Graduate Students' Perception of Standards and Accreditation in Higher Education in Turkey: A Qualitative Analysis

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My aim in this this study was to investigate graduate students' perceptions about the concepts of standard and accreditation and their views on the problems of accreditation in Turkey. I conducted research on 26 graduate students in Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Turkey. I administered an open-ended questionnaire consisting of four questions to collect the data. To analyze the data I used content analysis technique. The internal consistency of the study was found 0.81. My initial findings showed that the participants associated the concept of quality especially with reliability, first-class, and expensive which are commonly used; associated the concept of standard with criteria, similarity, and necessity which are confused much with; finally associated the concept of accreditation with quality assurance, auditing, and approval which are the among of its meaning. The results also manifested that the accreditation cycle of higher education in Turkey had crucial barriers as improper standards lack of accreditation board, and institutional issues. I hope that my findings will enlighten researchers about the main issues associated with accreditation in Turkey, and encourage stakeholders to refocus on the inactive accreditation system. Keywords: Quality, Quality Assurance, Accreditation System, Accreditation, Standards, Qualitative Analysis

Introduction

Turkey having an Asiatic-Islamic cultural and educational background is a geographical, sociological and cultural bridge between Asia and Europe; between eastern and western attitudes, values and life styles. Since the last three decades, Turkey has appeared more receptive to western style of education (Mocan-Aydın, 2000).

As many countries, Turkey is also in search of improving educational institutions in order to satisfy social, economic and scientific expectations of the society. Since the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923, education has been considered as the fundamental pillar of keeping up with civilized countries. Over the 89 years, education reforms have been an on-going process and the republic has shown great efforts to develop, adopt, upgrade, transform and orientate education and educational systems (Grossman & Sands, 2008; Mango, 2004). Within this period, impressive improvements have been witnessed such as rapid increase in the number of universities and schools; considerable raise in the literacy and enrolment rate of students, increase in education budget, restructuring teacher education system, and establishment of quality assurance system in higher education (Dundar & Lewis, 1999; Grossman & Onkol, 2006; Grossman, Sands, & Brittingham, 2010; MONE, 2002; Simsek & Yıldırım; 2001). Some of these reforms are in full flaw today, while some needs to be revised, reorganised, and reactivated. Among these, the project of establishing and implementing quality assurance system in higher education though was considered one of the crucial leaps and commenced with great expectations; it has not been maintained so far. This is the concern of this paper. After introducing Turkish accreditation system, the core concepts and issues in the system will be examined in terms of Turkish graduate students' perceptions.

Accreditation System of Teacher Education in Turkey

Higher Education, particularly teacher education, has been of great significance in Turkey since the establishment of the Republic. Much of the consideration has always been mainly on the quality of education. In last two decade considerable reforms regarding quality development in higher education were carried out by Higher Education Council (HEC), the only authority of higher education in Turkey.

The first important reform, which began in late 1994, was an extension and conversion of the countywide teacher education system, focusing mainly on curriculum development and teacher training (Sands & Özçelik, 1998). The HEC therefore established and standardized all current teacher education programs in 1997, revised them in 2007. Nowadays, the reform movements are still in progress in line with Bologna Process.

The second reform was the preparation and piloting of an accreditation model for education faculties. Though, the reform activities date back to the end of 1997, a nationwide system of standards and accreditation of universities and of departments within universities has not been completed. Yet, some pioneering higher education institutions, who search for international recognition, invited Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) in the first half 1990's (MEB, 2005). Several engineering programs in these pioneering universities were accredited by ABET and were given "substantial equivalence" which means that the program is comparable in program content and educational experience, but may differ in format or method of delivery (ABET, 2012; Ergüder, 2006). Middle East Technical University (METU), one of the best technical universities in Turkey, was the first college to be accredited by ABET. After METU's success in accreditation, Bosphorus University in Istanbul commenced the accreditation process of their engineering programme and it was also successful in accreditation process in 2001. Finally, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, one of the best known private foundation universities, started the accreditation process and its engineering programme was also accredited by ABET. The successful accreditation of the engineering programmes of these three well-known universities inspired all the engineering faculties to establish a countrywide accreditation system for engineering programs (Akduman, Özkale, & Ekinci, 2001; Ergüder, 2006; Öz, 2005). The meetings and the workshops of the deans of all the engineering faculties resulted in a nationwide accreditation system of engineering programs called Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Engineering Programs (MÜDEK).

Considering teacher education, in 1997–1998 HEC, in cooperation with the British Council, made a pilot project of general accreditation issues in universities named "Turkish University Quality Assessment Project." Prior to the initiation of the project to adapt the British model of quality assurance on a pilot basis in Turkey a seminar was arranged by HEC to bring in comparative perspective on external quality assurance in different countries. This seminar indicated that the United Kingdom system of accreditation practised by professional institutions is the most comprehensive system in the world, and this system is widely adopted by many countries. Thus, Turkish accreditation system for teacher education was decided to mainly be grounded on the United Kingdom model that separates assessment of research and teaching (Billing & Thomas, 2000).

The pilot system commenced in 1999 was primarily to determine the value of academic assessment by conducting evaluations of both teaching and research. The main aim of the project was the development of an academic assessment cycle and construction, and finally leading to the creation of accreditation and quality assurance model similar to the OECD and EU countries. Within this context nine dissemination-training courses were conducted across the country, thirty-six senior teacher educators were trained as assessors, the Accreditation Body was enlarged, and received further training in the UK and US in order

to enhance their technical expertise, 40 national standards for teacher education for every faculty were developed, and finally six of education faculties were chosen. They were asked to submit self-evaluation reports for review by the Accreditation Board and then these faculties were visited. All activities were compiled in a report and published later that year (Brittingham et al., 1999; Grossman et al., 2010).

The accreditation project covered a wide variety of programs and higher education institutions. However, it has not been sustained since the last decade due to some problems such as the transfer of quality assurance systems from one country to another and the maintenance of the project (Billing & Thomas, 2000; Öz, 2005). Additionally, this yielded significant cultural, structural, political reactions as well as technical issues. These issues affected the transfer of the UK system to the Turkish situation. Billing & Thomas (2000) stated that project was initially designed to ascertain whether quality assurance systems could be introduced in Turkey; however, there was no culture of quality management at institutional (or any other) level already in existence in Turkey at that time. There was no system of external examiners and even no history of peer review in Turkey. Grossman et al. (2010) declared that the foremost factor that hinders the project is the large and very rapid increase in the number of Turkish universities. There were some 18 established state-run universities in 1992. By 2012 there were 103 state universities, and 62 private universities (HEC, 2012). The problem is not the increase in the number of the university. The problem is the decrease in quality. Almost all trained teaching or research members desire to stay in universities they have taken their master or doctoral degrees. While there is a density of qualified members in leading universities, some universities in west of Turkey have in difficulty to find even one qualified member for some programs. Moreover, one of the major and most probably the important factor that hinders the quality assurance system in teacher education in Turkey is lack of culture of quality (Grossman et al., 2010). It is hard to say that Turkey created culture of quality in teacher education. The first attempt was piloting of accreditation system, but it could not be prolonged. Neither the education faculties, nor the administrators, teaching and research members, instructors were prepared for such system. Even no course on accreditation and quality assurance has been offered neither in under graduate nor in postgraduate teacher education programs. Additionally, there are few studies related to this issue. These limited studies mostly are theoretical studies and scrutinize the history of the accreditation system and describe the stages in detail or discuss partly (Akduman et al., 2001; Dundar, & Lewis, 1999; Öz, 2005; Özgen, 1999; Payzin, Senatalar, & Platin, 2006; Platin, Erdem-Senatalar, & Payzin, 2005; Yüksel & Adigüzel, 2011). On the other hand, only one study (Grossman et al., 2010) investigated whether there is a culture of quality within the teacher education community in Turkey. However, the more compelling question is to determine the underlying reasons for collapse of the system. The study aims to address this issue from graduate students' perspectives.

Role of the Researcher

The development of standards and quality assurance systems has become a special interest of mine since I was a PhD student. I, İsmail Yüksel, am a researcher and an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education at Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Turkey. My teaching role includes both the preparation of undergraduate students for the teaching profession, and graduate students as specialists, instructors, etc. for universities. I deliver curriculum and instruction and program evaluation courses for such students.

As a researcher, my case study research investigated postgraduate students' perspectives on standard development and accreditation processes in teacher education in

Turkey. As a teacher educator myself, I contend that postgraduate students have little or no information on standard development and quality assurance systems in teacher education, and little attention is paid to their ideas. The significance of the study presented here is the potential to give a voice to this community. Since the research setting was also my working area, I collected the data as an insider researcher. As Hermann (1989) points out, being an insider researcher is one of the most important and challenging situation in qualitative studies. In my situation it is an advantage, in that I was already an insider as I am a teaching member of the Graduate School of Educational Sciences (GSES). Since I am a young professor I have been able to maintain close contacts with the participants, some of whom were research assistants in GSES and some of whom were my previous students from my curriculum and instruction Master degree courses.   However, this insider role would bring my bias into data analysis and interpretation. To address this issue, I used peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2012).

Methodology

I designed the current paper as a qualitative case study. This is an approach to research that facilitates the investigation of a phenomenon within its context, using various data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008), As Creswell (2012) indicates, a case study approach allows the exploration of a case over a period of time, using in-depth data collection and analysis procedures. Case studies make it possible to fully understand the issues regarding accreditation systems in higher education, by examining all the participants' views (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A descriptive case study research type is appropriate for the problem considered in this study, because it is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon in a real life context, allowed the exploration of individual experiences and relationships, and depended on one's perspective (Yin, 2003). In other words, I aimed to analyze graduate students' conceptual perceptions of the terms "standard" and "quality" as well as their perspectives on accreditation processes. To avoid a tendency to attempt to answer a question that is too broad, or a topic that has too many objectives for the study, I bounded the case in terms of time and activity (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995), place (Creswell, 2012), definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, there are no studies to date that examine the issues associated with the accreditation system in higher education in Turkey using a qualitative case study.

Participants

After obtaining approval for the research from the School's review board and from individuals providing the data, I recruited a purposeful sampling of postgraduate students at the Graduate School of Educational Sciences (GSES) at Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Turkey. This school delivers Master and PhD degree courses in elementary education, curriculum & instruction, and educational administration and planning. As the concern of this study is determining the problems associated with accreditation systems in teacher education from postgraduate students' perspectives, I decided that students in this School would provide sufficient data for the study. With the help of the school administration, I recruited participants who met the following criteria: (a) had completed at least one Master or PhD course regarding Turkish Education System, (b) are not currently enrolled on any of my courses and (c) are currently working as teachers, instructors or research assistants. The administration listed 34 students who met these criteria. I was then able to get in touch with 26 of them, with eight not responding to my efforts to contact them. Of the 26 postgraduate participants in the GSES, 18 were female and eight were male. Seven participants were

enrolled in PhD programs, while 19 of them were enrolled in Master degree programs. Ten participants reported being primary school teachers, eight secondary school teachers, four language instructors, and four research assistants. The participants were from the Departments of Elementary Education, Curriculum & Instruction, and Educational Administration and Planning in GSES.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected two types of data including demographic information and the participants' responses to open-ended questions. Demographic information included participants' gender, department, degree, and occupation. The interviews were semi-structured and included four general open-ended questions that were derived from the research literature. As Moustakas (1994) recommended, general questions are acceptable in regard to what is experienced in terms of the case/phenomenon, and what conditions influence these experiences. Thus, the questions used were: (a) what comes to mind when you hear the word "quality," (b) what comes to mind when you hear the word "standard," (c) what comes to mind when you hear the word "accreditation," (d) what do you think about the issues with regard to the accreditation system in teacher education in Turkey? These questions tap into the participants' perceptions of the main terms regarding quality assurance systems, and their experience of the accreditation problems in teacher education.

After collecting the data, I analyzed it for content with the assistance of three experts. As Patton (2002) states, content analysis is the process of searching the text for themes and patterns that occur over and over again. My first step of the analysis was to utilize the data, called open coding, as proposed by Straus and Corbin (1990). Open coding is one of the ways to inductively analyze a text for themes or patterns. It mainly refers to the naming and categorizing of the phenomena through a close examination of data (Mertens, 2005). We followed two criteria recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for this step: (a) the unit must reveal relevant information about the case (b) the unit should stand by itself in that it could be interpreted in the absence of additional information. We first read the interview documents in order to familiarize ourselves with the participants' perceptions. Then, analyzing the data question by question, we placed codes or idea words in the right margin. In the last reading/checking we placed these codes into categories by using labels which could be quickly referenced. Each of us generated the categories based on his/her background knowledge of the case. The second step of the analysis was axial coding. This is "…a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). In this step we focused on the initial codes more than on the data. After noting the categories in the axial coding stage, each of us selected a core category and systematically related it to other categories (the selective coding process). In this stage, close attention should be paid to separation and connection (Chenail, 2012). As Chenail signifies, to establish the credibility of qualitative findings, we need to maintain connections and separations when we create codes and categories. If there is no separation between codes and categories, there is no connection, and then there is no perspective and no analysis (Chenail, 2012). All the activities done by the analyzing team were conducted independently of each other. Finally, I compared my derived codes and categories to those of the experts to determine the degree of consistency between us. In order to conduct intercoder consistency analysis, I prepared a sheet which indicated the number of codes on which we agreed, and the number of codes on which we did not agree. With the help of a formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) (interrater consistency = number of agreements/total number of agreements + disagreements), I calculated the

consistency value to be 0.81. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a consistency value above 0.70 is acceptable for a qualitative study.

Findings

The terms "quality," "standard," and "accreditation" are the main concepts in quality assurance systems (Meraler & Adigüzel, 2012). In Turkey, as mentioned in the literature review, quality assurance systems have emerged in the last two decades. In teacher education in particular, such systems have not been discussed thoroughly. Thus, to create a culture of quality, the concepts regarding quality assurance systems should be defined and used accurately within teacher education. The concepts in this study (standards, accreditation, quality) were translated into Turkish without a change in spelling and pronunciation (standarts, akreditasyon, kalite). However, they are being used in various situations with different meanings. By investigating participants' perceptions of these concepts, I aimed to reveal the contexts within which they relate the concepts of standards, accreditation and quality.

The first question that guided this aim in the study was "What comes to mind when you hear the word *quality*?" I encouraged them to write either one word or phrase. I classified the responses into five themes based on common codes. The results are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' perceptions of the word "Quality"

Themes	η	%	Themes	η	%
Reliability	9	34.6%	**Strength**	5	19.2%
Reliability	4	15.4%	*strength,*	2	7.7%
Credibility	2	7.7%	*solidity*	2	7.7%
Dependability	2	7.7%	*soundness*	1	3.8%
Authenticity	1	3.8%			
First-class	6	23.1%	**Attribute**	4	15.4%
top-class	2	7.7%	*attribute*	2	7.7%
high-class	2	7.7%	*caliber*	1	3.8%
top-line	1	3.8%	*grade*	1	3.8%
pucka,	1	3.8%			
Expensive	2	7.7			

The results indicated that nine participants associated quality with the words *"credibility, dependability, authenticity, and reliability"* gathered under "Reliability" theme. The six participants associated quality with *"top-class, pucka, top-line, high-class"* merged under the theme of "first-class." And, five of them told that quality is related to *"strength, solidity and soundness"* merged under theme of "Strength." Four of the participants identified the word "quality" with the concepts of *"attribute, calibre, and grade"* gathered under "attribute" theme. Finally two of them endorsed the *"the more expensive the more qualified"* idea merged under "expensive" theme.

The second question that guided the aim mentioned above was "What comes to mind when you hear the word *standard*"? This word is greatly misused in the Turkish setting (Yuksel, 2010). Most of the students, even the researchers or instructors in universities, confuse this concept with the criteria, benchmark and quantity (Glass, 1978; Yuksel, 2010). I categorized participants' responses into three themes which relate to the common

meanings/synonyms of the concept.   The themes and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' perceptions of the word "Standard"

Themes	*η*	%	Themes	*η*	%
Criteria	**13**	**50.0%**	**Necessity**	**6**	**23.1%**
required criteria	*6*	*23.1%*	*strength,*	*2*	*7.7%*
valuation criteria	*4*	*15.4%*	*solidity*	*2*	*7.7%*
benchmark	*2*	*7.7%*	*soundness*	*1*	*3.8%*
measure	*1*	*3.8%*			
Similarity	**6**	**23.1%**	**No response**	**1**	**3.8%**
conformity	*2*	*7.7%*			
making an analogy	*2*	*7.7%*			
checking parity	*1*	*3.8%*			
sharing similarity	*1*	*3.8%*			

Findings in Table 2 indicated that the participants explained the concept of standard in three themes. Firstly, standard was perceived as *"required criteria, valuation criteria, benchmark and measure"* under the theme of "Criteria." Secondly, five participants explained standard as *"conformity, making an analogy, checking parity and sharing similarity"* assembled under the theme of "Similarity." Thirdly, five of the participants perceived the term standard as "*indispensable for evaluation, imperative in production, and necessary"* gathered under the theme of "Necessity." One of the participants did not reflect on this question.

Table 3. *Participants'* perceptions of the word "Accreditation"

Themes	*η*	%	Themes	*η*	%
Quality Assurance	**12**	**46.2%**	**Approval**	**5**	**19.2%**
quality assurance	*7*	*26.9%*	*approval*	*3*	*11.5%*
to guarantee	*3*	*11.5%*	*self-approval*	*1*	*3.8%*
establishing confidence	*1*	*3.8%*	*recognition*	*1*	*3.8%*
warranty	*1*	*3.8%*			
Auditing	**8**	**30.8%**	**No response**	**1**	**3.8%**
Auditing	*4*	*15.4%*			
inspection, a way to inspect foundation	*2*	*7.7%*			
supervisory service	*1*	*3.8%*			
self-scrutiny of institutions	*1*	*3.8%*			

My third question investigated the concept of accreditation by asking "What comes to mind when you hear the word *accreditation*?" The concept of accreditation is frequently used in the press in Turkey. In educational settings, the concepts of auditing and evaluation are frequently used incorrectly in place of accreditation (Yüksel & Adigüzel, 2011).The participants' responses were in line with this misuse of the term. Based on the codes, I classified the participants' response-codes into three themes. All these themes were closely related to the term "accreditation." The results are presented in Table 3.

The findings in Table 3 showed that a great majority of participants defined accreditation as *"to guarantee, establish confidence, warranty, and quality assurance"* which were merged under the theme of "Quality assurance." The second theme based on eight participants' reflections was "Auditing," and consisted of the replies as *"auditing, inspection, a way to inspect foundations, a supervisory service, and self-scrutiny of institutions."* Finally, five of the participants remarked accreditation as *"approval, self-approval and recognition"* categorized as "Approval."

The fourth question I directed to participants was "What do you think about the issues with regard to the accreditation system in teacher education in Turkey?" The reflections of the participants were classified into three themes. The distribution of themes is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Participants' views on accreditation in higher education in Turkey*

Themes	η	%
Accreditation Board	12	46.2%
Institutions' Concerns	7	26.9%
Improper Standards	5	19.2%
Have no information	2	7.7%

As indicated in Table 4, the findings showed that almost half the participants (12) remarked the fundamental problems in higher education in Turkey was a lack of an independent and an active accreditation board. One of the participants declared

> *To me, the biggest reason for accreditation issue in Turkey is that the Higher Education Council (HEC) has the all responsibility and control of accreditation. Both accreditation team and the universities to be accredited are under the responsibility of HEC. Nobody shoots himself in the foot.*

Another one stated

> *The accreditation process in Turkey depended on conflict of interest. The team was not independent. It was consisted of university members. These members may not be objective while accrediting their universities*

and one clarified

> *As I know from my readings the accreditation process is inactive and functionless since the beginning of the decade, I haven't heard of accredited teacher education faculties.* And one stated that "*the accreditation board in Turkey should be independent or like DDK (the state supervisory council) should be under responsibility of President of Republic.*

The results indicated that seven participants focused on the problems (i.e., Institutions' Concerns) related to universities. For instance one of the participants denoted

> *As one the research assistants, I heard accreditation and quality assurance system in turkey by ADEK (accreditation studies within university) activities. To me the managers and the faculty in universities have not sufficient information of accreditation and its process.*

While one of them stated

> *I think accreditation of higher education institutions in today's Turkey is impossible. The state universities have not the equal rights. The west universities are in need of quality students and faculty. It is possible to say that METU in Ankara and Hakkari University have the same budget, faculty, student profile, or state opportunities? On the other hand, most of them are afraid of being ranked.*

And one passed an opinion

> *according to me the main problem in accreditation of teacher education in Turkey is the universities. They are not ready to be evaluated, accredited or audited.*

Equally, four participants put emphasis on lack of standards for accreditation (i.e., Improper Standards). They criticized that the standards for accreditation were uncertain, not measurable, and poor developed, for instance, one them stated

> *Once in a course we discussed the standards developed in 1998, we had a consensus that they are to general and do not reflect an optimal program's features.*

Another one specified

> *I heard the development of teacher competencies by the ministry, but as I see, there are no standards developed for teacher education.*

While a third one passed an opinion

> *the standards were too general, they were cancelled by HEC. I think there studies on development of new standards and accreditation process.*

Finally, two of the participants surprisingly, stated that they have no information about the accreditation process in higher education in Turkey.

Conclusion and Discussion

The objective of this study is to publicize accreditation studies which are less recognized in my country, to emphasize in what way accreditation studies must be done, offer alternative solutions for the problems encountered by updating sufficiency and insufficiency of completed or expected accreditation practices.

According to the data gathered in this study, a large number of the participants associate quality with reliability, qualification, and accordance with standards. The concept of "quality" has been contemplated throughout history and continues to be a topic of intense interest today (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). Quality has been variously defined by Feigenbaum, (1991) as "the single most important force leading to the economic growth of companies in international markets," by Gilmore (1974) as "conformance to specifications," by Crosby (1979) as "conformance to requirements," by Juran (1992) as "fitness for use," and by Gronroos (1990) as "meeting and/or exceeding customers' expectations" (cited in Reeves & Bednar, 1994). Consequently, the participants in my study associated the word quality with the close meaning of the word defined by the experts.

The term of standard agreed as being the initiative for quality is explained by the participants as "similarity," "expectation," and "criteria." Within the historical process, different words such as "criterion," "scale," "accuracy," "touchstone," and "testing" have been used to refer to the expression of standard. Nonetheless, Glass (1978) asserted that specifically the term of "criterion" among these words did not carry the same meaning as standard and that most educators use the term of standard inappropriately. As said by Glass, criterion is "an interest variable in taking a decision, but standard shows the quantity of that variable" (p. 238) With all these arguments, "criterion," and "standard" are still used as synonyms in Turkey (Yüksel, 2010).

In the scope of the research done, quality-assurance is described as "quality" and "reliability." It is also seen that participants believe in the positive correlation of quality and reliability. Quality- assurance can be defined as all kind of deliberate and systematic activities having capacity to assure to maintain and develop standards, science and quality at higher education (Peterson, 1999). It is possible to describe quality-assurance as systematic monitoring and evaluating of different components of a project/service/institution in order to make sure the fulfilment of quality standards (Özer, Gür, & Küçükcan, 2010). Two approaches are signified for the fulfilment of quality-assurance at higher education. The first of them is accreditation and the second one is evaluation of the outputs (Bakioğlu & Baltacı, 2010).

Today, convenience evaluation practices aiming to assure the quality of goods and service are called as standardization, certification, and accreditation (Aktan & Gencel, 2007). Accreditation is the process of authorized approval of the competence of educational institutions in terms of their capability to meet the standards that are defined by the accreditation unit at the beginning and later. Accreditation is the approval of educational quality and competence by an institution. Accreditation is an indicator of the sufficiency of educational quality and it publicizes the state of the educational activities' meeting certain standards. In this study, it is seen that mostly preferred answers while defining accreditation are "quality" and "supervision."

In the scope of the questions asked in this study, it is perceived that the educational accreditation in Turkey is not found sufficient and lack of knowledge is thought to be the reason of that insufficiency. The fact that in the past both supervising and supervised units were linked to the same institution is criticized and it is mentioned that accreditation practices were insufficient due to prevention of objectivity (Hesapçıoğlu, Bakioğlu, & Baltacı, 2001; Karaca, 2008). In their empirical study on the evaluation of accreditation standards in Turkey,

Erkus and Ozdemir (2010) emphasized that the accreditation studies done so far were not trustworthy owing to uncertainty with regard to the meaning of the term "evaluation standards."

The participants reported that one of the important issues associated with the accreditation system in Turkish teacher education was the uncertainty of the accrediting, accredited, and the standard-setter institutions. In Turkey, the Higher Education Council develops standards and accredits its universities by making experts who are also the personnel of these universities responsible (Kargın & Bıkmaz, 2007). However, in modern countries there is a division of labour in that an independent institution develops standards while another accredits (Yuksel & Adiguzel, 2010). Participants secondly manifested the fact that there is a lack of quantifiable standards. Adıguzel (2008) and Erisen (2004) investigated the applicability of the standards developed by the HEC. They concluded that the standards were narrowly focused and most of them were ambiguous in terms of their meaning. The anxiety of universities about being ranked, and the conflict of interest among institutions, are other problems which participants reported. In Turkey, university entrance exams are the main tools used by students to rank universities (Yamamoto, 2006). Creating a quality assurance system within the Turkish university system could change this view. As Kargın & Bıkmaz (2007) claim, there are academics who are against such a system with regard to universities in Turkey.

There are some limitations to this study that readers should consider when evaluating the findings. The first limitation is the fact that the study was a case study research, and the nature of a study signifies that its findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. Thus the participants' views in the GSES are not representative of all postgraduate students in other schools. Additional qualitative studies might help to develop a better understanding of the accreditation system in universities by involving students in the engineering, economic, administrative and social science faculties. The second limitation of the study is the fear that I, as an insider researcher, might have influenced the analysis. However, all efforts were made to represent the participants' voice by using peer debriefing, experts for coding, and looking for consensus in the coding stage. Finally, the study is limited to the three concepts related to quality assurance, and to problems rather than the solution with regard to the Turkish accreditation system in teacher education. Consequently, new studies may investigate possible solutions for addressing the problems identified in this study. Additionally, deeper investigations might be conducted on academic members of staff in universities to get a better understanding of the issues and solutions in terms of the accreditation system in teacher education in Turkey.

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