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Supporting societal engagement of higher education

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Call for contributions: Paper submission form

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If there are several authors, please copy and fill in the fields for each author and indicate who is the corresponding author and who will be responsible for presenting the paper at the Forum.

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Proposal

Title: The Impact of On-line Simulation Platform on Training of Evaluation Team Members

Abstract (150 words max): In recent years, Turkish higher education system has witnessed to a radical change by the establishment of Higher Education Quality Council of Turkey (THEQC), which has both financial and administrative independence. Currently, there are 207 HEIs in Turkey; and since 2016, THEQC has completed the institutional external evaluation (IEE) of 160 HEIs. In this respect, it is clear that the success of these evaluations is highly dependent on experience, capabilities, and behavioural features of evaluation teams. In this paper, it is aimed to explain the unique evaluator training programs of THEQC, which were designed by the experts to prepare evaluation teams for IEE of HEIs. THEQC regularly collected feedbacks from the participants at the end of each evaluator training program.



Consequently, a wide spectrum of training programs were developed including face-to-face and interactive programs, case-based trainings, on-line training platforms with videos and tests.

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? NO.

Text of paper (3000 words max): The text is given in the following pages.

References: THEQC. <http://yokak.gov.tr/>

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 22 July 2019 to egaf@eua.eu. The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.



The Impact of On-line Simulation Platform on Training of Evaluation Team Members

Abstract

In recent years, Turkish higher education system has witnessed to a radical change by the establishment of Higher Education Quality Council of Turkey (THEQC), which has both financial and administrative independence. Currently, there are 207 HEIs in Turkey; nevertheless, there is a need to attain quality assurance of these HEIs to gain competitive advantage. Since 2016, THEQC has completed the institutional external evaluation (IEE) of 160 HEIs. In this respect, it is clear that the success of these evaluations is highly dependent on experience, capabilities, and behavioral features of evaluation teams. In this paper, it is aimed to explain the unique evaluator training programs of THEQC, which were designed to prepare evaluation teams for IEE of HEIs. Consequently, a wide spectrum of training programs were developed including face-to-face and interactive programs, case-based trainings, on-line training platforms with videos and presentations. The quality assurance management information system (QAMIS) of THEQC hosts these online training programs from a user-friendly perspective.

I. Introduction

Turkish Higher Education System

The Council of Higher Education of Turkey (CoHE-YÖK) was established with the Law No. 2547 dated 6 November 1981. With this law, all higher education institutions in Turkey have gathered under the roof of CoHE, which is an autonomous institution that is responsible for the planning, coordination and governance of higher education system in Turkey. Among the HEIs there are both governmental and non-profit foundation universities. The HEIs in Turkey offer, *2-year associate's degree programs; 4-6 years bachelor's degree programs; 2-years master's and 4-years doctorate graduate programs*. There are 129 governmental and 78 non-profit foundation HEIs. As of 2019, 7,740,502 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in these programs.

Establishment of Higher Education Quality Council of Turkey (THEQC)

The establishment of the THEQC with financial and administrative autonomy, was one of the most break-through structural change in the Turkish higher education system. In 2015, Higher Education Quality Board of Turkey was founded as part of the “Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation” and then, in 2017 the Board was reorganized and renamed as the Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC), and this time THEQC became a public entity with administrative and financial autonomy.

THEQC has become the only national body responsible for quality assurance in the Turkish higher education system. It consists of 13 members, including a student representative. Furthermore, almost all



major stakeholders of higher education system have representation in THEQC. The primary duties of THEQC are: external evaluation of HEIs; authorization of national and recognition of international accreditation agencies; and dissemination of quality assurance culture in HEIs.

II. Institutional External Evaluation Program (IEEP) of THEQC

THEQC developed an IEEP for HEIs that evaluate their processes of learning and teaching, research and development, and management systems. In this sense, THEQC contributes to the progress of quality assurance system within HEIs by requesting Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs) on annual basis about the processes aforementioned. Besides, according to the related regulations, HEIs are required to undergo IEE at least once in every five years. IEEP is run by evaluation teams on behalf of the THEQC, and the teams are formed by independent and well-trained as well as experienced members. Academic staff from different disciplines, and administrative staff as well as students can apply to be a member of the evaluation team. Since its establishment, THEQC calls for evaluators every year, and forms a pool of candidate evaluators. The evaluators are required to sit for the Institutional External Evaluator Training before being eligible to be assigned with an IEE task. After the training of the evaluators, THEQC forms an evaluation team, and the team makes a site visit to the HEI. The external evaluation teams prepare Institutional Feedback Reports (IFRs) after their site visits, which are the most valuable output of the external evaluation process.

A. Evaluator Training Programs in 2016 and 2017

The evaluators that attend to the evaluator training programs of THEQC were expected:

- to define the steps of IEEP,
- to internalize the standards of IEEP,
- to successfully perform the activities before, during and after the site visits,
- to show appropriate behavior towards other team members as well as the members of the HEIs.

The first IEEP was performed by THEQC in 2016 for 20 volunteer HEIs. There were 1,341 applications to be a member of evaluation teams, and of those 256 evaluators were chosen to be included in the evaluator pool. These evaluators were included in the one-day training program composed of a series of conferences and discussion panels.

In 2017, there were 2,596 applications to the call for being evaluator in IEEP. In 2017, besides some of the experienced evaluators that took part in 2016 during the site visits to HEIs, additional 280 evaluators were added to the pool.



The evaluators underwent a full day orientation training before the evaluation visits to the HEIs in 2017. A post-training satisfaction survey was given to them to inquire the effectiveness of the training. The majority of attendees had reported that they found the training beneficial with well-described goals and outcomes. However, shortage of time allocated for the training, and the improvement in need for training materials were declared as the drawbacks of the program. Based on the comments received from attendees of 2016 and 2017 programs, and the feedbacks from the rectors of the visited HEIs, a better training was developed for 2018.

B. Evaluator Training Programs in 2018

The 2018 training of the evaluators was actualized by face-to-face workshops which were accompanied with e-learning platforms that were integrated to each other.

Development Process of the E-learning Platform

In designing the 2018 THEQC evaluators training program, “Flipped Learning” approach was used, transferring the knowledge base of the training from group learning sessions to individual learning platforms enabling more dynamism and interaction. The two components of this approach were the online platform and face-to-face sessions.

The first step was planning and appropriate re-formatting of the contents of the training for the user-friendly on-line platforms. The most important content of the Flipped Learning was the informative videos, the presentation videos, and related questionnaires. Besides the training modules, pre and post-tests were also included in the on-line platform to evaluate the efficiency of the platform. The presentations provided further details on the subjects and the knowledge base was reinforced with related questions in the platform. The users were to answer the pre-test before having access to the training contents and then same test as post-test at the end of training. The comparison of test results showed a clear success obtained by training.

Face-to-face Training Process Design and Implementation

Face-to-face training process started with a Jigsaw session including separation and then rejoining of the group members. Each participant sitting in round tables took one sub-section of the information materials equally sharing the subsections. Then the ones with the same sub-sections moved to another table to join the others with same sub-sections for discussion together. Later, in rejoining step each participant returned to their original table and transferred the discussions to their group-mates. The second session of the face-to-face training process included group discussions on sample cases and problem solving.

The Moderator and Attendant Profile of the 2018 Evaluators Training

IEE Training was performed by 8 moderators from THEQC's members, as well as consultants and experts from THEQC. After a call for new evaluator applications, 2433 academic and administrative personnel of HEIs have applied. At the end, 528 applications, who meet the following criteria were found eligible for the trainings:

- Competency on higher education quality assurance
- Previous experiences as evaluator
- Experiences in different accreditation agencies
- Having served in quality commissions of HEIs

Statistical Information Based on Evaluation Forms

The mean values of the data obtained for the first section of the general evaluation forms for both 2018 and 2019 are given in Table 1.

Table 1. The mean values of the comments on the General Evaluation Form.

	COMMENTS	2018	2019
		\bar{x}	\bar{x}
1	Overall, I found the face-to-face training beneficial	4.75	4.68
2	Goals and outcomes of the face-to-face training was clearly described	4.49	4.57
3	I believe that the face-to-face training reached its goals	4.48	4.44
4	Time allocated for the activities in face-to-face training was adequate	4.35	3.66
5	The physical environment of the face-to-face training was appropriate	4.72	4.63
6	Overall, I found the e-learning platform beneficial	4.42	4.40
7	I did not have difficulty in reaching the contents in e-learning platform	2.27	4.16
8	My support requests on the problems in using the e-platform was responded	3.81	4.30
9	I believe that I will be able to use the information I gained in the evaluators training	4.72	4.74

According to Table 1, the mean values of responses to the questions were relatively high except the seventh question in which a low mean value was expected due to its negative expression for 2018. The overall beneficialness of the face-to-face training was the strength of this activity, whereas receiving adequate help in using the online platform was found as an aspect with room for improvement.

For the open-ended questions part, it was revealed that reinforcing the sharing of experiences through teamwork and reviewing the sample cases were among the top acquisitions of face-to-face training. As for the advantages of the online platform, the participants prioritized the presence of rich and high-quality visual and printed materials during the training the most.

Among the recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the training, the prominent ones are increasing the number of detailed, diversified and realistic sample cases in parallel with a prolonged training to two days. On the other hand, the participants recommended to increase the number of detailed, diversified and realistic cases as well as to shorten the video clips.

The efficacy of the online learning platform was aimed to be measured by adding the pre and post-test to the process, and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of the pre and post-test results.

	n	\bar{x}	SD.	t	p
Pre-test	363	51.41	13.98	34.76	.000*
Post-test		68.11	12.01		

While the mean value of the participants' right answers to pre-tests was 51.41/100, the mean of post-tests was found to be 68.11/100, which demonstrated a statistically significant improvement (* $p < .05$).

C. Evaluator Training Programs in 2019

The previous training feedbacks, the 360° evaluations by the external evaluation team members and the visited HEI leaders and IFRs were all used as inputs in designing the 2019 training. The evaluators' performances were evaluated with a 5-point Likert scale on the following criteria:

- Objectivity/justness
- Information about the institution being visited
- Competency
- Asking task-related and high quality of questions
- Constructive attitude
- Harmony with other team-members
- Timing

The following findings were found to be open for improvement:

- Having satisfactory knowledge regarding the institution
- Sufficient preparation prior to visit
- Effective use of the THEQC on-line system during the visit
- Preparation of authentic reports



Previous experiences and multidirectional feedbacks, led the THEQC in 2019, to design a problem-based evaluators training with hands-on interactive simulation of a real visit starting from reviewing ISERs till to constructing an IFR.

Face-to-face training goals were:

- Formation of consensus among team-members
- Improving the IFR consistency
- Internalization of the evidence-based evaluation
- Report authenticity
- More reliable evaluations

In 2019, training was designed with the theme of “From the ISER to the IFR Activity”. A fictitious institution as the Mars University with anonymized ISER and IFR from a real institutional visit was uploaded in the test copy of the THEQC’s on-line evaluation system. The training activity involved reviewing of ISER and its supplements, constructing the IFR and entering them into the online test evaluation system.

Flipped learning approach was used in 2019 as well. The previous education videos were updated in accordance with the current evaluation process and was launched for access prior to the face-to-face component of the training. Pre and post-tests were used to evaluate the effect of the platform on learning, and end-topic multiple choice questions helped the participants to assess their knowledge base.

Case study method was adopted to fill the gap between theoretical applications and the real life experience. The most important advantage of this method is to provide opportunity to take the others’ opinions when taking decisions and later reflect on their decisions in a safe environment. Hence, the external evaluation process was simulated step by step.

During the morning sessions, the activities related with the ISER and quality assurance of the Mars University were realized. Then, in the afternoon session the remaining three sections, namely learning & teaching, research & development, and governance, were reviewed by the evaluator participants. The participants also practiced writing the related IFR sections on the online evaluation test system.

Moderator and Attendant Profiles of the 2019 Evaluators Training

IEE Training was performed by 8 moderators from THEQC’s. The present 282 of 325 evaluators in the evaluator pool attended to the 2019 training program.

Findings of Evaluation Forms

Please look at Table 1 to see means of the data obtained from the first section of the general evaluation forms. The information obtained from the second part of the general evaluation form (namely open-ended questions) were given in Table 3.

Table 3. Responses given to open-ended questions

	“Most valuable aspects of the face-to-face training”	n
1	Step by step simulation of the process via the method of sample case	69
2	Meeting of the different approaches and experiences around the table	37
3	Training activities encouraging active participation and team work	35
4	Receiving instant and competent answers from the moderators	27
	“Most valuable aspects of the online learning platform”	n
1	Presentation files	25
2	Videos	17
3	Opportunity to review the contents at one’s convenience	16
4	Opportunity to watch the contents repeatedly as needed	14
	“Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the training”	n
1	Very successful. I have no other recommendation	62
2	Time allocations for activities may be reviewed	51
3	Number of days for the training may be increased	49
4	Materials may be shared with participants prior to training	34
	“Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the online learning platform”	n
1	Very successful. I have no other recommendation	45
2	Pre and post-test results and correct answers can be shared after the test	14
3	Presentations can be updated	10
4	The videos can be edited to a shorter and summarized format	9

Evaluators training in 2019 had more complicated, rich and demanding content. The participants gave their feedbacks on increasing the time for training and requesting the earlier sharing of the materials prior to training.

Many of the participants found the step by step simulation of the “From the ISER to the IFR activity” as the most constructive and positive aspect of the face-to-face training. The second and third most common advantages of this training were reported to be the meeting of the different approaches and experiences around the table and training activities encouraging active participation and team work. These were of no surprise as during this training, the learners actively participated in activities encouraging collaborative and face-to-face interaction.



The participants presented their appreciation for the online learning platform by placing the comment of its successful design with no further recommendations to the first place.

Pre and Post-test Results

Within the online platform the results of the pre and post-test results are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of the mean values of the pre and post-tests

	n	\bar{x}	SD	t	p
Pre-test	187	62.25	15.22	-7.555	.000*
Post-test		70.16	11.50		

The mean values of participants changed from 62.25/100 for pre-test to 70.16/100 for post-test. This proved a significant ($*p<.05$) contribution of e-learning platform to the learning of the participants and to the success of the training activity in turn.

III. CONCLUSIONS and DISCUSSION

This study is particularly aimed to demonstrate the role and importance of evaluator training programs. Well-trained and experienced evaluation team members will contribute to the success of the IEE. The external evaluator pool is composed of evaluator candidates of academic and administrative staff as well as students. THEQC has been regularly designing training programs for these candidates who will take place in the evaluation teams. Since 2016, THEQC has applied several learning & teaching approaches and techniques (e.g. flipped learning approach, jigsaw technique, etc.) on a face-to-face and as well as on-line learning platforms for the training of evaluators. Besides, THEQC has developed some unique training approaches by integrating information technology to its processes. At the end of every training event, a survey was carried out to depict the strengths as well as the areas that are in need of improvement, of the program.

THEQC launched its “Quality Assurance Management Information System-QAMIS” which is still expanding as new modules are added on-demand. QAMIS has several interfaces for different users, including HEIs, external evaluation teams, accreditation agencies, and the members of THEQC. The QAMIS facilitates procedures, enables monitoring of the improvements over the years for HEIs, and reduces the work load of different users. This system also generates an “online platform” for the evaluators as well as the quality commission members of HEIs. QAMIS provides an online platform with training videos, presentations, and knowledge-base. However the most important contribution of the QAMIS to the quality assurance evaluation program in Turkish higher education system is its great



impact in engaging the stakeholders' members in using the system to enter more solid, genuine and reliable information owing to its well-structured and automated architecture and significantly improving the performances of all of the parties in institutional external evaluation process.

Within the last two years, both the number and the scope of the THEQC's training activities were proliferated significantly. As it is outlined in this paper, THEQC has also examined the impact of its training programs. Pre-test and post-test results before, during and after the trainings have proved the positive contribution of those trainings. The feedbacks from the participants also support the positive impact of implementation of these advanced teaching & learning approaches in the context of training of evaluation team members for IEE of HEIs.