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Author(s)

Name: Ruben Topchyan

Position: Director

Organization: National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA)

Country: Armenia

Short bio:

Ruben Topchyan has been the Director of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) since its establishment in 2008, demonstrating a longstanding commitment to enhancing education quality assurance in Armenia and aligning it to the European practices. Ruben Topchyan has motivated the public quality assurance system development in Armenia from scratch. The question of the impact of EQA activities on the development of quality culture in higher and vocational education system in Armenia were in focus of research. ANQA promotes research activities based on survey or focus group studies to have a clear picture of ANQA impact on the existing culture of reforms. As the director of the agency, Ruben Topchyan prioritizes international cooperation and partnership with developed and developing countries. Led by Ruben Topchyan, ANQA passed two successful reviews for ENQA membership and EQAR registration. Prior to this, he served as the Executive Director of the Information Technologies Educational and Research Centre at Yerevan State University from 2007 to 2008. His academic career spans several decades, having been an Associate Professor in the Informatics and Applied Mathematics faculty since 1987. Ruben Topchyan also played a crucial role at Yerevan State University as the Director of the Computer Centre from 1995 to 2009, and as the Chairman of the System Programming Chair from 1992 to 2001, showcasing his leadership and expertise in the field of computer science and technology. He holds a PhD in Physics and Mathematics from Moscow State University and a Diploma with Honors in Applied Mathematics from Yerevan State University.

Author(s)

Name: Varduhi Gyulazyan

Position: Head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division

Organization: National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA)

Country: Armenia

Short bio:

Varduhi Gyulazyan has been working in ANQA since 2011. She is actively involved in development and reviewing the regulatory documents on quality assurance at national level. Varduhi Gyulazyan has a huge experience in coordinating institutional and programme accreditation processes in Armenia since 2011. She has an experience coordinating join accreditation processes in Armenia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan. Varduhi Gyulazyan has been involved in the development of databases for tertiary level institutions' accreditation in Armenia. Since July 2020, she serves as the Head of the Institutional and

Programme Accreditation Division in ANQA. Since May 2019, Varduhi Gyulazyan is a member of the Bologna Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance.

Varduhi holds a bachelor's degree in foreign languages (English and German) from Yerevan State Linguistic University, a master's degree in education management from ASUE and has completed postgraduate studies in Management at the same university.

Paper

Title: Evaluating the Impact of Institutional Accreditation on Armenian Universities: An AI-Assisted Text Analysis Approach

Abstract

Since the establishment of Armenia's external quality assurance system in 2011, institutional accreditation has been instrumental in advancing reforms across higher education institutions (HEIs). As Armenian HEIs enter the third cycle of institutional accreditation, assessing the tangible effects of past accreditation initiatives and planning future reform steps becomes essential. This study examines the impact of institutional accreditation on the ongoing development of universities, focusing on how accreditation has guided HEIs to demonstrate their successes based on their mission statements. The primary goal of accreditation has been to encourage HEIs to establish internal quality assurance systems and to cultivate a culture of quality. To impartially and comprehensively evaluate the impact of accreditation, we applied advanced text analysis techniques using artificial intelligence (AI). This AI-assisted approach allowed us to analyze diverse data sources, including expert reports and institutional self-evaluations. By examining the evolution of language in these reports over time, we aimed to understand how quality culture has developed and evolved within Armenian HEIs. Preliminary findings indicate that accreditation has significantly impacted multiple areas within Armenian HEIs, including autonomy, governance structures, resource allocation, academic programs, and internal quality assurance, while also strengthening quality culture. Additionally, accreditation has shaped the discourse on quality assurance in Armenian higher education.

Keywords

Institutional Accreditation, Higher Education Development, AI in Education Research, Text Analysis, Faculty Development, Resource Management

Introduction

The evolution of Armenia's institutional accreditation system can be broadly divided into two phases: before and after Armenia's adoption of the Bologna Declaration in 2005. Initiated in 1999 with the formation of an accreditation unit within the Ministry of Education and Science, early accreditation was mandatory for both state and private universities. However, state universities seldom engaged in the process due to their existing authority to issue state diplomas, whereas nearly all private universities pursued accreditation to boost their reputation and competitiveness in the educational and job markets. By 2007, 47 universities had been accredited based on criteria resembling licensing, which largely centered on final exam outcomes. This approach prioritized quality control over quality enhancement, lacked a cyclical framework, and did not foster institutional autonomy or continuous improvement, exposing significant gaps in the system's structure and execution.

An important transformation began in 2008 with the establishment of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA), marking a strategic shift towards European standards and guidelines. This new phase focused on developing an external quality assurance (EQA) system that aligned with European methodologies, emphasizing enhancement-led processes and active stakeholder participation. Armenia's integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) further propelled a thorough restructuring of the higher education system, aiming to meet European benchmarks, increase institutional autonomy, and advance quality assurance discourse.

Institutional accreditation, grounded in peer review principles, has been central to these reforms, acting as a key mechanism to drive educational improvement nationwide. This process has encouraged

Armenian HEIs to engage in self-reflection, benchmark against established standards, and implement necessary changes to elevate their educational quality and operational effectiveness.

Problem Statement

ANQA initially adopted a peer review approach in its accreditation process, tailoring evaluations to capture the unique characteristics of each institution. The criteria and standards for institutional accreditation were designed to assess universities based on their alignment with their specific mission and purpose. Consequently, each self-evaluation report (SER) and expert panel report is distinct, as quantitative indicators were not prioritized in the evaluation process.

Given the diversity and complexity of the data, tracking progress has proven challenging. Rather than concentrating on the individual standing of each university, the focus has been on fostering the overall development of the higher education system.

Objective

This study aims to tackle these challenges by utilizing an AI-assisted text analysis approach to objectively assess shifts in discourse towards European values. By applying advanced techniques, the study will examine changes in language and narrative.

The primary evaluation criteria focus on how well universities align with the European approach, the effectiveness of their adaptation, and the extent to which they have embraced and promoted European values. Emphasizing the significance of these values, we observe that each university has made progress consistent with its unique mission and approach.

Methodology

Data Collection

The primary sources of data for this study are self-evaluation reports and expert panel reports from various Armenian higher education institutions (HEIs). These documents were meticulously selected based on specific criteria to ensure a comprehensive analysis across different types and sizes of universities. The selection included institutions that have undergone multiple accreditation cycles (specifically two or three cycles), as well as those with varying durations of accreditation (e.g., institutions initially accredited for four years, followed by two years, and then four years again). This dataset comprises reports from both state and private universities, including both large and small institutions. This stratification allows for a detailed examination of trends and patterns across diverse university environments and accreditation experiences. This data is not oriented toward quantitative metrics; rather, it reflects the specific characteristics of each university and represents the dialogue of the experts.

Research tool

The analytical process employed advanced AI technologies, particularly ChatGPT. This tool was important in processing large volumes of textual data from the accreditation documents. The AI system was configured to handle separate data inputs for each university, allowing for customized queries and analyses that address specific institutional characteristics and changes.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this study was structured around three principal research questions:

1. **Progress Analysis:** This dimension involved analyzing the expert panel reports to assess the progress of universities through two to three accreditation phases. The focus was on how specific dimensions such as governance, academic quality, and resource allocation have evolved according to the expert assessments.
2. **Evolution of Wording:** The study examined changes in the language used in self-evaluation reports and expert assessments across three accreditation cycles. This analysis aimed to

identify shifts in focus areas, priorities, and the overall narrative of quality assurance as articulated by the institutions themselves and the evaluators.

3. **Quality Culture Dynamics:** A critical aspect of the study was evaluating how the notion and implementation of quality culture within these universities have transformed over the years. This was assessed through thematic analysis of both self-evaluation and expert reports, focusing on recurring themes and the introduction of new concepts related to quality assurance.

To analyze each university independently, separate chat sessions were used in the AI tool to prevent cross-contamination of insights and maintain a clear, individual focus. Additional, customized questions were introduced during the evaluation of specific universities to delve deeper into unique or emerging issues identified in the initial analysis stages. The aggregated data and insights from these individual analyses were then synthesized to build a comprehensive picture of the progress and challenges within Armenia's institutional accreditation landscape.

Initially, I trialed the questions with a select group of universities whose texts and approaches I was already familiar with. After this pilot, the same questions were applied to additional universities. In the final stage, I manually reviewed and organized the data into a structured table, conducting the analysis personally. The data was accurate, making manual processing feasible as the foundational work was already completed.

Findings

Initial Stages and Establishment of QA Systems:

In the early 2010s, Armenian HEIs began formalizing their internal quality assurance systems, often as a response to initial accreditation reports. Large state universities were in the emerging stages of developing structured QA processes, with reports highlighting the need for clearer policies and more systematic approaches to quality management.

Progress and Partial Implementation:

By the mid-2010s, significant strides were made in developing and implementing QA frameworks. One of the 2018 reports, for example, highlighted improvements in stakeholder involvement and the establishment of evaluative processes, although challenges remained in fully operationalizing these systems. Similarly, other HEI showed progress in adopting student-centered learning and enhancing faculty development, though the need for more robust research integration and interdisciplinary program development was still evident.

Maturation and Strategic Focus:

The reports from the late 2010s to early 2020s reflect a more mature approach to quality culture, with institutions moving from establishing QA frameworks to embedding them within their operational and strategic goals. One large state university's 2023 report, for example, demonstrated a shift towards sustainability in quality improvements, emphasizing strategic management. Small private universities also showed progress in refining their governance structures, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and aligning academic programs with labor market needs.

2014 Reports: The language in the 2014 reports is formal and straightforward, focusing on describing the institution's alignment with its mission and state academic standards. It uses a descriptive approach to present information about various programs and initiatives. This reflects the early stages of institutional development, where the focus was more on compliance and descriptive reporting rather than critical evaluation.

2018 Reports: The wording in the 2018 reports shows an evolution towards a more evaluative and responsive style. These reports include more details on stakeholder involvement and feedback processes, reflecting a more dynamic approach to program development and improvement. The shift in language indicates that institutions were beginning to adopt more sophisticated methods of internal evaluation and stakeholder engagement.

2023 Reports: The language style in the 2023 reports is more systematic, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to academic program development and monitoring. The reports provide detailed descriptions of new regulations and benchmarking activities. There is a clear focus on continuous improvement and quality assurance, indicating a shift towards a more strategic and evaluative language style. This reflects a mature stage in the evolution of quality culture, where institutions are not only implementing QA processes but are also critically assessing their effectiveness and making strategic adjustments.

Conclusion

The evolution of Armenian higher education institutions from the early 2010s to the 2020s reflects a significant transformation shaped by accreditation processes and a deeper alignment with Bologna reforms and European values, especially following the third cycle of accreditation. These institutions have progressed from establishing foundational quality assurance frameworks to fostering a culture of continuous improvement, strategic management, and internationalization. While challenges remain, particularly in integrating research and enhancing infrastructure, the advancements over the past decade demonstrate an increasing commitment to European standards, quality education, institutional autonomy, and accountability. This analysis underscores the critical role of accreditation in steering Armenian HEIs towards Bologna principles and highlights the ongoing efforts needed to sustain and build upon these achievements.

References

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