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Investigation of the higher education students' participation in quality assurance processes based on the theory of planned behaviour: a case of Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate Turkish higher education students' participation behaviours in quality assurance systems. The data were collected from 113 students through a semi-structured qualitative questionnaire developed based on the theory of planned behaviour. The data were analysed under three main themes: feelings, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. According to the results, students generally had positive opinions concerning their feelings about the quality assurance system and had positive subjective norms. However, the results for these two aspects indicated implementation-based passive participation rather than decision-based active participation. Challenges in behavioural control and ways of coping with these challenges were observed. The overall results has revealed the behavioural basis of student participation in quality assurance processes. In addition, the results can contribute to policy improvement processes in the higher education system and quality assurance activities for higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS

Quality assurance; higher education; student participation; the theory of planned behaviour; Turkey

Introduction

Students are a major stakeholder in the assurance of the quality of higher education. Students' role in quality assurance processes gained significance across Europe with the introduction of the Bologna Process (Alaniska *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, in the signatory states of the Bologna Declaration, the importance of the partnership between higher education institutions, staff and students became more prominent in reaching the goals set in the

European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Alaniska *et al.*, 2006; Gover & Loukkola, 2018).

The indicators employed in the Bologna Process Implementation Reports for student participation in quality assurance processes include student participation in the governance of national quality assurance organisations, external evaluation teams as members or observers, in the preparation of self-evaluation reports, decision-making processes of external evaluation and follow-up processes. In 2012, 23% of 47 countries were reported to fully comply with these indicators, which became 29% of 48 countries in 2015 and 40% of 50 countries in 2018 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012; 2015; 2018). However, the improvement in the compliance with the indicators is not considered significant progress by the European Students' Union (ESU). The study conducted among ESU-associates demonstrated that the student participation rate was 86% in internal quality assurance systems, 79% in external quality assurance systems, 70% in governance processes, and 50% in quality assurance expert pools (European Student's Union, 2018).

In Turkey, the number of higher education students is increasing annually. According to the 2019–2020 higher education statistics released by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2020), Turkey has 129 state universities, 74 foundation universities, and four foundation vocational schools of higher education. In addition, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions is reported as 3,002,964 in associate degree programmes, 4,538,926 in undergraduate programmes, and 398,243 in graduate programmes. Quality assurance in higher education has gradually become a more prominent subject due to the ever-increasing number of students. Only programme accreditation implementations were available in Turkey until 2001, when Turkey joined the Bologna Process. In 2015, external institutional evaluations were initiated by the Higher Education Quality Board initially founded within CoHE. In 2018, the Board was reorganised as a fully independent body and renamed as Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC). Since then, institutional external evaluation practices have been improved and disseminated. Parallel to these developments, student participation in quality assurance processes has gradually increased. THEQC has a student member for the senior-level representation of students. Besides, higher education institutions' quality commissions, which are mandatory for all higher education institutions in Turkey, have student members who actively participate in all processes (internal quality assurance).

Along with institutional representation, students in Turkey take part in programme accreditation (coordinated by accreditation agencies) and external institutional evaluation (coordinated by THEQC) practices as evaluation team members (external quality assurance). Despite all these initiatives, student experience in the field is still limited since quality assurance practices were introduced in Turkey quite recently (THEQC, 2020). The student's role in the quality assurance processes of higher education can be examined in three main

categories, given the various practices in the world (Dearlove, 2006; Palomares, 2011; Tück, 2006; Wiberg, 2006):

- (1) Their roles in the internal quality assurance system are:
 - providing information (periodic responses to surveys, focus groups);
 - preparing self-evaluation reports (report writing as members of self-evaluation groups, providing feedback on reports);
 - being members of bodies in charge of internal quality assurance processes.
- (2) Their roles in the external quality assurance system are:
 - providing information (in the external evaluation process);
 - acting as observers or team members in external evaluation teams.
- (3) Their roles in governance are:
 - As planners, members of consulting or managing bodies.

Along with these roles, the students officially participating in quality assurance practices may take on various tasks, such as informing and training other students. Such practices that are not official but of voluntary nature would also make significant contributions, particularly in gaining trust in quality processes and outcomes (Dearlove, 2006; Tück, 2006).

Undoubtedly, student participation in quality processes should be encouraged within the framework of the roles mentioned above. However, another critical aspect is to examine the development of participation behaviour by asking, 'How does a behaviour emerge?' in the socio-psychological context. Only in this way can robust and sustainable participation behaviour not affected by prejudices be developed. In this study, the focus is on the roots of student participation behaviour in quality assurance processes. Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour is one of the most commonly referred approaches in the literature for affective processes underlying different behaviours (Cheon *et al.*, 2012; Frawley *et al.*, 2019; Nie *et al.*, 2020; Sandler, 2000; Shirokova *et al.*, 2016).

Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour can be defined as a deliberative processing model explaining cognitive and motivational effects on behaviour. According to this theory, the proximal determinant of an individual's behaviour is the intention to perform that behaviour. Intentions reflect a deliberate plan or decision to display behaviour. This theory explains one's intentions under three main titles: attitudes towards the behaviour; subjective norms; and perceived behavioural control. Attitudes towards the behaviour means that one defines particular behaviour as positive or negative, reflecting his or her perspective. The subjective norm is the expectations and acceptance of an individual's social environment (for example, person, institution, community) at the point of performing or not performing a behaviour. Perceived behavioural control refers to the subjective perception of the ease or difficulty of the behaviour that one intends to reveal (Ajzen, 1991).

In the context of the theory of planned behaviour, the first determinant in student participation behaviour regarding quality assurance processes is students' attitude towards this behaviour. Attitude stems from direct or indirect experiences on the object of the attitude and our behavioural beliefs on the value of interacting with this object. However, attitude cannot be directly observed but is revealed through the behaviour (based on an idea, emotion, action) regarding the object (Ajzen, 1991; 2005). As quality assurance processes are considered an object of attitude, various factors, such as feelings, perspective, biases and confidence regarding these processes, can influence student participation.

In quality assurance processes, the subjective norm can be considered the beliefs in prestige or importance is given to students due to their participation in these processes. In this sense, the roles students assign to themselves in quality assurance processes can be regarded as essential prestige indicators. The perceived behavioural control is students' thoughts on their competencies regarding involvement in quality assurance processes. At this point, the main focus is on students' ways of coping with personal or institutional challenges while trying to get involved in the process.

This study analyses the socio-psychological roots of higher education students' participation behaviours in quality assurance processes within the theory of planned behaviour context. The following questions are sought to be answered in the study:

- (1) How do higher education students feel about quality assurance processes?
- (2) What are the subjective norms of students regarding quality assurance processes?
- (3) How are students' behavioural control perceptions regarding quality assurance processes?

The study framework, participants, data collection tool, data analysis process, results organised based on theory of planned behaviour and related discussions are included in the following sections.

Methods

A qualitative study was undertaken. The quality assurance phenomenon is relatively new in the Turkish higher education system. Therefore, the number of students with experience in the quality assurance field is scarce. Thus, the participants were selected with purposive sampling based on their quality assurance background. Using this approach, 113 voluntary students from 75 higher education institutions in Turkey, who have experience as student evaluators in programme accreditation activities or as student members in quality

commissions in higher education institution, participated in this study. [Table 1](#) shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Data collection tool and process

The data were obtained through the Higher Education Students' Survey on Participation Behaviour in Quality Assurance, designed by the research team. The survey questions in line with the research aim (see Appendix) were developed based on the theory of planned behaviour and prior studies (Al-Sheeb *et al.*, 2018; Lucas & Meyer, 2004; Santos *et al.*, 2018). Then, three experts in the field of quality assurance in higher education and educational sciences were consulted regarding the suitability of the questions, clarity, comprehensibility, and the survey's integrity. The survey's final form contained six open-ended questions and demographic information. Data collection was done *via* an online platform by inviting the participants to the research during May–June 2020.

The data were analysed with the deductive content analysis method. Deductive content analysis is used in qualitative research and, unlike inductive content analysis that uses the data to develop a theory, deductive content analysis has prior theoretical knowledge from the outset, which determines what questions are posed at the data collection stage and provides a framework for analysis (Armat *et al.*, 2018).

Ajzen's (2005) theory of planned behaviour was referred to in the analysis process and the research problems were determined as main themes. The theory of planned behaviour examines the source of intentions and behaviours

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	f	%
Gender		
Female	60	53.1
Male	53	46.9
Educational Level		
Associate degree	3	2.7
Bachelor's degree	74	65.5
Master's degree	19	16.8
Doctoral degree	17	15.0
Field		
Engineering and natural sciences	37	32.8
Social sciences	23	20.4
Health sciences	25	22.1
Educational sciences	22	19.5
Sports sciences	6	5.2
Age		
17–19	1	0.9
20–22	48	42.5
23–25	33	29.2
26–28	17	15.0
28 and above	14	12.4
Experience		
Quality commission membership	71	63.0
Evaluation team membership in programme accreditation	26	23.0
Quality commission membership and evaluation team membership in programme accreditation	16	14.0

in the context of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. However, it is challenging to measure a highly latent structure such as attitude in qualitative processes. Therefore, in this study, feelings, which are intensely related to prior experiences as attitudes, were preferred.

The analysis unit was designated at the word level to directly reflect the participants' statements. The analysis process's focal point was to ensure that the findings offer a comprehensive view of participation behaviour's emergence. The analysis tended to explain the latent structures that are the source of the participation intentions and behaviours (Ajzen, 2005) in quality assurance activities.

In the case of Turkey, sufficient quantitative scales are not available in higher education quality assurance. Moreover, higher education students have limited chances of developing quality assurance attitudes. Therefore, despite the general tendency of theory of planned behaviour usage for testing causal effects in the previous studies (Chang, 1998; Krueger *et al.*, 2000; Mathieson, 1991; Taylor & Todd, 1995), this study carried out a more exploratory qualitative process that could form a basis for further studies. The coding framework of the research is presented in Figure 1.

Reliability

The research data were collected voluntarily. The participants' privacy was protected in data collection and analysis processes. A two-person team undertook the analysis, then a third expert from the research team independently reanalysed 10% of the data. The consistency between the encoders was examined. For this purpose, the encoders' internal consistency ratio (Miles *et al.*, 2014) and Cohen's Kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960, Sim & Wright, 2005) were calculated. Miles *et al.*'s (2014) ratio was calculated as 0.84, and Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated as 0.78. This consistency ratio is very close to the 0.85–0.90 ranges proposed by Miles *et al.* (2014) for satisfactory consistency. Kappa coefficient also shows that the encoders' reliability is sufficient (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Limitations

The study had two main limitations. The first one was the constraint faced in diversifying specific demographical characteristics such as region, social-cultural background and type of experience while choosing participants due to the insufficient number of experienced students in the field. This constraint was sought to be compensated by trying to reach as many participants as possible. The second limitation was collecting data solely *via* online platforms due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Great emphasis was given to the survey to reveal the study's purpose and ensure reliability. Besides, an informative meeting was

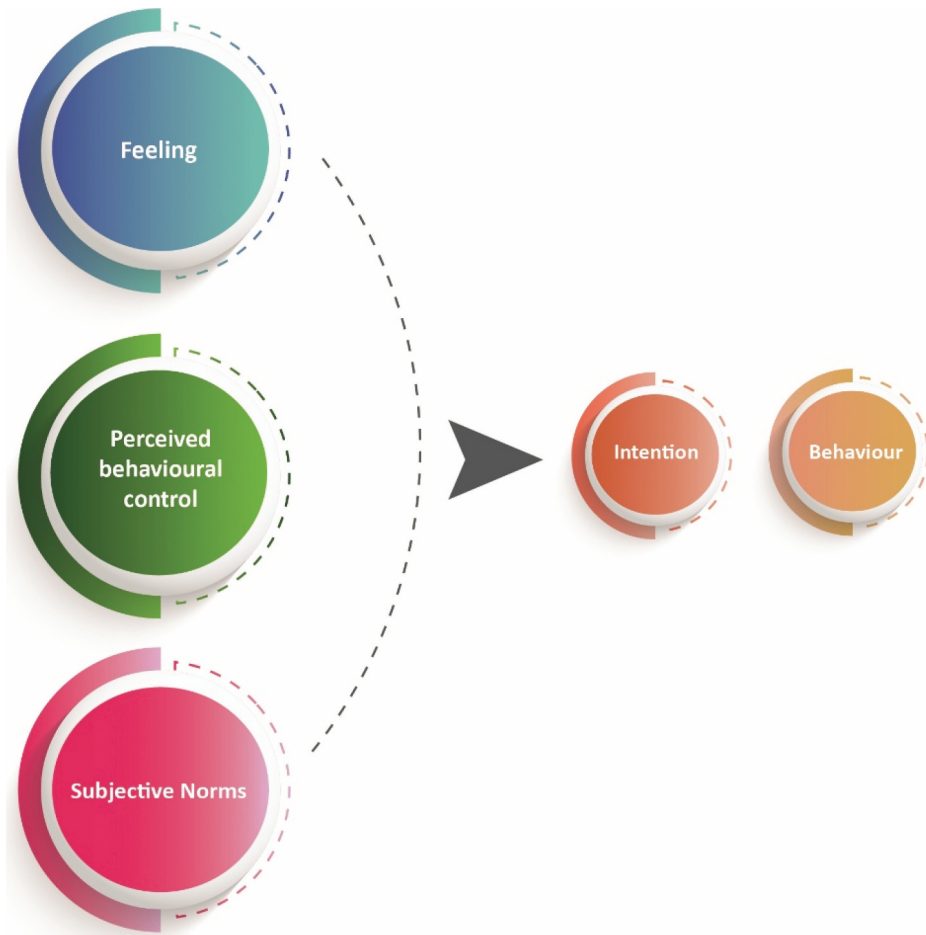


Figure 1. Coding framework

held with the participants to understand better the study's purpose and how to answer the survey questions.

Results

Feelings to quality assurance processes

Various meanings students ascribe to the phenomenon of 'quality' can be grouped under six themes (Table 2).

As the meanings ascribed to the phenomenon of quality were examined, it was observed that the students' views focus on existing quality standards (norms, expectations or specifications (Harvey, 2004–21)). A hierarchical tendency was seen in enhancement, complying with standards, and going above standards. The most frequently expressed meaning was 'complying with standards'. At this point, the students described the requirement of meeting their

Table 2. Meanings ascribed to the quality phenomenon

Theme	Codes*	%**
Complying with quality standards	Complying with standards, meeting requirements and expectations, sustainability, satisfaction, accomplishing the vision, stability.	38.3
Enhancement	Quality or qualified, practical or productive, enhancement, presenting quality products, endeavour.	22.8
Going above standards	Being above standards, being the best, excellent, perfect, unique trademark.	16.2
Reliability	Reliability, transparency, controllability, reputation, the product of ethical principles.	8.1
Innovation	Innovative, continuous improvement, up to date, building blocks of future, difference, adaptation.	7.3
Value	Appreciation, the importance attached to a task, doing a task in the best possible way, discipline.	7.3

*Listed from most to least frequently given responses.

**Percentages were calculated over the total number of codes in the table.

expectations while complying with standards. Another considerable meaning was 'going above standards'. It was observed that quality was perceived as an excellent process under this theme.

The students primarily associated quality with the concept of 'standards', which indicated that they perceive quality as a process with specific criteria. Besides, they mostly expressed views connoting improvements such as meeting or going above standards rather than protecting existing standards, demonstrating that they tend to regard quality and quality criteria within the scope of change and innovation. This implied that students were inclined to adopt quality assurance processes created with similar motivations. Despite their emphasis on standards, the students still thought that standards were developed with a set of processes excluding themselves; thus, they did not regard themselves as active agents defining standards.

Student opinions regarding the aim of quality assurance processes in higher education were grouped under four themes (Table 3).

According to the students, the ultimate goal of higher education quality assurance processes was to improve their services. Other highlighted purposes were ensuring reliability, increasing competitiveness and productivity, and creating quality culture. As the themes were examined, the two main inclinations regarding the aim of quality assurance processes in higher education appeared to improve students' educational services and improve higher education institutions' quality. The students also thought they were the primary reason for higher education quality assurance services. A comprehensive analysis of their views on quality assurance processes indicated that they perceived these processes as a functioning and a contributing component of the higher education system rather than regarding them as passive and non-operative constructs. Despite the limited background of quality assurance in Turkey's higher education, this positive perception of the students can be considered significant.

The students' opinions on the contributions of quality assurance processes were categorised under seven themes (Table 4).

Table 3. Aim of quality assurance processes

Theme	Codes*	%**
Improving the quality of services offered to students	Improving quality in education, meeting higher education standards, enhancing processes, completing accreditation processes, safeguarding quality standards in education, complying with standards, increasing productivity, providing tailor-made services, creating opportunities, improving quality of services, encouraging active student participation in education, increasing efficiency of education.	66.2
Ensuring reliability	Evaluating universities, ensuring continuity, safeguarding the public interest, safeguarding the student interest, increasing the prestige of higher education, ensuring stakeholder participation, improving transparency, guiding relevant institutions.	15.9
Increasing competitiveness and productivity	Internationalisation, competition, improving the quality of academic products, contributing to the country's progress, creating added value, familiarising students with universal values, keeping up to date.	6.0
Creating quality culture	Promoting the development of higher education institutions, improving institutional culture, fostering a quality culture.	4.6
No idea	No idea.	7.3

*Listed from most to most minor frequent responses.

**Percentages were calculated over the total number of codes in the table.

Table 4. Contributions of quality assurance processes

Theme	Codes*	%**
Increasing student participation	Presenting an opportunity for management-staff-student communication, providing a student-centred approach, presenting an opportunity to express opinions, developing commitment/sense of belonging, creating social opportunities, being a component of governance.	22.5
Personal contributions	Providing quality information, contributing to personal development, developing communication skills, building self-confidence, providing information on accreditation, encouraging self-development, improving general knowledge and cultural background, expanding social network, presenting opportunities to take up and develop hobbies, developing the sense of responsibility, developing decision-making skills, developing self-regulation skills.	21.9
Educational contributions	Improving the quality of education, providing an enhancement in education, increasing the efficiency of education, increasing awareness for education, enhancing equal opportunities in education, providing academic progress, providing transparent assessment and evaluation processes, improving learning environments.	20.1
Institutional development	Guaranteeing graduate competencies, facilitating the institution's practices, providing the university's enhancement, emphasising learning and teaching processes, complying with standards, fostering a quality culture in the institution, enabling stakeholder participation, contributing to the development of academic staff.	14.2
Student reputation	Guaranteeing vocational qualifications, recognition of degrees, robust social network, international awareness.	8.9
Social contribution	Contribution to social development.	1.7
No contribution	No contribution.	10.7

*Listed from most to most minor frequent responses.

**Percentages were calculated over the total number of codes in the table.

The views on quality assurance contributions focused on two main points: institutional contributions and personal contributions. Institutional contributions were expressed more frequently than individual contributions. The students also stated that institutional development strengthens the institution's capabilities of organising student-centred activities and organisational

involvement. Personal contributions, communication skills, self-expression, and socialisation were the most expressed features and quality assurance competencies. On the other hand, many students thought that higher education quality assurance processes did not make any contributions, which showed that the field's efforts were not thoroughly conveyed to students.

Subjective norms for quality assurance processes

Student norms for quality assurance processes focused on their perception of reputation regarding student roles in quality assurance processes and their belief in gaining reputation thanks to quality assurance processes. The students' views on their roles in quality assurance processes are grouped under eight themes (Table 5).

It can be observed that the themes on the role of students predominantly stress the importance of students. Themes were hierarchically structured, from leadership roles to being ineffective. The 'key aspect' was the most common theme, followed by being a stakeholder with equal rights, supporting agents and ineffective.

One group of themes focuses on the function of students within this context. 'Bridge' stood out as the most prominent theme. The participants regarded themselves as communicators between quality assurance processes and other students since they have a better command of quality assurance processes than other students and take on various responsibilities in the field.

Another primary function is being a 'guarantor'. It was seen that the students perceive themselves as agents who guarantee quality assurance processes. For the 'consumer' function, the students defined themselves as a group primarily affected by the results of quality assurance practices.

Table 5. Role of students in quality assurance processes

Theme	Codes*	%**
Key aspect (Leader)	The centrepiece, the most important stakeholder, leader, leading role, determinant, key, backbone, directly influencing, principal component, most essential evaluators, most innovative, executive, model, crucial, compass, indispensable, mapping out a road map, grounds, roots, mostly affected, subject.	35.0
Team member / stakeholder	Stakeholder, evaluator, implementer, player, producer, building block, determinant, effective, dynamic, commenting, quality creator.	30.9
Bridge	Ambassador, bridge, representative, searching for solution, chain, obtaining and conveying information on quality, mediator, balancing figure.	15.0
Guarantor/observer	Observer, guarantor, reformer, guard, criticising, providing feedback.	5.0
Consumer	Experiencing, user, consumer, demanding, explorer	5.0
Learning-improving	Learning, continuously improving.	3.3
Contributor	Supporter, helper.	3.3
Ineffective	Passive, figure, experimental object .	2.5

*Listed from most to least frequent responses.

**Percentages were calculated over the total number of codes in the table.

Table 6. Challenges faced in quality assurance processes

Theme	Codes*	%**
Inadequacy of institutional support	Not taking student participation/opinions into account, not informing students on quality assurance processes, the institution's reluctance about student participation.	41.8
Lack of awareness or knowledge among students	Students' lack of interest in quality assurance processes, students' regarding quality assurance processes as a waste of time, novelty of quality assurance processes, students' lack of knowledge of quality assurance processes.	13.3
The ambiguity of students' role in quality assurance processes	The ambiguity of students' role in quality assurance processes, students' avoidance of taking on active roles, same students' role in the process, generation gap, limited periods allocated to evaluations.	8.2
Inability to spend time on quality assurance processes	Excessive course load, organisation of quality assurance meetings during examination periods, challenges in attending courses.	6.1
No challenge	No challenge confronted.	30.6

*Listed from most to most minor frequent responses.

**Percentages were calculated over the total number of codes in the table.

The codes on the reputation gained by quality assurance processes were available in the 'student reputation' theme (Table 4). As these codes were examined, it becomes evident that quality assurance processes were believed to bring recognition of degrees and, therefore, vocational qualifications and visibility.

Students' behavioural control perception for quality assurance processes

The students' behavioural control perception was analysed according to their quality assurance practices. Hence, the challenges students confront while acting and their coping methods were addressed. Five themes emerged when coding the challenges (Table 6) and six themes when coding the coping strategies (Table 7).

Challenges can be categorised as institution-based and student-based challenges. The most common theme in the institution-based challenges was institutional support's inadequacy. Another theme was the ambiguity of students' role in quality assurance processes. The students mainly complain about the confusion about their roles, the insecurity caused by this ambiguity and reassigning the same student multiple times. As for the student-centred challenges, the leading theme was the lack of awareness or knowledge among students. Under this title, they stressed that they could not spend time on quality assurance works due to the lack of institutional flexibility.

The students mostly tried to cope with challenges by actively participating in quality assurance processes, which was followed by trying to raise awareness among students, researching and conveying student opinions to relevant officials. However, a small group of students stated that they cannot cope with the challenges.

All the results obtained through this study are summarised in Figure 2.

Table 7. Ways of coping with the challenges faced in quality assurance processes

Theme	Codes*	%**
Active participation	Expressing opinions actively, taking part in practices actively and quickly, contacting relevant academic staff for quality assurance processes, meeting with advisors, meeting with instructors, trying to reach relevant authorities, taking more initiatives, joining voluntary works, trying to get support from unit heads and administrators, speaking to appropriate officials about their legal rights, contacting quality coordination office, coping with reluctant/uncooperative behaviour, proposing solutions, spending time on quality assurance practices.	33.2
Trying to raise awareness for quality assurance among students	Trying to communicate with students, trying to persuade peers, telling them about the processes at every opportunity and conducting surveys, contacting student societies.	19.1
Researching	Going through studies, data and reports; researching, following studies of relevant institutions and organisations, examining evaluations made in previous terms.	19.1
Receiving student opinions and conveying them to relevant officials	Organising meetings that would involve students in the process, organising petitions, receiving views of my peers and conveying them to appropriate officials along with my own opinions, preparing a variety of surveys, acting as a communicator and evaluator between governance and students via surveys.	11.9
Inability to cope	I cannot cope with the challenges.	16.7

*Listed from most to most minor frequent responses.

**Percentages were calculated over the total number of codes in the table.

Implications towards higher education institutions and the quality assurance system

How can student participation in quality assurance processes be increased? The ideal starting point to answer this question is to interrogate how students understand the quality assurance phenomenon and position themselves in this process. Thus, the phenomenon was described from a student perspective.

Feelings about quality assurance

It was observed that the students define quality as the process of achieving or even passing a set of standards determined by higher education institutions by excluding students. They considered themselves quite effective in catching up with the standards but ineffective and passive in defining these same standards. Similar results are observed in the literature. For instance, Little and Williams (2010) and Woodall *et al.* (2012) indicated that students were passive implementers rather than active decision-makers in quality assurance processes. However, being the most important stakeholder group in quality assurance of higher education, students must actively participate in all processes (policy-making, decision-making, follow-up, improvement works. At this point, students need to perceive themselves as active agents of quality assurance processes for developing functional participation behaviours among students.

As the opinions on the aims of quality assurance were analysed, it was found that the students perceive themselves as consumers to a considerable extent,

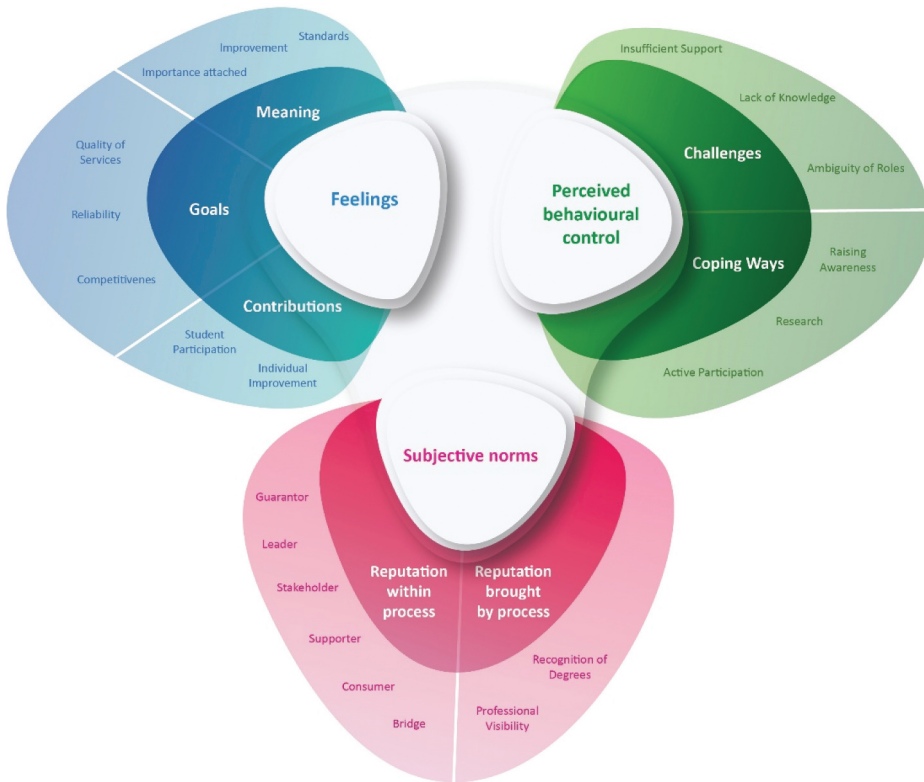


Figure 2. Themes

which was a result parallel to the study of Molesworth *et al.* (2009). This perspective unites to increase the service quality offered to students, downgrades students' participation in quality assurance processes to move towards a more evaluative and complaining position. It also undermines the notion of students as empowered participants in the learning process to mere purchasers of a product (Harvey, 1997). However, in a quality assurance framework, students and other stakeholders are expected to guide improvement works and be more constructive in processes. The first thing that was noteworthy in the opinions on the contributions of quality assurance was that the students generally had positive views on the contributions of quality assurance processes to the higher education system, positively affecting the participation intentions and behaviours. This positive impression should be sustained with effective policies and approaches. Although the customer perspective of the students is strong, it is also seen that the students perceived that they are a component of the system in general. Therefore, the result is affected by all these perceptions.

The second aspect that drew attention was the students' focus on institutional contributions of quality assurance processes rather than personal contributions. Trowler (2010) found similar results about contributions. This finding also implies that students commonly believe that they would have indirect

outcomes from quality assurance practices. However, quality assurance practices have many direct contributions, such as taking more initiatives, intervening in processes, and reflecting wishes and opinions on processes and mechanisms. Therefore, expanding students' general views on these factors' contributions may improve functional behaviours of participation.

Subjective norms

The students' normative beliefs towards quality assurance processes are favourable to a great extent. They firmly believed that participation in quality assurance practices would bring them credit and a professional reputation after graduating. These positive normative beliefs can contribute to their participation intentions and behaviours in quality assurance practices. In this study, the normative beliefs were compiled from the students' perception of their quality assurance roles. In this way, statements about their perception of reputation were received, and the functional roles centring upon the reputation factor were identified. The functional roles were observed to focus on the implementing functions such as being members of quality commissions or evaluation teams and acting as a bridge between quality assurance processes and students, and on the consumer functions such as being directly affected by quality assurance processes. The most active role noted here is the guarantor, responsible for safeguarding the functioning of quality assurance processes. However, the observation rate of this role was only 5%. So, even though the students' normative beliefs are positive, these beliefs mostly pertain to being implementers who provide the functioning of decisions rather than being decision-makers, policymakers, governors, or creating opportunities. Similar results were obtained in various literature studies that analyse students' perception of their roles in quality assurance processes (European Commission, 2010; Little & Williams, 2010; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009, McCulloch, 2009). This indicates a problematic situation concerning the comprehension of student roles in Turkey's quality assurance processes and other cultural contexts. The European Commission (2010) pointed out that the two primary reasons for this situation are the quality culture's inability to encompass students on a larger spectrum and the low level of awareness for student-centred approaches.

In this sense, McCulloch (2009) criticised the 'student as a consumer model' dominant in the university and its relationship. According to him, this common-sense excludes the student's role as a decision-maker in higher education systems and reduces them to a level of users affected by decisions. However, in modern higher education systems with adequate quality assurance processes, students, academics, and other stakeholders should be recognised as equal stakeholders in the production, dissemination, and use of information and

decisions. With similar perspectives, Cook-Sather *et al.* (2014); and Marquis *et al.* (2017) focused on the quality culture and emphasised the significance of including students in higher education processes as necessary, equal and responsible actors. They stress the notion of a university–student partnership. Likewise, Carey (2013) suggested that students should act as advisors that could intervene in processes more freely and provide knowledge in quality assurance processes when necessary. McCulloch (2009) characterised this form of participation as active participation and argued that students can feel more responsible for the university's quality of education only through this way.

Perceived behavioural control

One of the most noteworthy titles within students' behavioural control perception is challenges. Only 30.6% of the participants expressed that they did not face any challenges in quality assurance works. A substantial part of these challenges is directly linked to institutional processes, especially institutional support, and quality culture. The time problems stated under the category of personal challenges are also indirectly related to institutional processes. Many similar results are found in previous studies (Carey, 2013; Isaeva, 2020; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Merabishvili *et al.*, 2017).

When coping with challenges was examined comprehensively, the leading ones were related to the institutional structure and culture. The most frequently observed themes in this respect were participating more, expressing oneself more, and raising awareness among students.

Students' behavioural control perception indicated that students are more active in quality assurance processes. Still, higher education institutions do not give them enough opportunities. Another study conducted by Doganay and Sari (2006) scrutinised higher education students' perceptions about the quality of life in their campus within democratic life culture. It was found that the lowest averages were for 'participation in decision-making'.

Conclusion

The theory of planned behaviour proposed by Ajzen (2005) states that attitude, social norms and perceived behavioural control are three pillars of an individual's intentions and behaviours. This study indicated that the students who had experience in quality assurance processes in Turkey generally have positive feelings and normative beliefs regarding the field. Thus, it can be argued that the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council's national activities and quality assurance processes maintained in higher education institutions have positively affected student participation. However, some problems caused by institutional approaches or insufficient institutional support were observed in the context of students' perceived

behavioural control. Since only a tiny proportion of the students expressed having behavioural control, many stated that they confront and try to cope with institutional obstacles even though they try to gain behavioural control. It can be contended that this problem might impede participation behaviours in quality assurance processes. At this point, a situation that needs to be expressed is the passive participation tendency observed in students. The common feelings and understandings of quality assurance systems and results of normative beliefs demonstrated that students tend to participate in institutional quality processes not as decision-makers but as implementers who meet the criteria and fulfil the decisions determined by a group of authorities excluding students. This problem, which essentially stems from the quality culture effective in higher education institutions, leads to several other issues in the context of perceived behavioural control, such as the inability of self-expression, feeling of underestimation and ambiguity of roles played in quality assurance processes.

In conclusion, all the results firmly pointed to the requirement that higher education institutions in Turkey should encourage active student participation in their quality assurance processes. This active participation umbrella should encompass governance and decision-making roles beyond the implementer roles. Besides, the quality assurance system in higher education should also focus on monitoring and improving the quality of participation beyond quantity and rates at the point of student participation.

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Appendix. Higher education students' survey on participation behaviour in quality assurance

Dear students,

We are researching to determine your awareness of the quality assurance system in higher education. Taking part in this research is entirely up to you. Therefore, you can decline to participate in the research or quit after it begins.

The questions in the questionnaire do not contain information that will describe you or your identity information. The results of the research will be used for scientific purposes only. If you agree to participate in the research under these conditions, the "I have read the explanation above, I have understood that my identity will not be disclosed in my answers to the questionnaire. You can participate in the research by checking the option 'I agree to answer the questions in the survey'.

Thank you for your participation.

- Gender:
 - Age:
 - University:
 - Education degree (associate, undergraduate, master, Ph.D.):
 -
 - Educational field (engineering and natural sciences, social sciences, health sciences, educational sciences, sports sciences):
 - Experience with the higher education quality assurance process
 -
- (1) What do you think is quality?
 - (2) What do you think is the purpose of the quality assurance system in higher education?
 - (3) What do you think the quality assurance studies at your university have contributed to your learning and teaching process (your social-cultural life and your relationship with your university, etc.)
 - (4) Students play the role of in the quality assurance system. Describe the role of the students by filling in the blank space in the sentence.
 - (5) Are there any obstacles you face in terms of student participation in higher education quality assurance processes? If any, what are they?
 - (6) How do you deal with these obstacles you are facing?

Note that the items were in Turkish, and the language validity for English was not established.