



A study on the implementation of an accreditation process within a university
intensive language programme

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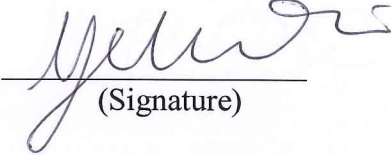
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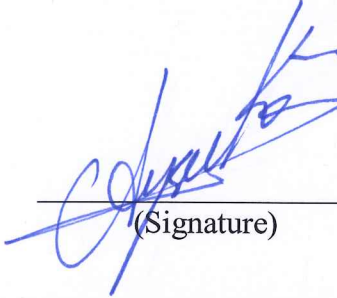
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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance programs take a significant place in today's foreign language programs in higher education. However, the adaptation process of the quality assurance programs in universities may differ according to their situational or institutional factors. In this study, the main aim was to explore the opinions of instructors in the adaptation process of Accreditation Process within the Prep- Program in a Private Foundation University, School of Foreign Languages Department through the lens of socio-constructivist theoretical framework. In order to explore and this aim of qualitative study, unstructured interview was conducted to get clear and in-depth results. For the purpose of the study, 20 university instructors were interviewed accordingly, and open coding was done. The results revealed four themes and that accreditation process has some advantages and disadvantages in terms of teaching, motivation, teamwork, quality, and creativity of teachers.

ÖZET

Günümüzde kalite güvence programları yüksek öğrenimde yabancı dil programlarında çok önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Ancak kalite güvence programlarının üniversitelere adaptasyonu onların durumsal ve kurumsal faktörlerine göre değişkenlik gösterebilir. Bu çalışmanın asıl amacı Özel Vakıf Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Bölümü Hazırlık Okulu'nda akreditasyon sürecinin ve eğitmenlerin bu adaptasyon süresindeki fikirlerini sosyo-yapılandırıcı teorik çerçevesinde ele araştırmaktır. Bu niteliksel çalışmanın amaçlarına ulaşması için yapılandırılmamış mülakat yöntemi kullanılarak açık ve ayrıntılı sonuçlara ulaşılması hedeflenmiştir. Üniversite Hazırlık Okulu'ndaki 20 okutman ile mülakat tekniği kullanılarak görüşülmüş ve buna bağlı olarak elde edilen veriler açık kodlama yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmanın niteliksel veri sonuçlarının analizine göre dört tema ortaya çıkmış ve akreditasyon sürecinin okutmanların öğretim, motivasyon, takım çalışması, kalite ve yaratıcılık bakış açılarına bağlı olarak bazı avantaj ve dezavantajları olduğu saptanmıştır.

DEDICATION



To my family.

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There have been many people that I felt appreciation for during this challenging process which requires both motivation and lots of guidance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The search for quality has played a key role in advancement in every field. The 21st century has been shaped by this key element. As a result of globalization and digital revolution in communications, consumers have become more aware of their needs, and they look for the best in every field. Among all other fields, education may be the unique area where consumers go beyond the limits to get the best out of a system or an institution. The reason for this is the very nature of education because by means of education, individuals shape their futures; countries shape their future generations. Thus, education plays maybe the most important role in development of individuals and countries.

The pursuit of quality in the field of education brings many issues to consider. On the highly competitive and commerce-based trends of our world, many private institutions open almost every year. Some of these institutions achieve high standards and provide quality education to their students. Some of the others, on the other hand, may fail to do this. Thus, learners of the new age look for better and better institutions to get the best education possible particularly if they are paying a lot of money.

Accreditation procedures and quality assurance systems come in to the picture at this point. Accreditation procedures demand preparatory programs of School of Foreign Languages to achieve many standards and also to ensure continuity and seek for the improvement and excellence in language education in SFL Programs. In this process, accreditation systematizes the language programs that supply the necessary standards which are in the name of continuous improvement. The standards are expected to be in consistent with the universal standards that are uniquely set for language learning

services. Quality assurance agencies in the field of education are generally set up by non-profit organizations and select respected and objective authorities as their assessors; thus, they make sure that their standards are met by the instructions that have applied to get accredited. As a result of this chain of systems, Prep Programs are forced to meet high quality standards in order to have betterment in their program, which result in the best education for individuals. In time, this helps language programs to get highly developed. Therefore, accreditation and quality assurance systems play a vital role in the field of education.

This study aims to investigate the opinions of instructors regarding the utilization of an accreditation processes to bring quality into an intensive language program (Prep.) of a private foundation university. In order to explore this the research question, teachers' opinions were elicited regarding the need for accreditation and there perceived changes in the quality of the Prep Program as a result of the accreditation process.

During the study, one preparatory program of a private foundation university in Istanbul that was accredited has been studied. The instructors of the prep program have been interviewed by six open-ended questions, and their answers were analyzed. The results have been brought together under themes.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine instructors' opinions regarding the need for accreditation and changes resulting from an accreditation process. Following a qualitative case study design, the study analyzes the accreditation process undertaken by an intensive language program. The present study also sheds a light over organizational dynamics – such as the interaction of the instructors and the administrators within the Prep Program throughout the accreditation application

process. The instructors served as participants for the study.

1.2. Research Question

In the light of the information above, the following research question was addressed in the study:

"What are the opinions of instructors regarding the implementation of a program level accreditation process?"

The following questions are the supporting questions:

1. What are the opinions of instructors regarding the need for accreditation?
2. What are the instructor opinions in terms of changes in the quality of the prep program as a result of the accreditation process?

1.3. Significance of the Study

Increasingly, higher education institutions are pursuing quality assurance initiatives, both for the sake of improving and validating quality, as well as for increasing the marketability of programs. A visible indicator of quality is the certificate awarded by an accreditation body for a program that meets rigorous international standards. However, to simply declare that a program or university is pursuing accreditation will not guarantee a successful process. It is critical that instructors understand the need for the process and that positive changes in the program actually result from the process. This paper, through a case study, attempts to identify the instructor opinions in terms of an accreditation process.

1.4. Definition of Terms

This chapter provides a discussion of how the key concepts utilized in this project are defined in the literature. The following are the most frequent concepts that are used in this project.

Quality: a concept that stresses the need to meet generally accepted standards such as those defined by an accreditation or quality assurance body, the focus being on the efficiency of the process at work in the institution or Program in accomplishing the stated, given objectives and mission (Vlasceanu, Grunberg&Parlea 2004, p.47).

Accreditation: A process conveyed by peers by means of specialized agencies to hold one another accountable, to achieve appropriate institutional program goals; and to determine the extent to which the institution or program meets established standards. The major intents of the process are to foster improvement and to pinpoint, for public assurance, institutions and programs that seem to be achieving stated goals and meeting agreed- upon standards (Kelly, 1995, p.11).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Quality in Education

Education is the fundamental factor in sustainable development and is also the touchstone of improvement in almost all areas of life. In order to have well-established and strong institutions in today's world, many countries struggle to add innovation to their education system. Nations have a consciousness of improvement via educating and training as many people as possible in order to cope with their rivals since education and training give financial, social, political and above all scientific strength and betterment. While the international competition is ongoing, countries are also struggling for the quality of their education systems by continuously producing projects and ways of betterment (Petersen, 1999). The mostly accepted and preferable innovation is bringing a certain quality to education, which gives the chance of betterment and in development. However, the measure of quality in education cannot be assessed intuitively and should be established on certain grounds. According to Mizikaci (2006), in order to establish and implement quality systems in higher education institutions, she firstly advocates that the current state description of the institution and the expectations and needs of the stakeholders are required to be assessed. Thus, beliefs, the mental outlook of primary decision makers about the quality concept, purposes of higher education, the way to reach quality assurance as well as circumstantial issues such as directing policies, on-going practices, historical, political, socioeconomic environment where the institutions operate are required to be explored.

Quality has numerous definitions in positive terms such as "well-being", "excellence" and "good practice" and so forth. When quality is expressed under the term of professionalism, it is the "quality improvement" that explains the progress and

betterment of the type of provided services. Friend and Pereira (2002) point out that organizations which maintain their service of education with a certain quality become stronger and have stronger assets due to their staff loyalty, eagerness of students, less liability to economic fluctuations, higher funding levels and increased autonomy. However, according to Frazer (1992) quality can be "multi-faceted" and according to Harvey and Green (1993) it is "slippery and value-laden". Scott (1995) suggests that there is no general, accepted definition of quality in higher education.

Green (1994) notes that quality is an abstract concept such as 'freedom' or 'justice' and he states that people have innate comprehension of what it refers. However, it is not easy to express. When defining the concept of quality in higher education, Harvey and Green state that it is the most common cited literature which is "a three-year Quality in Higher Education project" applied in the United Kingdom'. The aim the project was to enlighten policy on the advancement of a technique for estimating higher education's quality degree in the UK. The result of the project illustrated marked differences and how quality is gestated by numerous stakeholders. Harvey and Green (1993a) reported that even if employers saw quality as a capacity to supply a suitable educated workforce, staff and students' key focus was on resources and learning experience.

Harvey and Green (1993b) created a framework in order to categorize viewpoints on quality higher education. Five categories are as follows: a. quality as exceptional, b. quality as perfection or consistency, c. quality as fitness for purpose, d. quality as value for money and e. quality as transformation. They describe 'exceptional' as referent to 'high class' and 'exclusive' educational system which can be understood as a stamp of quality of an education that goes unquestioned. Secondly, exceptional also refers to

having high standards. The target is on attracting the best students and supplying the best services, so the quality is believed to flow naturally. Final view of exception can be referred as 'passing a set of recommended standards. The assessment of institution or program occurs against standards that are established for their inputs and output and they are given an approved seal when they are found in conformity. The second category of quality as perfection or consistency focuses on processes rather than looking at inputs or outputs. The effort is diminishing 'defects' into minimum standards through rigid conformance to specifications. The target is 'zero defects'. It is the conformance of policies and procedures to ensure quality results in higher education. In order to be regarded as 'quality institutions', institutions are required to show little or no deviation from specified guides or by external agencies. 'Quality as fitness for purpose' is the third category. Harvey and Green (1993b) state that there are some expectations of employers and students from the institution. If these expectations are met, then the education is considered as fit for its purpose and it has quality. Therefore, institutions are trying to ensure their fitness for their expressed mission. Institutions may have quality because they are meeting with the standards. However, there is another quality that judges an institution is the extent to which institution is able to achieve its standards or its goals to national objectives. The fourth category is 'quality as value for money'. Since fiscal demands for social programs increase, there is a high external pressure on institutions to be transparent in their use of public. For this reason institutions begin to depend on funding resources such as tuition, students and their parents become more questioning about the returns on their investment. Hence, government calls an institution as 'quality' if it can serve accelerating numbers of students. The final category is 'quality as transformation' which indicates the sustainable quality within the department.

2.1.1. Quality in Higher Education

Quality is viewed as empowering of education. In other words, quality is assessed by measuring the value added to participants. This transformation can be observed by an increased knowledge and skills or improvements in manners, values of students (Harvey and Green, 1993a). According to Watty (2005), this framework is by far a crucial model of perfection and consistency in education, and of a “flawless consistency of a product or service”. They are mainly showing the ideal, seeing quality as a performance, transforming students by adding value to their knowledge and personal development. Finally, fitness for purpose is preferred mostly by governments and higher educational institutions which are seen as quality of the service.

Green (1994) defines quality as a composed form of highest standards and exceptionality, acquiescence to standards, richness for purpose, effectiveness and fulfilling the satisfaction. According to Al-Hassnawi and Al-Fatlawi (2013) quality is better to be considered as combined rather than a free concept. In other words, when quality measures are applied, it simply increases the value and effectiveness, so when quality is attained in education, a more reliable and more effective outcome can be achieved. Green takes quality as a suitable fitness on specific items that might change in meantime, establishing goals and reaching to the needs of stakeholders (Green, 1994).

In many nations global comparison and internalization of institutions are the key policy themes which have increased the significance of quality in education in the past 25 years (Scott, 2000). Moreover, Knight (2003) indicates the importance of internalization by defining it as the action of emerging an international, global culture or dimension into the aim of delivering an education. According to Scott (1998), not all

of the universities are international and become the victims of this process. Therefore, in order to cope with the results of internalization, they should create a clear response to globalization and to internalization system. At this point, higher education institutions have started to question their own system whether they have served a quality-based education or not. Thus, there have been many efforts to explain and measure quality by universities. According to Frazer (1992), quality can be achieved within universities only if everyone involves in this process. In other words, teachers, students, senior managers should contribute for betterment and for the ongoing improvement in higher education. Lemaitre (2002) also adds that quality exists in higher education when there is a balance between social actors as managers, students or teachers.

The three fundamental mechanisms for measuring quality in higher education institutions are audit, accreditation, and assessment. Dill and Massy (1996) outline accreditation, assessment and academic audit as a quality mechanism as follows;

1. Accreditation links degree of performance, self-study and peer review. It compasses aspiration and how the objectives are applied. In other words, accreditation verifies that the institution or the program meets educational standards.
2. Assessment includes peer review, self-study and performance indicators. It makes judgments about levels of quality and it focuses on the evaluation of specific activities at the subject or program level.
3. Academic audit varies from assessment and accreditation in several ways. Firstly, no common performance indicators by which the institutional judgments exist. Academic audits focus on the processes that institutions use to certify quality such as procedures, rules and policy statements.

Alderman and Brown (2005) focus on the similarities and differences between audit and accreditation and they state that the academic audit which is used by UK through Quality Assurance Agency for Higher education (QAA) includes the preparation of institutional self –evaluation document, institutional visits and summary reports of evaluation. As a difference, audit does not handle fiscal, budgetary issues, salaries or the conditions of service. Brittingham (2008) moves further and asserts that audit pays attention to comparability of academic standards and the result are open to public which is another difference with accreditation. He also indicates that the visits of audit are more frequent than the visits of accreditation. Audit visitors often look at the externally developed frameworks, standards of degree and specification of the program. On the other hand, accreditation agencies work with less staff and with a large team of academic volunteers.

According to Dill (2000) the primary aim of Audit is to concentrate on the engaged processes which are carried out by higher education institutions to raise the level of teaching and learning. Petersen (1999) indicates that quality audits test quality assurance and control system by its self-evaluation. It ensures a trust to an institution since external body approves the institution's quality assurance process periodically. However, Chernay (1990) asserts that accreditation assures the institutions, educational programs that they obtain clear objectives that are practiced in an ongoing process. This can be the acceptance of institutions or programs by society and by the government (Craft, 2003). Accreditation is acknowledged as the key part of quality by nations.

European Network for Quality Assurance (2001) state that accreditation indicates the abstract idea of a precise authorizing power which conducts according to the authoritative verdicts on the approval or not of institutions or study programs. In other sense, it refers to the issuing of a quality label to institutions or programs. In both cases,

a judgment is reached through certain assessment process. According to Alstete (2004), accreditation is the fundamental way of assuring quality of higher institutions to its system.

As the last mechanism, assessment (program, academic, quality reviews) which is run by an external body or an individual institution is directly related to measurement. Dill and Massy (1996) believe that assessment has more advantageous and has more prominence in teaching and learning over accreditation or audit. Additionally, Dill (1999) asserts that the academic liability influences the quality assurance policies in many countries and this shows that universities are the learning organizations regarding their own core processes of teaching and learning. Dill and Massy broaden this topic by claiming that external agencies control assessment and some of the benefits may not be recognized. Alternately a sense of collective responsibility for quality is not promoted. Addressing only to subject-specific outcomes may decrease the unified interactions across departments and uncoordinated visits by external agencies can be felt as burden on the institution (Dill and Massy, 1996).

Assessment is seen as a quantitative evaluation (Woodhouse, 1995). It assures that an institution strictly follows determined standards and criteria and quality assessment remarks the product, the outcome of the process. No matter how these terms are defined, it is crucial to indicate the fact that assessment, audit, accreditation are not used exactly the same in every countries but key elements are universal. According to Stensaker and Harvey (2006) the input and outcome factors among different accrediting agencies are common. Furthermore, Aelterman (2006) also indicates the comparable standards between several accreditation networks.

2.1.2. Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The idea of a higher education system has changed as a result of the increasing interest of state, changes in funding, transformation of student request high accountability. Due to these demands, massification; (i.e., large classes in higher education), has become one of the considered results (Hornsby and Ruksana, 2014). Large class environment limits the value of pedagogy in which the quality of student learning can be affected in a negative way (Hornsby et. al., 2013). Scott (1995) defines large classes as a connected term to massification which occurs due to sharp increase of student enrollment towards the end of the twentieth century. Barnett (2004) states there are some factors for universal changes take place in higher education and as a result, massification becomes inevitable in education. The factors are as follows;

- a. globalization
- b. competition
- c. the development of nationwide state-sponsored quality mechanisms
- d. marketization of institutions of higher education and knowledge services for customers
- e. agendas of involvement, equal opportunities.

Moreover, International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) (2007a, p.6) asserts several relevant global factors in higher education systems. IIEP indicates that growth of systems and expansion of social demand are the leading trends on the list The enrollment rate accelerated from 69.4 million in 1998 and 1999 to 13.8 million in the years between 2004 and 2005. Varghese (2013) also states that the global higher education enrollment rate rose from 13.8 % in 1990 to 29 % in 2010. According to

Bloom (2006) these rates represents crucial changes in the system of higher education in countries since it brings empowerment and economic development to nations. Therefore, in order to cope with this expansion, higher education institutions have developed new forms. IIEP (2007a) also asserts "deregulation and governments' interest for value for money" trend. Governments have increased their request for institutions to be more liable. Liability means that institutions accord their efficiency in using resources and their adequacy in meeting the needs of local economy. Furthermore "globalization is another economic trend that has impact on higher education world-wide. As it is clearly seen, there is a competition in higher education and students are seen as "customers" and these customers are interested in education services that are high and the qualification that they will receive, will supply them with access to global job markets. These pressures on higher education directly influence the application of quality assurance as well. According to Salmi (2002, p.11), the communication revolution, the expending significance of knowledge and economic globalization are the fundamental challenges that higher education comes across. He states that higher education needs radical changes as configurations of operation within the institutions, and these competitions in higher education inevitably change the quality assurance mechanisms. Harvey (2004a, p.65) believes that quality assurance has become world-wide due to cross national realization of qualification and transnational education. Hence, quality assurance agencies were set up in order to determine quality and standards which have become global concerns in higher education.

2.1.2.1. The Need for Quality Assurance

The theories of quality assurance were brought in as a domestic guidelines instrument in the UK in 1985. It was for the purpose of improving in higher education and individual lecturers. The Bologna declaration of 1999 brought a new meaning and

expedition of advancement. By this declaration quality assurance took more places in the framework of internalization. It led to policy agenda of the higher education (Westerheijden, Hulpiou, & Waeytens, 2007). Harvey (2004a) states the other examples of quality assurance movements are as the establishment of the INQAAHE “International Network of Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education”, MERCOSUR process of mutual recognition in South America, CHEA “The Council for Higher Education Accreditation” in the United States of America. These international agencies are in search of sustainable quality in higher education, but they are also challenged by language and cultural compatibility among countries. There are also economic factors that affect the quality form of higher education. Lemaitre (2002, p.36), states that globalization has an effect on higher education in all countries, but it has worse scenario in developing countries. They both need to certify the quality and establish the conditions that supply quality. Lim (1999) indicates the situation that in developing countries many conditions which support quality assurance are not present in many universities and these universities have few academic staff that has formal qualification. Lim (1999, p.385) also believes that there are some steps to be taken in developing countries. The first one is to check the conditions that a quality assurance program can work, then see if these conditions are present and finally assess if the total or half-done absence of these conditions diminishes the effectiveness of quality assurance programs.

2.1.2.2. The Content of Quality Assurance

Harvey (1998) believes that quality assurance consists of three main pillars which are accountability, control and improvement. Accountability refers to acquiring the choices of outside parties i.e. families and society. Control refers to whether quality is achievable or not; and improvement is the assurance of the ultimate aim: whether the

required input is received or not, the process is sustained, and the quality standards increase. International Institute for Educational Planning "IIEP" (2007a) also state the same three existing quality assurance system purposes: (a) quality control- verifying that the institutions meet minimum needs for quality, (b) accountability - maintaining assurance to public sector's fitting with quality standards or guiding the higher education in one direction, (c) improvement - assisting institutions to move towards higher standards.

Harman (2000) asserts that quality assurance is a well-ordered management and procedures are selected to check performance and certify quality outputs and advancement. Its aim is to supply the evidence of quality which also gives confidence to stakeholders. According to Adria and Dona (2006), it is the quality assurance that assures the maintenance and improvement of quality. In other words, quality assurance applies to all systematized actions that supply trust in terms of international standards of education, scholarship that continues and it is the quality assurance that concentrates on the process itself" (Petersen, 1999). From another perspective quality which means as "exceptional" meets with assumptions "fitness for purpose", it is accepted by the academic quality assurance agencies. In this case, assurance occurs when the clear evidence with clear objectives are obtained (Woodhouse, 1995).

When defining quality assurance, many people ignore the fact that education is a human process, so quality can be identified as the intended activities that confirms quality. Jesse (1977) believes that quality assurance comprises improvement, assessment, monitoring. Segers and Dochys (1996) define the aim of monitoring as to amplify quality during the process, assessment as the bringing together the evidence about the previous indicators and improvement as planning and applying ingenious activities to eliminate the deficiencies. That's the reason why almost all countries try

to have a kind of quality assurance. However, they are different in the terms of purpose, focus and organization (Friend-Pereira, 2002). In order to achieve international quality standards, the development policies must be clear while defining goals and needs of faculty so that faculty members can understand what works best for them (Baldwin, 1984). To assure quality in higher education, institutional self-evaluation or self-study process can be applied as a quality assurance model. In this case, institutions it is expected to collect evaluate and present data on different aspects of institutional departments. A typical academic review includes a self-study proceeding on an external evaluation team site visit such as external agencies and related activities. Self-studies are assumed to be conducted by program faculty and administrators.

The other features of academic review are as follows; a- review teams consist of knowledgeable external individuals b- review teams report their evaluation c- the faculty receives the report and provides feedback to administrators d- the feedback collected by the administrative department are related to other institutional processes such as; curriculum development, budgeting resource allocation.

Another practice is outcomes assessment. The findings of this assessment provide information regarding self-studies, carried out as a part of academic review and accreditation process. According to Peterson and Einarson (2001), when it is required to assess student learning and program effectiveness, there are different forms which are in relation with the target, context and tradition of an institution. These are the kind of collected data, the methods during application of this collection, the type of analysis and its effect on institutional improvement. Kells (1995) states that the more recent trend in measuring education outcomes expects the institutions to adopt, more practical structures and procedures and develop a culture of evaluation. This concept includes the degree to what level the institution intends to regulate itself, the awareness,

readiness and preferences of its professionals that are concerned with evaluation and regulation methods. A culture of evaluation is hectic since it includes the knowledge, experience and preference of leaders and the general body of professionals, the previous experience of leaders and the framework for evaluation. This framework includes database, experience with surveys, methods of interview, leaders experienced in group process, the capability of diagnose, workshop experience and alteration strategies.

According to Dills (1999), academic learning organizations are based on five point model. This model involves 1- exhibition of a culture of evidence in problem solving. In other words, institutions collect data effectively; define measurement of student learning, quality assurance policies and codes of practice; 2- improvement of coordination of teaching units. This can be accomplished through faculty committees, curriculum coordinators and academic units to develop and deliver the curriculum; 3- learning from others through practices such as external program reviewers, founding external curriculum advisory committees, performing surveys for program graduates, benchmarking against peer institutions or international criteria; 4- coordinating institutional learning via interdepartmental committees and teaching and learning centers to initiatives; 5- transferring knowledge successfully within the institution to improve quality.

2.1.3. Accreditation

When accreditation is given to an institution, it means that a certain standard is met in higher education programs or institutions. This process consists of benchmarking assessment whose verdicts are based on the criteria of quality (ENQA, 2001). According to Eaton (2012), accreditation is a process of a quality review done by external organizations within universities, colleges and programs that are scrutinized

so that they have the required standards of quality improvement and quality assurance. Standards are the key elements of accreditation and are the main concern of accreditation organizations. Hayward (2006) assures that if an institution or a program requires accreditation, the utmost thing they need to do is to have clear and effective standards and criteria for accreditation. Harvey (2002) believes that when the accreditation body's standards are generated, accreditation occurs. The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) asserts that accreditation systematize the programs or institutions since they supply the required standards on behalf of continuous improvement. CEA's accreditation process comprises an eligibility application, workshop, self- study report, and site visit and accreditation decision (CEA, 2016). Fertig (2007) indicates that accreditation is a meeting of standards that improve the quality. When these definitions are taken into consideration, it is quite clear that in order to reach a level of excellence in institutions or programs, standardization is the first step to take. It is clear that accreditation provides a framework to improve institutions. CHEA as a private nonprofit national organization that conducts accreditation activity in USA states that accreditation is taken as a trustworthy activity by federal and state government and The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) adds that it is grasped as a entrustment, standards, confirmation, judgment, peer based process" (Eaton, 2012) According to Stensaker (2006), it is the accreditation why American higher education is a world leader. Due to accreditation, the institutions set their outcomes, raise the effectiveness in the classroom and in the management of educational institutions. In other words, accreditation simply does not only bring quality to institution but also to its education and administration. When instructors understand the process of accreditation, knows the criteria, standards, they can even buy into this process, too. To create a long and effective development,

Askling and Kristen (2000) believe that students, staff members need to be involved and empowered so that they will be more aware of their organization's characters, situations, process and outcomes. In other words, "combining a bottom-up and a top-down approach and an internal and external audit, a new expression might come up which can promote an improvement-oriented culture" (Harvey,1998).

2.1.3.1. Accreditation in Higher Education

The education system which is conducted in higher education is assumed to sustain quality development, show weaknesses on behalf of quality and require assessments to present all covered and bureaucratic system. On the institutional level, external quality monitors, forms the authority distribution, the conducting of leadership, the result of work done by the organization and the transparency within the institution (Eaton, 2012). By accomplishing these aspects, the possible quality weaknesses in programs and disciplines have the chance to be investigated intensely. Also, data collection which is done every year, self-appraisals and evaluations, internal quality work reports may also disclose strengths and weaknesses in institutional quality work. Accreditation agencies and audits ask for clearly identified mission statements and corporate strategies posted on their web site and marketing materials since each university is an entity that requires corporate identity (Kristen, 2000). By defining these, a more transparent development may occur for the benefit of the university. This process may also be embraces as an agent of internal cultural and a powerful organizational change. It is not only a vehicle of control for governmental and public but also a development-oriented national system of academic audits which may prompt the institutions in a way to set their own system, establish their strategies and routines for organizational learning, to rename the concept decentralization in terms of "shared responsibilities" instead of "freedom to everyone to protect individual academic autonomy", and to assign students roles in the internal

quality work. As a result, accreditation might offer conceptual tools (memos, meetings agendas) and basic facts for internal debate about the nature and purpose of higher education (Eaton, 2012).

2.1.3.2. Accrediting Bodies

There are two main levels of accreditation for higher education. (The Higher Learning Commission, 2003) First type is ‘institutional accreditation’ which is an accrediting body appraises the whole of the organization and accredits it. The second type is ‘specialized accrediting agencies’ which reviews particular organizations, institutions, schools, nursing and engineering and EFL programs (European Network for Quality Assurance [ENQA], p.7, 2001). These specialized independent or non – governmental accrediting organizations pay visits to review and judge the institutions. These institutions give the final verdicts whether or not these institutions meet the standards of accreditation. In the field of foreign language education, particularly English as a foreign language, EAQUALS and the Commission on English language program accreditation (CEA) are the most commonly known accrediting bodies which promote excellence, quality and assurance in the institutions and EFL programs. CEA’s review process and procedures are based on U.S Department of Education requirements that promote continuous development during the self-study and feedback regarding the review team report; “Accreditation is a process by which special experts in the field decide and choose common standards then, regulate themselves according to those standards. In order to become accredited, especially in the field of education, a program or institution participates in a voluntary process of peer review, designed to improve and assure the quality of the program or institution” (CEA, 2016) EAQUALS which is a European association, seeks for the improvement and excellence in language education. The main aim of accreditation is to demonstration of language courses’

standards in consistence with the international standards that are designed especially for language learning services (2011). Since these associations serve in terms of quality improvement, Pearson as an association dwells on the assurance of the institutions. Pearson's main concern is to view if the institution or the program's quality or standards meet an independent and international quality benchmark. "Pearson assures the quality of the process constructs the design, delivery, quality assurance & assessment of the organization's own education or training programs", ("Approaches to organization and management," 2016).

2.1.3.3. Accreditation and Language Schools

Because of the economic, political, societal pressures in 21st century, higher education has gained greater worldwide involvement. In other words, it is the globalization which causes competition among institutions. It puts emphasis on wealth, knowledge and power. Therefore, knowledge society is highly crucial for the rise of service sector since the international intellectual mobility recognize well-developed education system and institutions. Use of English as lingua franca for scientific communication, international labor market has also become an international asset. Altbach and Knight (2007) add that many nations are interested in obtaining high quality language programs to give better service to their public. At this point, internalization comes to a point. It includes policies and practices which are applied by academic systems and institutions in order to handle global academic environment. Due to openness to new economic systems and new labor market, many language programs make high investments in marketing to earn more recognition. According to Williams (1996) current language programs insist on being accredited by specialized professional accreditation agencies which provides an incentive for reevaluation of organizational structures, curricular content in School of Foreign Languages Program

in higher education. Many language Programs claim to be high in quality. However, when they are certified by accreditation agencies, they are officially recognized publicly.

2.1.4. Theoretical Framework of the Study

As learning and teaching cannot be considered as isolated processes, it needs to be considered those in a unified understanding in which interaction takes place. In other words, humans are not isolated beings; therefore, they cannot communicate and learn separated from society. Within the society, members communicate with each other; they negotiate meaning through dialogue in which they construct meaning; thus, in order learning to take place, persons learn from each other through social interaction. In this regard, the theory of social constructivism is needed to be touched upon. With this purpose, this study seeks to find out the opinions of EFL instructors, and they are assumed to learn from each other within and between the new system parties-accreditation people since they are considered as role models for successful communicators in interactive situations.

Social constructivism is rooted in Vygotsky (1978), because he highlighted the critical importance of the social context for cognitive development. He brought the concept of the zone of proximal development to understanding learning. According to his concept, learners can master concepts and ideas, which they cannot understand on their own in isolation, with help from adults or peers who are more advanced. Based on Vygotsky's approach to learning, the socio-constructivist perspective claims that the mind of the individual is shaped by social interaction. In that sense, social constructivist approach to EFL (this context can be considered as an EFL context) and learning can be considered as a process of enculturation into a community of practice which takes place inside the classroom, monitored and

supervised by teachers.

Furthermore, when EFL teachers are considered particularly under the scope of this study, interdependent process of social interaction which is provided by teachers' expert guidance, and participation should be focused on. Such approach leads this research's structure and sequence the steps of this study accordingly. The opinions of those teachers are assumed to be shaped through such mentioned interaction.

As it is mentioned previously, preparatory schools of universities' settings are one of the many contexts of EFL teaching. If those instructors are assumed to be competent teachers, they will likely show and reveal the hints of their constructed meaning through previous dialogue within their social context, which is referred here to preparatory school's new system as for the data collection context.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

In this study, qualitative research method is used for several reasons in line with the research question in nature. First of all, it was important to gain insight into the phenomena with regards to what the participants think and believe of the new system applied to their classroom composition. It was believed for this research that a quantitative research would not be sufficient and lack such an insight. Only one of the qualitative methods would provide this research with significant insight. By insight here, it meant what and how the participants would perceive the characteristics of the accreditation system as a product and process as well. In addition to what the teachers thought, to gain such insight and the related reflections, the feelings of the participants were thought to be revealed as important in order to find an answer to the research question; merely through such a method, the context-the accreditation composition would be better understood to come up with some important implementations.

Secondly, a method of qualitative research would help the researcher to generate important ideas for further improvements in accordance with the findings. In fact, it might be difficult and challenging to generalize the findings of a qualitative research; however, as long as the context is identified in detail, similarities might be found among the other contexts, and thus, though 'relatively' to some 'extent', the issue of generalizability might not be much of such problem.

Third, a qualitative approach would likely uncover some potential dimensions within and between the previous educational system and the new system through revealing how the participants perceive the message of the accreditation system.

Apart from those, it was thought that such type of study would help further studies to develop some different parameters for a quantitative study through developing other kinds of research questions which would lead the researchers to a different design, perspective and/or framework that would reveal the phenomena from various angles.

Also, because, in line with the scope of this research, it was not the aim to count, measure or offer statistical validation, but to gain insight into the phenomena and shed light into the perceptions and/or pre-perceptions, a method of quantitative research method was not expected and selected. In a nutshell, the only and mere purpose was to find out what the teachers think, feel, perceive, approach, and value the accreditation as a product and process as well.

Lastly, this type of a study would assumed to reveal the participants' values which would have affected their mindset and cognition. Through that approach, it would be found out how and/or why their behaviors were influenced by the new system applied in their contextual composition since there assumed to be a change/changes in the teaching/learning context.

Additionally, exploratory research method is used among the other methods of a qualitative research.

As mentioned, this study adopted an exploratory research design which intends to explore the processes and does not intend to offer final solutions to existing problems. It has been noted that “exploratory research is the initial research, which forms the basis of more conclusive research. It can even help in determining the research design, sampling methodology and data collection method” (Sing, 2007). This study tries to understand the processes in the Prep Program within a Private Foundation University

after accreditation program and how the effects are of it on teaching and quality of the education. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative approach where only small samples or groups are chosen and the results of the study have low level of generalizability and are limited too. However, data shows some patterns related to research questions, more research might be needed for a more in-depth understanding to shed insight into the emerging themes afterwards or theoretical models could be developed too. This is the important benefit of descriptive type research which is main scope of our study.

3.2 Setting

The study has adopted a qualitative approach to understand the possible impacts, outcomes or losses that occurred due to accreditation program in the prep department of the University through the opinions of the participants. As the participants are chosen in one university with a small sample size, there is high potential to discover possible answers of the research questions. The interviews were held between May- June 2016. The sample of the study was chosen from a reputable University in Istanbul, Turkey. The research is conducted in Prep Program of a private foundation university. Since its founding in 1996, the Private Foundation University has strengthened today to 5 Faculties with 35 undergraduate programs, two Vocational Schools with 21 associate degree programs, Graduate Institutes in Social Sciences and Applied Sciences, a School of Foreign Languages, and a Center for Continuing Education.

3.3 Participants

The total number of the instructors of the department is 29 and sample size is 20 people which are an adequate size for a qualitative research. The sample consists of different kinds of respondents in terms of their educational background, total years of

experience, years of experience in University and the nationalities of the instructors. In the following table, the details of the sample are given.

Table 1: Demographic Information

		%			%
Age	25-35	20	Education	Bachelor	45
	35-45	50		Master	55
	45 and more	80		PhD.	-
Nationality	Foreign	25	Years of experience	Less than 5 years	-
	Turkish	75		5-10 Years	15
				10+ Years	85
Gender	Female	55	Years of experience at case university	1-3	5
	Male	45		3-5 Years	10
				5+ Years	85

The sample size consists of 20 people that work in the same department in a Private Foundation University, Istanbul.

3.4 Data Collection

Convenient sampling is used to collect data in this study because of time and space constraints. Despite its disadvantages stated in the related literature regarding the difficulty in generalizing the findings (though this is not the purpose of this study but to describe an important situation based on teacher opinions in relation to their perceptions and experience throughout a new dimension in their teaching-learning context, to reduce sampling bias, the two most important steps are taken. When this study is designed, open-coding analysis is chosen to analyze the data in order to find out emerging codes grounded among the common and/or shared patterns. Also, to reduce researcher judgment, another researcher was involved for repeated debriefing sessions and inter-rater reliability was calculated. Secondly, it was ensured that the

selected sample frame matches the target population it as much as possible. That is, the most experienced teacher was found out through the demographic information and asked to suggest more participants who were more involved, interested, and experienced in the new system at their institution.

The process of the qualitative research is given as a schematic representation in *Figure 1* on the next page.



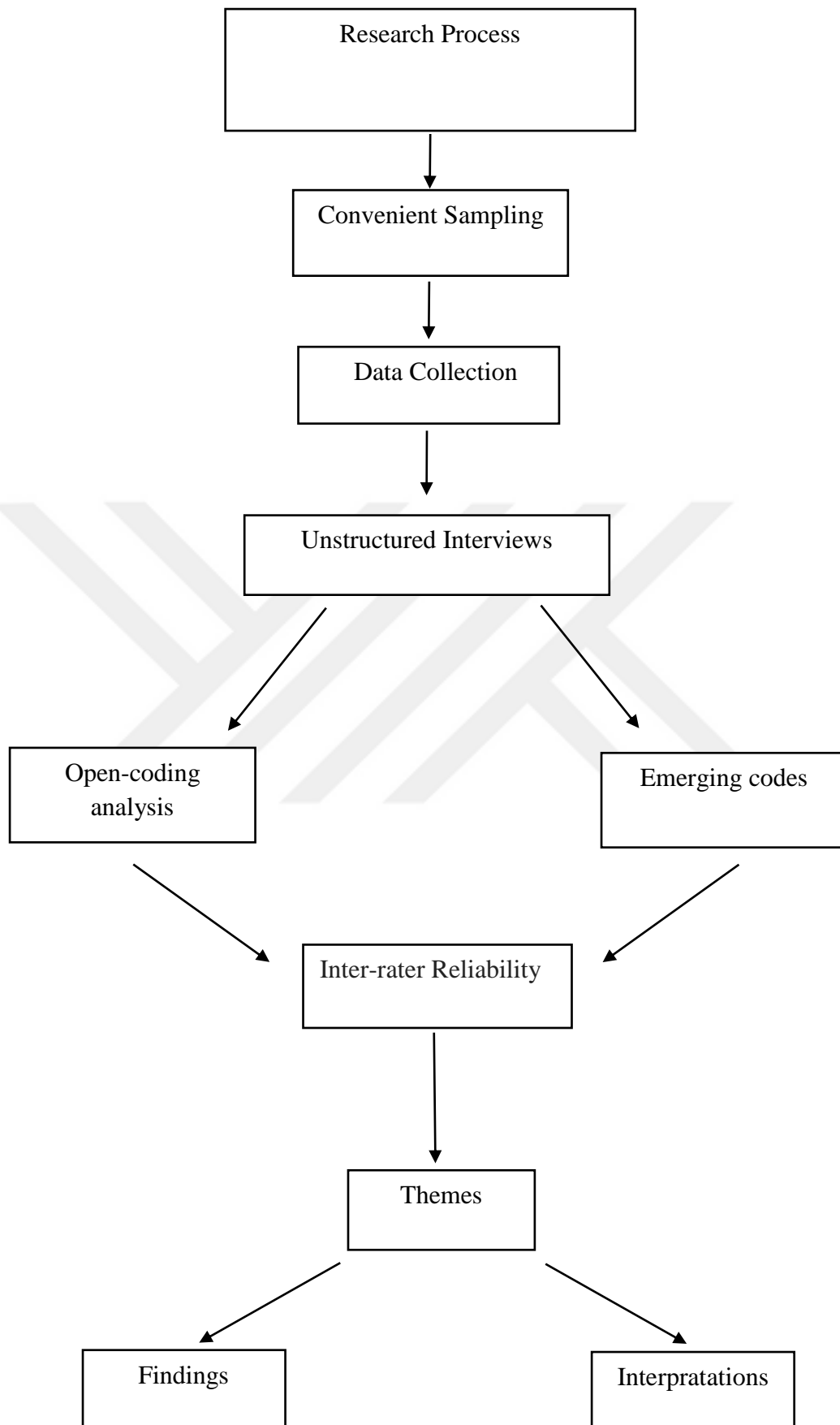


Figure 1. The framework used in this qualitative research

Apart from the sampling, as it is widespread well-known piece of information in the literature that it is important to select an appropriate technique to find adequate answers to the research questions in a qualitative study (Marshall, Martin N., 1996). Accordingly, as this study adopted an exploratory research method, the qualitative data of the study was collected through face-to-face unstructured interviews that comprises of open-ended questions. In qualitative designs, there are four types of interviews that can be used to collect data, depending on the nature of the study-thus on the purpose of the study, in short, that depends on the nature of research questions. Before stating why 'unstructured interview' type is selected for this study, it might be better to state the basic characteristics of all the four interview types. The first is the structured interview. It's underlying characteristics is that it is mostly dependent on a set of predetermined questions which are direct and require immediate, mostly short answers- 'yes' or 'no' type, responses. Therefore, here, the researcher and participants have relatively very little freedom compared to the other types (Berg, 2007). The second type of interviews is the open-ended (unstructured) interview, which is used in this study. This type of interviewing is done in an open situation. Unlike structured interview, there is a greater flexibility and freedom on both parties, namely the researcher and participants regarding planning, implementing and organizing the interview content and questions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 35). Thus, the researcher here is "keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on various issues" as mentioned by Dörnyei (2007: 136). The third type is the semi-structured interview. This type of interview is more flexible version compared to the structured interview. This type of interview brings depth to the data because it provides the researcher with an opportunity to probe and expand the interviewee's responses. The last type of interview is focus group interviewing. This is "...an interviewing technique in which participants

are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being ‘focused’ on a given topic” (Barbour & Schostak, 2005, p. 46). However, the purpose of this study is to reveal the teacher opinions without losing any data, and because the researcher herself does not want to use any predetermined theme in mind taken from a previous research in the literature, the second type of interview is selected based on the scope of this research depending on the research question. As referred by Legard et al. (2003), the unstructured interview is also called as in-depth interview in qualitative studies. It is described as a “conversation with a purpose” (2003, p. 138). This is because it helps researchers to collect in-depth information as it is the purpose of this study. The unstructured interview can then be considered as a shared experience within a context of conversational intimacy where interviewees feel comfortable talking about their story. Legard (2003) considers unstructured interview as one of the “main advantage of the in-depth interview is the ability to combine structure with flexibility” (p. 141).

Besides, another significant researcher in qualitative research field, Gill (2008) considers that type of interview through a different lens and brings an argument which claims that the unstructured interview does “not reflect any preconceived theories or idea and are performed with little or no organization”, thereby in this study, no pre-determined theory and/or theme and pre-determined code chosen from the previous studies in the literature are used. There assumed and was a flow of ideas in data collection conversation with the participants in order not to lose any data.

As it mentioned before qualitative data have been obtained from the instructors of Prep Program of University. The interview questions are comprised of four questions without having a predetermined theme in mind in advance in order not to lose any data.

Interviews are able to provide more personalized form of data than questionnaires, and interviewers should be trained before conducting interviews so that they follow same research protocol as questionnaire surveys. The interview script may include special instructions for the interviewer that are not seen by respondents and may hold space for the interviewer to record personal comments. Furthermore, interview techniques enable creating opportunities for interviewers to explain any issues raised by the respondent or ask probing or follow-up questions (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The most typical form of interview is personal or face-to-face interview. The interviewer works precisely with the respondent to ask questions and record their responses. Personal interviews may be conducted at the respondent's home or office location (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The interview questions were prepared to understand and evaluate the instructors' comments, opinions for accreditation program, quality of education of the prep program, the processes in the department, and suggestions for better language teaching. The interview is conducted in Turkish with the Turkish EFL instructors since their L1 was Turkish and with the foreign teachers, it was done in English. Before the interview, consent form was given to all participants and the administrative staff for ethical consideration

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The interviews data were collected in 2016 in two months' time in a private foundation university in Istanbul. Availability of time was an issue for the participants who are working four-day work weeks. Although interviews should be more conversational in nature, time limitation kept most interviews to an average of 40-45 minutes. As the interviews progressed, it was found that this was sufficient time to gather useful information.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data is collected through face to face individual unstructured interview and the interviews are voice recorded. The recordings are first transcribed, then are analyzed by two researchers. In order to make sure the same procedure was followed by the two researchers, the main researcher first demonstrated how she analyzed the data, then the two again came together and compared and contrasted how they went over the data. After making sure that the steps of the same procedure were done by the two researchers, the analysis was done individually before the calculating inter-rater reliability regarding repeated before-after debriefing sessions.

Since the nature of the qualitative study analysis is based on non-parametric techniques, coding was used when analyzing the responses to open-ended questions; key terms and phrases were identified in order to speak patterns across participant responses. Following this first step, categorization of responses was carried out in order to develop a full picture of how participants responded to the questions; what responses supported a common view, which responses were unique and isolated. This procedure is repeated for every single response. More specifically, each answer to each question is analyzed one by one, one after the other respondent's answer (to question 1, as an example) and similar patterns were sought and found out. After determining similar-shared patterns, they are coded. The frequencies of each code for all respondents' answers for each question are calculated and linkages are found out for the highest codes to find out emerging categories. Then, for each category, the frequencies are calculated to link those to an umbrella theme, which again grounded within the categories and codes. After this step, the themes are emerged, which will be mentioned in later sections of this study. No web tool is used for this analysis procedure. Reliability in identifying codes, categories, and themes was ensured when the researcher worked

in cooperation with a colleague in analyzing the transcripts – separately, then coming together to discuss the disagreements. The inter-rater reliability is found to be at 98%. Debriefing was done for debatable codes, categories, and themes in order to come at an optimum understanding. For some of the discussions for the debriefing sessions with the other rater, the data is analyzed in detail through going through over the analysis procedure one more time if needed repeated, the codes and categories are determined when similar patterns are observed, frequencies of the patterns are calculated to reach to a common-shared theme. When a disagreement occurred, the linkages among the themes, categories, codes, and the emerged patterns were checked through several discussions. The same procedure was done after individual analysis were completed in order not to lose any data. Then in order to understand outputs such as positive and negative influences, satisfactions, benefits etc. were worked on. After categorizing the themes, the major reasons or major situations that instructors stated were tried to be explained by giving instructors' quotations. Thus, the quotations took a large place in the data analysis part to support the evaluations of the finding. In addition, the frequencies of the results and percentages were manually calculated and by making tables, they were tried to be visualized. In fact, since demographic variables such as age, gender, nationality, years of experience of the instructors were obtained, they were calculated manually too due to small sample size which is below 30. The rates were shown in table or the percentages are given in the findings. It is quite important to give numeric results in a research since it tries to find outcomes of situations. Finally, the examples were given from previous studies to validate data results or increase the explanatory power. Since this study is exploratory research in nature, the findings are not able to represent certain results on the situations, which will lead to the generalizability of the findings.

3.7. Limitations

This study investigated and described the opinions of a foundation university instructors working in the school of foreign languages regarding how the Accreditation Program changed the processes in the Prep-Program of a Private Foundation University and the evaluations of the instructors on it. However, the data collection methods are limited because the interviews were only conducted with the instructors in one university and that creates some limitations because there are so many universities in Turkey that offer foreign language education. That is one of the reasons why the findings and results of this study cannot be generalized for another study. Method triangulation might have provided more valid and reliable results though this was not the aim of this study.

As this is an exploratory research, it has its own limitations such as qualitative information and analysis of data might contain subjective perspective, which brings a difficulty in generalizing the findings though the context is given in detail to help researchers to find similarities among the other contexts and generalize the findings.

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Because the analysis is done through the frame of social-constructivist theory, which is rooted in Vygotsky, the analysis should be touched upon through its lens.

Social constructivist approach, which means, as also mentioned in the ‘Theoretical Framework of the Study’ section, a mutual understanding and negotiated meaning through dialogue among and between the new system parties (the accreditation organizing team members) are observed in most of the participants responses. More specifically, the answer of respondent 8 quite reflects such previous interaction and change in perception of the new system:

“The caring-sharing sessions were really helpful since we learned from each other’s experiences, and thanks to accreditation and organizing team member’s explanations and help, we had the chance to get together and learned from each other. At first, I was thinking differently about what I did in the class, assignment types and procedures, examination procedures. I had a great self-confidence which had made me to perceive myself as a great experienced teacher. But then, I came to understand the significance of standardization.”

Respondent 12 also gives us explicit answer which indicates socially constructed understanding of the approach to the new system:

“Accreditation has brought us a quality... because...with the help of the accreditation, we have a more bureaucratic system and more transparent way of communication among administration and colleagues. I have discussed this observation with both my colleagues and the admin, and I now have that new perception. I am sure, without having discussed such issue with those people, I still would have had prejudice...Also, I think accreditation gives us a certificate that we have quality in our department. We

have had many discussions on the dimensions of that quality. I can say my perception of EFL in this school is totally changed.”

Another example can be given in respondent 3’s response as follows:

“We have a more transparent system now, this is what I have observed until so far. I compared the previous system and to be honest after I started to work here, I started to have a better understanding of the system through talking and asking to my friends. We have exchanged many ideas and experiences. I believe each and every one of us has given the shape to the system together through our discussion. This situation continued in trying to make sense of this very new system. We actually learned from each other. What I try to mean from this is that...yes...there was the system but a system coming from the top, I believe cannot be applied to the real world since we are all human beings with their own mindset, prejudice, and different thoughts. In that sense, we fed the system and the system itself fed us, and lastly we fed each other as ...I mean the colleagues. We did the same in this new system in this accreditation process with the help of the organizing professional team members. We planned and documented everything for the accreditation board together through many again discussions asking many questions to each other and reading, for sure, a lot...”

In this descriptive study, four interview questions were asked in order to find out the opinions of the participants regarding relatively a new system implemented in their institution. To find out whether those participants were familiar with the previous system and the new system, the first research question sought out their years of experience at this university. The other three research questions sought what they thought about possible reasons behind going through an accreditation programme, whether there had been a change in the quality of the prep programme since going

through the process and if so in what ways and why that change occurred. Because all those four questions are assumed to be inter-related, the answers to those four research questions are analyzed and given below under different titles within a compact and intense understanding rather than discussing them separately. More specifically, the responses of the participants were all inter-related, so it would have been almost impossible to categorize the analysis under a division of the research questions, also because the interview was unstructured, depending on the content of the interview conversation, the questions were not asked in a linear ongoing procedure, but it was more followed a discursive and unplanned fashion of asking-answering session as it is the nature of this type of interview as mentioned in the research design and data collection sections of this thesis.

4.1 The Opinions of Instructors towards Accreditation Process

Participants were asked to give their general opinions about the implementation of accreditation program which took place two years ago. As it is shown in the table, there are several reasons for instructors to comment on the implemented accreditation program with a for-profit accrediting firm. The satisfaction degree of samples as follows: 35% of the respondents were totally dissatisfied, 45% of respondents were satisfied and 20% of respondents were partially satisfied with the accreditation program.

4.1.1 Quality

First of all, all respondent declared accreditation as a process that evaluates the educational quality in institutions. As 60% of respondents stated that the reason for having an accreditation program is to improve quality. The rest of respondents declare that there are several reasons to choose an accreditation program such as marketing

objectives, standardization objectives and institutional objectives. These findings will be discussed in this section too.

Respondents state that the quality improvements have existed in teaching with using new materials, documents, paper works as bureaucratic outcomes; organizational processes such as using different programs and implementing different policies; transparency of the education for better evaluation and providing a valid worldwide certificate is considered as one of the indicators of high quality for a higher education institution. Respondents think that being accredited provides a valid foreign language certificates to the students which are significant indicators of the quality. Quality concern of respondents is a common issue since respondent 18 states as; “We wanted to be acknowledged by some external bodies to show that we were able to attain a level of quality in our teaching, implementation, organizational processes, structures and I guess it is good to have an aim”.

4.1.2 Marketing

The study revealed that the instructors believe that Accreditation program might be an investment due to marketing concern of the institution. The accreditation program which is implemented at a Private Foundation University is a well-known and a reputable program. Therefore, having a partnership with a well-known brand also enhances the image of the institutions. This accreditation firm is considered as a program that strengthens Private University’s image not only in national but also in international areas so that the institution can attract more students by approving high standards of educational programs. As respondent 19 explains; “I think accreditation is a worldwide brand to prove that here we give a worldwide quality English education. We also give a certificate for that I guess to the students who want and via that certificate...”

Table 2: Themes of the respondents: frequencies and percentages

Theme	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Quality Objective	12	60
Marketing Objective	5	25
Institutional Objective	9	45
Standardization Objective	13	65

Table 3: Participant responses for accreditation rationale and satisfaction level

Reason for Accreditation	The Quality Objective	Marketing Objective	Institutional Objective	Standardization Objective	Accreditation Satisfaction Level
Respondent					
R1			V		No
R2	√				No
R3	√	√	√		Partially
R4	√		V		Partially
R5	√	√	√		Yes
R6				√	No
R7				√	No
R8	√		√		Partially
R9	√		√	√	Yes
R10	√		V	√	Partially
R11	√	√		√	Yes
R12	√	√	√	√	Yes
R13				√	Yes
R14			√	√	Yes
R15	√				Yes
R16				√	No
R17				√	Yes
R18	√			√	Yes
R19	√	√		√	No
R20				√	No
F	12	5	9	13	

4.1.3 Institutional Objectives

Institutional objective is a significant issue for the instructors as 45% of respondents perceive that the implemented accreditation program was implemented to bring change and quality to organizational process, build new structure with an innovative approach from the top management. According to Greenwood (2002) change in current practices first go theorization and legitimation by existing or new actors and changes in rules or practices diffuse throughout organization and become institutionalized. Based on this analysis, the similar process has been consisted in the EFL program after the accreditation program. After the accreditation program, new rules such as documentation, meetings and new actors like accreditation bureau have come up with new practices and gradually instructors have adopted these organizational changes first in theory than in practice which make it legitimate among institution. As respondent 14 states that;

“...when accreditation team came up with informative meetings, statistics, you know things were getting in a correct path. We have been seeing many changes in the curriculum, in the testing, in the operations being done there. I think this process of accreditation has some kind of effects on those things why we are having those changes. Names of the departments are changing, some applications are changing, and job descriptions are being rewritten because of accreditation.”

The accreditation program has changed organizational process of daily works. For instance, documentation process became more transparent, the communication between instructors were increased due to regular meetings, the responsibilities of instructors changed due to certification process, instructors get the chance for self-evaluation through Continuous Professional Development Unit (CPD). All instructors were trying

to learn together and benefit from each other's experiences in terms of teaching techniques. As respondent 9 states that; "...we have been teachers for so long and in these caring and sharing sessions, we benefitted out of each other's own techniques. These sessions were mainly based on sharing the experienced or techniques of everyone with each other"

The accreditation program is also considered as organizational innovation that brings new approaches, new system throughout the organization. Organizational innovation is an adaptation of an idea or behavior that is new to the organization and the innovation can either be a new product, a new service, a new technology, or a new administrative practice (Damanpour, 1988). As respondent 13 explains how she is satisfied with intensive communication within organization;

"...if there is no accreditation, we won't even have these dialogues, we won't have these meetings and talk about our educational philosophy, because it is basically a part of accreditation, it basically gives us a chance to look at procedures and stuff so that's why, we want accreditation right? Therefore, the innovation in Prep Program is a new process in our department"

Higher education institutions define their missions and set the objectives to achieve since higher education institutions are required to adopt or change regarding on the last updates or innovations which are crucially important to compete globally. The analysis unit of our study which is a private foundation university also sets new objectives within the accreditation program and the practices within the university have positive preliminary results from the view of the instructors however it is still in the process.

4.1.4 Standardization

One other perceived objective of choosing this accreditation program is about standardization issue. The rate of this idea among instructors calculated as 65% so that the respondents believed that the goal of this program is to meet international standards. Respondents agree on description of jobs, techniques, programs have brought positive outcomes mostly on paper works and business practices in other words in bureaucracy. The program has urged instructors to work according to standards with more systematic approach.

4.2 Impacts of Accreditation Program on Quality of Prep Program

The evaluation of impacts of the accreditation program on quality responses shed light on different aspects of the program. As the data collected through face-to-face interviews, the data were categorized main changes as negative and positive sides. In addition, the data provided the expected positive effects of accreditation by instructors and these expected effects of the program were not achieved for the instructors. So during this part, the study will separate the data as positive change, negative change and no effects.

Table 4: The Perceived Changes by Instructors

Positive Changes	Negative Changes	No effect
Systemized Organization	Teaching Materials	Teaching
Assessment	Workload	Quality
Teaching Materials	Limits on Creativity	
Teamwork	Wasted Time	
Quality		
Professionalism		

4.2.1 Positive Changes

Systemized organization: Documentation encompasses all the process related to writing, recording and archiving with the stated procedures and policies. The accreditation program brought a new approach for documentation which needs time for total diffusion in the organization. The data clearly reveals that majority of respondents are aware of the fact that bureaucratic processes are carried out in a better system. One of the indicators of this thought is that all processes have been recorded and archives are kept more carefully as a result of accreditation policies. Some respondents stated “Systemization” as a more organized structured or positive institutional change to create better system. Respondents consider this documentation process as an important task that is why they put more attention than it was before. Accreditation ensured that documentation becomes clearer and more transparent which is one of the major criterions of this process. As respondent 1 clearly explains how work processes become more systemized:

“This agency was mainly focusing on how things are run and managed in educational institutions, like universities and it was not necessarily focusing a lot on how teaching and learning taking place in classroom. So, the way I saw it as a business implementation, business code and code, institutional. For that reason it was good in the sense that it gave us an idea about the necessities of how we can record and archive certain things, ways of communication and how things become more systematized...”

Respondent 8 also supports this idea by adding positive comments about the system: “About system wise, we already had a system, but it brought betterment, archives are more carefully kept in file and other than that, it did not change the performance of the

teachers. But it helped us to become more organized. It improved the system we already had”

Assessment: The majority of respondents realized that they got the opportunity to be assessed by third parties in terms of their performances, teaching techniques. Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) and Continuous Professional Development Unit (CPD) have provided this by observing instructors. As respondent 2 states “It is good to know that there are some people who are kind of observing and watching us if we are doing the right thing or on the right track. “Meetings play significant role for instructors to evaluate themselves in terms of their teaching styles, practices. As they discuss more in the meetings, they share more and learn more from each other.

Teaching Materials: All respondents were highly satisfied with access of new teaching materials. Teaching materials are crucial for students to increase their understanding capacities in foreign language. Respondents think that teaching materials for foreign language should be used by students as original books and documents. Accreditation program requested from school using original books and materials which reputable universities adapted before in Turkey. As respondent 10 states:

“We are no longer using any photocopied materials that we are not allowed to use. It is good because we all use the same level of material prepared by CTU. This change in quality made me think what I am doing in my class, what my students get. “

Respondents agreed on that using original books and materials have contributed to school image and it is a sign of quality. Before accreditation program photocopies were used as class materials and that was considered unprofessional. Also, varied photocopies used as class materials made it difficult to align the way of teaching and

learning.

Teamwork: One of the significant results of the study is respondents' evaluation of accreditation program is led to improvement of teamwork skills of the instructors during the program. As CPD unit organized regular meetings, the instructors got together, and they held discussions. Respondent 8 states:

“I cannot say accreditation didn't bring any quality. I can't see concretely anything, but I can say it brought maybe the idea that we can work together, accreditation showed us something that we can do something altogether. Also, we had CPD unit because of accreditation. It had positive effects; too, caring and sharing sessions were motivating, it also provided observation sessions which were mainly observing if we as teachers have different techniques to share.”

These meeting were considered beneficial in terms of caring and sharing. The instructors had chances to observe their colleagues, discuss with them, plan new teaching techniques and share their advices. Instructors realized that whenever they came together, they learnt together, and these discussion sessions upgraded their motivation. As Salas, Sims and Klein (2004) state that team members should have knowledge, skills and attitudes to work effectively together. The instructors acquired the skill of observing and evaluating each other performance, knowledge while working in the team. From this perspective, meetings that were held by CPD unit have provided the opportunity for instructors to share their knowledge, observe each other's attitudes and evaluate the performance of each other's. As they attend more meetings and discussions, they learn more from each other; they motivate each other and focus on the objectives of the Accreditation program.

Quality: As mentioned previously, 48% of respondents stated that the reason for having an accreditation program is to improve quality. However only 60% of respondents think that accreditation program created a change in terms of quality. From these results, it could be claimed that some instructors were expecting an increase in the quality of the program, but it did not occur due to several reasons which will be discussed in the negative or “no effect” section.

The respondents submit that there are several indicators of positive change in the quality of language program after standardization with the Accreditation Program. Respondents’ answers vary on quality issues of foreign language education after accreditation. As it is mentioned before, the perception of the quality improvement occurred due to several factors. Respectively, change in the system of organization, easy access of educational materials, copyright issues, books, CPD unit, standardization in paper works and archiving, regular meetings, transparency in documentation process, assessments, new procedures and regulations are the indicators of the quality improvement for 60% of the respondents. Beside these factors, respondents states the increase in the student success is also significant indicator of change in the quality. Harvey and Green (1993) stated as “Quality is parallel to the user of the term and the situations in which it is involved. It differs according to the people’s way of grasping ; in point of fact the same person may adopt different perceptions at different moments...”. This might be an explanation why the perceptions of the quality differ among respondents since it is considered as subjective issue that has been arguing by several authors.

Professionalism: From the perspectives of instructors, the accreditation program has brought several changes into the organization which instructors consider that they are indicators of professionalism in a language institution. Standardizations, caring

sessions, using of original books, CPD unit, new documentation policies, and existence of QAU are the combination of the quality which seems more professional. The term of “professionalism” is used here according to instructors’ perspective for accreditation program, it is important to note that there are several dimensions of profession that stated below:

- to have high self confidence
- to accept liability;
- to take personal and shared responsibility to improve their own skills and subject knowledge;
- to seek to base decisions on evidence of what works in schools in the country and internationally;
- to work in partnership with other staff in schools;
- to receive the grant that parents, business and others outside a school can make to its success; and
- to anticipate change and promote innovation (DfEE, 1998).

When the dimensions of professionalism are examined, it is clearly seen that accreditation program brought “accountability” with more transparent documentation, caring and observation sessions provide an environment to discuss and learn among instructors which improves their teaching techniques and they feel more motivated, responsible, too. Instructors adopted changes and helped diffusion of innovations faster in the organization which existed after accreditation program. The ability to change among institutions and obey the new standards complies with the requirements of a professional teaching.

4.2.2 Negative Changes

In this part, the study aimed to analyze negative outcomes of accreditation program from the perspective of instructors depending on the answers to especially the second, third and the fourth research question, so that we categorized this part as; limiting creativity, decrease in the quality and time waste for the instructors however it is important to note that stated outcomes also dissatisfaction reasons too. The study categorized it due to take in-depth analysis with respondents' responses.

As it stated before, 35% of instructors are not satisfied with the changes after accreditation program while 20% of instructors are partially dissatisfied. There are several reasons that disturb instructors such as long meetings; so much workload due to paperwork, pressures for documentations, time waste staffs for instructors, limits for using teaching materials and the standardizations prevents individualist behaviors of the instructors. These examples could be considered as complaints of instructors due to accreditation program. It could be said that accreditation program could not meet their expectations and decrease their motivations too. Unmotivated instructors are a critical negative outcome of the accreditation program which creates risk of decreasing an effective teaching, and quality too. From the dissatisfaction perspective, there are several evidences that support these dissatisfactions.

Teaching Materials: There are few respondents that criticize teaching materials because they want to use their own materials and share with students. These instructors claim that they have their own experience to teach and they wish to use their language material during the class too. They states that there are various kinds of teaching materials that could be used and teaching materials cannot be standardized. As respondent 12 complains about teaching materials:

“I think our main aim is getting students to learn, this is my quality. Or the materials we use bring quality. Because of accreditation, ok we have prepared materials in the drop box, that is fine, but this is a limitation, too. I would like to use my own material but because of this photocopy issue, I can't... if standardization is a part of accreditation, I think it was a dumb thing to do. Because, teachers cannot be standardized”

Workload: The change in workload is another issue for dissatisfaction, as respondent 11 states;

“I see this accreditation as a paper work, systematizing, documenting, and meetings every week which were sometimes putting us in a hectic situation. I can understand that this is a process, ok but trying to change everything in a year is too much. It put us too much working load. I taught 18 hours, I had extra duties, plus accreditation and CPD unit...”

Even majority of the instructors think that meetings are so beneficial for them, they complain about it since it is an extra workload for them, as respondent 7 proves that

“Books, CPD unit, drop box this is a better system. I think they can be classified as a change in quality. As a teaching, accreditation doesn't limit my teaching. Well, it only takes time, for those teachers who are giving 18 hours you know this very well because you are also giving 18 hours, it's a little burden after 18 hours to go to the meetings, but some meetings are really beneficial as we have seen the other day with the accreditation team. They were understandable. “

Limits on Creativity: According to instructors who are not satisfied with accreditation program claim that accreditation program is limiting their creativity on teaching

therefore that prevents improving students' foreign language knowledge and improving learning capacity which are critical losses for self-improvement of students. Creativity in education has become a growing field of interest since 1990s and both society and government support to improve creativity. According to the study of Craft (2003), curriculum is an important tool that might affect the educators' creativity. The author explains that a curriculum which is fixed, compulsory, which involves a great deal of propositional knowledge, and which takes up a great deal of learning time, could cause challenges to stimulate creativity an education program; that is why, he advises more flexible curriculum and standards for educators. The findings of the study also support the idea of the author since instructors complains about accreditation duties and how it limits the creative environment of teachers. For instance, respondent 4 explains the situation as follows:

“...Well it is hard to answer. I never like standards, personally. It is a limitation for me. I don't think standards mean quality. As I said, if you put aside my admin position, this is my personal opinion. I don't like standards in any area. I believe in inspiration, individualism, and creativity. Although there is argument that standardization doesn't kill creativity, when you put in rules , you are limited I mean of course you need rules when you are dealing with 700 students, 50 teachers, I do understand the need to put in those standards and rules but I think there is a conflict there...”

Respondent 12 also think in that way and says:

“...Yeah ok we all have to get to this end point, ok we have these materials but how we do it is up to teacher. I think accreditation in teaching limits the creativity. It limited me in my writing class, how the materials and the vocabulary the materials were written

in high language. And they were not helpful. So, in a way it is maybe curriculum unit and accreditation, I don't know, I don't see them as separate. That was limiting..."

The findings have revealed that the perception of the creativity of instructors comes from being free by any standards about teaching and to be independent while choosing teaching materials or techniques.

Wasted Time: The interview findings have suggested that the accreditation program brought about unnecessary or excessive workloads for the instructors. Therefore, new workloads due to accreditation program created dissatisfaction among instructors. Instructors claimed that workloads such as paper works, meeting etc. Influence general performances of them. For instance, respondent 8 states that "... When to talk about work load, I would be unsatisfied if we keep changing our documents or rewriting everything again and again..." or another respondent 4 claims about workload by saying;

"...I do understand the need to put in those standards and rules, but I think there is a conflict there. Personally, like in the back days, we already had everything in practice, but we didn't have this much pressure like documentation and proving. It is just too many paper works, bureaucracy. Even if it is single thing, you have to document it and I find it very difficult..."

4.2.3 Perceived Non-Changes by Instructors

Interviews have revealed that accreditation program was not as effective as to create changes in the process of teaching and quality in the institution for 25% of respondents. This rate is significant to consider the insight of these thoughts of the instructors. Possibly, the perception of the accreditation program would influence not just the system but also their teaching improvement which creates quality improvement too. It

is obvious to see that accreditation program could not meet the expectations of 25% of the instructors.

Teaching: As it mentioned above, 25% of respondents state that accreditation program did not bring any significant change on teaching of the instructors. The findings shows that instructors were excited about learning new techniques, improving themselves for their teaching however they are disappointed because there aren't any contribution by accreditation program for the teaching skills of the instructors. As respondent 1 explains "...The purpose of accreditation program always institutional; it would be more prestigious for the institution, but our teaching will be affected more positively. At least I never got that impression. " And same respondent continues to explain the reason by saying:

"I mean openly, like these might be the improvements like not using photocopied materials, CPD unit as improvement in the program. But it will have really marginal impact on actual teaching. It didn't, I mean not at all, indirectly because we have that CPD unit and because people benefited out of it, it affected our teaching so again, I cannot say one hundred percent it had any impact on teaching, the accreditation process made that CPD unit possible but still obviously teachers expectations were different and were high."

Respondent 6 strengths this opinion by saying; "Teaching wise, for two years nothing really changed much. I don't think that it changed my in class activities, my relationship with my students or how I structure my lessons with my students".

Quality: As mentioned before, 48% of respondents stated that the reason for having an Accreditation program is to improve quality however only 60% of respondents thinks that accreditation program created a change in terms of quality. From these results, it could be claimed that some instructors were expecting an increase in the quality of the

programme but it did not occur due to several reasons which is discussed in the negative or “no effect” section.

The respondents submit that there are several indicators of positive change in the quality of language program after standardization with the accreditation program. Respondents' answers vary on quality issues of foreign language education after accreditation. As it is mentioned before, the perception of the quality improvement occurred due to several factors. Respectively, change in the system of organization, easy access of educational materials, copyright issues, books, CPD unit, standardization in paper works and archiving, regular meetings, transparency in documentation process, assessments, new procedures and regulations are the indicators of the quality improvement for 60% of the respondents. Beside these factors, respondents state the increase in the student success is also significant indicator of change in the quality. Harvey and Green (1993) stated as; *“Quality is relative to the user of the term and the circumstances in which it is involved. It means different things to different people; indeed, the same person may adopt different conceptualizations at different moments...”* This might be an explanation why the perceptions of the quality differ among respondents since it is considered as subjective issue that has been arguing by several authors.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the four research questions, which sought to the first research question sought to find out the participants' years of experience at the university, what they thought about possible reasons behind going through an accreditation programme, whether there had been a change in the quality of the prep programme since going through the process and if so in what ways and why that change occurred, significant in-depth analysis is revealed. First, this study is endeavored to increase our knowledge about the accreditation program influences on the quality of language education, the new processes that adopted by department members due to accreditation program. Since the target of the investigation is the instructors, the study results were shaped from their point of view.

First of all, the study has revealed that respondents think that there are several major reasons for choosing this accreditation program by the institutions. The increase in the quality of the education program is the most observed reason from instructors' point of view. Secondly, from instructors' perspectives there are other reasons such as marketing the university, increase the reputation of the department by proving international standards are in practice. The evaluations of impacts of the accreditation program on quality have extracted both positive and negative sides for the institution. However, some of the instructors haven't realized any effects on the quality of the language education although they have expected. Respectively, data have revealed that the perceived positive changes are better system in the organization, assessment of performance, change in teaching materials, increase in the teamwork spirit, better quality in education and professionalism which have come with standardizations, caring sessions, using of original books, CPD unit, new documentation policies.

The findings have shown that there are negative changes that were perceived too. Some of the respondents stated that standardization have created negative outcomes for teaching practices and causing time waste. Respondents clearly state that the standardizations limit the creativity in teaching and this influence the performance in the class and motivation of the instructors. Time waste is another issue for the dissatisfaction; respondents claimed that the accreditation program brought about unnecessary or excessive workloads for them which is decreasing their motivation too. One of the interesting findings of the study is some respondents have stated that there is no significant change for them after the accreditation program in terms of quality and teaching. Although the instructors were excited about learning new techniques, improving themselves for their teaching however they are disappointed because there aren't any contribution by accreditation program for the teaching skills of the instructors. Thus, increase in the language education quality has not been observed during the accreditation process.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of participant responses to the research questions, it can be claimed that while there may be limited evidence that accreditation, particularly for foreign language programs, results in significant improvements for the programs seeking this certification (Collins, 2015; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016), this should not mean that the accreditation enterprise should stop functioning. Therefore, this study points to one major recommendation as we look to the future. That is, for English as a foreign language programs that want to pursue accreditation as also revealed by other research as given in the literature section of this study.

English as a Foreign Language Programs and Accreditation

In general, any program that seeks to pursue accreditation, and sustain quality, must focus on creating an environment that is welcome to such activities. The instructors and staff of that program must feel that they have a quality program – and therefore worthy of accreditation – and they must feel that quality enhancement is a reasonable goal. Therefore, an important step is for educational leaders to develop an environment of trust and collaboration. To achieve that goal, Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2004) should be an important aim. Educational leaders must understand the nature of psychological safety; they should assess it within their organization and where necessary, seek to improve it. While psychological safety has been mentioned in the context of developing effective teams, it has a much larger impact on the overall health of the organization – the program and the institution. Within any such program, the instructors and staff want to feel pride and accomplishment. To create this perception, it is important for the educational leaders within that program to create structures and processes that encourage and reward participation and engagement in activities such as

accreditation and quality assurance. An excellent way to reach such a goal is to create an environment of distributed leadership. While distributed leadership is much easier to describe than to actually identify within an organization (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe, & Ryland, 2014), it still is worth pursuing because of the positive impact it can bring.

It can be argued that this is particularly the case in Turkey. Over the last twenty years, there has been a significant growth trend in the higher education sector in this country. In the late 1980s, there were approximately 100 universities in Turkey. Today, in 2018, that number is over 200. In many countries that are experiencing massification of higher education (Tight, 2017), growth is limited to the private sector. However, in Turkey, there is an equal balance as both the private and state sectors continue to expand at a rapid rate.

A reflection of this growth is the focus on English as the medium of instruction (EMI), whether at the institutional or program level. As the number of universities increase, so does the number of foundational programs that support the EMI efforts. There are certainly the well-known, established programs that exist; they have been developing effective systems over time, in addition to having the resources to sustain quality programs. Yet, the vast majority of foundation, or prep programs, are far from effective and efficient when it comes to delivering quality English language education. Certainly, this is not what these programs want or need. Thus, Turkey, and countries like it, is caught in a bottom-up top-down tension between accountability, regulation and quality. In other words, the question emerges as to where the pressure for quality should come from. Any time that quality becomes mandatory from a higher body such as the Council on Higher Education, there is suspicion and push back and

much less engagement from the local level. On the other hand, it is rare that prep programs become proactive and develop their own quality systems and units.

This is currently the situation in Turkey. The Council on Higher Education, in collaboration with the British Council, has developed and is piloting an external review process for prep programs across the country. This process is developmental and non-punitive, meaning that institutions submit a self-assessment report and peer experts (along with one student) from prep programs around the country visit the school to review a prep program's implementation of a specific set of standards. The resulting report guides prep programs on how to improve, but there are no penalties associated with the process. At the same time, the independent accrediting body, DEDAK, will soon begin the prep program accreditation process in Turkey. This is a locally developed group of EFL professionals who have established this accreditation process. They are currently piloting their process and will begin operations in 2019.

These are positive developments for prep programs in Turkey. The external review process is low-stakes and the accreditation process is intended to be voluntary. Both of these efforts support the idea that such initiatives should, at least in the beginning, be elective. This research supports this message. That programs that want to improve may establish internal systems, provided there is leadership and resources, but from a higher level, the central regulation body is willing to guide programs toward improvement.

This research shines a light on the fact that without a healthy environment, without a vision for improvement, without the personnel who have the skills and dedication to quality, a program cannot be successful.

Apart from those significant highlighted points, a few words should be touched upon

the design of the study for further studies that would like to examine the phenomena from different angles. First of all, future studies might need to use more than one method to triangulate the findings, such as observation and administering survey questionnaires to come up with reliable results and reveal a correlation between participants' perceptions, beliefs, and values and what they actually do. Besides, different samples from other universities might give us different results and there might be change according to university type too. However, there have been relatively few universities who have gone through a qualified accreditation process. Yet, for instance, there might be significant differences between state and private universities' language education policies, management and structure. Additionally, instead of convenient sampling, future studies might use other sampling methods to collect data from randomly selected participants to provide the sample with an equal chance to participate in a study, so that the sample might be considered as a more accurate representative of the whole target population to generalize the results of the study.

Future studies could be investigated with quantitative data and with statistical approaches. In addition, future studies are encouraged to search how accreditation programs influence the organization as a whole or what are the barriers for successful adaptation or the degree of influence on teaching of instructors/learning degree of students. It is a wide research field that could be examined in different aspects for future research agenda.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Dear participant teacher,

The aim of the study is to find out your opinions on the new system-the accreditation at your institution, what you think about the system with all its dimensions, changes regarding any inside/outside classroom language education composition you think that have happened, what you feel about the process, and its outcomes. Please, feel free to interrupt me and ask me any questions during the interview if you have any questions in mind. You may go beyond the questions if you feel your answer will shed light in to any issue being under question. This interview will be much like a conversation about accreditation process. Participation in the study is on a voluntary basis. Your answers will be kept confidential and evaluated only by the researcher, me; the obtained data will be used for scientific purposes.

As part of this interview, the duration will be around 40-45 minutes and will be voice-recorded. Your names may anonymously be quoted in MA thesis.

The interview may cause discomfort in you. However, during participation, for any reason, if you feel uncomfortable, you are free to quit at any time. In such a case, it will be sufficient to notify the researcher, me collecting data.

At the end of the interview, your questions related to the study will be answered. I would like to thank you in advance for your contribution to this study. If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to contact me after the interview.

Unstructured Interview Questions

1. How long have you taught in this school?
2. We went through an accreditation process two years ago. Why do you think we were doing it?
3. Do you think there has been a change in the quality of the Prep Program since going through the process? If yes, in what way?
4. Why do you think that is - regardless of yes/no answer to #3.