of information between groups, it can always go one step further and change into a more effective transformation tool, as the process turns into peer learning.

Therefore, it can be said in the light of the findings of this study that it should be emphasized that quality assurance practices should go hand in hand with an ongoing discussion by the stakeholders of higher education.

#### 6.8 Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. One limitation of the study is that the study does not include the perspectives of other key stakeholders, who are students, parents, and

employers. The thing is several stakeholders influence and are influenced by quality assurance policies and practices. Although there is a variety of groups, this study has focused on three key stakeholders, who are THEQC members, evaluation team leaders and rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. The interviews with these groups have contributed a lot to the study in that they also have a managerial perspective. However, it would be more inclusive of other stakeholders that have been included in the study. Thus, additional research is necessary to understand the operation of the quality assurance practices, their rationales, their challenges, and their influences from the perspective of students, parents, and employers.

A second limitation is that data collected and analyzed in this study do not include the perspectives of academicians and administrative personnel. However, it is important to highlight that these two groups are the actual people who contribute to quality assurance practices in their institutions. It would have given a wider perspective to this study if these two groups have also been included. Further research is necessary to explore the issue from the perceptions of these two groups of stakeholders.

Another limitation is that quality assurance practices entail dynamic and complex processes. Its complexity is de-territorialized and re-territorialized connected to interdependent relationships both nationally and internationally. Although the study was guided by a conceptual framework formed after a broad review of literature, one study is not enough to reflect the growing complexity of the quality assurance practices.

This study was conducted with twenty-seven participants. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to the whole higher education community.

## 6.9 Suggestions for further research

Five suggestions for further research can be provided. Firstly, this study came up with a framework of quality assurance in which the rationales, benefits, challenges, and influences of quality assurance are explored. In this sense, it can be a route map for researchers as it includes practical guidelines for quality assurance practices. For this reason, another study that includes other key stakeholders can be conducted by referring to the framework. This way, the framework can be revisited, and new components can be added to it.

Secondly, there is no universal policy and implementation of quality assurance of higher education that addresses all the higher education institutions in the world. For this reason, for an exploration of new policies and implementations, the same research design could be repeated within other higher education systems that have the agenda of a more effective quality assurance system.

Thirdly, this study sheds light on the functioning of quality assurance in higher education in Turkey. Another study can make a further contribution to the unit of research by adopting a comparative approach.

Another one is that this study is qualitative. The same topic can reach more stakeholders with the help of a quantitative study and a survey. This thesis can be an inspiration for a more inclusive study in that sense.

Finally, stakeholders of higher education are not limited to THEQC members, evaluation team leaders, rectors, vice-rectors, and quality commission leaders. Rather, supra-national, national, and university-level policymakers, local students, administrative staff members, and academics influence and are influenced by quality

assurance practices. For this reason, exploring their understandings and experiences is noteworthy for a deeper understanding of quality assurance.

#### 6.10 Summary of the chapter

In the first section of this chapter, the findings of the study have been discussed. The next section has presented the conclusion by introducing the main component of the quality assurance system in Turkey. After the conclusion section, the implications of the study, recommendations, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research have been presented accordingly in different sections.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR THEQC MEMBERS

#### Consent Form for THEQC Members

Araştırmayı destekleyen kurum: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü

Araştırmamanın adı: Türkiye Yükseköğretimi'nde Kalite Güvencesi Politikaları:

Önemli Paydaşların Görüşleri

Proje Yürütücüsü: Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie

E-mail adresi: nevra.seggie@boun.edu.tr

Telefonu: [\(0212\) 359 54 00](tel:02123595400)

Araştırmacının adı: Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa

E-mail adresi: gulsah.basgurboga@fbu.edu.tr

Telefonu: (0216) 444 4 034

Proje konusu: Bu çalışma, Türkiye Yükseköğretim sisteminin kalite güvencesi politikası ve bu politika ile ilgili Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu (YÖKAK) üyelerinin, kurumsal kalite değerlendirme süreçlerine dahil olan takım liderlerinin ve bu süreçten geçmiş üniversitelerin yöneticilerinin ve / veya kalite komisyonu üyelerinin kalite güvencesi ile ilgili görüşlerini irdelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu araştırma için katılımcılarla yaklaşık bir saat süren yüzyüze görüşmeler yapılacaktır. Bu çalışma için üç grup hedeflenmektedir. Bu gruplardan ilki, YÖKAK'tır. YÖKAK, toplam on üç kişiden oluşmaktadır. Bu on üç kişi alanında uzman, uzun yıllar kalite güvencesi üzerine çalışmalar yapmış, farklı alanlardan gelen öğretim üyelerinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmacı kurul üyelerinin on üçü ile gönüllü olmaları takdirde görüşmeyi planlamaktadır. İkinci grup, YÖKAK tarafından seçilen ve çeşitli üniversitelerde çalışan takım liderleridir. Takım liderleri gerekli eğitimleri aldıktan sonra, YÖKAK adına kurumsal dış değerlendirme yapmaktadırlar. Bu süreç sonucunda, üniversiteler için raporlar hazırlamaktadırlar. Bu görevi çok sayıda öğretim üyesi ve alanında uzman kişiler yapmaktadır. Bu sebeple araştırmacı, *veri doygunluğa erişinceye kadar*, yeterli gördüğü sayıdaki öğretim üyesi ile görüşmeyi hedeflemektedir. Araştırmacı, bu gruptaki kişiler ile gönüllü oldukları takdirde yüzyüze görüşmeler yapmayı planlamaktadır. Üçüncü grup ise kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecinden geçmiş üniversitelerdeki üniversite yöneticileri ve / veya kalite komisyonu üyeleridir. YÖKAK, Türkiye'deki tüm üniversitelerde kurumsal değerlendirme faaliyeti yürütmektedir ve bu bilgiyi kamu ile paylaşmaktadır. Araştırmacı, bu süreçten geçen üniversitelerden hangilerini araştırmaya dahil edeceğine karar verirken, University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP)'ın yayınladığı "2019 vakıf üniversiteleri genel sıralaması" ve "2019 devlet üniversiteleri genel sıralaması" listelerini baz almıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcılar hassas ve savunmasız alt gruplara dahil değildirler. Katılımcıların cinsiyetleri son iki grup için eşit tutulmaya çalışılacaktır. Araştırmacı, katılımcılara mail yolu ile ulaşmayı planlamaktadır.

Onam:

Sayın YÖKAK üyesi,

Bu çalışma, Türkiye Yükseköğretim sisteminin kalite güvencesi politikası ve bu politika ile ilgili Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu (YÖKAK) üyelerinin, kurumsal kalite değerlendirme süreçlerine dahil olan takım liderlerinin ve bu süreçten geçmiş üniversitelerin yöneticilerinin ve / veya kalite komisyonu üyelerinin kalite güvencesi ile ilgili görüşlerini irdelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu araştırma için katılımcılarla

yaklaşık bir saat süren yüzyüze görüşmeler yapılacaktır. Nitel olarak toplanacak veriler araştırmacı Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa tarafından analiz edilecektir. Siz, YÖKAK üyelerinden biri olduğunuz için bu çalışmaya seçilmiş bulunmaktasınız. İsmiğiniz ya da her hangi bir tanımlayıcı kişisel özelliğiniz veri toplama ve analiz etme sürecinde yer almayacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katılım tamamen gönüllü olduğundan, çalışmadan istediğiniz zaman ayrılma hakkına sahipsiniz. Görüşme sonrasında size bir ücret ödenmeyecektir. Verileri analiz ederken ve yazarken kimliğiniz tamamen gizli tutulacaktır. Görüşme sürecinde herhangi bir rahatsızlık hissetmeniz durumunda herhangi bir soruyu cevaplamamayı ve/veya görüşmeye son vermeyi tercih edebilirsiniz. Görüşme sırasında ses kayıt edici cihaz kullanılacaktır. Görüşmenin kaydedilmesini istemiyor iseniz, görüşmenin başında araştırmacıyı bilgilendirebilirsiniz. Kayıtlar, veri analizi sonrasında uygun bir bilgisayar programı ile geri döndürülemeyecek şekilde silinecektir. Bu çalışmayla ilgili herhangi bir sorunuz olursa, araştırmacı Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa ile (gulsah.basgurboga@fbu.edu.tr) ya da araştırmacının doktora tez danışmanı Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie (nevra.seggie@boun.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz. Ayrıca, katılımcı olarak, haklarınızla ilgili bir sorunuz ya da söyleyecekleriniz olursa ya da çalışmanın herhangi bir yerinden memnun kalmazsanız Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu (SOBETİK) Başkanlığı ile irtibata geçebilirsiniz. Bu formun sonundaki bölüme atacağınız imza ile çalışmaya katılmayı kabul etmiş olursunuz.

Katılımcının Adı		
Katılımcının İmzası		
Tarih		
Ses Kayıt Cihazı	Evet	Hayır

Adres ve telefon numara değişikliğinde, bize haber veriniz.

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Bana anlatılanları ve yukarıda yazılanları anladım. Bu formun bir örneğini aldım / almak istemiyorum (bu durumda araştırmacı bu kopyayı saklar).

Çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

Katılımcı Adı-Soyadı:.....

İmzası:.....

Tarih (gün/ay/yıl):...../...../.....

#### Interview Questions for THEQC Members

Yükseköğretim sistemi ile ilgili sorular [Questions on higher education system]

1.YÖKAK'ın Türkiye Yükseköğretim sistemindeki rolü nedir? [What do you think about the role of THEQC on Turkish Higher Education?]

2. Bilindiği gibi YÖKAK, Avrupa Yüksek Öğretimde Kalite Güvencesi Birliği (ENQA)'ya geçtiğimiz aylarda üye olmuştur. Buna benzer, uluslararası kalite güvencesi kuruluşları ile yaptığınız faaliyetlerin Türkiye kalite güvencesi sistemine etkileri nelerdir? Bu tür uluslararası faaliyetlerin, Türkiye Yükseköğretiminde kalite güvencesi açısından önemi nedir? [As far as I know, THEQC has recently become an affiliate member of ENQA. (What are the impacts of the activities that you carry out with other quality assurance associations on Turkish quality assurance? What are the importance of such activities and affiliations regarding Turkish quality assurance?) ]

Kurumsal dış değerlendirme faaliyetleri ile ilgili sorular [Questions on external institutional evaluation]

3. YÖKAK, üniversitelerde kalite güvencesi sistemini yaygınlaştırmak için ne tür faaliyetler yürütmektedir? [What are the activities of THEQC to assure quality assurance at universities?]

Sürecin sorunlarıyla ilgili sorular [Questions on the process]

4. Kurumsal Dış Değerlendirme sürecinde üniversiteler ve takımlar bir takım zorluklarla karşılaşılıyorlar, YÖKAK'ın karşılaştığı zorluklar var mı? Bunlar nelerdir? [Universities and evaluation teams come across certain challenges in the process of quality assurance. (Does THEQC encounter any challenges regarding the issue? What are these challenges?)]

5. Kurumsal dış değerlendirmeler sonucunda süreçle ilgili aldığınız aksiyonlar nelerdir? [What actions do you take regarding the results of institutional evaluation processes?]

6. Kurumsal Dış Değerlendirme sonucunda üniversitelerde aldığınız aksiyonlar nelerdir? Kurumsal dış değerlendirme raporlarında üniversitelere tavsiyede edilen yenilikleri ve değişiklikleri, üniversitelerin yerine getirmelerini nasıl sağlamayı düşünüyorsunuz? [As far as I know, universities are not held responsible for the implementations of the suggestions mentioned in the reports published by team leaders who participate in institutional evaluation. (Are you planning to urge universities to make necessary changes based on the official reports in the upcoming years?)]

7. Kurumsal akreditasyon ve program akreditasyonu hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? Bu süreçte karşılaştığınız sorunlar nelerdir? [What do you think of institutional accreditation and faculty / department accreditation? (What are the challenges that you encounter while dealing with these two issues?)]

8. Yükseköğretim Kalite Güvencesi ile ilgili geleceğe dair planlarınız nelerdir? [What are your future goals regarding Higher Education Quality Policies?]

9. Eklemek istediğiniz başka bir nokta var mı?  
[ Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?]



## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEAM LEADERS

#### Consent Form for Team Leaders

Araştırmayı destekleyen kurum: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü

Araştırmamanın adı: Türkiye Yükseköğretimi'nde Kalite Güvencesi Politikaları:

Önemli Paydaşların Görüşleri

Proje Yürütücüsü: Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie

E-mail adresi: nevra.seggie@boun.edu.tr

Telefonu: [\(0212\) 359 54 00](tel:02123595400)

Araştırmacının adı: Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa

E-mail adresi: gulsah.basgurboga@fbu.edu.tr

Telefonu: (0216) 444 4 034

Proje konusu: Bu çalışma, Türkiye Yükseköğretim sisteminin kalite güvencesi politikası ve bu politika ile ilgili Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu (YÖKAK) üyelerinin, kurumsal kalite değerlendirme süreçlerine dahil olan takım liderlerinin ve bu süreçten geçmiş üniversitelerin yöneticilerinin ve / veya kalite komisyonu üyelerinin kalite güvencesi ile ilgili görüşlerini irdelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu araştırma için katılımcılarla yaklaşık bir saat süren yüzyüze görüşmeler yapılacaktır. Bu çalışma için üç grup hedeflenmektedir. İlk grup, Yükseköğretim Kurulu üyeleridir. İkinci grup, YÖKAK tarafından seçilen ve çeşitli üniversitelerde çalışan öğretim üyeleri ve alanında uzmanlardır. Bu kişiler gerekli eğitimleri aldıktan sonra, YÖKAK adına kurumsal dış değerlendirme yapmaktadırlar. Bu süreç sonucunda, üniversiteler için raporlar hazırlamaktadırlar. Bu görevi çok sayıda öğretim üyesi yapmaktadır. Bu sebeple araştırmacı, *veri doygunluğa erişinceye kadar*, yeterli gördüğü sayıdaki öğretim üyesi ile görüşmeyi hedeflemektedir. Araştırmacı, bu grupta bulunan öğretim elemanları ile gönüllü oldukları takdirde yüzyüze görüşmeler yapmayı planlamaktadır. Üçüncü grup ise kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecinden geçmiş üniversitelerdeki üniversite yöneticileridir. YÖKAK, Türkiye'deki tüm üniversitelerde kurumsal değerlendirme faaliyeti yürütmektedir ve bu bilgiyi kamu ile paylaşmaktadır. Araştırmacı, bu süreçten geçen üniversitelerden hangilerini araştırmaya dahil edeceğine karar verirken, University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP)'ın yayınladığı "2019 vakıf üniversiteleri genel sıralaması" ve "2019 devlet üniversiteleri genel sıralaması" listelerini baz almıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcılar hassas ve savunmasız alt gruplara dahil değildirler. Araştırmacı, katılımcılara mail yolu ile ulaşmayı planlamaktadır.

Onam:

Sayın kurumsal dış değerlendirme takım başkanı

Bu çalışma, Türkiye Yükseköğretim sisteminin kalite güvencesi politikası ve bu politika ile ilgili Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu (YÖKAK) üyelerinin, kurumsal kalite değerlendirme süreçlerine dahil olan öğretim elemanlarının ve bu süreçten geçmiş üniversitelerin yöneticilerinin kalite güvencesi ile ilgili görüşlerini irdelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Çalışma bir (1) adet yaklaşık bir (1) saat yüz yüze görüşme olasılığını içermektedir. Nitel olarak toplanacak veriler araştırmacı Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa tarafından analiz edilecektir. Siz, kurumsal değerlendirme takım liderlerinden biri olduğunuz için bu çalışmaya davetlisiniz. İsminiz ya da her hangi bir tanımlayıcı kişisel özelliğiniz veri toplama ve analiz etme sürecinde yer

almayacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katılım tamamen gönüllü olduğundan, çalışmadan istediğiniz zaman ayrılma hakkına sahipsiniz. Görüşme sonrasında size bir ücret ödenmeyecektir. Verileri analiz ederken ve yazarken kimliğiniz tamamen gizli tutulacaktır. Görüşme sürecinde herhangi bir rahatsızlık hissetmeniz durumunda herhangi bir soruyu cevaplamamayı ve/veya görüşmeye son vermeyi tercih edebilirsiniz. Görüşme sırasında ses kayıt edici cihaz kullanılacaktır. Görüşmenin kaydedilmesini istemiyor iseniz, görüşmenin başında araştırmacıyı bilgilendirebilirsiniz. Kayıtlar, veri analizi sonrasında uygun bir bilgisayar programı ile geri döndürülemez şekilde silinecektir. Bu çalışmayla ilgili herhangi bir sorunuz olursa, araştırmacı Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa ile (gulsahkisabacak@fbu.edu.tr) ya da araştırmacının doktora tez danışmanı Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie (nevra.seggie@boun.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz. Ayrıca, katılımcı olarak, haklarınızla ilgili bir sorunuz ya da söyleyecekleriniz olursa ya da çalışmanın herhangi bir yerinden memnun kalmazsanız Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu (SOBETİK) Başkanlığı ile irtibata geçebilirsiniz. Bu formun sonundaki bölüme atacağınız imza ile çalışmaya katılmayı kabul etmiş olursunuz.

Katılımcının Adı		
Katılımcının İmzası		
Tarih		
Ses Kayıt Cihazı	Evet	Hayır

Adres ve telefon numaranız değişikliğinde, haber veriniz.

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Bana anlatılanları ve yukarıda yazılanları anladım. Bu formun bir örneğini aldım / almak istemiyorum (bu durumda araştırmacı bu kopyayı saklar).

Çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

Katılımcı Adı-Soyadı:.....

İmzası:.....

Tarih (gün/ay/yıl):...../...../.....

Interview Questions for Team Leaders

Yükseköğretim sistemi ile ilgili sorular [Questions on higher education system]

1. Türkiye Yükseköğretimi kalite güvencesi sistemine neden ihtiyaç duymuştur? [ Why do you think Turkish Higher Education system needs a quality assurance system?]

2.Türkiye Yükseköğretiminde kalite güvencesinin yaygınlaşması için üniversiteler ne yapmalıdır? [What should universities do for a high-quality higher education system?]

Kurumsal Dış Değerlendirme faaliyetleri ile ilgili sorular[Questions on external institutional evaluation]

3.Dış Değerlendirme öncesindeki hazırlıklarınızı aktarır mısınız? Siz bu sürece nasıl hazırlanıyorsunuz? [ How do you get prepared for the institutional evaluation process?]

Kalite Güvencesi Sistemine ilişkin tutumlar ile ilgili sorular [Questions on quality assurance attitude]

4.Kurumsal dış değerlendirme yürütürken takım arkadaşlarınız ile aranızda yaşadığınız sorunlar nelerdir? [What are the possible problems between you and team members during field visits while dealing with institutional evaluation?]

5.Bu sorunları nasıl çözmektesiniz? [How do you handle these challenges?]

6.Bir kurumsal değerlendirici olarak üniversitelerin kalite güvencesi sistemi konusundaki tutumlarını nasıl buluyorsunuz? Bu tutumda saha ziyareti öncesi ve sonrasında bir değişim gözlemliyor musunuz? [From your perspective, how do universities respond to quality assurance system? (Is there a change in their attitude towards quality assurance system after the field visit?)]

7. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme yürütürken üniversiteler ile aranızdaki süreçte yaşadığınız sorunlar nelerdir? [What are the possible problems between you and the universities before field trip while dealing with institutional evaluation?]

8. Bu sorunları nasıl çözmektesiniz? [How do you handle these challenges?]  
Sürecin geri bildirimi ile ilgili sorular [Questions on feedback on the process]

9.Kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecinde üniversitelerden size gelen olumlu bildirimler nelerdir? [What are the positive comments coming from universities regarding quality assurance policies?]

10.Kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecinde üniversitelerden size gelen olumsuz bildirimler nelerdir? [What are the negative comments coming from universities regarding quality assurance policies?]

Vakıf – devlet farkı ile ilgili sorular [Questions on public-private university differences]

11.Kurumsal dış değerlendirme deneyiminizden yola çıkarak, üniversitelerin bu süreci sahiplenmelerini devlet ve vakıf üniversitesi karşılaştırması yaparak aktarabilir misiniz? Bir fark gözlemliyor musunuz? [Based on your institutional evaluation experiences, can you make a comparison between public and foundation universities in terms of internalizing the quality assurance process? (Do you realize any difference between public and foundation universities?)]

12.Kurumsal dış değerlendirme deneyiminizden yola çıkarak, yöneticiler ve öğretim elemanları bağlamında bu sürece karşı tutumlarını, devlet ve vakıf üniversitesi karşılaştırması yaparak aktarabilir misiniz? Bir fark gözlemliyor musunuz? [Based on your institutional evaluation experiences, can you make a comparison between public and foundation university managers and faculty members' attitude towards quality assurance process? (Do you realize any difference between public and foundation universities' managers and faculty members?)]

13. Eklemek istediğiniz başka bir nokta var mı?  
[Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?]

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR RECTORS, VICE-RECTORS, AND QUALITY COMMISSION MEMBERS

Consent Form for Rectors, Vice-rectors, and Quality Commission Members  
Araştırmayı destekleyen kurum: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü  
Araştırmacının adı: Türkiye Yükseköğretimi'nde Kalite Güvencesi Politikaları:  
Önemli Paydaşların Görüşleri

Proje Yürütücüsü: Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie

E-mail adresi: nevra.seggie@boun.edu.tr

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Araştırmacının adı: Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa

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Onam:

Sayın üniversite yöneticisi ve / veya kalite komisyonu üyesi

Bu çalışma, Türkiye Yükseköğretim sisteminin kalite güvencesi politikası ve bu politika ile ilgili Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu (YÖKAK) üyelerinin, kurumsal kalite değerlendirme süreçlerine dahil olan öğretim elemanlarının ve bu süreçten geçmiş üniversitelerin yöneticilerinin kalite güvencesi ile ilgili görüşlerini irdelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu araştırma için katılımcılarla yaklaşık bir saat süren yüzyüze görüşmeler yapılacaktır. Nitel olarak toplanacak veriler araştırmacı Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa tarafından analiz edilecektir. Siz, kurumsal değerlendirme sürecinden geçmiş üniversitelerden birinde yönetici olduğunuz için bu çalışmaya

seçilmiş bulunmaktasınız. İsminiz ya da her hangi bir tanımlayıcı kişisel özelliğiniz veri toplama ve analiz etme sürecinde yer almayacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katılım tamamen gönüllü olduğundan, çalışmadan istediğiniz zaman ayrılma hakkına sahipsiniz. Görüşme sonrasında size bir ücret ödenmeyecektir. Verileri analiz ederken ve yazarken kimliğiniz tamamen gizli tutulacaktır. Görüşme sürecinde herhangi bir rahatsızlık hissetmeniz durumunda herhangi bir soruyu cevaplamamayı ve/veya görüşmeye son vermeyi tercih edebilirsiniz. Görüşme sırasında ses kayıt edici cihaz kullanılacaktır. Görüşmenin kaydedilmesini istemiyor iseniz, görüşmenin başında araştırmacıyı bilgilendirebilirsiniz. Kayıtlar, veri analizi sonrasında uygun bir bilgisayar programı ile geri döndürülemeyecek şekilde silinecektir. Bu çalışmayla ilgili herhangi bir sorunuz olursa, araştırmacı Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa ile (gulsahkisabacak@fbu.edu.tr) ya da araştırmacının doktora tez danışmanı Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie (nevra.seggie@boun.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz. Ayrıca, katılımcı olarak, haklarınızla ilgili bir sorunuz ya da söyleyecekleriniz olursa ya da çalışmanın herhangi bir yerinden memnun kalmazsanız Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu (SOBETİK) Başkanlığı ile irtibata geçebilirsiniz. Bu formun sonundaki bölüme atacağınız imza ile çalışmaya katılmayı kabul etmiş olursunuz.

Katılımcının Adı		
Katılımcının İmzası		
Tarih		
Ses Kayıt Cihazı	Evet	Hayır

Adres ve telefon numara değişikliğinde, haber veriniz.

Bana anlatılanları ve yukarıda yazılanları anladım. Bu formun bir örneğini aldım / almak istemiyorum (bu durumda araştırmacı bu kopyayı saklar).

Çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

Katılımcı Adı-Soyadı:.....

İmzası:.....

Tarih (gün/ay/yıl):...../...../.....

Kurumsal dış değerlendirmeden geçen üniversitelerin yöneticileri ve / veya kalite komisyonu üyeleri için görüşme soruları

Yükseköğretim sistemi ile ilgili sorular [Questions on higher education system]

1. Yükseköğretimde kalite güvencesi sistemi hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? [What do you think of quality assurance system in Higher Education?]

2. Üniversiteler sizce neden YÖKAK tarafından uygulanan kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecine dahil olmaktadır? [Why do you think universities participate in institutional evaluation process conducted by THEQC?]

Sürece dair tutumlar ile ilgili sorular [Questions on the attitude on the process]

3. Üniversitenizdeki öğretim elemanlarının, kurumsal dış değerlendirme öncesinde, kalite güvencesi konusuna tutumları nasıldı? Bu tutumda değerlendirme takımının ziyaretinden sonra bir farklılık gözlemlediniz mi? [How did faculty members

respond to quality assurance before the institutional evaluation process? (Did you realize any change in their attitude after the field visit?)]

4. Üniversitenizdeki diğer yöneticilerin kurumsal dış değerlendirme öncesinde kalite güvencesi konusuna tutumları nasıldı? Bu tutumda değerlendirme takımının ziyaretinden sonra bir farklılık gözlemlediniz mi? [How did other managers respond to quality assurance before the institutional evaluation process? (Did you realize any change in their attitude after the field visit?)]

Kurumsal dış değerlendirme faaliyetleri ile ilgili sorular [Questions on external institutional evaluation]

5.Dış Değerlendirme öncesindeki hazırlıklarınızı aktarır mısınız? Siz bu süreçte nasıl hazırlandınız? [How did you get prepared for the institutional evaluation process?]

6. Kurumsal geri bildirim raporunda iyileştirmeye açık yönleriniz nelerdir? [What are the aspects of the university that are open to amendments?]

7. Dış Değerlendirme takımının ziyareti sonrasında ne gibi aksiyonlar aldınız? [What actions did you take after the institutional evaluation?]

8. Ya da bu konuyu ileride gündeminize nasıl almayı düşünüyor musunuz? [Or are you planning to take these aspects into your agenda in the upcoming days?]

Sürecin faydalarına dair sorular [Questions on the contributions of the process]

9. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecinden geçmenin üniversiteniz için olumlu yönleri nelerdir? Örnek verebilir misiniz? [What are the positive outcomes of institutional evaluation process for your university? (Can you give a few examples?)]

Sürecin sorunlarıyla ilgili sorular [Questions on the problems of the process]

10. Kurumsal Dış Değerlendirme sürecinde üniversitenizin karşılaştığı temel sorunlar nelerdir?

[What are the challenges that your university encounters in the process of the institutional evaluation process?]

11. Bu sorunları nasıl çözmektesiniz? [How do you handle such problems?]

Kalite Güvencesi Sistemine ilişkin öneriler ile ilgili sorular [Questions on suggestion on quality assurance]

12.Kalite güvencesinin yaygınlaşması açısından üniversiteler ne yapmalıdır? [What should universities do to enhance quality assurance?]

13. Kalite güvencesinin yaygınlaşması açısından YÖKAK ne yapmalıdır? [What should THEQC do to enhance quality assurance?]

14. Eklemek istediğiniz başka bir nokta var mı?

[Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?]



## APPENDIX D

### ETHICAL APPROVAL BY SOBETİK

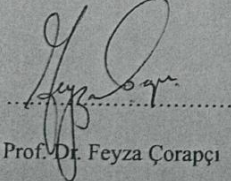
**T.C.**  
**BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu**

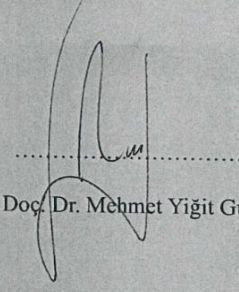
Sayı: 2019-66 30 Ekim 2019

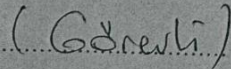
Gülşah Kısabacak  
Eğitim Bilimleri

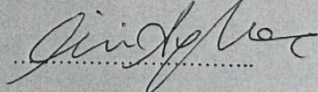
Sayın Araştırmacı,

"Türkiye Yükseköğretimi'nde Kalite Güvencesi Politikaları: Önemli Paydaşların Görüşleri"  
başlıklı projeniz ile ilgili olarak yaptığımız SBB-EAK 2019/63 sayılı başvuru komisyonumuz  
tarafından 30 Ekim 2019 tarihli toplantıda incelenmiş ve uygun bulunmuştur.

  
Prof. Dr. Feyza Çorapçı

  
Doç. Dr. Mehmet Yiğit Gürdal

  
Doç. Dr. Ebru Kaya

  
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi İnci Ayhan

## APPENDIX E

### APPROVAL FOR DATA COLLECTION BY THEQC

Ölçek geliştirme çalışması ( ) Dosya taraması ( ) Veri kaynakları taraması ( + ) Diğer ( ) (Yazınız).....
<b>ARAŞTIRMANIN ÖZELLİKLERİ</b> Araştırma, <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• çalışmanın amacını gizli tutmayı gerektiriyor mu? Evet ( ) Hayır ( + )</li><li>• katılımcıların fiziksel/ruhsal sağlıklarını tehdit edici sorular içeriyor mu? Evet ( ) Hayır ( + )</li><li>• katılımcıların kişilik hakları ve özel bilgileri korunmakta mıdır? Evet ( + ) Hayır ( )</li><li>• katılımcıların gönüllü katılımına olanak sağlamakta mıdır? Evet ( + ) Hayır ( )</li><li>• gönüllü katılım formu içermekte midir? Evet ( + ) Hayır ( )</li></ul>
<b>ARAŞTIRMA İÇİN DESTEK BAŞVURUSU YAPILACAK KURUM/KURULUŞLAR</b> Yoktur ( + ) Üniversite ( ) [Kurum adı: .....] Uluslararası kurum/kuruluş ( ) [Kurum adı: .....] TÜBİTAK ( ) Diğer ( ) (Yazınız).....

#### ARAŞTIRMANIN ÖZETİ

Küreselleşmenin dönüştürücü etkisi altında, Yükseköğretim sistemleri tüm Dünya'da daha *kitlesel* hale gelmiştir. Yükseköğretimin kitleselleşmesi ile birlikte üniversite sayılarında büyük artışlar yaşanmıştır. Türkiye toplam yüz seksen bir üniversitesi ve 7.5 milyon üniversite öğrencisi ile yükseköğretimin kitleselleşmesi için önemli bir emsaldir (yok.gov.tr). Ayrıca, küreselleşme, yükseköğretim sistemlerine *uluslararası* bir boyut da katmıştır. Yükseköğretimin uluslararasılaşması, öğrenci ve akademisyenlerin hareketliliğini artırmış, üniversiteler arasında sınırları aşan işbirlikleri kurulmasını sağlamıştır (Hou, 2012). Bu tür köklü değişimlerin yaşanması yükseköğretim sistemlerinde kalitenin sorgulanmasına yol açmıştır. Bu nedenle, yükseköğretim sistemleri, kalite güvencesini sağlayabilmeyi önemli bir amaç edinmişlerdir. Bunun için, örneğin merkezi Avrupa'da bulunan Avrupa Yükseköğretimde Kalite Güvencesi Birliği (ENQA) gibi önemli kalite güvencesi birlikleri kurulmuştur. ENQA, yükseköğretimde kaliteyi ölçebilmek için belirli ilke ve standartlar (Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanında Kalite Güvencesi İlke ve Standartları-ESG) oluşturmuştur. Bu dönüşümden Türkiye Yükseköğretim sistemi de etkilennmiştir. Özellikle Avrupa'nın bir parçası olarak, Avrupa Yüksek Öğretim Alanı'ndaki gelişmeleri takip etmektedir. Örneğin, 2017 yılında YÖK tarafından Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu (YÖKAK) kurulmuştur. YÖKAK, Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı'ndaki paydaşlar tarafından oluşturulan Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanında Kalite Güvencesi İlke ve Standartlarını (ESG) baz alarak, kendi yükseköğretim sistemi içerisinde kaliteyi sağlamak için faaliyetler yürütmektedir. Bu faaliyetlerden bir tanesi de üniversitelerin kurumsal dış değerlendirmeden geçmesidir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada, YÖKAK üyeleri, kurumsal değerlendirme yapan takım başkanları ve bu değerlendirme süreçlerinden geçen üniversitelerin yöneticileri ile kalite güvencesi üzerine görüşmeler yapılacaktır. Böylece, Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı'nın etkisi altında olan Türkiye Yükseköğretim sistemindeki kalite güvencesi politikaları bu sürecin önemli paydaşlarının bakış açısıyla incelenecektir.

#### BELGE KONTROL LİSTESİ

1. Form eksiksiz doldurulmuştur. Evet ( + ) Hayır ( )
2. Veri toplama araçlarının (anket, ölçek vb.) tamamı ekte sunulmuştur. Evet ( + ) Hayır ( )
3. Gönüllü katılım bilgilendirme formu ekte sunulmuştur. Evet ( + ) Hayır ( )
4. Başvuru formunun bütün sayfaları sorumlu araştırmacı tarafından imzalanmıştır.

2





**YÜKSEKÖĞRETİM KALİTE KURULU ETİK KOMİSYONU**

**BAŞVURU FORMU**

<b>ARAŞTIRMANIN ADI:</b> Türkiye Yükseköğretimi'nde Kalite Güvencesi Politikaları: Önemli Paydaşların Görüşleri
<b>SORUMLU ARAŞTIRMACI/YÜRÜTÜCÜ</b> Unvanı-Adı-Soyadı: Öğretim Görevlisi, Gülşah Kısabacak Başgürboğa Görev yeri: Fenerbahçe Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Bölümü E-posta adresi: gulsah.basgurboga@fbu.edu.tr İmza:
<b>YARDIMCI ARAŞTIRMACILAR</b> Unvanı-Adı-Soyadı: - Görev yeri: -
<b>ARAŞTIRMANIN NİTELİĞİ:</b> Bilimsel araştırma makalesi ( ) Yüksek lisans tezi ( ) [Tez Danışmanının Adı-Soyadı/Kurumu: .....] Uzmanlık tezi ( ) [Tez Danışmanının Adı-Soyadı/Kurumu: .....] Doktora tezi (+) [Tez Danışmanının Adı-Soyadı/Kurumu: Fatma Nevra Seggie, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi] Proje ( ) Diğer ( ) (Yazınız).....
<b>ARAŞTIRMANIN TÜRÜ</b> Nicel araştırma ( ) Nitel araştırma (x) Karma araştırma ( ) İnceleme ( ) Diğer ( ) (Yazınız).....
<b>KATILIMCILAR</b> Üniversite öğrencileri ( ) Yükseköğretim kurumu yöneticileri (+) Akademik personel (+) İdari personel ( ) Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu üyeleri (+) Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu danışmanları ( ) Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu çalışanları ( ) Yükseköğretim dış paydaşları ( ) Diğer ( ) (Yazınız).....
<b>VERİ TOPLANMASI GEREKEN YERLER/KURUMLAR/KURULUŞLAR</b> 1. URAP Ranking Sıralaması'na göre belirlenmiş üniversiteler 2. YÖKAK 3. Yoktur ( )
<b>ARAŞTIRMADA KULLANILACAK VERİ TOPLAMA ARAÇ VE YÖNTEMLERİ</b> Anket ( ) Ölçek ( ) Görüşme formu (+) Gözlem ( ) Görüntü kaydı ( ) Ses kaydı (+)

 1

Evet (+) Hayır ( )

Yukarıdaki listede belirtilen kontroller tarafımdan yapılmıştır.

Sorumlu Araştırmacının;

Unvanı-Adı-Soyadı: Gülsol Kısabacak Başgırbaz

Tarih: 14.07.2020

İmza: 



YÜKSEKÖĞRETİM KALİTE KURULU ETİK KOMİSYONU

BAŞVURU DEĞERLENDİRME FORMU

ARAŞTIRMA ADI:
SORUMLU ARAŞTIRMACI/YÜRÜTÜCÜ:
DEĞERLENDİRME TARİHİ:
KARAR:
1. Kabul ( ) Açıklama: .....
2. Düzeltme gereklidir ( ) Açıklama: .....
3. Red ( ) Açıklama: .....

Komisyon Üyelerinin;

Unvanı-Adı-Soyadı:

İmza:

Unvanı-Adı-Soyadı:

İmza:

Unvanı-Adı-Soyadı:

İmza:

## APPENDIX F

### QUOTATIONS IN TURKISH

1. Türkiye bu konuda geri kaldı. Sistematik bir yaklaşım yoktu. Bir bütün olarak, kalite güvencesi bilinci oluşturuldu. THEQC bunu nasıl yapıyor? Elbette kalite kültürü oluşturmak için eğitim faaliyetleri yürütülmektedir. Üniversitelerde kalite güvence komisyonlarının kurulmasına yardımcı oluyorlar. Haber bültenleri yayınlamak, ilerleme raporlarını paylaşmak ve aynı zamanda bir mentorluk kurumu olarak çalışmak gibi bir görevimiz var.
2. Diğer bir deyişle üniversitelerin dış değerlendirmeden geçmesi son derece önemli bir katkı. Böylece üniversitelerin kalite konusundaki farkındalıkları artıyor. Kalite kültürünün yaygınlaştırılması açısından önemli bir misyona sahibiz. Üniversitelere kurumsal değerlendirme, kurumsal akreditasyon ve program akreditasyonları konusunda rehberlik ediyoruz. Bu anlamda Türk yükseköğretim kurumlarına bizzat rehberlik ediyoruz.
3. Ulusal bir kalite güvence sisteminin kurulması. Üniversitelerde iç kalite güvence süreçlerinin desteklenmesi ve bu sürecin dış değerlendirilmesi. Sadece değerlendirme yapıp orada durmuyorsun. Siz de sistemin gelişimine katkıda bulunuyorsunuz. İkinci görevimiz ise akreditasyon hizmeti veren kuruluşları yetkilendirmek. Üçüncüsü ve en önemlisi bu rollerden hangisi daha değerli diye sorarsanız bence kalite güvence kültürünün yaygınlaşmasıdır. Çünkü eğer kalite kültürü yoksa bu çabalar çok resmi bir şekilde olacak ve sistem içinde ne içselleştirilecek ne benimsenecek ne de sürdürülebilir olacaktır.
4. Biliyorsunuz Türkiye'de bu faaliyetler, yükseköğretimde kalite ve akreditasyon son yıllarda ivme kazandı. Daha önce Türkiye'de kalite konusunda faaliyet gösteren çok az kuruluş vardı. Bazı üniversiteler, bazı programlar yabancı kurumlardan akredite edildiler. Bu konuda farkındalığı olmayan çok fazla üniversite ve program vardı. Tabii ki YÖKAK bu konuda rol oynuyor ve bu farkındalığı artırmak için düzenli toplantılar yapıyor.
5. YÖKAK'ın kurulması temsil ve tanınma açısından bir dönüm noktasıdır. Hem öğrenci hem de akademik hareketlilik için çok önemli kapılar açmakta. Türkiye daha önce bu konuda geride kalmıştı. Sistematik bir yaklaşım yoktu. Daha önce ulusal tanınırlığa sahip bağımsız bir kurum yoktu. Yani özerk bir kurum yoktu.
6. Farklı paydaşlar için farklı faydalar var. Öğretim üyeleri hareketlilikte de öne geçmekte, öğrencilerin mezuniyetleri uluslararası arenada tanınmaktadır. Değerlendirme süreçleri sayesinde projelerde kaynak bulma ve finansman bulma oranı artmaktadır. Karşılıklı anlaşmaların yolu açılıyor. Bu da bir başka avantaj.
7. Dünyada ve Avrupa'da yıllardır bu işi yapan kuruluşlarla aynı çerçevede bu olaya daha doğru bakabilmek gerekiyor. Örgütlerin birbirine katkı sağlamasını sağlamak gerekir. Bu üniversiteyi kendi ülkemizde akredite ettiğimizi ve kaliteli faaliyetler yürüttüğümüzü söylemek yeterli değildir.

8. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, elbette uluslararasılaşma boyutu tüm kurum ve kuruluşlar için önemlidir. Değişen dünya koşullarında yaşadığımız pandemi süreci bu gerçeği farklı bir şekilde ortaya koymuştur. Bir yandan uluslararası konjonktürü takip etmek önemli ve değerli. Deneyim paylaşımı konusunda sınırlarınızı ne kadar genişletirseniz, çalışmalarınız o kadar güncel paydaşlara katkı sağlayacaktır. Doğu'dan Batı'ya bu süreçleri başlatan ülkelerin deneyimlerinden çok uzun zaman önce öğrenmeliydik.

9. Evet, bildiğiniz gibi dünyada yükseköğretimde standardizasyon çok önemli... Ülkemizde birçok üniversite var. Özellikle son yıllarda birçok üniversite kurulmuştur. Ancak bu kurumları kurmaktan ziyade eğitimlerinin kalitesi ve farklılık gösterdiği alanlar çok önemli. Ülkenin her yerindeki üniversitelerde aynı bölümlerde okuyan öğrencilerin eğitimlerinin aynı olmasını beklemek çok zor. Ancak, en azından birbirine yaklaşabilir. Dünyanın hiçbir yerinde aynı olması pek mümkün değil. Ancak bence YÖKAK'ın çok önemli bir görevi var, en azından belli bir standardın üzerinde olmasını sağlamak ve üniversiteleri standartlar açısından yakınlaştırmak.

10. Burada Amerika'da bir okulda, Hindistan'da bir okulda, Anadolu'da bir üniversitede ders verilmesi açısından fark olabildiğince azaltılır ve verim kalıcı ve sağlıklı bir şekilde sağlanır... düzenleyici faaliyetlerle kendilerini sürekli geliştirirler.

11. Eğitim, öğretim, araştırma ve toplumsal katkı... ve bu önemli hizmet ve işlevleri yerine getirirken elbette belirli standartlar, ulusal standartlara uygun olarak yürütülebilmesi için önemli ve değerlidir.

12. Veliler üniversite seçerken çocuklarının gelecekteki mesleklerinin yetkinliklerine sahip olmalarını isterler. İş dünyası... Kurumsal şirketler, uluslararası dünyayla bütünleşmiş, rekabet avantajı sağlayan ve başarılı işlere imza atan mezunlara ulaşmak istiyor.

13. Artık hangi üniversitelerin akredite olduğu öğrenci tercih kılavuzlarında yer aldığını biliyoruz. Sonuç olarak akredite olmuş üniversitelerin öğrenci tercihlerinde bir kriter olarak tercih sebebi olarak değer kazandığını düşünüyorum. Ve tabii ki özellikle devlet üniversitelerinde araştırma üniversitesi olmak ve daha fazla imkandan yararlanmak, akreditasyon ve bunun gibi şeyler gerekiyor.

14. Türkiye'de faaliyet gösteren kurum ve kuruluşları tanıyan ve yetkilendiren YÖKAK'ın uluslararası bir şemsiye kurum tarafından değerlendirilmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır. Paydaşlarının Türk yükseköğretim sistemindeki temsilini elbette bir üst lige taşıyacaktır. Sadece bunu yapmak, ülkenizdeki kalite standartlarını düzenlemek ve YÖKAK aracılığıyla kurumları akredite etmek bana göre yeterli değil. Tek başına kuralları belirlemenin çok anlamlı olmadığını düşünüyorum. Çünkü küresel bir dünyada diğer üniversiteler ve diğer eğitim kurumları ile rekabet eden bir sistemin içindeyiz.

15. Şunu söyleyeyim, aslında kaliteli altyapının güçlendirilmesinin çok önemli bir konu olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bu bağlamda eğitim kalitesinin bir Şura aracılığıyla yükseltilmesi eğitim sistemimizin geleceği için çok önemlidir. Bunu vazgeçilmez bir

adım olarak görüyorum. YÖKAK'ın işlevini çok önemli buluyorum. Artık Türkiye'nin yükseköğretim alanında dünya ile rekabet edebilecek bir kaliteye sahip olduğunu belgelemesi gerekiyor. Elbette dünyadaki modelleri burada, Türkiye'de uygulamak da çok önemli.

16. Vakıf üniversiteleri kalite güvence uygulamalarından farklı şekillerde etkilenmektedir. Gerçekten söz sahibi olmak için kaliteli değerlendirmeleri ciddiye alırlar. Örneğin bazı alanlarda program açmalarında bu tür değerlendirmeler faydalı olabilir. Ayrıca iyi ve rekabetçi olduklarını kanıtlamak isterler ve bunu kanıtlamak için değerlendirme ve akreditasyon süreçlerini bir fırsat olarak görürler.

17. Kurum üst yönetiminin liderlik bakış açısındaki farklılıklar veya yükseköğretim kurumlarının yerel bakış açıları açısından bazı zorluklar olabilir, bazı zorluklar olabilir veya farklı bakış açıları nedeniyle olgunluk seviyeleri daha hızlı ilerleyebilir. veya daha yavaş.

18. Önemli olan insandır. Ve tabii ki en önemlisi rektör. Yani rektör bu işi çok iyi biliyor, benimsiyor, içselleştiriyor ve vurguluyorsa üniversitesini de buna göre yönlendirmeli ve ikna etmelidir. Yani bir üniversitenin türünün o kadar etkili olmadığını görüyorsunuz. Önemli olan üniversite kültürüdür ve bu kültür rektörlerin davranışlarına da açıkça yansımıştır.

19. Ama hala bir içselleştirme meselesi var. En üst kademeden en alt kademeye kadar personelin değerlendirme sürecine dahil edilmesi çok önemlidir. Bu işin ne olduğunu, ne yaptığını, neden gerekli olduğunu, sonuçlarının üniversiteye neler getireceğini bilmeleri ve içselleştirmeleri gerekiyor.

20. Bilgi eksikliğinden dolayı sıkıntı yaşayabiliriz. Bizi diğer kurumlarla karıştırabilirler. Aslında onların üzerinde bir çatı kuruluştur... Bir diğer sorun da farkındalık eksikliği. Tüm kilit paydaşlar kurumsal dış değerlendirmeye dahil edilmelidir. İdari personel de bütünün bir parçasıdır. Sisteme katkı sağlar. Ancak idari kadronun hazırlıklı olmadığını görüyorsunuz. İdari personel yabancı dil konuşamaz. Uluslararası ofisinizde İngilizce konuşan bir çalışanınız var mı? Bu tür sorunlara çözüm bulmak gerekiyor. Bu sorunlar hizmet içi eğitimlerle çözülmelidir.

21. YÖKAK olarak bu organizasyonlarda karşılaştığımız temel sorunlardan biri de farkındalık sorunudur. Aslında bu sorun akreditasyonun birçok alanında yaşanmaktadır. Sadece yüksek öğrenimde değil. Kuruluşların aslında öz değerlendirmelerini doğru bir şekilde yapmaları ve tüm paydaşları sürece dahil etmeleri gerekir. Sisteme ne kadar çok paydaş dahil olursa, farkındalık o kadar artacaktır. Hem üniversiteler hem de YÖKAK bu sorunları daha kolay çözecektir.

22. Bu girdi çeşitliliği ile her şeyi aynı düzeye getirmek kolay değildir. Kontenjanı yüksek bir bölümde eğitim kalitesine daha az yer olabilir. Bu her zaman bireylerin veya öğretim üyelerinin elinde değildir. Ya da kurumun fiziki altyapısı ya da eğitmen sayısı... Kalitenin kendisini etkileyecek pek çok şey var. Dolayısıyla bu kültürü yaymaya çalışırken kurumsal bir direnişle karşılaşıyorsunuz. Örneğin, bazı daha büyük ölçekli coğrafi özellikler vardır. Son yıllarda terör olayları veya depremler nedeniyle rapor yazamayan üniversiteler olmuştur.

23. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme açısından kendimizi sürekli yeniledik. Dokümantasyon stratejimiz, önceliklerimiz, saha ziyaretlerimiz üniversitenin büyüklüğüne göre değişiklik gösterebilir. İlk olarak, biraz daha detaylı bir site ziyaret programı oluşturduk. Kriterlerimizi çeşitlendirdik. Bunlar hep değerlendirme sürecinde karşılaştığımız bazı sorunlardan kaynaklandı. Bazen saha ziyareti çok büyük bir üniversite için ise tamamını göremezsiniz, yani bilirsiniz, üniversite açısından bir değerlendirme yapmanız gerekir. Ziyaret sayısı bakımından büyük üniversiteler olduğu gibi küçük olan üniversiteler de bulunmaktadır.

24. Örneğin program akreditasyonları var. Yabancı kuruluşlar geliyor. Türkiye'nin başka kuruluşları da var. Hepsi aynı şeyi yapmaya çalışıyor. Hedeflenen öğrenci çıktınıza nasıl ulaşırsınız? Mühendislikte farklı, laboratuvarınız var, projeniz var. Sosyolojide durum farklıdır. Yabancı Diller de farklıdır. Ama hepsinin amacı aynıdır, amaçları uygun çıktılar sağlamaktır. Dolayısıyla bir buluş, farklı bir şey olarak algılanınca üniversitelerde direniş oluyor. Çünkü akademisyenler değerlendirme süreçlerini sevmezler. Bürokrasiden hoşlanmazlar.

25. Yani bir denetim olmaksızın rahat yaşayan insanlar artık birçok şeye mecbur kalıyor. Birçok şeye uyum sağlamak zorundalar. Birçok şeyi yerine getirmek zorundalar. Bu yüzden başlangıçta bir direnç var. Ama şimdi bu direnç kayboluyor. Yani bir veya iki yılın sonunda direnç giderek azaldı. Herkes bu eserin değerini anladı. Bunun yapılması gerektiğini anladılar.

26. Bir de şöyle bir şey var. Son yıllarda yükseköğretim kalitesi ve akreditasyon faaliyetleri dediğim gibi Türkiye'de revaçta. Üniversitelerimizde çalışan öğretim üyeleri, şu anda veya geçmiş yıllarda genç öğretim üyelerinde de aynı şeyi yaşayabiliyoruz. Bu konuda direniş olabilir.

27. Şimdi burada farklı zorluk seviyeleri var. Bireysel düzeyde zorluktan bahsederseniz, zihinsel direnç vardır. Pek çok yeniliğin kuruma entegrasyonunda ortaya çıkabilecek bir şeyi kuruma getirmeye çalıştığınızda direnç var. Değerlendiriciler şöyle şeyler söylemek zorunda kalabilirler: Ölçme ve değerlendirme yaklaşımı çeşitlendirilmeli; değiştirmen gerekiyor. Bazı öğretim üyeleri bu tür noktalara direnç göstermektedir.

28. Tüm değerlendiricilerin sürece aynı bakış açısıyla yaklaşmasını beklemek, zamanla olgunluk seviyesinin artmasını gerektiren bir konudur. Bu nedenle elbette puan derecelendirmelerinde, bakış açılarında ve değerlendirmelerde bazı farklılıklar olabilir.

29. Ziyaret açısından büyük üniversiteler var, küçük üniversiteler var. Dolayısıyla zaman zaman burada bir farklılık olduğunu fark ettik. Elbette değerlendiricileri çok iyi yetiştirmemiz gerekiyor. Bu konuya büyük önem veriyoruz. Eğitimlerde davranışsal boyuttan değerlendirme kriterlerine, objektiflikten etik önermeye kadar değerlendiricilere birçok noktayı açıklıyorsunuz. Bu konuyla ilgili zaman zaman sorunlar olabilir.

30. Bazı yaygın sorunlar vardır. Kuruma dışarıdan bir ekip gönderirsiniz. Ayrıca ekip liderlerinin yetiştirilmesi, standardizasyonun sağlanması, dil birliğinin sağlanması,

raporların güvenilirliğinin sağlanması, etik davranış sergilenmesi, prosedürlerin işletilmesi... bunlar zorlu noktalar. Çok nadiren de olsa bazı takım arkadaşlarının kurumlar tarafından yayınlanan raporlara tam olarak hazırlanamadığı zamanlar oluyor. Süreci sürekli iyileştirmek, memnuniyet ve verimliliği artırmak için her yıl 360 derece, çok yönlü geri bildirim toplantıları düzenlenmektedir.

31. Değerlendirme raporları geliyor. Bir önceki yıla göre yapılanların tamamlanmasına bakılır. Dolayısıyla bu iş ciddiye alınır. Bu raporları tamamlamayan üniversiteler uyarılır. Hemen hemen tüm üniversiteler bir şekilde YÖKAK'ın talep ettiği standartlara uygun olsun ya da olmasın bir değerlendirme raporu hazırlamaktadır. Ancak bu değerlendirme raporlarını yaparken bazen kendilerini daha iyi göstermek için abartıyorlar veya olduğundan daha iyi görünmesini sağlıyorlar.

32. Bu raporlar kurumlar için başlı başına bir rehber niteliğindedir. Yani üniversitelerin hangi alanlarda eksiklikleri olduğunu ve hangi alanlarda daha iyi hazırlanmaları gerektiğini çok iyi aktarıyorlar. Bu raporlar aslında kurumların başka hiçbir şey yapmadan gelişmesine çok ciddi bir adımdır.

33. Kendi öz değerlendirme raporlarını hazırlarlar. Üniversiteler, site ziyaretlerinden sonra çıkarımlarda bulunur. Güçlü yönlerini ve gelişmeye açık yönlerini ve nasıl geliştiklerini görürler. Raporlar röntgen çeker ve kurumların dışarıdan nasıl algılandığını gösterir. İyi yaptığını düşünüyorsun, ama güncel misin? Dünyayla uyumlu musun? Kaynaklar etkin bir şekilde kullanılıyor mu? Sorunları doğru tespit etmek önemlidir, dışarıdan bir gözün size söylemesi gerekir.

34. Kurumsal dış değerlendirmelerden sonra elbette biliyorsunuz ki raporlarımızı şeffaf bir şekilde yayınlıyoruz... Böylece geçmişten günümüze nasıl bir değişim olduğunu görebiliyoruz. Bence bu inanılmaz bir veri. Dolayısıyla bu anlamda önlem almak için tüm bunları yayınlıyoruz... Bir anlamda geri dönüş var. Böyle bir katkısı olduğunu söyleyebilirim ve bu raporlar kurumların gelişmesine yardımcı oldu çünkü her seferinde o raporlara bakarak kendilerini geliştiriyorlar.

35. Ne yapılmaz! Yani YÖKAK gerçekten çok çalışıyor. Her şeyden önce değerlendiriciler, üniversitelerin bir kalite güvence sistemi oluşturmalarına yardımcı olur. Rektörler bilgilendirildi. Rektörler kurumlarında kalite kurulları oluşturur. Değişiklikler en üstten en alt birimlere doğru gerçekleşir. Ardından YÖKAK, üniversitelerin ve birimlerin kalite ile ilgili tüm personelinin eğitimini gerçekleştirir.

36. Dış değerlendirme sürecindeki yükseköğretim kurumları, ilk uygulamasından bu yana önemli sayıda değerlendirici ile görüşmüştür. Elbette bu dış değerlendirme sürecini daha etkin kılmak için sürece dahil olan tüm tarafların olgunluk düzeylerinin yükseltilmesi adına eğitim verilmesi önemlidir. Bunlar tabii ki yükseköğretim kurumlarının üst yönetimi, kalite komisyonları, değerlendiriciler, ekip başkanlarımız. Aslında birçok eğitim, çalıştay ve bilgilendirme faaliyetinden sonra geri bildirim alınmaktadır.

37. Raporların yayınlanması bilinçli veli ve öğrenciler için de önemlidir. YÖK web sitesine girip üniversitelerin özellikleri hakkında bilgi ararlar. Veliler ve öğrenciler bir üniversiteye kaydolmadan önce birçok soru soruyorlar. Üniversitelerin buna

hazırlıklı olması gerekiyor. Bu öğrencilerin ilgisini çekmesi açısından önemlidir. Üniversiteler gelişmezse öğrenciler bunu kolayca anlar.

38. Bu raporların gelişmeye açık yönleri de kurumlara bildirildiği için genel tablonun çıkarılması açısından önemlidir. Bu nedenle yükseköğretim kurumlarının genel durumu değerlendirilerek veya yükseköğretim sistemi içinde politika üretme açısından en sorunlu ya da en iyileri değerlendirilerek bazı politikalar geliştirilmektedir. Şimdi elbette raporların yayınlanması önemli bir durum biliyorsunuz. Bunun zamanla kabul edildiğini görmek de sevindirici. Tabii ki, akran öğrenmesi için önemlidir.

39. Geçen yıl tüm devlet üniversitelerine programlarını izleyebilecekleri bir yazılım verdik. Bu ülkenin kaynaklarını geliştirecek yazılımlar. Öncelikle bu tür sorunları tespit ediyoruz. Daha sonra üniversitelere bilgi veriyoruz. İlk yıllar diyorlardı ki... Bunu yapamayız. Bu bilgiyi nerede bulacağız? Bu gerçekten ciddi bir engel mi? Evet. Şimdi, YÖKAK olarak, örneğin onlara yardım etmenin bir yolunu veya nasıl yapılacağını bulmaya çalışıyoruz. Amacımız kurumlarımızı geliştirmek ve iyileştirmektir. Bunun için sadece değerlendirmekle kalmamalı, yol gösterici boyutumuz olan know-how ile beslemelisiniz. Birbirimizden öğrenme süreci çok önemli olduğu için iyi uygulamaları görünür kılmaya çalışıyoruz.

40. Bu anlamda önlem almak için tüm bunları yayınlıyoruz. Bunları da toplantılarda paylaşıyoruz. Tüm bunların önemli sonuçlarını ister bilgilendirme toplantılarında ister çalıştaylarda üniversitelerle paylaşıyoruz. Bu sayede yükseköğretim kurumları değerlendirme raporlarını ve eğitimleri dikkate alır.

41. Yıllar içinde, yükseköğretim sistemimizde üniversite sayısı artmıştır. Türkiye, alanında en fazla üniversite öğrencisine sahip ülkelerden biridir. Tabii benim açımdan bu trend gelecekte de bir anlamda devam edecek.

42. Ülkemizde bu alanda hızlı ve dengesiz bir büyüme yaşanmaktadır. En yüksek brüt okullaşma oranı Türkiye'dedir. Tabii bunda açık öğretimin de etkisi var. Son yıllarda kontenjanların dolmadığına dair şikayetler var. Bu durumda kaliteli bir yükseköğretime ihtiyaç duyulmuştur. Bu sayede rekabet bilinci gelişecek ve belgelendirme mekanizmalarına olan ihtiyaç artacaktır. Kaliteye duyarsız kalan kurumlar düşecek.

43. Kalite güvencesinin birçok nedeni olduğunu düşünüyorum. Örneğin, kalite güvence prosedürleri üniversitelerin kendilerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olur. Ayrıca son yıllarda açılan birçok üniversite var. Kalite güvence prosedürleri, bu üniversitelerin ne yaptığını ve ne kadar kaliteli olduklarını anlamamıza yardımcı olur.

44. Üniversiteler çıktı odaklı bir yapıya kavuşmaktadır. Eskiden araştırma savının yayına dönüşüp dönüşmediğinden bahsediyorduk. Günümüzde üniversitelerin işlevi değişmiştir. Üniversiteler artık daha çıktı odaklı. Türkiye'de iki yüzden fazla üniversite var. Bu üniversitelerin bazıları genç, bazıları köklü, bazıları orta ölçeklidir. Baktığınızda bir mozaik var.



45. Dünyadaki gelişmeler bir anlamda bunu gerekli kılmıştır. Küreselleşme ve öğrenci ve akademik hareketlilik gibi konular, sistem ve programların uyumlu olmasını ve kalitelerinin güvence altına alınmasını gerekli kılmıştır. AB'ye uyum sürecinde başlattığı Bologna Süreci'nin yanı sıra Türkiye, Avrupa'nın toplam kalite felsefesini de modellemeye çalışmıştır.

46. Üniversitelerin sadece yerelde değil, uluslararası alanda da rekabet etmesi önemlidir. Üniversiteler tercih edilmek istiyor. Bu durumda, sistemlerini geliştirmekten başka seçenekleri yok gibi görünüyor. Ayrıca yarış sadece yerel üniversiteler arasında değil, dünya çapında çok gelişmiş yükseköğretim sistemleri var. Onlar da bu yarışta.

47. Tercih edilebilir bir sistem olmak önemlidir. Potansiyel öğrenciler akreditasyon arıyor. Paydaşlar bu konuda daha bilinçli hale geldi. Ebeveynler ve öğrenciler bu tür konulara değer verir. Üniversitede hareketlilik için gerekli olan şey, kaliteli ve dünya standartlarına uygun bir kalite güvence sistemidir.

48. Türkiye'de yükseköğretimin 1980'lerden başlayan bir geçmişi vardır. O yıllarda çok fazla üniversite yoktu. Zaman içinde 1990'larla birlikte üniversitelerin sayısının artırılması, yükseköğretimin yaygınlaştırılması gibi politikalar izlendi. Bu hızlı büyüme kalite tartışmalarını da başlattı. Kalite arayışında pilot çalışmalar yapıldı. Bir mekanizma arayışı oldu ve ülkemizdeki bu durum dünya ile paralel gitti ve bir örtüşme oluştu. Elbette Bologna bu konuda önemli bir adım.

49. Türk yükseköğretim sisteminde kalite güvencesi alanındaki gelişmeler hakkında bir eleştiri yapacağım. Ulusal Ajans'ı en son kuran ülkelerden biri de Türkiye'dir. Bence her ülke rutin olarak bir kalite güvence sistemi kurmalı. Buna, yani küresel ölçekte birbiriyle konuşan kurumların varlığına ihtiyaç olduğunu düşünüyorum.

50. Kalite süreçleri aslında bir kilometre taşıdır. Üniversiteler bu şekilde toparlanmaya başlıyor. Politikalarını gözden geçiriyorlar. Dokümantasyon mekanizması oluşturuluyor. Üniversitelerde bir hareketlenme var. Diğer kurumları örnek alıyorlar. Onlarda bir iyileşme başlar. İyileştirmeye açık alanlar belirlenir. Ama müdahale yok. Bunun altını çizelim.

51. Kalite güvencesi büyük önem taşımaktadır. Birçok yönden önemlidir. Örneğin dışarıdan, paydaşlarla üniversite hakkında bilgi paylaşımı yapılıyor. Ayrıca üniversitenin bir aynası olduğunu söyleyebiliriz. İyileşme fırsatı.

52. Elbette süreç içinde ve sonunda üniversitelerden farklı türde geri bildirimler alıyoruz. Örneğin acil ve günlük işlerle uğraşırken önemli işleri erteleyebileceğimizi söylüyorlar. Önemli işlere zaman ayıramayabiliriz. Dış göz olursun. Sanki aynada kendimizi daha iyi görüyoruz. Başka bir deyişle, üniversiteleri geliştirme işlevi de vardır.

53. Bu sürecin rektöre de ışık tuttuğunu söyleyebilirim. Başka bir deyişle, kalite için en önemli muhatap kişidir. Onun liderliği önemlidir. Bu benim deneyimimde de işe yaradı. Bazı sorunları içeride görmek, ne yaptıklarını bilmek kalite güvencesi yolunda rektörlere çok yardımcı oldu.

54. Kurumun vizyonuna daha hızlı ulaşmasını sağlar. Örgüte ait olma duygusu artar. Öğrencinin kalitesi artar. Akreditasyon, gelen öğrenciler için önemli bir parametredir. Akredite olmak birçok alanda tercih durumunu yükseltmektedir. Kalite süreci geri bildirim sürecidir. Şeffaflık sağlar. Kurumun varlıklarını halka açmasını sağlar. Bu varlıkların yönetilmesini sağlar.

55. YÖKAK bazı değerlendirmeler yaparak üniversitelere yön veriyor ve üniversitelerde bu bilincin kademeli olarak oluşmasının çok önemli olduğunu düşünüyorum çünkü tüm yükseköğretim kurumlarında kalite ile ilgili bir standart oluşturulmalıdır.

56. Eksiklikler üniversiteler tarafından hızla doldurulmaktadır. Örneğin, birçok üniversitenin daha önce araştırma koordinatörleri yoktu. Halihazırda tüm üniversitelerde araştırma koordinasyon birimi kurulmuş ve bu koordinasyon birimleri ve paydaşlar tarafından ortak kararlar alınmıştır.

57. Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde ortak bir sorun, müfettiş olarak algılanmamızdır. Ama aslında kurumsal dış değerlendirme bir akran ziyaretidir. Biz buna değerlendirme diyoruz. Kontrol veya muayene kelimesini bir terim olarak kullanmayız.

58. Bence önemli bir sorun üniversitelerde teftiş algısıdır. Üniversiteler kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecini bir değerlendirmeden çok bir teftiş olarak görebilirler. Endişelerini site ziyaretleri sırasında ve hatta öz değerlendirme raporlarının yazım sürecinde hissedebilirsiniz.

59. İlk değerlendirme ziyaretlerinde denetim ve tedirginlik algısı vardı. Rektörlerle yapılan YÖKAK toplantıları ve hizmet içi eğitimler bunu önemli ölçüde değiştirmiştir. Bazı üniversitelerde kurumun gelişime açık yönleri çıkış toplantısında aktarılırken biraz kırgınlık olabilir. Bazı kurumlar geri bildirim sürecini kendileri için bir puan kartı olarak algılayabilir.

60. Bazı durumlarda savunmacı bir yaklaşımla karşılaşabiliriz. Fark ettiğim kadarıyla öz değerlendirme ve özeleştirme kültürüne sahip olmayan kurumlar var. Böyle bir alışkanlık yok. Ne yaptığınızı ölçmek yeni bir kültürdür. Akademimizde geliştirilmesi gereken bir kültürdür.

61. Kalite süreçleri bürokratik bir kontrol değildir. Hata yapmak ve sorunlarınızı gönüllü olarak paylaşmak aslında bir yardım eli olarak görülmelidir. Ancak bazı kurumlar bu gibi durumlarda kapalıdır. Kendilerini ifşa etmekten çekinirler.

62. Her iki durumda da akademik personele rektör, dekan veya bölüm başkanı tarafından verilen ek idari görevlerden biri olarak algılandığını düşünüyorum. Kalite, genel olarak Kalite Komisyonu ve alt komitelerinin öğretim üyelerinin sorumluluğunda yürütülen ek bir idari görev olarak algılanmaktadır. Bir üniversitede herkesin kaliteden sorumlu olduğu düşünülmez.

63. Bazen üniversitelerin kalite güvence sistemleri çok karmaşık olabilir. Bunun basitleştirilmesi gerekiyor. Örneğin bir akademik veya idari personele üniversitede kalite güvencesinin ne olduğunu ve nasıl çalıştığını sorduğunuzda, sanki dünyanın en

zor sorusunu soruyormuşsunuz gibi geliyor. Bu nedenle karşılaştığımız en büyük zorluklardan biri kalite güvence sistemini içselleştirmemektir.

64. Çok genel olarak ifade edersem, devlet üniversiteleri bu süreci mevzuattan kaynaklanan bir gereklilik olarak görmektedir. Vakıf üniversiteleri bunu rekabet için bir tehdit olarak algılamaktadır. Zamanla sürecin asıl amacının kalite kültürü oluşturmak olduğu anlaşıldığında ve bu algı yaygınlaştığında sürecin kendi çıkarları için olduğunu anlayacaklarını düşünüyorum.

65. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme aslında ekipler için zahmetli bir konudur. Nereden bakarsanız bakın bu işlemin tamamlanması 4-5 ayı bulabiliyor. Bu zaman alır. Bunca zaman etkileşim içinde kalmalısınız. Bu süre zarfında raporlar gelir, raporlar gider. Grup olarak iletişim kuruyorsunuz. Her zaman aktif katılım veya katkı olmayabilir.

66. Büyük bir sorunun olduğunu söyleyemem. Takım arkadaşlarımdan bilgi, yetenek ve yetkinliklerini onurlandırarak takım lideri olmaya çalışıyorum. ... Şimdiye kadarki tecrübelerime göre sabah geç kalma alışkanlığı, ekip toplantılarını akşam erken bitirme isteği vs. sorun oldu. Zamana ve programa uyum sağlama konusunda küçük sorunlar yaşadım.

67. Üniversite ile ilgili değerlendirdiğiniz bazı yönler hakkında insanlarla aynı fikirde olmak bazen zordur. Anladığımızın benzer olup olmadığını anlamak önemlidir. Ekip lideri olarak ekip üyelerine öz değerlendirme raporlarını dikkatle okumalarını, Stratejik Planı dikkatle incelemelerini ve web sayfasına bakmalarını hatırlatırız. Ortak bir anlaşmaya varmak bazen zor olabilir. Ön ziyaret ve ana ziyaret sırasında ekibe elimden geldiğince doğru bir şekilde rehberlik etmeye çalışırım.

68. Bize yıllık olarak bir üniversite veriliyor. Bu süreçte ekip üyeleri belirlenir. YÖKAK bunu yapar: bir anket. Örneğin, ankette kişilerin kişisel özelliklerini belirler. Örneğin bir kişi çok romantik olabilirken, bir diğeri analitik olabilir ve ince ayrıntılara dikkat edebilir. Kişilikleri dikkate alınarak bir ekip oluşturulur. Bu önemli bence. Yani ekibi oluşturan kişiler aslında birbirini tanımayan, farklı kişiliklere sahip kişilerdir.

69. Kurumlar bazen yaptıklarını tam olarak yansıtmazlar. Bazen raporları kısa tutmazlar ve özü anlatırlar. Raporda kanıt olarak sunulan bilgiler tam olarak anlaşılmayabilir. Ancak saha ziyareti sırasında raporda tam olarak ifade edilmeyen bazı uygulamaların görülmesi, değerlendirmemizi olumlu yönde değiştirmektedir.

70. Kalite kültürü yaygın değilse raporlar eleştirel olarak yazılamaz. Daha çok üniversiteyi tanıtmak veya reklamını yapmak gibi bir durumla karşılaştım. Bazı durumlarda, zayıf noktalar yazılmaz. Delil olarak paylaşılanlar delil niteliği taşımayabilir. Aslında, raporlar kısa, öz ve eleştirel olmalıdır. Bu bir fırsat, ancak bazı üniversiteler bunu gözden kaçırabilir.

71. Kurumun iç değerlendirme raporlarının düzgün yönetilememesi de bir sorundur. İç değerlendirme raporu yazmak bir başarıdır. Bunu fark edebilmeniz gerekir. Bu raporun yazarları kalite komisyonunun tek üyeleri olmamalıdır. Ancak birçok kurumda bu yapılmamaktadır. Kalite komisyonları, sadece kurumsal iç değerlendirme raporunu yazmak için yıldan yıla bir araya geliyor gibi görünüyor.

Bence kurum, kurumsal iç değerlendirme raporunu iyi yazmazsa, gelişmeye açık alanları fark edemez.

72. Bazen üniversiteler kriterlerini son dakikaya bırakıp son dakika değişiklikleri olarak bize sunarlar. Ama kalite dediğiniz kavram süreklilik gerektirir. Örneğin ekosistemi kurarken paydaşlardan görüş alıyor musunuz diye bir soru var. Onlara göre cevap evet. Ama bu son altı ayda yapıldı. Beş yıllık sürece baktığınızda yapılmamış. Bu şekilde devamlılık görmüyoruz.

73. Kurumu iyice tanımaya çalışıyoruz. Fotoğraf çekiyoruz. Kurum bir sonraki değerlendirme dönemine kadar bu alanda ne yaptı? Gelişime açık alanlarda iyileştirmeler yaptı mı? Bu tür konuları değerlendirme yoluyla ortaya koyuyoruz.

74. Bu sayede üniversiteler kendilerini gözden geçirme imkanı bulmaktadır. Değerlendirme aslında bir danışmanlık ve rehberlik hizmetidir. rehberlik eden bir harekettir. Gelişime açık alanların belirlenmesi açısından çok değerli bir süreç olduğunu söyleyebilirim.

75. Aslında kurumsal dış değerlendirme süreçleri ile gündelik hayat bir anlamda çarpıtılmaktadır. Bu durumda bir tür tepki var. Ancak süreç sonunda bu çalışmayı faydalı buluyorlar ve eksikliklerini başka bir açıdan gördüklerini belirtiyorlar.

76. Üniversitelerde yazı çok eksikti. Başka bir deyişle, toplantıları kaydetmeye yönelik belgeler her zaman eksikti. Bunlar kurumsal dış değerlendirme içinde olgunlaşmıştır. Hatta bazı üniversiteler dokümantasyon için birimler bile kurmuştur. Bu birimler de üniversitelerin farklı birimlerinden bilgi toplamaya başlamıştır.

77. Benim gözlemlediğim kadarıyla üniversiteler verilerini yönetemiyor. Bu büyük bir eksiklik. Ölçemezseniz yönetemezsiniz. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme, bir dereceye kadar belgelerin önemini anlamalarına izin verdi.

78. Bu şekilde kurumlar kendilerini toparlar. Bu süreç tüm boyutları etkiler. İç kalite güvence sistemleri kurulur. Farklı konularda merkezlerin kurulması hızlanıyor. Üniversiteler şartlarını yeniden gözden geçiriyor. Başka kurumları örnek almaya başladılar. Üniversite içinde bir hareketlenme var. Dokümantasyon mekanizmaları çalışmaya başlıyor. Örneğin yaptıklarının daha sistemli ve düzenli bir şekilde arşivlenmesi üniversiteler için önem arz eden bir konu haline gelmiştir.

79. Bu süreç, üniversitelere toparlanma fırsatı verdiği için rekabeti de artırmaktadır. Diğer üniversitelerden gelen raporlar inceleniyor, yani kamuoyuyla paylaşılıyor. İyi olanlar örnek alınabilir. Böylece kurumsal dış değerlendirme süreci, diğer üniversitelere göre nasıl daha çok tercih edilen bir üniversite olabileceklerini açıklamaktadır.

80. Üniversiteler için en önemli şey geri bildirim raporudur. Bir anlamda üniversitelerin yaptıklarını doğru yapmaları halinde daha kaliteli ve daha başarılı bir üniversite olacaklarını gösteriyor. Yani kurumlar için hazırladığımız bu raporlarda görüşlerimizi sunuyoruz. Bu süreç üniversiteler için başta korkutucu gelebilir. Ancak üniversiteler, özellikle güçlü yönlerin raporlardan daha ağır bastığı durumlarda, rekabet bağlamında bu tür raporları paylaşmak ve kullanmak isteyebilir.

81. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecinde sadece kendilerini değil, kamu veya özel tüm üniversiteleri görmektedirler. Bence bu aslında bir anlamda aralarındaki rekabeti arttırıyor.

82. Yani vakıf üniversitelerini sistem içinde bir çeşitlilik olarak görüyorum. Çeşitlilik iyidir. Bence vakıf üniversitelerinde kar odaklı bir durum olduğu için bu kurumlarda işleri iyi yapmak, işleri farklı yapmak ön plana çıkıyor. Bunun için motivasyonları var. Öğrenci talepleri önemlidir çünkü öğrencileri çekmek önemlidir. Bu nedenle farklı bir alternatif olabilmek için farklı bir yönetim sistemini benimsemektedirler.

83. Bir bakıma diyebilirim ki... Özellikle yeni açılan vakıf üniversiteleri en azından birkaç bölümde akreditasyon sürecini başlatıyor. Kurumsal dış değerlendirmeyi ciddiye alırlar ve öne çıkmaya çalışırlar. Böyle bir gözlemim olduğunu söyleyebilirim.

84. Bu aslında kolay bir konu değil. Yani baktığınızda personel konusu çok önemli. Ancak, idari personelin kalitesi üniversiteler tarafından ihmal edilmektedir. Onların kalitesi çok önemlidir. Fakülte kalitesi çok önemli. Düzenli olarak hizmet içi eğitimler yaptığınızda uzun bir süre sonra kesinlikle sonuç alabilirsiniz. Hizmet içi eğitim çok önemlidir. Birçok üniversite bunu ihmal ediyor. İdari personelin hizmet içi eğitimi ve akademik personelin hizmet içi eğitimi çok önemlidir. Üniversite her şeyden önce insan demektir. İnsana yatırım yapılmalı.

85. Kalite bir zihniyet meselesidir. Bu anlayış bazı kurumlarda hala yerleşmediğinden resmi düzenlemeler etkili olamamaktadır. Ama yine de büyük bir hareket görüyorum. Bu konudaki hassasiyet ve istek her geçen gün artmaktadır. Eğitimlerin bu anlamda üniversitelere çok yardımcı olduğunu düşünüyorum. Kalite güvencesi ile ilgili daha fazla eğitim olmuştur. Yükseköğretimde kalitenin artması için biçimsel ve yüzeysel değişiklikler dışında bu işe inananların sayısının artması gerekmektedir. Hizmet içi eğitimlerin bu etkiye sahip olduğuna inanıyorum.

86. Kaliteli çalışmanın sonu yoktur. Bu iş, sürekli iyileştirme ve iyileştirme ile ilgilidir. Bunun için know-how ve Ar-Ge kültürü çok önemlidir. Takım ruhu bu sürecin gidişatını belirleyen en önemli unsurlardan biridir. Kalite konusunda yapılan hizmet içi eğitimler ve düzenli toplantılarla ekip ruhu oluşturulabilir. Yani insanların bir araya gelip kalite konusuna odaklanma fırsatı var.

87. Kaliteli bir yükseköğretim için bir iç kalite sistemi oluşturulmalıdır. Tüm paydaşlar da bu sürece katılmalı ve kalite terminolojisi yaygınlaştırılmalıdır. Bunu nasıl yönetebilirsin? Yani takım ruhu çok önemli. Çalışacağınız ekipte kalite kültürü ruhuna sahip insanları dahil etmeniz gerekiyor. Bu, şimdiye kadar saha ziyaretim sırasında ziyaret ettiğim birçok üniversitede sorunlu.

88. Bir çalışma kalite güvencesi oluşturmak gereklidir. Genel olarak kalite kültürü oluşmadığı için muğlak bir yapılanma olabiliyor. Kalite kültürü geliştirilmelidir. Bu süreci sahiplenen insanlara ihtiyacımız var. Etkili bir kalite sistemi olduğunda birçok şey yeniden düzenlenecektir. İyi bir rekabet ortamı ancak motivasyonu yüksek kişilerle oluşturulabilir.

89. Belirli süreçleri iyi bilen kişilerin olması çok önemlidir. Ancak tecrübelerime dayanarak, ne yazık ki bazen kalite kültürü kavramı hakkında fazla bilgisi olmayan insanlarla etkileşime giriyorum.

90. Üniversiteler kendilerini böyle bir değerlendirme sürecine hazırlamaya başlarlar. Öncelikle kalite kavramı üniversite yönetiminin gündemine oturmaktadır. Daha önceki yıllarda çalıştığımız üniversitelerde böyle kavramlarla hiç karşılaşmıyorduk.

91. Güzel girişim. Harika servis. Eğitimler ile kalite bilinci oluşturulmaktadır. Üniversitelerde hem akademik hem de idari personel inisiyatif almaya ve kalite ilkelerine uygun hareket etmeye başlar. Yükseköğretim sistemimizde kesinlikle böyle bir çatı organizasyona ihtiyaç olduğunu düşünüyorum.

92. Az önce de vurguladığım gibi, üniversitelerin vizyonu doğrultusunda yapılan çalışmaların öz değerlendirme yapabilmesi ve kurumsal nitelikte tüm birimlere yaygınlaştırılabilmesi için çok önemli bir süreç olduğunu düşünüyorum. A'dan Z'ye güvence sistemi, sadece akademik değil, aynı zamanda idari birimler.

93. Bu aslında ister özel ister kamu olsun her kurumda bir ihtiyaçtır. Sonuçta bunun bir döngüsü var, biliyorsun. Planlama, uygulama, kontrol ve önleme döngüsünü tamamlama. Bu döngü her yerde olmalı. Her kurum yapılan hataları planlamalı, uygulamalı, ölçmeli ve düzeltmelidir. Kalite Konseyi ilk kurulduğunda hazırladıkları dokümanları paylaştılar. Örneğin Kalite Komisyonumuz yoktu. Daha sonra kurulmuştur. Şimdi buna göre yapılandık.

94. Kurumsal bakış açısına daha yatkınım. Bu benim düşüncem ama değerlendirmenin aslında kurumsal disiplinin oluşmasına katkı sağladığını düşünüyorum. Başka bir deyişle, bir hedef belirlemek, onun için çalışmak, onu başarmak ve bunu kanıtlamak, kurumsal dış değerlendirme bize bunu öğretti.

95. Değerlendirme ekibi gelmeden önce fakülte danışma kurulları ile toplantılar yaptık. Bu toplantılarda fakültelerin iletişim halinde olduğu dış paydaşlarla da görüşme gerekliliği ortaya çıkmıştır. Aynı zamanda akademik, idari ve öğrenci anketlerini de inceledik. Böylece aslında farklı grupların üniversite faaliyetleri hakkında fikir edinmeye çalıştık.

96. Kurumsal dış değerlendirmede, aslında başlangıçta bocalıyor gibiydik. Kendimizi gözden geçirdik. Bunu yaparken özellikle üniversite öğrencilerinin bazı konulardaki fikirlerini göz ardı ettiğimizi gördük ve onları karar alma süreçlerine nasıl dahil edebiliriz diye düşündük. Başka bir deyişle, değerlendirme bizi bunun hakkında düşünmeye zorladı.

97. THEQC ile birlikte farklı bir açıdan fotoğraf çekilir. Başka bir deyişle, bu sisteme dahil olmak isteyen üniversiteler, dış paydaşların sunduğu kriterler çerçevesinde kendilerini bir şekilde değerlendirme olanağına sahiptir.

98. Diğeri ise dış paydaşların bu sürece aktif katılımıdır. Orada da ayrı bir heyecan yarattı. Dış paydaşlarımızla belirli bir düzeyde ilişkimiz vardı ancak bu kalite değerlendirme süreci dış paydaşlarımızla ilişkilerimizin daha kurumsallaşmasına ve

daha tanımlı hale gelmesine olanak sağladı. Bu, dış paydaşlarla ilişkileri daha da güçlendirdi.

99. Kurumsal dış değerlendirmenin birçok işlevi vardır. Aklıma gelen ilk şeyi söyleyeyim. YÖKAK'ın performans göstergelerini öz değerlendirme raporuna dahil etmek, faaliyetlerini bu formatta kamuoyu ile paylaşmak bize yol gösteriyor. Ayrıca, akredite edilmiş programlar yükseköğretim tercih kılavuzunda yer almaktadır. Bu nedenle öğrenciler bir seçim yaparken üniversitenin diğerlerine göre konumuna bakarlar. Bir bakıma öğrencilerimize kendimizi ifade etmemizin önünü açıyor. Bu, öğrencilerin üniversitemiz hakkında bilgi edinmelerini sağlar.

100. Bazı öğretim üyeleri bu olaya eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşmaktadır. Bunun ne kadar önemli olduğunu daha sonra anlarlar. Ne kadar faydalı olduğunu görüyorlar. Zamanla bölümlerinin iyiliği için, bölümlerin iyiliği için, bölümlerin öğrenci çekmesi için gerekli olduğunu anlarlar. Elbette sadece öğrenci çekmek için değil, iyi akademisyenler de başarılı üniversitelerde çalışmak istiyor. Bir şekilde her şeyin buna bağlı olduğunu anlıyorlar.

101. Çünkü kalitenin hizmet kalitesinin sürekli iyileştirilmesi anlamına geldiğini biliyorsunuz. Yüksek öğrenim topluluğu için de aynı şey, bilirsiniz. Türkiye'de yükseköğretim potansiyelinin artması ve üniversite sayısının artması ile rekabet ortamı yaratılmaktadır. Yine tüm bu vakıf üniversiteleri ile devlet üniversiteleri arasında rekabet vardır. Bu rekabet ortamında kurumsal dış değerlendirme, akreditasyon ve benzeri uygulamalar önem arz etmektedir.

102. Öğrenciler artık bilinçli. Bizim zamanımızda böyle bir şey yoktu. Şimdi, bir derste, bir öğretmen twitter'da bir şeyler yapıyor. Öğrenci odaklı olmalısınız. Bazen abartıyorlar. Öğrenciler artık hangi üniversitenin akredite olduğunu ve hangi programın olmadığını biliyor. Bunu aslında kurumsal dış değerlendirmeye bağlayabiliriz. Sonuçta bu, akreditasyonun bir önceki adımıdır.

103. Yüksek öğretimde kalite güvencesi çok iyi bir girişimdir. Yükseköğretim Kalite Kurulu olarak kanunla mali özerkliğe sahip bir yapının oluşturulması. Türk yüksek öğretimine yapılacak en büyük hizmetlerden biriydi. Türkiye'nin böyle bir şemsiye kuruma ihtiyacı vardı. Dünyanın her yerinde var. Bizde de olmalı. Bu kurum artık uluslararası bir değerlendirme kurumuna dönüşmüştür. Sadece içeride değil, dışarıda da.

104. Her üniversite kalite konusunda endişelenmek zorunda kalmıştır. Birincisi, kendilerini Türk yüksek öğretiminde bu tür kalite süreçlerine tabi bulmuşlardır. Sonra yıllar içinde bu tabii ki uluslararası entegrasyonlarla güçlenen bir süreç haline geldi. Üniversiteler mevzuata kalite süreçleri eklemek zorunda kalmışlardır. Kalite kaygısı yerelde kalmadı, artık uluslararası sıralamalar var. Ortadoğu'daki yeriniz nedir, Avrupa'daki yeriniz nedir, ona göre hareket etmelisiniz.

105. Üniversitelerde kalite arayışına bir cevap olduğunu düşünüyorum. YÖKAK, üniversitelere neyi daha iyi yapmaları gerektiği konusunda rehberlik eder. Dünyada YÖKAK'a eşdeğer birçok kurum var. Yani bu aslında yerel değil genel bir yaklaşım. Bu süreci yakından takip ediyoruz.

106. Tabii ki en önemli sorun denetim sürecinin kalite değerlendirme sürecine hakim olmasıdır. İnsanlarımız ister istemez bir teftişe hazırlanır gibi kendilerini hazırladılar. Elbette düzenlediğimiz toplantılarda arkadaşlarımızı bilgilendirerek bunun denetimden farklı bir süreç olduğunu, kaygıları bir kenara bırakmamız gerektiğini, ne yapıyoruz, ne kadar yapıyoruz sorusuna hazırlıklı olmamız gerektiğini anlatmaya çalıştık. kaliteli bir bakış açısı.

107. Kendi üniversitemiz açısından konuşursak, daha önce YÖKAK seminerlerine katıldık. Sürekli Ankara'ya gittik, toplantılara katıldık vb. Orada bize bunun teftiş gibi olmayacağı söylendi. Bu kesinlikle bir inceleme değil, değerlendirmedir. Bu yüzden bizi nispeten rahat hissettiren şeyler söylendi.

108. Artık kalite biraz zahmetli ve zaman alıcı bir sürece dönüşüyor. Örneğin bu yıl dış değerlendirme sürecine girdik ve birimlerin böyle bir tecrübesi olduğu için en büyük zorluğumuz birimlerimizi bu sürece hazırlamak oldu. Her zaman kendilerini teftiş için hazırladılar. Kaçınılmaz olarak kalite sürecini denetime benzer algılar ve konumlandırırlar.

109. Genel olarak, bu tür süreçlere, dış değerlendirmeye sempati duymazlar. Bu olumsuz tutum bazen sadece idari personel arasında değil, akademisyenler arasında da yaygın olabilmektedir. Bu tür işlemler iş yükü olarak görülür. Üniversitemizde bariz bir direniş ya da sempati yoktu.

110. Kurumumuzda özellikle idari personel arasında kurumsal dış değerlendirme sürecine olumsuz bir yaklaşım olduğunu gözlemledim. Başka bir deyişle, bazıları tarafından gerekli olmadığı düşünülüyordu. Yapılacak çok iş olduğu düşünülüyordu. Nereden geldiğine dair bir his vardı.

111. Ya yaparsak? Yaparsan ne olur, yapmazsan ne olur? Biz zaten işimizi yapıyoruz? İnsanların kafasında bu tür sorular vardı. Ama öyle değil. Başka bir deyişle, iyiyi deneyimlemeden faydayı pek anlamazlar.

112. Değerlendirmeye bakış açınıza bağlıdır. gerekli olduğuna inanıyorum. Ancak bazı insanlar buna zaman kaybı olarak bakabilir. Yapılması gereken başka önemli şeyler olduğunu ve bu tür uygulamaların asıl işlerini engellediğini düşünenler var.

113. Biraz direnç olabilir. Özgürlüğe müdahale olarak algılanabilir. İnsanlar bunun hem idari hem de akademik personele ekstra yükümlülükler getirdiğini düşünüyor. Kalite zor bir kavramdır. Rakipler olabilir. Ayrıca adapte olmak biraz zor.

114. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme öncesinde kaçınılmaz bir koşuşturma, eksiklikleri giderme çabası vardır. Bazı öğretim üyeleri eski alışkanlıklarından vazgeçip yeni koşullara uyum sağlamakta zorlanırlar.

115. Kalite yönetimini benimsemiş bir insanım. Bunu her sektörde olumlu buluyorum. Mükemmel değil, ancak optimal olarak sürekli iyileştirme sağlar. Büyük ya da küçük her birimin gelişimine katkı sağlar. Kendi fotoğrafınızı çekmenizi sağlar. Güçlü ve zayıf yönleri ortaya çıkarır.



116. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme, kurumları dışarıdan daha objektif bir gözle görerek iyileştirmeler yapmayı amaçlar. Üniversitenin tüm süreçlerini objektif olarak gözlemler ve yönlendirir. Bu açıdan tüm üniversitelerin her beş yılda bir böyle bir değerlendirmeden geçmesinin faydalı olduğuna inanıyorum.

117. Çok önemli. Üniversiteyi düzene sokar. Demek istediğim, özellikle akademik personel bu tür değerlendirme süreçleri yaşadıklarında işlerini daha organize bir şekilde yapma eğiliminde olurlar. Bu tür süreçler insanları yönlendirir. Sürdürülebilirlik açısından da önemlidir.

118. Aslında Avrupa Üniversiteler Birliği'ninkine benzer bir sistem. Bu onların öz değerlendirme süreçlerine oldukça benzer. Çok benzer formlar ve iş akışları var. Bu anlamda Avrupa Üniversiteler Birliği'ne kabaca 2013 yılından beri üye olduğumuz için bizim için uygun oldu. Derneğin faaliyetlerinden biri olan kurumsal öz değerlendirme sürecine girdik. Onlar da bizi ziyarete geldiler. Kalite Kurulu tarafından başlatılan bu modele benzer bir öz değerlendirme raporu hazırlıyoruz. Bu anlamda, YÖKAK açıkça bir fotoğraf çekiyor. Vizyonumuz çerçevesinde zayıf ve güçlü noktalarımızı fark etmemize yardımcı olan süreçler.

119. PUKO döngüsünün kapanmasıyla ilgili geri bildirim aldık. Kurumda kalite bilincini artırdı. Stratejik planımızı güncelledik. Hedeflerimizi gözden geçirmemizi ve üniversitelerin ve birimlerin hedeflerinin uyumlu olup olmadığını değerlendirmemizi sağladı. Örneğin, dış paydaş katılımı üzerinde çalıştık.

120. Teknoloji Transfer Ofisimiz yoktu. Web sitemiz kullanıcı dostu değildi. Değiştirdik. Bu konuda da tavsiye aldık. Kalite El Kitabı tam olarak olgunlaşmamıştı. Akış şemasını inceledik. Bilgi güvenliği mekanizmalarımızı güçlendirmek için Bilgi Güvenliği Sertifikası aldık.

121. Öğrenci Bilgi Sistemi ile ilgili sorunlar yaşadık. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme sonrası aldığımız geri bildirimler sonucunda bilgi sistemini daha entegre hale getirdik. Ayrıca fakülte programlarının çıktılarının gözden geçirilmesine yönelik çalışmalar yaptık. Web sitesinde güncellemeler yaptık.

122. Pandemi sürecinde zor olsa da süreç sonrasında spor, kültür ve sanat etkinliklerini en üst düzeye çıkarmayı düşünüyoruz. Kantin, yemekhane gibi tesislerimizi geliştirmek için bütçe isteyeceğiz.

123. Örneğin Araştırma Merkezlerinin sayısını artırdık. Ar-Ge birimine personel alımına destek verdik. Spor sahaları oluşturduk. Değerlendirme çalışmaları bazı eksikliklerimizi gidermemizi sağladı. Örneğin hocalar ders kataloğundaki eksiklikleri giderdi ve güncellemeler yaptı.

124. Denetimden farklı olarak süreçte ve süreç sonunda bize çok şey öğrettiğini gördük. Bize yeni konseptler kazandırdı. İkincisi, yaptığımız şeyi nasıl daha iyi yapacağımız konusunda bize rehberlik etti. Geri bildirim aldık. Bilgilendiriciydi. Biraz mesafeli olan akademisyenlerimiz daha heyecanlı bir şekilde ilgi göstermeye başladılar.

125. Değerlendirme öncesinde kurumumuzda belirgin bir direnç veya sempati yoktu. Değerlendirmeden sonra idari ve akademik personel arasında memnuniyet gözlemlendim. Kendi birimlerinin takdir edilmesi motivasyonu artırmıştır. İşlem sonrası sempati duygusu arttı. Bunda değerlendirme ekibinin tutumunun çok etkili olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çalışanlar sürece ısındı.

126. İşlem sonrası büyük bir farkındalık oluştu. Değerlendirme ekibi, kavramın hem akademik personel hem de idari personel için ne anlama geldiğini gösterdi. Herkes kalite süreçlerine daha fazla dikkat etmeye başladı. Kilit noktalar üzerinde ayrıca anlaşmaya varıldı.

127. Aslında istekliydik. isteyerek yaptık. Ama buna gerek olmadığı, çok uğraşıldığı gibi yorumlar da vardı. Süreç sonucunda nereden geldiği algısı ortadan kalktı. Değerlendirme ekibinin insanların algılarında olumlu yönde büyük etkisi oldu.

128. Bugün yaptıkları faydalı olsa da her üniversitenin imkanları ve şartları farklıdır. Ortak şablon uymuyor. Üniversitelerin yapısına göre özel modeller oluşturmalarıdır.

129. Ancak bazı kurumların daha fazla bilgiye ihtiyacı olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bence özellikle ihtiyacı olanlar için YÖKAK toplantıları çok daha fazla olmalı. YÖKAK'ın da çok meşgul olduğunu biliyorum. Ama yine de toplantılar ve hatta ziyaretler yoluyla üniversitelere daha fazla ulaşırsa, üniversiteler bu işi daha ciddiye alacaklardır.

130. Değerlendirici havuzu, sistemin daha hızlı gelişmesini sağlamak için genişletilebilir. Üniversitelere mentorlar atanabilir. Akredite olan üniversiteler için YÖK veya YÖKAK tarafından TÜBİTAK projelerinde olduğu gibi ödüllendirilerek bütçeleri desteklenebilir. Bu tür faaliyetlere zaman ayıran öğretim elemanlarının masrafları karşılanabilir.

131. İyi niyetli bir yaklaşım ama sürecin bu kadar detaylı olması iyi değil. Faydadan çok zarar verebilir. Süreci detaylandırmak yerine mevcut olanı iyileştirmeye odaklanmalıdırlar. YÖKAK bazen çok talepkar olabilir. İşin özünü kaçırmamak, karmaşıktırmamak gerekir.

132. Burada bir kurumun performans göstergelerini yayınlıyoruz. İzleme sonuçlarını yayınlıyoruz. Ama dediğim gibi bazı yasal zorunlulukların buraya gelmesi gerekiyor. Şimdi Türkiye bu noktada. Bir üniversite akredite ise, akredite değilse ikisi arasında bir fark olmalıdır. Daha doğrusu dünyada ne yapıyorsa bizim ülkemizin şartlarına göre biz de buna benzer şeyler yapmalıyız. Örneğin dünyada radikal kararlar var. Örneğin, akredite edilmezlerse o kuruma öğrenci verilmez. Kaynakları kesiliyor. Kaynaklar buna göre verilmiş gibi görünüyor.

133. YÖKAK'taki yaptırımları kabul ettiremem. Bazı yaptırımlar olmalı. Bilmiyorum mesela o üniversiteye personel tahsisinde bazı kısıtlamalar olabilir. Belki o üniversitenin maddi desteği azalabilir. Üzmeyecek, çok fazla zarar vermeyecek, ancak onları zorlayacak bazı yaptırımlar.

134. Dünyada bunu zorunlu olarak yapan ülkeler var. Açıkçası bu konu hakkında fazla yorum yapmak istemiyorum. Çünkü akreditasyon gönüllü bir çalışma

sistemidir. Diğer alanlarda da durum aynıdır. Ancak bunun gerekliliğinin gerçekten verimlilik seviyesini yükselteceğine inanıyorum. Zamanla gerekli olabilir. Bence çok erken. Zorunluluk için çok erken olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çünkü akreditasyon faaliyetleri çok ciddi hazırlık süreçleri gerektirir.

135. Kurumsal değerlendirmeler YÖKAK tarafından yapılır. Akreditasyon denilince en önemli farkı kararları içermesidir. Ölçek üzerinde bir değerlendirme olduğu için standartları karşılama düzeyi ile ilgilidir. Sonuç olarak bu standartları tutturma düzeyinin düşük veya iyi olması bir karardır, bir sonuçtur... Akreditasyon konusu belli dinamiklere, konjonktüre ve hazırlık düzeyine bakılarak evet ya da hayır denilebilir. Bunu yapan ülkeler var. Ülkemizde henüz o aşamaya gelinip gelinmediği sorusunun cevabını benim söylemem mümkün değil.

136. Çünkü siz bir değerlendirici kurum olarak tüm kurumları akredite ediyorsunuz. Akreditasyon budur. Bu kurumun kamuoyu nezdinde bir kalite güvence sistemi kurmuş olduğunu veya bir kalite güvence sistemi kurmadığını söylüyoruz. Biz bunu söyleyene kadar yaptığımız her şey güvenilir olmalı. Sağlam bir karar olmalı. Bu çok tehlikeli bir şey... Bu üniversite tercihlerine bile yansıyor. Şimdi bu işin en büyük riski diyebileceğim yönleri bunlar. Yani paydaşlar artık bilgilendirildikleri zaman ayırt edebiliyorlar, burada bu öğretim üyesi var, bu üniversitede akredite edilmiş birçok program var diyerek seçim yapabiliyorlar.

137. Kurumsal dış değerlendirme sonucunda herhangi bir yaptırım yetkisi, program açma kapama vb. bulunmamaktadır. Yükseköğretimi yönlendirme yetkisi YÖK'tedir. Biz de destekliyoruz. Bir ayna tutuyoruz. Üniversitelerin zaman içinde kaliteli süreçler oluşturmalarını sağlıyoruz. Bunu toplumla paylaşıyoruz. Zamanla değerlendirmenin yerini akreditasyona bırakacaktır. Ancak henüz hazır değil. Bir kriter eksikse, ne olduğuna dair bir cevap yoktur.

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