National Accreditation Experience of the Faculty of Theology of Amasya University

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to describe the national accreditation preparation experience in higher education through the sample of a Faculty of Theology affiliated to a state university. The case study, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in the research. A total of three people experiencing the accreditation process in a state university were determined as the working group. In the research, the participants stated that the accreditation studies have beneficial effects for the institutions and education. They also emphasised that they had difficulties in obtaining the documents during the accreditation preparation phase and that the uncertainty brought about by the new process was challenging. It was pointed out that the accreditation studies would keep the institutions dynamic and carry the quality to advanced levels.

Keywords: Higher Education, Accreditation, Faculty of Theology, Amasya University

Introduction

In today's world, where the rapid developments and changes are experienced in every field, it is inevitable for the institutions to be affected by these developments and changes. It is obvious that the educational institutions, one of the fields, are also affected by these. These institutions, including education, need to keep up with these developments and changes to survive. In the 21st century, they need to increase their qualifications to continue their existence. The institutions improving their quality, also gain a reputation in terms of society (Yılmaz 18).

Some of these institutions belong to the state and some to the private enterprises. Whether it is state or private, these should make great efforts within certain standards to ensure this quality. These standards are evaluated under Total Quality Management (TQM) (Yılmaz 11). This quality can be realized thanks to TQM. When evaluated in terms of education, the aim is to increase the quality of the education. A qualified education should be at the forefront for the individuals and institutions. One of the important factors affecting individuals' choice of educational institutions is the worry of finding a job. When evaluated in terms of employment, the people having a good education are preferred for the institutions. Therefore, this should not be taken into account in terms of training the students in higher education, which is one of the most important factors of education, on the other hand, some qualifications should be taken into account in entering undergraduate education (Skelton 64). Apart from these, there are many factors affecting the qualified education.

For these, the experts of the field have continuously made many researches to make the education more qualified. Faculty members, teachers, administrators in educational institutions that train students, and the physical conditions and social facilities of the school affect the quality of this education (Ross 93). Such factors as cultural structure, economic situation, geographical characteristics also affect the quality of education (Karakaya, Arık, & Yılmaz 219). Because the main element of education is the student, and she/he is affected by many factors that can or cannot be taken into account. In today's education, the qualifications of educational institutions should be evaluated under the nationally or internationally accepted standards (Kavak 2). Especially, the effort to integrate with Europe has made this situation even more important. The countries realizing the importance of economic development, qualified workforce and global competition, have made serious investments and various efforts to increase the quality of their education. Therefore, this process, including the certain standards in terms of both economic and education, is important (Karakaya, Arık, & Yılmaz: 222).

There are many variables in a qualified education. Especially in the age we live in, the science education has been seriously affected by the scientific and technological breakthroughs. Therefore, providing a certain quality in education can only be achieved by fulfilling the standards and criteria that may keep up with the changes. Qualified curriculum, good learning environment and competence can be shown as an example of this situation (Karakaya, Arık, & Yılmaz: 221; Tribus: 100).

The concept of accreditation has gained an important place in achieving an international level of quality in education. Accreditation is the process of granting and accrediting the relevant institution as a result of evaluating the existence of one or more competencies in an institution under the accepted standards (Yılmaz: 27).

The term accreditation means verifying the reliability-validity, evaluation within the framework of certain standards and creating credits (Kelly 24; Mulligan 62). Management and quality assurance, library-facility-equipment, faculty-school cooperation, students and lecturers can be shown

as examples to the standards in the accreditation process. Thanks to accreditation, the qualifications are determined either at national or international level. Both the evaluation made within the structure of the institutions (self-evaluation) and the evaluation made outside the institutions (at national or international levels) is called accreditation evaluation. Therefore, whether it is internal or external, the one making this evaluation is obliged to make this evaluation in line with objective criteria in order for the evaluation to be acceptable.

Accreditation process is not a compulsory for the institutions, on the contrary, it is a voluntary basis procedure (Yılmaz 26). The accreditation process based on volunteering, is the determination of the level of the program competence of the accredited institutions and at what level they have reached the predetermined standards. Accreditation assessment is also carried out in higher education institutions. The institutions meeting the conditions are given a certificate stating that they do the requirements. This is a source of reputation for an institution

The accreditation process in higher education is also carried out continuously. The functioning of universities is dynamic and affected by constantly changing conditions. Therefore, the institutions / organizations should be in a constant change and development by taking these conditions into consideration. The studies done in order to make an inter-university evaluation and to increase the quality of education is named as accreditation. The necessary criteria for this are called accreditation criteria. Accreditation is a process in which an institution measures these qualities by observing certain standards and the qualifications are continuously evaluated. Accreditation is divided into two groups as institutional accreditation and program-oriented accreditation (YÖDEK 11).

- Institutional accreditation: It is an accreditation evaluation process with minimum standards in which the administrative, financial, social and economic structures of educational institutions are examined.
- Program-oriented accreditation: It is an accreditation evaluation process that ensures that the curriculum provided by an educational institution is sufficiently qualified. It mostly

focuses on a curriculum and as a result of the evaluation, the process is accredited if appropriate.

Thanks to accreditation, it is ensured that the society may have information about the institutions. There are several stages of the accreditation process (YÖDEK 19, 20). These can be listed as determining the standards, creating a self-evaluation (internal evaluation) report, creating an external evaluation / inspection report, monitoring the process and making the final decision by accreditation organizations / agencies. Through an agreement between the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and the World Bank in Turkey in 1999, the standards for teacher education have been established under a National Education Development Project named as "Standarts and Accreditation in Teacher Education in Turkey" (YÖK 2.3).In 2015, the "the Council of Higher Education" was established by CHE and the "Regulation on Quality Assurance in Higher Education" was published (Yılmaz 15). The Theology Accreditation Agency (TAA) is a non-profit non-governmental organization that contributes to improving the quality of the education by providing information, external evaluation and accreditation services for Theology programs. It was established in 2018. The purpose of Theology Accreditation Agency is to define the educational and research activities and administrative processes of undergraduate / graduate theology and equivalent programs, as well as the quality of all kinds of religious services for the community through national and international standards. Therefore, being a leading agency that makes quality registration by sharing the results with the relevant institutions and organizations is aimed (iaa.org.tr).In this study, it was aimed to examine the accreditation experiences of the lecturers working in a theology faculty within a state university in detail.

Method

In this study, the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in order to examine, in depth, the accreditation experiences of the lecturers working in a faculty of theology within a state university. Case study is a method where a single situation or event is examined in depth longitudinally, data is collected systematically and

what is happening in the real environment can be seen (Subaşı & Okumuş 419).

Working Group

The criterion sampling was used because the 3 people that made up the working group were selected from those living through the accreditation process in a state university from the beginning to the end. The codes and short information about the participants are given below. 1 of the participants was woman and 2 of them were men and they are coded as P1, P2, P3. All three of the participants, including P1 female, were research assistants.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interview technique was preferred as the data collection method in the study and a semi-structured interview form prepared in this context, was used. In the interview method, a form consisting of questions prepared to obtain information for the purpose of the research is prepared. It enables to make comparisons by identifying the similar and different points among the data obtained from this form (Cansız Aktaş 118). The following questions were included in the developed interview form:

1. What do you think about accreditation in general and the accreditation of Theology Faculties in our country?
2. What did you experience during the accreditation preparation phase of your faculty? Did you have difficulties and what issues did you encounter as a problem? What solutions did you find for these? Did you have problems that you could not find a solution for? Can you give examples?
3. What were the difficulties you faced during the preparation of the self-evaluation report (SER)? How did you overcome the difficulties you faced? Were there any difficulties you could not overcome?
4. Do you think accreditation will contribute to your faculty? If there are, could you explain the positive / negative aspects of these contributions to your faculty by giving examples?
5. If you successfully complete your accreditation process, do you think the accreditation is sustainable?
6. Can you explain your positive / negative experiences during the accreditation preparation

process of your faculty with the TAA (Theology Accreditation Agency), which is the authorized accreditation agency of the Theology Faculties, by giving examples?

The data obtained from the semi-structured interview form were analyzed and interpreted by applying the content analysis method. Content analysis is a systematic technique that aims to collect the data similar to the codings made within the framework of some rules around some categories and thus summarize them (Büyüköztürk et al., 22).

Findings

In this section, the categories and themes were created as a result of the answers from the interview questions. The created categories (nodes) are given in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The Matrix of the Answers to the Interview Questions

Accreditation Theme

The first interview question was *"What do you think about accreditation in general and the accreditation of Theology Faculties in our country?"*. When the answers were examined, Standards (40%), Accreditation is positive (40%) and Accreditation is negative (20%) categories were created under the theme of accreditation and presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Theme of Accreditation, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Accreditation	Standarts	3	40	"…Accreditation can have some beneficial effects on settling the education system in newly established faculties…" (P1)"… For example, it may protect students' rights more effectively. It also increase the ability to measure the comprehension of the lessons in the educational process by not only exams but also other activities..." (P2)
	Accreditation is positive	3	40	"…Accreditation can have some beneficial effects on settling the education system in newly established faculties…" (P1) "… For example, it may protect students' rights more effectively. It also increase the ability to measure the comprehension of the lessons in the educational process by not only exams but also other activities..." (P2) "…The accreditation of theology faculties in our country can be seen as a good start, even if it's late.Thanks to these accreditation studies, which can be considered among the factors that may be effective in increasing the quality of education provided in Theology Faculties, the quality of the theological education in Turkey can be increased and it's reaching to a globa impact level may be targeted…" (P3)
	Accreditation is negative	1	20	"... Since a certain scientific discipline is effective in the faculties that provide numerical education, the benefits of accreditation are more pronounced. On the other hand, this may turn into negative effects in such faculties as theology, which have a predominance of verbal education, as there are different views and methods. "(P1)

Lack of Knowledge Theme

The second interview question was *"What did you experience during the accreditation preparation phase of your faculty? Did you have difficulties and what issues did you encounter as a problem? What solutions did you find for these?* Did you have problems that you could not find a solution for? Can you give examples?"*. When the answers given for

this question were examined, under the theme of lack of information, two categories as Uncertainty (50%) and Lack of documentation (50%) were created and presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Lack of Information Theme, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Lack of information	Uncertainity	1	50	"…As there may be problems that are likely to be experienced at the beginning of every new project, we also faced some problems in our faculty which was involved in such a process for the first time. All in all, making application with a newly opened program that has no history, for an audit that would be mainly inspected over past processes,the fact that the Theology Accreditation Agency had just completed its establishment and was still in the process of establishing its own standards left the people who took part in the preparation of the report in the lurch…" (P2)
	Lack of documentation	1	50	"…Our faculty was one of the first in the department of theology. This was very difficult for us as it was not an example that we could inspire.Due to our unprepared transition to the accreditation program, we experienced insufficient supply of the requested documents, like recording in-class activities…" (P3)

Experienced Difficulties and Solutions Themes

The third interview question was *"What were the difficulties you faced during the preparation of the self-evaluation report (SER)? How did you overcome the difficulties you faced? Were there any difficulties you could not overcome?"*. When the answers given to this question were interpreted, the themes of Experienced Difficulties and Solutions were created. Under the theme of the experienced difficulties two categories as "Deficiencies (50%) and Workload (50%)" were created and presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Experienced Difficulties Theme, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Experienced difficulties Experienced difficulties	Deficiencies	1	50	"…In the draft report determined by the agency, it has been observed that there are serious difficulties in terms of not only having many deficiencies, having many ambiguous points but also especially student-centered learning and teaching process which is more related to the contents of the lessons. This shows that the quality studies are insufficient in terms of recording the work done with evidence, which is the cornerstone. Therefore, although the requested data were applied by faculty lecturers, it was difficult to express them in the report..." (P2)
	Workload	1	50	"…I think a small number of people are subjected to a lot of workload. But we have managed to finish the works by focusing on these, especially in recent times.Although we didn't not know what to write in many places, we were able to complete this job with the help of our professors..." (P1)

Under the theme of solutions; Working coordinatedly (50%) and Questionnaire support (50%) categories were created and presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Solutions Theme, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Solutions	Working coordinatedly	1	50	"…I think a small number of people are subjected to a lot of workload. But we have managed to finish the works by focusing on these, especially in recent times. Although we didn't not know what to write in many places, we were able to complete this job with the help of our professors..." (P1)
	Questionnaire support	1	50	"...In this new distance education process that started due to the pandemic, although it raised some questions about how to get feedback from students in quality studies. However, the problem of being away from the schools was solved thanks to the questionnaires transferred to the online environment. In this way, by creating environments where students could express their problems, great contributions were made to the cycles that the faculty should carry out within the scope of its accreditation. That also ensured the completion of the necessary processes. (P2)"

Contribution of Accreditation

The fourth interview question was *"Do you think accreditation will contribute to your faculty? If there are, could you explain the positive / negative aspects of these contributions to your faculty by giving examples?"*. When the answers given to these questions were interpreted under the theme of Accreditation; two categories as Dynamism (50%) and Exercising of power (50%) were created and presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Contribution of Accreditation Theme, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Contribution of Accreditation	Dynamism	1	50	"…Being in a process focused on self-renewal and development" by detecting its deficiencies in some way indicates that the service provided will be carried to an advanced level in any case. However, I think that the fact that everything is based on evidence in this process may cause the administrative and academic staff to be tired over time…"(P2)
	Exercising of power	1	50	"…Every system has its positive and negative aspects, the important thing is to minimize its negative aspects. Protecting students' rights is as important as protecting the rights of teaching staff. Faculty members may abuse their powers, and similarly, students may also abuse the rights given to them. There may be lecturers and students who have different perspectives. Academic freedom should be created by providing the students' comprehension and presentation of the outputs created by the academic staff…" (P1)

Theme of Sustainability of Accreditation

The fifth interview question was *"If you successfully complete your accreditation process, do you think the accreditation is sustainable?"*. When the answers given to this question were examined, under the theme of sustainability of accreditation; Successful accreditation (40%), Evaluation study (20%), Standardization in communication (20%), Continuous follow-up (20%) categories were created and presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Theme of Sustainability of Accreditation, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Sustainability of Accreditation	Successful accreditation	2	40	"Accreditation can be successful if it includes the student-lecturer relationship with certain criteria without limiting the field of academic freedoms." (P1)"Yes, but I think that as long as they are followed up by the faculty / university administration, the commissions formed will continue to function. Therefore, I believe that the continuity of what needs to be done within the scope of accreditation can be achieved."(P2) "Of course, it should also give a collective seminar to the academic and administrative staff working within the faculty at the beginnings and ends of the semesters. In addition, meetings should be held for the purpose of gaining continuity of accreditation in order to evaluate the process. "(P3)
	Evaluation study	1	20	"Of course, it should also give a collective seminar to the academic and administrative staff working within the faculty at the beginnings and ends of the semesters.In addition, meetings should be held for the purpose of gaining continuity of accreditation in order to evaluate the process." (P3)
	Evaluation study	1	20	"Of course, it should also give a collective seminar to the academic and administrative staff working within the faculty at the beginnings and ends of the semesters.In addition, meetings should be held for the purpose of gaining continuity of accreditation in order to evaluate the process." (P3)
	Standardization in communication	1	20	"Accreditation can be successful if it includes the student-lecturer relationship with certain criteria without limiting the field of academic freedoms." (P1)
	Continuous follow-up	1	20	"Yes, but I think that as long as they are followed up by the faculty / university administration, the commissions formed will continue to function. Therefore, I believe that the continuity of what needs to be done within the scope of accreditation can be achieved." (P2)

Preparation Process Theme of Accreditation

The sixth interview question was *"Can you explain your positive / negative experiences during the accreditation preparation process of your faculty with the TAA (Theology Accreditation Agency), which is the authorized accreditation agency of the Theology Faculties, by giving examples?"*. When the answers given to this question were examined, under the theme of Accreditation preparation process; two categories as Lack of communication (50%), Difficulty in obtaining documents (50%) were created and presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Theme of the Preparation Process for Accreditation, Categories, Frequency and Percentages

Theme	Categories	N	%	Sample Views
Preparation Process for Accreditation	Lack of communication	1	50	"Although there were communication problems from time to time, they were solved. The underlying reasons for these problems were, in general terms, that the agency was new and did not fully complete its setup."(P2)
	Difficulty in obtaining documents	1	50	"We had some difficulties in obtaining the required documents, but in the end, we were able to obtain the sufficient documents. We had a lot of workload, but I think such a comprehensive study gave us a good experience."(P1)

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, it was aimed to examine the accreditation experiences of the faculty members working in a theology faculty within a state university in detail and the following conclusions were reached in the examinations made in this context:

- When the answers given to the questions about determining the opinions of the participants about accreditation were examined, most of the participants stated that accreditation studies have beneficial effects on the institutions and education. Concluded in his research that accreditation studies could increase the quality of the education (Erkuş 129). This result supports the findings obtained from the research. On the other hand, there were some participants who even a little talked about the negative effects of accreditation studies.

- Participants stated that they had difficulties in obtaining documents during the accreditation preparation phase and the uncertainty brought about by the new process was also challenging. The main difficulties encountered during the preparation of the self-evaluation report were determined as the exposure of a small number of people to excessive workload and the missing points encountered in the draft report. Survey support and working coordinatedly were stated as a solution to overcome these difficulties.

- Regarding the contributions of accreditation to the faculty, the participants stated that accreditation studies could keep the institution dynamic and raise the quality to advanced levels. In addition, they emphasized that accreditation might have some positive and negative effects in terms of the exercise of power among faculty members and students.

- On the sustainability of accreditation, the participants stated that the standardization in communication, continuous process monitoring and evaluation should be done.They drew attention to the fact that a successful and sustainable accreditation can be achieved in this way.

- In the light of the conclusions obtained from the research, the following suggestions can be listed as:

- More studies should be done on quality standards in higher education.

- By ensuring the participation of all the personnel in accreditation studies, the workload of the people can be reduced.

- Accreditation studies should be continuously followed up effectively.

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