

INQAAHE PAPERS

CONFERENCE 2021

**Re-Imagining Higher Education
Quality in an Age of
Uncertainty**

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from 1 to 10 June

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INQAAHE, 2021

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FOREWORD



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is truly our honour to be able to offer a global enhancement platform for the quality assurance providers in tertiary education, proudly hosted by QAA, Digitally 1-15 June.

We have, as the global QA community in tertiary education, an important role to play in ensuring that the quality of, and trust in, higher education is not eroded and is improved through the known disruptions that we are facing globally, namely changing globalization patterns, changing demographics and technological change

including digitalization.

Hence, under the theme: Reimagining of Higher Education Quality in an Age of Uncertainty, the Conference endeavors to unpack the most recent developments in the sphere of quality assurance to provide confidence and reassurance in changes that have come about as a result of recent disruptions and challenges.

In particular, the themes explored will evolve around:

- Digital disruption for HE brings disruption for quality assurance;
- New quality agendas for external and internal quality assurance;
- Quality assurance supporting changing learner journeys;
- Maintaining trust in the face of uncertainty.

We are pleased to be able to invite the best of the expertise globally to share the most advanced knowledge, as well as to support the discussions on our global enhancement platform.

Most importantly, 2021 is a special year for INQAAHE, as it marks its 30th anniversary - celebrating three decades of INQAAHE's leadership of global tertiary education quality.

We are thrilled to be able to offer our 30th Anniversary conference held online. The INQAAHE Conference Committee, chaired by Orla Lynch and the QAA UK Organizing Committee chaired by Douglas Blackstock.

We cordially invite you to enjoy the unique opportunities offered by the INQAAHE Conference, which brings together the best of quality assurance practices and bridges diversity of QA systems from all over the world.

INQAAHE is always here for you and with you!

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Karakhanyan', written in a cursive style.

Susanna Karakhanyan
INQAAHE VII President

THEME 1. DIGITAL DISRUPTION FOR HE BRINGS DISRUPTION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Supporting Role of Quality Agencies for a Sustainable QA System: the Training Model in the “New Normal Environment”

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explain how the training of Turkish HEIs' quality commissions, which support internal quality assurance systems in HEIs, has been maintained in the new normal environment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and to discuss the efficacy of this new training model. In the design of the training program, the HEIs' self-evaluation reports were reviewed and their areas for further development were identified. Subsequently, a distance training model based on group activities and interaction was practiced, and then the learning outcomes were defined. A total of 600 participants consisting of students, academic and administrative personnel, and administrators assigned in quality commissions of Turkish HEIs attended the training. The results demonstrated the success and efficacy of the training model practiced in the new normal environment.

Keywords: Turkish Higher Education Quality Council, Covid-19, new normal, quality assurance, quality commissions of higher education institutions, instructional design, distance education, interaction.

Introduction

Quality assurance practices in Turkey began in the 1990s, and program accreditation has mainly been used as a tool for quality assurance. Turkey's participation in the Bologna process accelerated the creation of an institutional structure by the State and a council was founded within the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in 2015. Then, with the re-establishment of an independent council in terms

of administrative, financial and decision-making processes in 2017, namely Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC), the quality assurance structuring in the Turkish Higher Education System has reached the level of similar institutional structures in the world. In line with the development stated above, national standards for quality assurance in higher education were formed and institutional external evaluation activities began (the Official Gazette No. 29423 of 23 July 2015, the Official Gazette No. 30111 of 1 July 2017, THEQC, 2019).

THEQC's primary duties can be grouped under the three headings below (THEQC, 2020):

- Performing external evaluation of higher education institutions,
- Coordinating the authorization processes of national and recognition processes of international of accreditation agencies,
- Ensuring the internalization and dissemination of quality assurance culture in higher education institutions.

Along with the foundation of THEQC, "quality commissions", which are under the responsibility of HEIs, in charge of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions were also structured with the regulations THEQC issued and published. Thus, in the Turkish Higher Education System, external quality assurance is ensured by the works of THEQC, while internal quality assurance systems are executed by the operations of the quality commissions of higher education institutions. In addition to the university executives/administrators of higher education institutions, faculty members, administrative staff and students also take charge in quality commissions.

As of 2020, external evaluation activities are carried out within the framework of the Institutional External Evaluation Program, the Institutional Accreditation Program, and the Institutional Follow-up Program (THEQC, 2021). Also, awareness-raising processes aimed at increasing the culture of quality assurance are carried out intensively. Through all these activities, THEQC completed the institutional external evaluation of more than 160 higher education institutions, carried out accreditation and recognition procedures for 15 program accrediting agencies, consisting of 12 national and 3 international entities, and has held numerous information sharing, and awareness-raising meetings (THEQC, 2020).

The underlying reason for THEQC's success in a short time lies in higher education institutions' ownership of the quality assurance works and the increased awareness of all stakeholders. At this point, the training provided by THEQC is of great importance. Although the training activities were carried out mainly to increase the awareness of external evaluators and institutions' officials, they were extended in line with stakeholder feedback to include members of the higher education quality commissions and university students. To date, more than 800 external evaluators composed of executives/administrators, faculty members, administrative staff, and students of higher education institutions have been trained in these activities. Besides, training has also been provided to quality commissions and students from all universities across the country.

Another training activity highly valued by THEQC to support the quality assurance of higher education institutions is the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program. This training, which includes different stakeholders working in the quality commissions, enables quality commissions and THEQC to speak the same language, increases the capacity of the quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, and also helps them to prepare correctly the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, which is a crucial document that reveals this capacity.

During the pandemic period, THEQC quickly shifted its training activities to distance learning platforms. However, at this point, THEQC perceived this transformation as an opportunity to improve existing training services rather than a crisis or an urgent transfer of traditional training processes to remote learning environments. Such a transformation has been reflected in instructional design processes through the following developments:

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- Analysis phase; need and task analysis for distance education, remote/blended external evaluation and institutional uncertainty.
- Development phase; consideration of interaction and engagement.

The purpose of this study is to examine the Higher Education Quality Commissions' Training Program, that THEQC realized in 2020 with this perspective, in terms of design, development, implementation, and of course, effectiveness.

Method

The research was conducted as part of a program assessment approach (Driscoll & Dick, 1999; Briggs, 1984). In this sense, as a first step, an instructional design process was carried out. Then, the teaching activities developed were implemented and the effectiveness of the program was evaluated according to the results obtained.

Institutional Design Process and Activities

All instructional design activities carried out within the scope of the research were conducted within the context of the "*THEQC Evaluator Training Model*".

In order to train the human resources of internal and external quality assurance studies in THEQC's institutional external evaluation and accreditation processes, "THEQC Evaluator Training Model" was developed based on the instructional design models of Dick, Dick and Carey (2015) and Smith and Ragan (2004) as well as THEQC's previous experiences in institutional external evaluation and evaluator trainings. It is an original model compatible with the dynamics of the Turkish higher education culture and global developments. This model systematically addresses evaluator training with examinations on the following issues and their components:

- Analysis (conditions, tasks, needs, expectations, technology),
- Design (goal, target, strategy, interaction),
- Development (environment, method, material, assessment tool, learning resources),
- Formative evaluation (expert opinions),
- Moderator (instructor) training,
- Conformity review (with moderators),
- Implementation,
- Effectiveness and impact (success, satisfaction, long-term effects).

The new dynamics of the pandemic period were reflected in this design model in the form of online training activities and, consequently, new components of the environment, method, and skills.

THEQC made significant changes in its training activities in terms of environment and method during the pandemic period. Two components were at the center of this change:

1. Bringing the interaction (with dimensions such as student-material, student-student, and student-teacher) to a higher level in distance learning-teaching processes than in face-to-face processes,
2. Increasing the competencies in combating uncertainty at the point of ensuring/evaluating quality assurance.

This transformation of perspective brought the concept of dealing with quality assurance skills in the design phase of teaching activities in the context of tackling uncertainty, and thus the concept of including skills to manage change in an agile (urgent) manner. In the development phase, determining the teaching method, materials, and distance education infrastructure that will maximize interaction has become an important requirement. At this point, an important change has been made to improve the skills of trainers (we call it moderators) in training programs regarding distance and interactive teaching methods.

The objective of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program planned for 2020 was based on the development of internal quality assurance processes implemented in higher education institutions in accordance with universal/national standards, as well as the support for the means to fight against the uncertainty that began with the COVID-19 pandemic. Quality Commissions, which exist in all higher education institutions in Turkey by law and which are responsible for coordinating the quality assurance processes, have stakeholders like university executives/administrators, academics, administrative staff, and students.

The process of developing the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program began with needs and task analysis. The task analysis revealed new tasks for quality commissions, shaped in the light of the existing changes, and the needs analysis disclosed new learning needs. To this end, the opinions of experts in quality assurance, staff who work in quality commissions of higher education institutions as well as those of experts in the field of management, leadership, and educational technology were received. Thus, the development of internal quality assurance systems, as well as the needs in areas such as leadership, change management, and process management, were identified. Achievements determined in the light of needs have been distributed, according to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Colder, 1983), in the cognitive (knowledge, understanding, practice, analysis, synthesis, assessment), affective (development of the value judgment) and psychomotor (skilled movements) domains. These achievements are listed below.

- Explanation of the conceptual dimension of the quality assurance system and institutional accreditation program in higher education (understanding, comprehension-valuing),
- Creation of mechanisms for ensuring stakeholder participation in the quality assurance system (application),
- Conduct of studies on strategic management and process management in the higher education institution (application),
- Conduct of studies on process management in the higher education institution (application),
- Execution of, and leadership for activities to disseminate the quality assurance culture within the institution (valuing, internalizing),
- Execution of the institution's internal evaluation processes (review, placing importance/evaluation, internalizing, skilled movements).

During the development phase, teaching approaches and methods were determined in light of both the determined objectives and the conditions of the pandemic period. Flipped learning, group-based discussions, and collective decision-making processes based on simulation of real events/situations are included in the teaching approach. In this direction, the parts of the content that serve to increase basic cognitive competencies such as knowledge and comprehension have been transformed into formats that support self-learning (short text, diagram, presentation, short video, etc.) and presented to the participants from the Learning Resources section of the THEQC's E-learning Platform. To develop high-level cognitive and affective abilities, activity sheets have been developed to be used in simultaneous distance learning activities. After formative evaluations, a moderator training was held, where the training program and materials were finalized with the feedback received regarding applicability and usability.

Application and Participants

The Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program included a total of eight discussions and decision-making activities under five different modules. These events were supported by two different video conferences titled "process management" and "leadership and culture". The first module discussed THEQC's new quality assurance initiatives. Subsequently, the first activity was a JIGSAW with six topics (and related worksheets) and cross-discussions. In this activity, first, all participants were divided into six groups and a topic was understood/comprehended in each group. Later, the participants returned to their classes, and discussions were held on all topics in the classes. These topics are as follows:

1. What is a quality assurance system in higher education?
2. Quality assurance system in the field of higher education in our country,
3. What is Institutional External Evaluation Program (IEEP)?
4. What is Institutional Accreditation Program (IAP)?
5. What is Institutional Follow-up Program (IFuP)?
6. What is the THEQC information portal?

The second module was about stakeholder participation. Therefore, it included a mind map development activity regarding stakeholder participation in internal quality assurance processes (Figure 1).

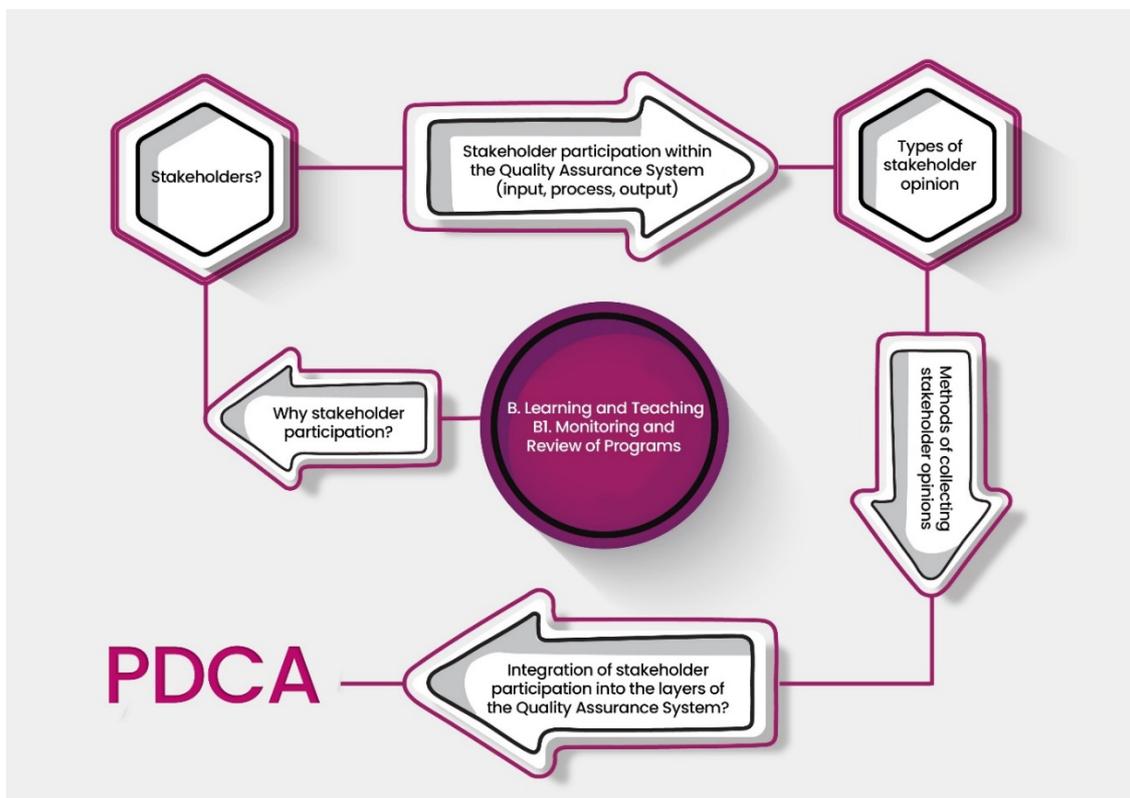


Figure 1. The basic relationship structure used in the mind map development activity.

During the activity, each class created their mind map based on the discussions in the light of the questions on the worksheet, and then these maps were compared to the answers previously developed by the team of moderators.

The third module focused on process management. At the beginning, there was a video conference titled "Process Management" and two separate activities were included in this module. One of these activities is the completion of an incomplete concept map for process management. This map is given in Figure 2.

Another activity of this module was the definition of processes. In this activity, an answer was sought to the question "What are the macro and sub-processes of a higher education institution?" based on discussions in each class.

The fourth module consisted of a videoconference titled "Leadership and Culture" and related discussions were done.

The fifth module, on the other hand, involved reviewing a simulated quality assurance self-evaluation report of The Sun University (Güneş University), a fictional university created by THEQC, in various dimensions. Four different activities were included in this module. As part of these activities, the following issues related to the internal quality assurance processes of the Güneş University were reviewed:

- stakeholder participation,
- the nature of the quality commission's activities,
- the competence of the University to decide on the maturity of its quality assurance processes (in accordance with THEQC's grading rubric evaluation form),
- the status of taking into account the suggestions for improvement, and
- the relevance of expressing all these elements in the report.

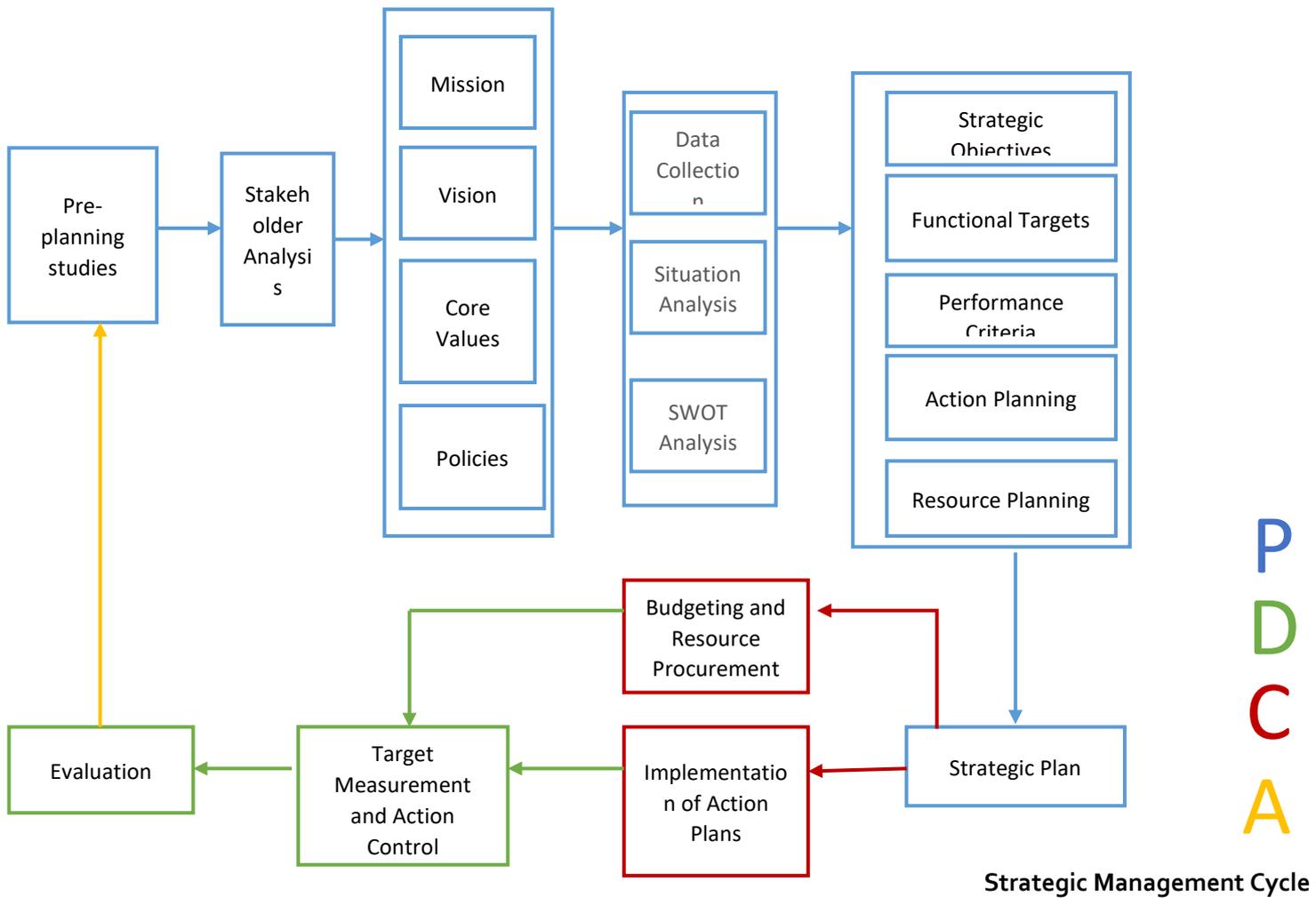


Figure 2: The final material was reached in the definition of processes activity.

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The two-day training program took place three times between September 25 and October 8, 2020, on the THEQC E-learning platform. A total of 574 members of Higher Education Quality Commissions received training under the program. There was participation from 202 higher education institutions out of 207 HEIs (97.60% of all higher education institutions) across the country. The distribution of participants according to their functions is as follows:

- University executive/administrators (rector, vice-rector, dean, institute director, vocational school director): 197 (34.32%),
- Quality coordinators (coordinator, vice-coordinator): 136 (23.69%),
- Faculty members: 182 (31.71%),
- Students: 8 (1.39%),
- Administrative staff (secretary-general, head of an administrative department, adviser, secretary, officer): 51 (8.89%).

53% of participants had already attended the training activities offered by THEQC, and 47% have followed the training provided by THEQC for the first time.

There were 10 different virtual classrooms and 10 moderators in each training program attended by an average of 192 people. Also, a coordination team made up of information and communication technologists and educational scientists were present in each training program. All training materials, worksheets, and related learning resources were emailed to participants at least one week before the training.

During the training programs, participants took an active role in all learning activities in the main room and classrooms. Each participant had access to the entire program with a single link, and class-to-room transitions were performed automatically by the system. A total of 85.68% participation was reached in the pieces of training (670 people applied, 574 people fully participated).

Effectiveness Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program, an achievement test developed by THEQC moderators and experts as well as a satisfaction survey developed based on expert opinions were applied to participants. The achievement test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions. The satisfaction survey, on the other hand, consisted of 17 items, three of which were open-ended, to determine satisfaction with the overall program and the moderator. Participants used the quantitative items in the tool with an understanding similar to the 5-point Likert type; they gave points between 1 and 5: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (undecided), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics and content analysis were performed on the data obtained.

Effectiveness of the Program

Achievement

When the success of the training program was examined, it was observed that the general achievement average was at the level of 76.50 out of 100 (Maximum 100, Minimum 45). It was 73.50 for the first week, 78 for the second week, and 79 for the third week. This indicated the good effectiveness of the program both in general terms and based on weeks.

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Satisfaction with the Overall Program

Table 1. Satisfaction Results with the Overall Program

Item	1st week	2nd week	3rd week	Average
I found the event generally beneficial.	4,64	4,59	4,61	4,61
I think the training has achieved its goal.	4,59	4,49	4,51	4,53
The duration of the training was sufficient.	4,21	4,17	4,26	4,22
The online platform where the training took place was helpful.	4,69	4,69	4,73	4,71
The content of the training was sufficient.	4,3	4,34	4,33	4,33
The materials presented in the training were clear, understandable, and sufficient.	4,45	4,46	4,48	4,46
After the training, I feel more competent in internal quality assurance system studies.	4,34	4,37	4,35	4,35
Overall Average	4,46	4,44	4,47	4,46

According to Table 1, it is seen that satisfaction with the program is at a high level both in general terms and for all items. The participants say they are very satisfied with the usefulness of the online platform used. Next comes satisfaction with the overall activity and its suitability for training purposes. Satisfaction with the length of the training is relatively low. When the qualitative statements are examined, it is found that they require an increase in the duration of the training.

Satisfaction with the Moderators

Table 2. Satisfaction Results with the Moderators

Item	1st week	2nd week	3rd week	Average
The moderator carried out the process actively and effectively.	4,74	4,85	4,82	4,80
The moderator used time effectively.	4,73	4,79	4,69	4,74
The moderator provided necessary guidance when needed.	4,77	4,80	4,79	4,79
The moderator answered the questions posed to him or her.	4,82	4,83	4,82	4,82
The moderator took into account the suggestions.	4,76	4,80	4,83	4,79
The moderator used clear, understandable, and plain language.	4,83	4,85	4,82	4,84

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Overall Average	4,77	4,82	4,79	4,79
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When Table 2 is examined, it is noteworthy that the satisfaction with the moderators is quite high both in general and in terms of items. Participants are most pleased with the moderators' use of a clear and understandable language of expression, the way they conduct (manage) training activities, and the rate and manner of answering the questions posed. Satisfaction with the moderators' use of time is relatively low.

When the qualitative statements regarding satisfaction situations are examined holistically, inferences that support and enrich the quantitative results can be reached. Accordingly, the prominent positive and negative opinions of the participants about the program are as follows:

Positive opinions:

- The high competence level of the moderators and their warm communication style,
- Interactive teaching methods and activities,
- Possibility to work on case studies,
- The importance given to group work,
- Fluidity and ease of use of the distance education infrastructure and environment.

Negative opinions:

- The fact that one day of the training program coincides with the weekend,
- Little time allocated to training (especially for new participants),
- Duration of the training period (especially for experienced participants),
- Problems of adaptation between experienced participants and new participants.

Discussion

This study examines the effectiveness of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program led by THEQC in 2020, in an understanding of instructional design. It reveals the dimensions of design, development, implementation, evaluation, and suggestions for improvement. The Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program has been developed in accordance with the "THEQC Evaluator Training Model". Executives/administrators of higher education institutions in Turkey, academics, administrative staff, and students participated in this program at a highest level.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the whole world, Turkey is also affected by this outbreak. For this reason, the basic philosophy of this training program, which was planned and carried out remotely; was based on maximizing the interaction in terms of both human-human and human-material elements and on increasing the competence of the quality commissions about internal quality assurance processes as well as their ability to fight against the uncertainty created by the pandemic period.

A major weakness of online learning lies in the potential shortcomings that may arise in the structures of interaction (in the context of human-human, human-environment, human-content, etc.). Therefore, interaction should be seen as a component that should be developed in the design of such instructional environments. Otherwise, despite all the efforts made in the preparation phase, the effectiveness, efficiency, and attractiveness of online education may be much lower than face-to-face processes (Arkorful & Abadio, 2015). The results of this study show that the program was able to effectively meet its objectives in terms of success and satisfaction. The opinions of the participants obtained in dimensions such as the competence of the trainers, the quality of the activities, and the usefulness of the distance education infrastructure strongly support this situation. All these results also reveal the success of the interaction and engagement components

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highlighted during the design and development phase of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program.

When participants' negative opinions on the training program were examined; beyond its basic design components such as goals and events; participants can be seen to focus on factors such as time and adjustment issues. At this point, it can be said that negative opinions are grouped along two main axes. The first concerns the days the training took place. The program took place on weekends due to the workload of a group of participants (such as university executives/administrators, students) and their problems obtaining time off, and due to the difficulty of obtaining training on the weekdays. However, this item, which is considered an interim solution in the design, created participant issues for another group. According to Mungania (2003), e-learning barriers can be classified into seven categories: (1) personal barriers, (2) learning style barriers, (3) educational barriers, (4) organizational barriers, (5) situational barriers, (6) content adequacy barriers and (7) technological barriers. Consequently, this encountered situation can be qualified as an individual or situational handicap of the participants. At this point, it is envisaged to create weekdays and weekends options in future training and to give participants the option to choose a date of participation.

Another negative opinion relates to the harmony between the participants and the associated time problems. In the training program, experienced participants, i.e. participants who had already participated in THEQC training, and new participants, who took part in the processes for the first time, got together. As a result of the implementation, experienced participants found the duration of the program longer, while new participants said that the duration of the program should be longer.

In this study, the coexistence of experienced and new participants was seen as a supporting element of peer learning in the instructional design process and was deliberately employed. Peer learning can be defined as individuals of equal or comparable status who help each other learn and learn for themselves both formally and informally (Theodosiou, 2018, p.6). Peer learning is one of the oldest forms of collaborative and connective learning, according to Theodosiou (2018). Peer learning involves individuals learning from each other formally or informally. In this learning process, the roles of teachers and students are not defined and roles may change during the learning experience (Boud, 2001). In this regard, peer learning is a highly valued element by THEQC in developing the skills of higher education quality commissions, which have members from different backgrounds and with different skills such as university executives/administrators, teachers, students. Therefore, it is believed that peer learning will be used in future training and training programs that will include activities where both experienced and new participants will be together. Besides, it is planned to enrich the program with preparatory/beginner level activities for novice participants and improvement/deepening activities for experienced participants. Thus, the two problems related to the duration of the program will be resolved and the process will be more effective and efficient for all participants.

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