ACCREDITATION AS TRANSPARENT STANDARDS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Ayfer SU-BERGİL

1. Introduction

Technological developments in the 21st century, especially innovations in the field of transportation and communication, have taken the whole world under its influence. However, the number of people who need to learn a foreign language has increased day by day and with the globalization, foreign language has become extremely important in the life of today's people and a common language has been needed for international communication. Thus, today, especially the use and learning of English has a special place (Seidlhofer et al., 2006; Staub, 2019). When its historical course is examined, after the Second World War, English quickly gained importance and has become a dominant language in the international arena; in other words, it has become a 'lingua franca' (Crystal, 2003). As a result, English as the language of science, communication, information technologies, business, entertainment, and diplomacy has become a common communication tool used by people from different countries (Kasap, 2019). Published by the British Council in 2013; the report, which states that the number of English-speaking people around the world is approximately 1.8 billion and that this figure is expected to reach 2 billion in 2020, supports this situation. This is one of the indicators that approximately one quarter of the world's population communicate using English (British Council, 2013).

The use of English as a common language of communication all over the world has played an important role in determining the foreign language education policies of the world countries (Crystal, 2003). In order to respond to the needs of today's world and to catch up with the developments, states have needed to implement and support English language teaching (Ataman, 2021; Ataman & Adıgüzel, 2020; Chang, 2006). Thus, it has been revealed that foreign language teaching has a strategic importance in the development of labor force (Coşkun-Demirpolat, 2015). In addition, the role of the country's education system has come to the fore once again in raising qualified workforce that will provide the necessary change, development, and innovation in social systems in line with the developments in the field of economy, technology, and informatics on a global scale (Adıgüzel, 2008).

According to the English Proficiency Index (EPI) data, which lists the English proficiency levels of countries, although English teaching is given importance in Turkey, material, building, time, personnel, etc. and great resources are devoted to these aspects, the results are not very bright in terms of English language proficiency. According to the index results, in terms of English language proficiency, Turkey ranks 79th among 100 countries and 32nd among 33 European countries (EPI, 2019).

In addition, in the British Council (2015) report, which sheds light on English education in higher education institutions in Turkey, the important problems of English education in universities were revealed and as one of the prominent findings, the 'English deficit' in the country was clearly expressed. It has been stated that this is one of the main factors affecting the quality of higher education negatively and restricting access to academic resources,

international research publications and the mobility of both staff and students (British Council, 2015). In the same report, it was stated that foreign language schools in universities should develop quality assurance plans and aim to obtain accreditation as one of the solutions to overcome the problems presented (British Council, 2015).

Another issue is that the rapid quantitative increase in higher education in recent years has caused some concerns in terms of quality. Especially since the second half of the 20th century, the demand for higher education has increased, a great massification has been experienced in higher education and higher education systems have been rapidly renewed. As a result, interest in quality and quality assurance has increased and these issues constitute the most important agenda item in the field of higher education in many countries (Altbach et al., 2009; Cheng, 2010; Çetinsaya, 2014; Dogan, 2022; Eaton, 2004). In addition to the continuous increase in the number of higher education institutions and accessibility to higher education throughout the world, higher education systems have started to show diversity in many aspects (opening of branch campuses, increase in the number of private universities, distance education). Such developments have led to increasing concerns about the quality of processes and outputs in higher education. As a result, many countries develop external quality management systems at the national level, and accreditation systems are the most common among them (Martin, 2008).

Turkey is also affected by these developments on a global scale, both quantitatively and qualitatively. While the total number of universities in the country was 75 in 2005, the total number of public and private universities increased to over 200 as of 2020. In other words, more than half of the universities in the country were established only in the last 15 years (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu [The Council of Higher Education (CoHE)], 2015). In recent years, unlike other G20 countries, Turkey has significantly increased the number and size of universities by focusing on quantity. Some improvements were also made in terms of quality, and thus some universities in the country were able to enter global university rankings. On the other hand, 100 of the universities in Turkey are still not among the top 2,000 universities in the world according to the country's own URAP (University Ranking by Academic Performance) rankings (British Council, 2015). In summary, increasing the quality of education and research in Turkey, as in many other countries, is considered as one of the most fundamental problems the system faces. For many years, there has been a general expectation that the quality of the Turkish higher education system should be improved. Therefore, Turkey's new higher education policy should focus on quality (Ataman, 2021; Ataman, & Adıgüzel, 2020; Çetinsaya, 2014; Staub, 2019).

In this context, it is seen that foreign language proficiency in Turkey is not at the desired level, the rapid increase in the number of universities has caused concerns about the quality of education, and quality assurance and accreditation have come to the fore as a solution offer in response to these problems. This study was designed with the aim of (i) presenting the historical development of accreditation (ii) highlighting the foundations and principles of it, and (iii) displaying its effects on the quality of foreign language education and aimed to spread accreditation awareness throughout the target field.

2. The Concept of Accreditation

'Accreditation', a French word of Latin origin, means the state of being reliable and credible. Monitoring being reliable; stating that it is reliable and credible is also expressed as the act of 'accreditation' in French. Accreditation can be defined as the process of monitoring the level of fulfillment of the objectives of an institution or program at certain intervals, according to predetermined standards, with a voluntary and informal accredited agency (Doğan, 1999). Accreditation is the process of quality control and quality assurance to confirm that an institution or its programs meet acceptable minimum standards as a result of audit and evaluation (Adelman, 1992; Skolnik, 2010). Accreditation is a quality assessment method that aims to demonstrate that a program or institution has predetermined quality standards by the expert group in the relevant field, excluding the official organs of the state (Adelman, 1992; Skolnik, 2010).

Accreditation is the recognition of higher education institutions or programs for a certain period of time by an independent and authorized institution in order to demonstrate that the education-training service offered to students in higher education programs is carried out in accordance with certain criteria (Eaton, 2015; Sanyal & Martin, 2007). Accreditation is the determination of the adequacy of an institution or organization that is a candidate to produce a certain good or to provide a service within the framework of the determined standards (YÖK, 1999). Accreditation is the formal recognition that an organization or person is competent to perform certain tasks (Peker, 1996). Aktan and Gencel (2007) expressed accreditation as a system for assuring that the goods and services offered to the society in general are offered at certain standards of excellence. Accreditation is a method developed to assure the quality of the programs and services offered to the society with a systematic approach (YÖK/World Bank, 1999). Accreditation is a formal process that includes the examination and approval of an organization, program or group's compliance with standards or criteria by an authorized institution (Hesapçıoğlu, 2006).

As a concept, accreditation in education can be defined as the recognition of education programs or the approval of their quality by giving an official document stating that there are some pre-determined standards and that they are in force (Bakioğlu & Baltacı, 2010). In other words, accreditation of a higher education institution or training program by an accreditation institution can be considered as an indicator that the teaching staff in an institution fully meet the pre-determined quality criteria and standards in terms of curriculum, administration and services provided to students (Adelman, 1992; Skolnik, 2010, The World Bank, 2010).

Accreditation in higher education is a system that ensures that any program implemented within the higher education institution has the quality standards determined by national or international accreditation institutions, and that this program provides a qualified education, both for those who demand higher education and for the public. In this sense, accreditation constitutes a quality assurance system that requires both the evaluation of a higher education program by

independent accreditation institutions at regular intervals and its self-evaluation (institutional self-evaluation) at the same time (Aktan & Gencel, 2007). Quality accreditation refers to a kind of quality control process and is a systematic examination of the effectiveness of all or parts of a quality assurance program, including all quality processes (Adelman, 1992; Sinha & Willborn, 1985; Skolnik, 2010; The World Bank, 2010).

3. The Foundations and Principles of Accreditation

Accreditation follows a non-state form of operation on a voluntary basis. In the cultural basis of this process, there are individuals who develop themselves and transform quality and efficiency into a lifestyle. The accreditation of individuals and institutions that see themselves as part of automation is only a process of inspection. Control includes ensuring similarity to the law and previous practices. On the other hand, accreditation can be evaluated as a phenomenon that develops above creativity and productivity (Doğan, 1999).

Accreditation brings with it a process that aims to shift from a centralized structure to a philosophy of quality education evaluation based on creativity, originality, productivity and contemporary approaches on account of the fact that creating quality can be achieved with freedom, originality, free thinking, not being under pressure, not feeling fear and threat. At this point, it should not be forgotten that the purpose of accreditation is not to question but to develop the academic facilities and practices of institutions (Epstein, 2012; Hesapçıoğlu et al., 2001; Martin, 2008). Since accreditation is a quality infrastructure, various approval documents are issued as a result of the evaluations made by the organization that evaluates the conformity. Thanks to these documents, the reliability and validity of the products and services offered to the society in many countries and many sectors are approved and the quality of the institutions is guaranteed (Sarp, 2014).

Accreditation is closely related to the concept of quality assurance. Therefore, in all areas where quality and efficiency are based, accreditation is considered and operated as an important mechanism. Therefore, accreditation has been used as a common way to ensure quality assurance and efficiency in universities in recent years (Aktan & Gencel, 2007; Dogan, 2022; Doğan, 1999; Eaton, 2015; Kohler, 2003; Sanyal & Martin, 2007; Wergin, 2005; Yalçınkaya, 1997). Such as, in the USA, accreditation is applied as the main method in assuring quality at higher education level (Eaton, 2004).

In recent years, the most widely adopted model to evaluate higher education around the world is based on independent institutions rather than government institutions. Higher education institutions are mostly evaluated by independent institutions according to the mission and goals they have determined. At this point, the regulatory feature of state institutions has been replaced by the role of approval or registration (Altbach et al., 2009). Kis (2005) lists three approaches used for quality assurance in higher education as accreditation, evaluation and inspection. While accreditation and evaluation focus on the quality of teaching and learning, audit focuses more on the in-house administrative policies implemented by the higher education institution to

achieve its goals. Aktan and Gencel (2007) listed the elements and basic features of the concept of accreditation in higher education as follows:

• Accreditation is a system that allows higher education institutions and/or programs to self-evaluate in terms of performance standards, as well as external evaluation by authorized accreditation bodies.

• Accreditation is a system that ensures the general reliability and recognition of a higher education institution and/or program. Accreditation is the process of awarding a respected certificate that certifies that the relevant institution or program has certain standards of excellence.

• Accreditation is not a one-off process; on the contrary, it is long-term and based on periodic internal and external evaluations.

• Accreditation is a process that aims to continuously improve quality in higher education institutions. Accreditation is a tool that provides quality assurance.

• Accreditation is a system that aims to establish honesty and ethical standards in higher education institutions apart from quality improvement.

• Accreditation is a voluntary (optional) process; there is no pressure or coercion from external public authorities to be involved in this process.

• Accreditation is a self-regulation process in which a non-governmental control mechanism is valid, unlike the regulations determined by public authorities.

• Accreditation is when an institution meets and consistently maintains certain standards.

• Accreditation ensures that accredited institutions and programs will meet or exceed predetermined standards of excellence.

The foundations and principles of the concept of accreditation are fed by its objectives. Sanyal and Martin (2007, p. 6) stated that the purposes of accreditation in higher education are "(i) quality control (providing minimum conditions), (ii) accountability and transparency, (iii) improvement in quality and (iv) facilitating student mobility". Today, accreditation is an important element in the efforts of educational institutions "to be responsible to the public and students, to be accountable to transparency and to increase academic quality" (Hesapçıoğlu et al., 2001, p. 147). Accreditation bodies have stated that evaluation can serve two purposes: "internal improvement and external accountability" (Volkwein, 2010, p.5). Accreditation activity in higher education has benefits for the relevant higher education institution, students, and all stakeholders. Accreditation in higher education is a tool of transparency and accountability. The agreement of accreditation bodies on certain standards and the use of these standards by all relevant institutions ensures transparency. Accreditation bodies are obliged to inform the public about important decisions. These disclosures allow more information to be

provided about institutions. Increasing the information activities carried out in line with the needs of students and the public builds transparency (Aktan & Gencel, 2007).

4. The Historical Development of Accreditation and Foreign Language Education in Turkey

After the industrial revolution, the increase in products and services has revealed the need for continuous improvement in order to ensure that the increasing product and service is appreciated by the user or customer. Quality standard practices aimed at improving the quality in production and service have created the need to have the quality of the product and service approved by an external institution. Thus, accreditation institutions emerged (Çoruh, 2000; Eaton, 2004; 2012). When the process is examined historically, with the concept of quality gaining more and more importance in the field of education, it has been inspired by the applications in the fields of commercial activity and the private sector, and applications to increase the quality in the field of education have started (Newton, 2002). One of these, accreditation practices, first appeared in the fields of engineering and medicine in the United States at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Later, it started to be applied in England and Anglo-Saxon countries, and the search for accreditation and quality in other professional fields became widespread. In the field of education, it is seen that accreditation activities started at the state level in order to determine the conditions for transitioning from secondary education to higher education (Doğan, 1999; Martin, 2008).

The reason for the emergence of accreditation practices in the field of education, especially in the USA, is that there is a 'local' public institution responsible for education in each state. The fact that there are significant differences between educational practices in these states necessitated accreditation studies and accelerated the studies in this direction. In other words, the absence of a central authority with national authority over educational institutions in the USA has caused the programs to vary widely in terms of quality and structure. As a result, the need for accreditation as an independent non-governmental evaluation tool has emerged in order to ensure a certain quality and compliance (Günçer, 1999). To this end, four regional associations for institutional accreditation were established in the United States between 1885 and 1895. In 1906, it was decided to establish common standards for universities by the National Association of State Universities in the United States of America. After this decision, accreditation studies were carried out for many professions (Martin, 2008).

In the UK, in the 1980s, quality assurance systems in the field of education first emerged within the scope of Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) activities. These studies, mostly as an external evaluation carried out by colleagues, contributed to the planning and development of the teaching process in the program. Such assessments have been replaced by institutional audits by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the early 2000s (Cheng, 2010).

In Europe, the fact that the higher education systems of the countries are different has caused problems in reaching the criteria created by the European Union in higher education. For this reason, the member states of the European Union prepared and put into effect some common declarations in the late 1990s and early 2000s in order to bring a common understanding of higher education. Agreements and declarations within this scope can be listed chronologically as follows; Sorbon-1998, Bologna-1999, Prague-2001, Berlin-2003, Bergen-2005 and London-2007 (Sakınç, 2006). The most important of these is seen as the Bologna (1999) process. In the Bologna Declaration, it was suggested that the 'Diploma Supplement' application be implemented in order to make the higher education systems of the countries in Europe as compatible with each other as possible, to search for comparison opportunities to the end, and to have undergraduate or graduate degrees recognized by all European countries (Arslan, 2008). However, the Bologna Declaration aims to develop international mobility, ensure quality assurance in higher education and ensure that countries are harmonized in the field of higher education by prioritizing transparency. The reports prepared in this context led governments to evaluate the compliance of higher education institutions in their countries with the determined standards (Süngü & Bayrakcı, 2010). With the Bologna Declaration, a new process has started in the field of higher education in Europe and one of the most important elements of this process is transparency in higher education. This has led to the conversion of quality assurance systems in many European countries to accreditation, which is thought to provide greater transparency (Kis, 2005; Westerheijden, 2001).

Studies on the establishment of quality assurance and accreditation systems in higher education in Turkey have been carried out largely in parallel with the studies in European Union countries. In this sense, the process that started with the signing of the text of the agreement known as the 'Bologna Declaration' by the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries on 19 June 1999 at the University of Bologna is considered to be one of the important turning points. The main purpose explained in this statement is to create a common higher education system, which is expressed as 'European Higher Education Area (EHEA)' and which ensures harmony between member countries in the field of higher education (Soran et al., 2006). In addition, one of the primary objectives of the Bologna Declaration was stated as "to create a network of quality assurance systems in higher education and to disseminate this practice" (Bologna Declaration, 1999, p. 4). The number of countries that accepted the Bologna Declaration reached 33 in 2001 and Turkey was one of these countries.

Therefore, studies on the establishment of quality assurance and accreditation systems in higher education in Turkey have gained importance since 2001 with the Bologna process. Since the early 2000s, independent national accreditation bodies authorized by YÖK have started to give accreditation in various fields (Arslan, 2008; Koçdar & Kapar, 2017). The effects of the Bologna Declaration, which had a significant impact on the Turkish higher education system can be addressed in two ways. First, Turkey has approved and accepted the standards determined on the harmonization with the European Union on education policies in higher

education. The second is to search for ways to catch up with the quality of higher education in European Union countries and to improve it by adapting it, especially in terms of quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms. For this purpose, official agencies to cooperate with education and research institutions in Europe have been appointed (ENQA, 2000; Kohler, 2003; Mızıkacı, 2003).

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in 2000 to ensure cooperation on quality assurance in European higher education. In parallel with the 'European Higher Education Quality Assurance Principles and Standards' report published by ENQA in 2005, YÖK prepared the 'Regulation for Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions' in the same year. With this regulation, YÖDEK (Higher Education Institutions Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Commission) was established to lead the activities to increase the quality in higher education. YÖDEK has prepared the 'Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Guide in Higher Education Institutions'. Thus, the activities for establishing quality assurance systems in higher education in Turkey have started to be carried out in accordance with this guide as of 2005. Compared to other institutions, higher education institutions carry out academic audits for internal evaluation of quality, student, graduate and external stakeholder satisfaction surveys, quality commissions, etc. with more quality assurance practices (OECD, 2009). In terms of external evaluation, to provide quality assurance systems in higher education, European Quality in Higher Education, a stakeholder of 'Quality in the European Higher Education Area' developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2005 started to take charge for higher education institutions. European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) has been brought to an international dimension with the publication (ENQA, 2000; ENQA, 2015). This process was followed closely in Turkey and the CoHE published the 'Regulation for Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions' in the Official Gazette dated 20.09.2005 and numbered 25942 (YÖK, 2005).

In 2015, the 'Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation' came into force and thus the regulation in 2005 lost its validity. However, the 'Higher Education Quality Board' (YÖKAK), which regulates the execution of the quality assessment and accreditation processes of universities, was established in line with the new regulation, replacing YÖDEK, which was established in line with the regulation of 2005.

According to this regulation, quality assurance and accreditation practices will be carried out in a dual structure as institutional evaluation and program accreditation. Institutional evaluation will be carried out in a way to cover the 'education-training, research and administrative processes' of the relevant higher education institution and will be repeated every 5 years. On the other hand, accreditation was not required for the programs and the programs were based on the voluntary basis of their own wishes. It is planned that the program accreditation will be carried out by the institutions authorized by YÖK for the accreditation of the relevant program, and that the accredited programs should be specified in the preference guide in order to

encourage the process (Yükseköğretim Kalite Güvencesi Yönetmeliği [The Regulation on Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions], 2015).

In the law published in the Official Gazette dated 1 July 2017 and numbered 30111, there are also some regulations regarding the quality assurance system in higher education. One of them was aimed that the Higher Education Quality Board, which was previously under the body of YÖK, now has an administratively and financially autonomous structure. With this regulation, YÖK transferred the evaluation of universities in terms of quality standards and accreditation procedures to this independent board. Thus, the Higher Education Quality Board gained a contemporary feature like the equivalent accreditation institutions operating abroad. Martin (2008) emphasized that the accreditation body should be independent in order to build trust in the academic community.

Now, the main duties of YÖKAK, which has become a full member of ENQA as of April 28, 2020, are to carry out the external evaluation of higher education institutions, to carry out the processes of authorization and recognition of accreditation institutions, and to ensure the internalization and dissemination of the culture of quality assurance in higher education institutions (YÖKAK, 2021-b). In this context, YÖKAK, started to implement for the first time in 2020, evaluates the institutional accreditation by 22 criteria with 56 sub-criteria under the titles of "Quality Assurance System, Education and Training, Research and Development, Social Contribution and Management System" (YÖKAK, 2021-b).

In recent years, it has been observed that there has been a very tight competition between the countries where English is spoken as the mother tongue for English learning, in order to attract more students and to satisfy the incoming students more. For this reason, the quality of the education service; in other words, providing extremely high-quality English education has become very important for all these countries. As a result, the countries that come to the fore with English language teaching give great importance to accreditation practices as the state in order to compete with other countries in the international arena in English education services, to increase the quality of the English education services they offer and to provide quality assurance.

Thus, foreign language teaching and quality assurance studies in higher education in Turkey needs to be taken into consideration parallel to the global developments and changes in this aspect. When it was examined, it is seen that foreign language teaching in higher education institutions is regulated in accordance with the "Regulation on the Principles to be Followed in Foreign Language Teaching and Teaching in a Foreign Language in Higher Education Institutions" published in the Official Gazette dated 23.03.2016 and numbered 29662 (YÖK, 2016). This regulation covers the compulsory foreign language courses and the opening and running of compulsory and optional preparatory classes in accordance with subparagraph (i) of the first paragraph of Article 5 of the Law No. 2547. The quality of foreign language teaching in associate, undergraduate and graduate programs is inspected by YÖK according to the 9th

article of this regulation, and according to the result of the inspection, the program's permission to teach in a foreign language can be revoked. However, there is no article in this regulation regarding the compulsory foreign language courses taught in accordance with subparagraph (i) of the first paragraph of Article 5 of the Law No. 2547 and the supervision of foreign language teaching offered in foreign language preparatory classes (Doğan,2022).

When the quality assurance studies related to foreign language teaching in higher education institutions are examined, it is seen that quality studies started with a workshop organized in 2015 with the participation of 40 universities with the cooperation of YÖK and British Council (YÖKAK, 2021). The workshop report stated that there are differences in curriculum, learning outcomes and quality levels in English language education offered at universities. In addition, some suggestions that can be made on a national and institutional basis are included. In the second study carried out in 2017, it was decided to start the 'Quality Program in English Education' in 5 determined state universities. Thereupon, YÖK organized the 'Workshop on Quality Assurance in Foreign Language Preparatory Education in Higher Education' in cooperation with the British Council and YÖKAK in 2018. As a result of this workshop attended by the directors of the School of Foreign Languages of 26 universities, the goal of establishing a national quality assurance system was revealed (YÖKAK, 2021). In line with this goal, as Dogan declared (2022, p.143) YÖKAK has completed the English preparatory school of 10 pilot universities (Bezm-i Alem Vakıf University, Boğaziçi University, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, İstanbul Medeniyet University, İzmir Institute of Technology, Karabük University, Koç University, Middle East Technical University and Sabancı University) to the "English Preparatory Schools External Evaluation Program (IHO-DDPP)". In order to be used in the evaluation process, the 'Universities English Preparatory Schools External Evaluation Pilot Program Guide' was prepared by the directors of the School of Foreign Languages of 6 universities in line with the 'YÖKAK Institutional External Evaluation Guide' and 30 evaluator candidates who will serve as evaluators in the program were assigned by YÖKAK on October 10-11, 2018. 'English Preparatory Schools Evaluator Training' was organized (YÖKAK, 2021). To this end, studies in this area of foreign language accreditation have shown that "Pearson Assured, EAQUALS (Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality Language Services), CEA (Commission on English Language Program Accreditation), and the national YKAK-HO-DDPP and DEDAK (Language Education Evaluation and Accreditation Board)" of Turkey provide quality assurance internationally with external evaluation (Dogan, 2022, p.138). Ayvaz and Mutçalıoğlu (2019) declared that, among them, DEDAK has some strengths, one of which is every member of the task force had some prior experience with accreditation, and it is significant that its members have competence in accrediting process and assuring quality in education. Alumnae of the WSCUC Accreditation Assessment Leadership Academy, CEA commissioners, a former chair of the Commission, CEA site-reviewers, members of the Board of Trustees of EAQUALS, and many other individuals actively involved in the accreditation of their own programs are among

the members. Second, because of their tenacity and commitment, DEDAK succeeded in spite of several changes to the board's organizational structure, including but not limited to the election of the initial chair. The transitions were seamless, and the work kept moving forward at every level. Additionally, DEDAK has been able to resist any potential commercial influences and the consequences of political instability at times thanks to the wisdom of its members. Reaching out to all parties and balancing the representation of various areas and university types has been another strength. One of DEDAK's core beliefs is inclusivity, but sometimes it is easier to say than accomplish. This is especially true because certification is frequently associated with control and conformity. This was one of DEDAK's obstacles, but it turned out to be a strength.

5. The Effects of Accreditation on the Quality of Foreign Language Education

In terms of the language education in Turkey, it is time for higher education agencies to focus on quality control in their language instruction that increases the importance of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) implementations since there has been a significant increase in the number of institutions that offer EMI (Staub, 2019; Şivil, 2019). Regardless of the department, learning English is essential due to its dominance in the global marketplace; in many circumstances, knowing other languages in addition to English gives aspiring businesses a competitive advantage. Thus, a strong language education can enable pupils to participate in global commerce and obtain a competitive edge. Additionally, quality higher education, research, and innovation are essential for economic growth and competition. Moreover, the significant percentage of universities that offer instruction in English (EMI) is also characterized by the global expansion of higher education institutions (Ataman, & Adıgüzel, 2020; Ataman, 2021; Dearden, 2014; Doiz et al., 2013; Earls, 2016; Macaro, et al., 2018; Staub, 2019). On the other hand, British Council (2015) had recently announced the deficiency of EMI that refers the ongoing process of English language education at higher education level in Turkey. Specifically, the report highlights the inefficient number of the English language teachers at the tertiary level who are qualified enough in organizing, planning, and delivering classes for English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Moreover, the academic staff and members of faculties have drawbacks in specifying and feeding the needs of learners related to the content of foreign language they perceive to learn. These aspects have sparked great attention in providing and pursuing quality and, as a result, announces the need of expertly-accredited English language programs.

It is of great importance that the higher education institution and its programs are given the opportunity to improve their current practices and increase the performance of the institution during and after the accreditation process. In the accreditation process, contributing to the development of the program by identifying the weaknesses of it and determining the strategies and practices to eliminate them, reveals the most functional effect of accreditation (Epstein, 2012; Provezis, 2010; Sanyal & Martin, 2007). Since accreditation is not an audit system that has direct sanctions according to the positive or negative result after the evaluation of the

institution, it has been stated that the accredited or non-accredited institutions can make improvements through some indirect ways from the evaluation result and that they may be beneficially affected by the process in any case (Bakioğlu & Baltacı, 2010).

The accreditation system generally determines whether higher education programs meet the standards by program-specific accreditation bodies. It ensures that the level of quality is revealed, and the findings obtained are shared with the public, so that students and the business world are informed about the subject (Ataman, 2021; Staub; 2019; Yalçınkaya, 1997). The feature of accreditation, revealing the performance of higher education programs based on some examinations and evidence, and sharing them openly with the public, is very important in terms of providing reliable data for students and parents to make the right decisions about education (Eaton, 2003; Sanyal & Martin, 2007; Wergin, 2005). Students, parents, and employers also demand higher education institutions to certify students' qualifications (Altbach et al., 2009). Similarly, according to Hernes (2008), the audience that wants to achieve and maintain the standards can be divided into three: universities, students, and finally employers who want to make sure that the qualifications specified in diplomas or certificates are actually gained by students. Accredited higher education programs directly or indirectly affect students' choices by documenting that they have achieved quality indicators (Hesapçıoğlu et al., 2001; Martin, 2008). Program accreditation ensures the continuous development of programs in changing and developing conditions, adopting output-oriented approaches, facilitating mobility in higher education, supporting academic staff, improving competition, increasing the respect and trust of the society and the sector in education (Çabuk 2018; Staub, 2019).

In order to better analyze the effects of accreditation on foreign language education, its process needs to be addressed more comprehensively. In the most basic sense, the accreditation process consists of self-assessment, visit, reporting and continuous monitoring to ensure continuity. The process first starts with self-assessment activities that reveal the extent to which the institution applying for accreditation meets the accreditation standards, and the institution begins its work towards the process to eliminate its deficiencies. Then the experts in the visiting team visit the institution and collect some evidence. Afterwards, the findings obtained through both document review and field visits are reported and a comprehensive evaluation is made. As a result, it is ultimately decided whether the institution should be accredited or not. This process takes an average of 1 year. In addition, since the accredited educational institution must demonstrate that it continues to meet the standards during the period of accreditation, it periodically submits reports and the continuity of accreditation is ensured (Eaton, 2012; 2015; Prasad & Bhar, 2010; Provezis, 2010; Volkwein, 2010; van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). In more detail, the stages in the accreditation process can be listed as follows (Aktan & Gencel, 2007; Gencel, 2001; Heyworth, 2013; Kotarska, 2019; Martin, 2008; Saunders, 2007; Wergin, 2005; YÖK/World Bank, 1999):

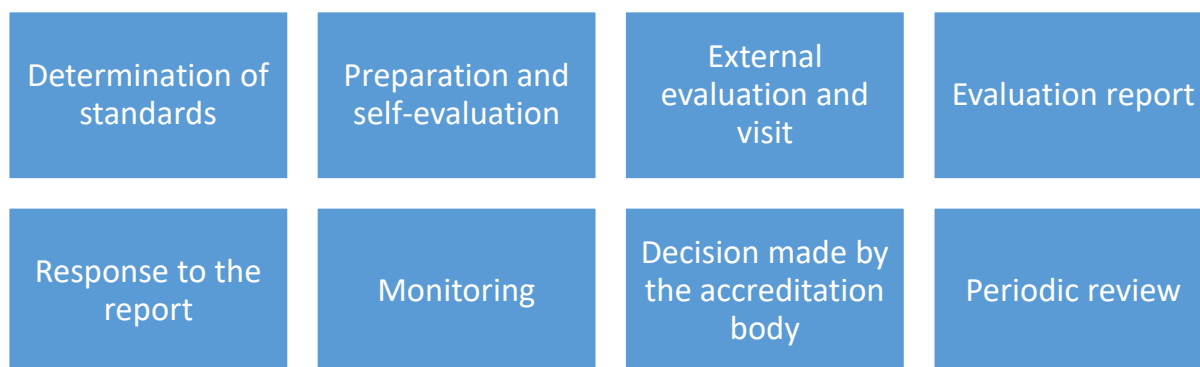|			
Determination of standards	Preparation and self-evaluation	External evaluation and visit	Evaluation report
Response to the report	Monitoring	Decision made by the accreditation body	Periodic review

Figure 1. The stages of accreditation process

• Determination of standards: In this first stage, the accreditation body determines the quality standards to be taken as a basis when evaluating a higher education program,

• Preparation and self-evaluation: In the second stage, the higher education institution applying for accreditation starts the preparatory work for the process. At this point, it first generates an internal self-evaluation (self-examination) report that includes their own assessment of how they are doing in meeting the standards.

• External evaluation and visit: Visiting team members appointed by the accreditation body conduct an on-site evaluation to assess whether the program is meeting the standards. During the field visit, the information and other documents in the self-evaluation report are reviewed, the facilities are inspected, the lectures are observed, and interviews and meetings are held with the lecturers, students, dean and other relevant persons.

• Evaluation report: Visiting team members prepare a report that includes their assessment of the degree to which the program meets the standards and their recommendations on the accreditation status of the programs.

• Response to the report: The administrators of the visited program prepare answers to the material errors, overlooked information and documents in the evaluation report.

• Monitoring: The higher education institution or program is closely monitored for a certain period of time and it is observed whether it meets the desired standards.

• Decision made by the accreditation body: The accreditation body takes the decision regarding the accreditation of the program based on the evidence obtained by convening the relevant commission.

• Periodic review: The accredited program is subject to reevaluation at regular intervals, providing continuous review and ensuring that the program maintains the standards.

Considering these stages of the accreditation process, the processes of revealing, examining and continuously improving teaching activities will undoubtedly have a positive effect on foreign language teaching. In this sense, the accreditation process should not be perceived only as the

process of revealing the educational activities carried out. Although the accreditation process is handled on an institutional basis, it is also based on the devoted cooperation of the program staff who carry out the works in the institutions. For this reason, accreditation processes can affect the working habits of the stakeholders working in the programs and play an important role in supporting stakeholder sharing. In this way, it can help individuals gain momentum in professional development and develop a self-view towards themselves by revealing the best examples and developable aspects of the instructors, with the effect of increasing transparency in the teaching processes.

Given these accreditation concerns, the majority of companies engaged in the delivery of English language education are extremely aware of the value of continuing professional development (CPD). As a result, CPD is listed as a significant institutional requirement in many educational accrediting programs. English language education is no exception to the fact that accreditation has become a crucial component of ensuring the quality of education in recent years. As Collins and Gün stated (2019), the European Association for Quality Language Services (EAQUALS) and the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) are two of the top international accreditors. There are also other national organizations, such as the recently established DEDAK in Turkey. Such programs' main goal is to advance educational excellence by evaluating institutions' adherence to set standards objectively and providing a guarantee of excellence. The degree to which a company engages in self-evaluation and continuous education is one of the key indicators of such quality assurance and offering CPD is a requirement of all the major accreditation programs. The accreditation process has been extremely helpful in creating a CPD 'system and culture' in the relevant institutions. CPD is also essential to the tenets of a high-quality accreditation organization (Collins & Gün, 2019). Each recognized institution is expected to establish a culture of ongoing self-reflection and improvement, constantly seeking to improve programs for all its stakeholders. In this view, certification is much more than a document attesting to conformity or the achievement of a minimum level of quality or suitability for a given purpose.

6. Conclusion

All stakeholders, including educational institutions and certification bodies, are facing new problems as a result of the contemporary environment's intense competition, and some of them have been inspired to go above and beyond just preserving and measuring quality. The next task will be to define excellence and make it a crucial component of accrediting processes in addition to pushing for it in educational institutions. Accreditation organizations must overcome this in order to ensure their long-term viability. The approach needs to be revised in order to clearly distinguish between criteria-based approaches to evaluating excellence and minimum/threshold norms and requirements. The next stage in educational progress should be marked by exceeding high standards rather than meeting the minimum requirements, no matter how stringent they may be. Accreditation organizations should be under pressure to establish

the standards and parameters by which excellence will be judged. A fundamental tenet of any accrediting procedure should be to maintain standards and go beyond simple quality assurance.

It is a widely held belief that obtaining accreditation is motivated by the desire to boost the caliber of language instruction, enhance student performance, establish, and uphold high standards, increase visibility, foster collegiality, and spread best practices. It is challenging to quantify the effects and results of accreditation, as well as to evaluate how well certification programs affect internal quality assurance procedures. It might be claimed that accreditation improves the standard for instruction and learning if the process includes mechanisms for self-review. It's still uncertain if accrediting programs would have had an impact on the quality of language instruction. The pursuit of quality is an ongoing process, and the issues of the harmony between the commercial and the practical, the developmental and the educational aspects remain hotly contesting for the accrediting bodies and authorities.

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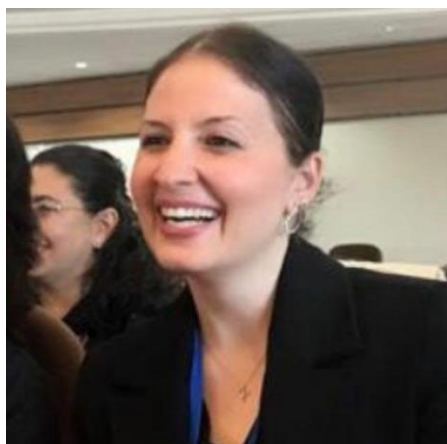
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ayfer SU BERGIL

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9277-2862

ayfersubergil@amasya.edu.tr

Amasya University

Ayfer Su-Bergil is currently working as an Assistant Professor Doctor in Amasya University, Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Language Education, Division of English Language Teaching. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Gazi University, English Language Teaching in 2004 and got Master of Arts degree from Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Curriculum and Instruction, in 2010. She completed her doctoral studies at the English Language Teaching Department, Hacettepe University in 2015. Su-Bergil teaches English language courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Teacher education, curriculum and instruction, English language teaching & learning are among the fields of her interest.