



Co-funded by
the European Union



FACTUAL ANALYSIS ON THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS IN VET INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

The research was carried out within the framework of the Erasmus+ project "Implementing Mock Accreditation for supporting quality assurance in Armenian VET institutions" (QA4VET).

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them".

Yerevan 2025

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	Error! Bookmark not defined.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 1. VET SYSTEM IN ARMENIA	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND MECHANISMS IN THE RA VET SYSTEM	8
CHAPTER 3 – THE EXPERIENCE, STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF VET ACCREDITATION IN ARMENIA (QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CONCLUSIONS	Error! Bookmark not defined.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	32

INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted within the framework of the Erasmus+ QA4VET program, aiming to study the impact of the accreditation process and especially self-evaluation in VET institutions in Armenia on improving the quality of education. The research also examined the quality culture formed after accreditation, the factors ensuring the continuity of improvement processes, and identified the main challenges encountered during institutional improvement.

The results of the research will serve as a basis for developing the content and methodology for training employees of VET institutions and the National Center for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education within the framework of the Erasmus+ QA4VET program, aimed at continuous improvement of the system.

The aim of the research is:

- to analyze how quality assurance processes are organized in VET institutions, and what challenges they face in effectively developing institutional self-analysis and improvement strategies.

The main research questions are:

1. Assess the effectiveness of the distribution of roles and responsibilities among those involved in the self-assessment process.
2. Identify the level of involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the self-assessment process.
3. Analyze the level of understanding of the self-assessment methodology among stakeholders and identify the main difficulties associated with its implementation.
4. Assess the level of integration of digital and “green” capabilities in the MSPs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in the study, aiming to comprehensively examine the course of the accreditation process and the difficulties encountered. The research aimed to:

- analyze the accreditation process based on quantitative data, in particular, in terms of the effectiveness of self-analysis and improvement strategies developed on its basis,
- to identify the perceptions, positions and experiences of the participants involved in the process through qualitative data, as well as to highlight existing obstacles and possible ways to overcome them.

Quantitative method

An electronically distributed questionnaire survey method was used to collect quantitative data. 61 out of 87 educational institutions providing vocational education participated in the survey, which constitutes a 66.67% participation rate, ensuring the necessary representativeness and analytical reliability. Of the participating institutions, 53 (87.93%) were public and 8 (12.07%) were private. The questionnaire included a number of thematic blocks aimed at examining the self-analysis process, stakeholder engagement, development of improvement strategies, methodological perceptions, and practical application of results.

The majority of respondents, 58.62%, indicated that they had 0–2 years of experience in accreditation processes, 22.41% had 3–5 years, 12.07% had 6–10 years, and only 6.90% had more than 10 years of experience. In general, the vast majority of participants, about 81%, have been involved in accreditation processes with up to 5 years of experience, which, on the one hand, indicates the representativeness of the survey, and on the other hand, determines the effectiveness and depth of the analysis of the results obtained.

¹ Green skills refer to the knowledge, abilities and behaviors that contribute to environmental protection, responsible use of resources and sustainable development.

Qualitative Method

For the purpose of collecting qualitative information, the focus group discussion method was used, aimed at an in-depth analysis of the needs, perceptions, and existing challenges of the representatives of the National Center for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education.

Data analysis

The analysis of the collected data was carried out using MS Excel and SPSS programs. Both content and comparative analysis were performed, aiming to identify the differences between different educational institutions commonalities and different approaches of experiences. This methodological comparison has made it possible to present a multifaceted and systematic picture of the accreditation process.

CHAPTER 1. VET SYSTEM IN ARMENIA

The secondary vocational education (VET) system is of strategic importance in ensuring the sustainable development of each country's economy, training specialists in line with labor market requirements, and ensuring the socio-economic integration of youth. In recent years, in Armenia a number of structural and substantial reforms are being implemented in the VET system in the Republic, which are conditioned by the redefinition of the role of VET institutions and their importance in the process of economic development.

Currently, the VET system in Armenia is in the process of reform, the main goal of which is to harmonize vocational education and production requirements. These reforms aim to ensure that educationally, the content of the programs is consistent with the current and projected demands of the labor market, promoting the increase in the employment rate of graduates and contributing to the economic development of the country.

The VET system in the Republic of Armenia includes both state and non-state educational institutions that train specialists in various fields in line with levels 4 and 5 of the National Qualifications Framework. Currently, there are 23 state primary and 63 secondary vocational educational institutions, as well as 24 non-state secondary vocational institutions operating in the Republic.

There are 1,189 students enrolled in initial vocational education programs, while the number of students enrolled in secondary vocational education programs is 4,118. It is noteworthy that in recent years, the number of students in the VET system has increased by 1,18% the number has a tendency to grow, which can be conditioned by the application of state policy and incentive mechanisms aimed at the development of the sector. Priority directions have been defined in the VET system, which include industry, construction and agricultural specialties, for which a scholarship of 50 thousand drams is provided.

The recent reforms taking place in the VET system of the Republic of Armenia are conditioned by certain strategic initiatives and legal frameworks aimed at increasing the quality, accessibility, and relevance of vocational education in line with the demands of the labor market: The goals and objectives of the development of the VET system are outlined in the “State Program

for the Development of Education in the Republic of Armenia until 2030”. The main strategic goal of the state policy of the Republic of Armenia in the system of vocational education and training is to: **increase the professional employment rate of graduates to at least 90% by 2030**. This indicator is seen as a key indicator of improving the linkage between education and the labor market, as well as increasing the competitiveness of the economy.

Taking into account the structural, substantive, and organizational challenges in the sector, the new Law on Vocational Education and Training entered into force on May 22, 2024. It is the legal basis for systemic reforms aimed at modernizing the VET system, increasing its efficiency, and creating an educational environment that meets the demands of the labor market.

Currently, a number of sub-legislative acts are being developed in accordance with the provisions of the new law, which aim to ensure the full and practical implementation of the law, including in the areas of educational program structure, quality control, teaching methods, and institutional management.

The adoption of the new law aims to ensure:

- Modernization of educational programs and an outcomes-based approach, aiming to prepare graduates in accordance with the requirements of the modern labor market.
- Development of institutional capacities of teaching and administrative staff.
- Encouraging work-based learning.
- Structural transformation of the vocational education system: unification of institutions, integration of programs.
- Encouraging the involvement of specialists by developing financial and non-financial incentives to attract highly qualified specialists to the education system.
- Expanding international cooperation through the study and localization of best practices.
- Improving the legal framework, particularly in terms of promoting entrepreneurial activity and strengthening connections between employers and educational institutions, etc.

Thus, the VET system is in a phase of reform, and it is necessary to demonstrate greater consistency in this process. To achieve the set goals, it is important to have clear strategies and practical steps that will help lead the system in the intended direction and ensure visible results.

CHAPTER 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND MECHANISMS IN THE RA VET SYSTEM

The quality assurance culture in Armenia is promoted based on two main principles: accountability and continuous improvement. The goal of external quality assurance is to align initial vocational and secondary vocational education with the needs of stakeholders and society.

External quality assurance in the VET sector is carried out through accreditation. External quality assurance includes two types of accreditation: institutional and programmatic. It is based on the principle of “conformity with declared objectives”. The accreditation process is carried out by the ANQA.

External quality assurance primarily emphasizes the implementation of goals set by educational institutions and determines their compliance with quality assurance standards and criteria set by the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

Institutional accreditation

Institutional accreditation focuses on the management of VET institutions and educational programs, as well as the effective implementation of teaching, learning and assessment processes. Institutional accreditation is mandatory for all VET institutions.

Thus, institutional accreditation is carried out according to 10 areas, which include:

1. Mission and goals,
2. Management and administration,
3. Educational programs of the specialty,
4. Students,
5. Faculty and teaching staff,
6. Research and development,
7. Infrastructure and resources,
8. Social responsibility,
9. External relations and internationalization,
10. Internal quality assurance system.

The criteria include 56 criteria.

The first steps towards ensuring the quality of VET began in 2009. In 2011-2017, institutional accreditation pilot processes were implemented in a number of VET institutions. The latter was the preparatory stage for the formation of a new quality culture. VET institutions are required to have quality in order to prepare for internal and external procurement processes, workshops and trainings have been regularly organized for management, administrative, and teaching staff.

In 2018, ANQA initiated institutional accreditation processes in 4 agricultural colleges, which was a condition of the EU budget support program “Better Skills for Better Jobs”. Since 2019, state funding has been allocated to state VET institutions for the implementation of institutional accreditation processes. State funding allocated for institutional accreditation of VET institutions is increasing year by year (in 2020: 5, in 2021: 5, in 2022: 5, in 2023: 15, in 2024: 20, in 2025: 15). It is planned that by 2026 all state VET institutions undergo institutional accreditation. In 2025, the program accreditation process was also launched in the medical field, in particular, 5 programs in the "Nursing" specialty.

Software accreditation

Program accreditation is the state's recognition of the educational program of a profession, the quality of training of specialists, as meeting state educational standards and program accreditation criteria. The target of program accreditation is the educational program of a separate profession. This process allows for a regular assessment of the effectiveness of the educational program of the specialty, as well as to assess whether it ensures the full achievement of the expected learning outcomes by students. Program accreditation is carried out at the initiative of the educational institution, on a voluntary basis, with the exception of educational programs in medical specialties, which must undergo mandatory program accreditation. In VET institutions by 2025 only institutional accreditation was carried out. Starting from 2025, program accreditation was launched. Program accreditations were launched in 2025 in 5 VET institutions within the framework of state-funded "Nursing" educational programs in VET institutions.

Program accreditation is based on seven criteria, which include the following areas:

1. Curriculum,
2. Faculty,
3. Teaching and learning,

4. Student assessment,
5. Research and creative activities,
6. Educational environment,
7. Quality assurance.

These criteria include 31 criteria.

Stages of the accreditation process

The accreditation process in the Republic of Armenia takes place in 3 stages:

1. **Self-analysis** it is the process of evaluating an institution or its educational program, followed by a written report based on standards adopted by the Government of the Republic of Armenia.
2. **External evaluation** The expert group conducts a preliminary assessment, which includes a review of the self-assessment report and all relevant documents submitted by the institution. This is followed by an expert visit, during which the expert group members meet in person with representatives of the institutions: administrative and support staff, students, alumni, and employers. As a result, the group prepares a written report that includes recommendations on areas for improvement.
3. **Making decisions about accreditation** is a process of reviewing the facts and identifying areas that need urgent solutions. One of the following decisions may be made:
 - Grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 years,
 - Grant institutional accreditation for a period of 6 years.
 - Deny accreditation.

ANQA VET Institutional Accreditation Policy

In 2020, ANQA developed VET approaches to institutional accreditation to help VET institutions assess their core activities based on guiding principles.

According to the latter, accreditation will become a tool for the following processes:

- effective strategic management and performance-based funding,
- review of the sector's development policy,
- increasing transparency, accountability, visibility, autonomy and recognition of qualifications of VET institutions.

The principles also guide the implementation of joint strategy development with local employers, which ensures the prospect of long-term investment for both parties.

These principles include:

1. guide VET institutions in meeting local labor market needs, contributing to the implementation of strategic management in partnership with employers,
2. align educational programs with regional needs and economic opportunities,
3. encourage VET institutions to jointly use the resource bases of sectorial employers for the effective implementation of educational programs, thus solving the problem of resource provision and promoting the development of practical skills among students,
4. increase the involvement of employer lecturers,
5. Promote the collection of analytical data in institutions and decision-making based on them.

Institutional accreditation is also a tool for assessing the effectiveness of state policy implementation in VET institutions.

Internal quality assurance of VET (IQA)

Currently, the QA system of VET institutions is in the development stage. A large number of institutions have QA managers. Internal quality assurance processes are part of the educational activities of the institution, they are part of and form the basis for the institution`s improvement and strengthening. Internal quality assurance processes are aimed at and contribute to the development and improvement of a quality culture in VET institutions.

Quality assurance processes are implemented based on pre-defined quality plans. An important component of the QA system is the evaluation of the effectiveness of educational programs. QA managers collect and analyze feedback from employers, students, lecturers, and other stakeholder satisfaction data. However, improving the capacity of quality assurance officers remains a significant challenge. The main mechanisms for implementing internal quality assurance processes are currently limited with surveys and listening to lectures. There is a need to diversify these mechanisms to increase the efficiency of the system.

CHAPTER 3 – VET ACCREDITATION EXPERIENCE, STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN ARMENIA (SURVEY RESULTS)

Distribution of roles and responsibilities in the accreditation process

The institutional accreditation process for VET educational institutions in the Republic of Armenia includes several stages, starting from the self-assessment and data collection process to analysis, organization of expert visits and improvement of strategy development. To organize the process, VET institutions and the National Center for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education appoint coordinators who are responsible for the organization and implementation of all stages of the accreditation process. A study was conducted to clarify those responsible for organizing and coordinating the self-assessment process of the VET institution, and the survey results show that in both public and private educational institutions, the primary responsibility for this process lies with the person responsible for ensuring the quality of education. There are also experiments in state educational institutions when coordinating committees are formed to implement the self-analysis process, which include lecturers, heads of various departments (chair heads, head of the academic department, career officer, accountant, and students). The scale of involvement of such committees in non-state educational institutions is relatively limited. The general picture is in the attached table:

Table 1. Role of responsible groups involved in the self-analysis process in public and private colleges

Պատասխանատու	Պետական քոլեջներ	Մասնավոր քոլեջներ
ՈԱ պատասխանատու	մեծամասամբ	մեծամասամբ
Տարբեր ստորաբաժանումների հանձնաժողով	շատ տարածված	պակաս տարածված
Առանձին ստորաբաժանումների ղեկավարներ	հազվադեպ	հազվադեպ
Արտաքին խորհրդատուներ	շատ հազվադեպ	շատ հազվադեպ

According to the survey results, the main functions of the groups involved in the self-analysis process include:

1. Data collection

The most frequently mentioned by respondents is that groups involved in the self-analysis process carry out data collection, which is a priority stage of the process in almost all educational institutions. It involves collecting necessary information from various departments and criteria, including documents, reports, digital statistics, survey analyses, etc.

2. Performing the analysis

The second important function included in self-analysis groups, according to the survey results, emphasizes the implementation of analytical work as the most important stage of data processing and evaluation. It is noted that the group members conduct SWOT analyses, textual and comparative analyses. The results of the analysis also served as a basis for formulating conclusions and developing recommendations for improvement.

3. Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement also has a broad scope in the responses. The process includes engaging both internal and external stakeholders in various formats, including surveys, meetings, discussions, and focus groups. The main goal is to elicit and incorporate stakeholders' perspectives, experiences, and suggestions into the self-analysis process.

4. Conducting surveys

Surveys are considered one of the most common data collection methods in VET institutions in the Republic of Armenia, which is why VET institutions attach particular importance to them and consider self-analysis to be a particularly important factor in identifying the needs of stakeholders.

5. Document collection and technical support

Some responses focused on document digitization, computer entry, scanning, and proper collection and storage of documents and information. These activities are considered important components of the technical support necessary for the documentation and subsequent use of the process.

Involving external stakeholders in the self-assessment process

The involvement of external stakeholders (employers, community representatives, graduates, etc.) in the implementation of self-assessment activities was emphasized by VET institutions, as well as in assessing the quality of educational programs, ensuring compliance with labor market requirements, as well as in developing students' practical knowledge and creating job opportunities. Involving external stakeholders in the self-evaluation process ensures a more objective analysis of VET institutions, as well as the identification of areas for future improvement. When asked to what extent external stakeholders were involved in the self-analysis process, according to the survey results, the majority of participating educational institutions (82.76%) stated that they were involved, while only 17.24% of institutions stated that they were not involved.

Involving external stakeholders in the self-assessment process

The involvement of external stakeholders (employers, community representatives, graduates, etc.) in the implementation of self-assessment activities was emphasized by VET institutions. The important role of the latter in assessing the quality of educational programs, ensuring compliance with labor market requirements, as well as in developing students' practical knowledge and creating job opportunities was emphasized. Involving external stakeholders in the self-evaluation process ensures a more objective analysis of VET institutions, as well as the identification of areas for future improvement. When asked to what extent external stakeholders were involved in the self-analysis process, according to the survey results, the majority of participating educational institutions (82.76%) stated that they were involved, while only 17.24% of institutions stated that they were not involved.

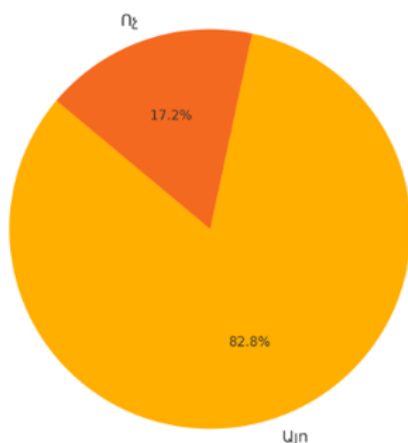


Figure 1. Involvement of external stakeholders in the self-assessment process

The results of the study show that the involvement of external stakeholders in the self-analysis process was mostly carried out in the following formats.

Table 2. Stakeholder engagement

Forms of involvement	Frequency
Receiving feedback from stakeholders (employers) regarding educational programs	36.38%
Meeting with employers and graduates and eliciting their needs	25.46%
Identifying external stakeholder needs through surveys	16.36%
Discussions with mentors from internship sites and identification of existing problems	12.74%
Other forms of engagement	9.06%

The table shows that the most common form of stakeholder engagement was providing feedback for the purpose of reviewing educational programs. Employers, alumni, and community representatives provided suggestions, assessing the relevance of educational programs to the labor market. The next most common response is: meetings and discussions with employers and alumni. Educational institutions have widely used various formats for organizing meetings:

- Roundtable discussions,
- Employers' Council meetings,
- Focus groups,
- Individual interviews.

Within the framework of these meetings, educational programs, the organization of student internships, as well as labor market trends were discussed. Stakeholders actively participated in organizing student internships, assessed students' practical skills, and contributed to their professional development. Surveys were conducted regularly to collect stakeholders' opinions and observations on the quality of education, the organization of the educational process, as well as the modernization of educational programs. The survey results show that external stakeholders were

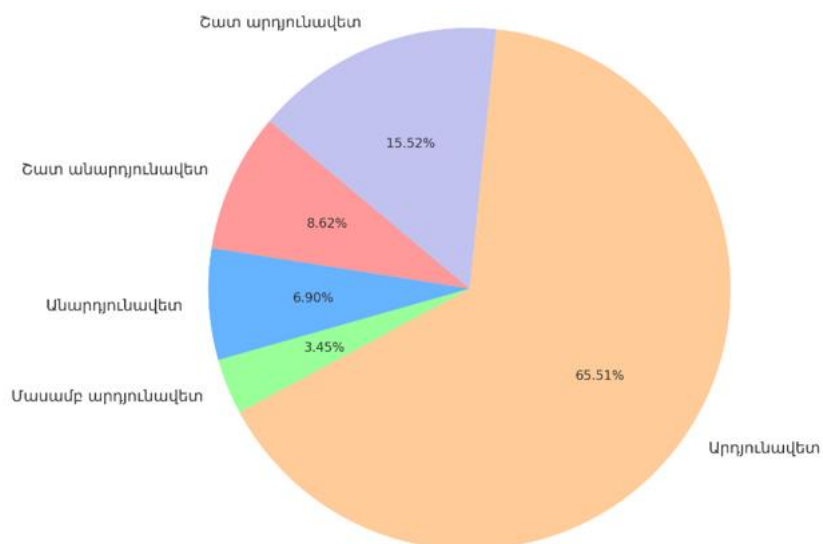
also involved in the self-evaluation process in other ways: supporting the development of student assessment criteria.

Thus, it can be concluded that the involvement of external stakeholders in the self-assessment processes has mostly taken place indirectly, from the perspective of improving the VET programs and providing feedback; this data has already been analyzed by the VET institutions and has been part of the self-assessment.

Communication and collaboration within the self-analysis process

Collaboration is of fundamental and very high importance in the self-analysis process, as it ensures efficient work and clearly defined responsibilities among those involved. In order for data to be collected, analyzed, and results to be generalized, it is necessary to ensure organized and coordinated work within the institution. The research also addressed the question of how effectively and clearly the institution has presented the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the accreditation process. According to the survey results, the following picture emerges.

Figure 2. Distribution of roles of stakeholders involved in the self-analysis process



The data presented shows that the majority, 65.51%, assessed that their institution effectively represents the responsibilities of the individuals involved, which speaks to the coherence and organization of the process. Meanwhile, 8.62% indicated that the process was very ineffective. This was due to the fact that not all of the respondents have extensive experience in conducting self-

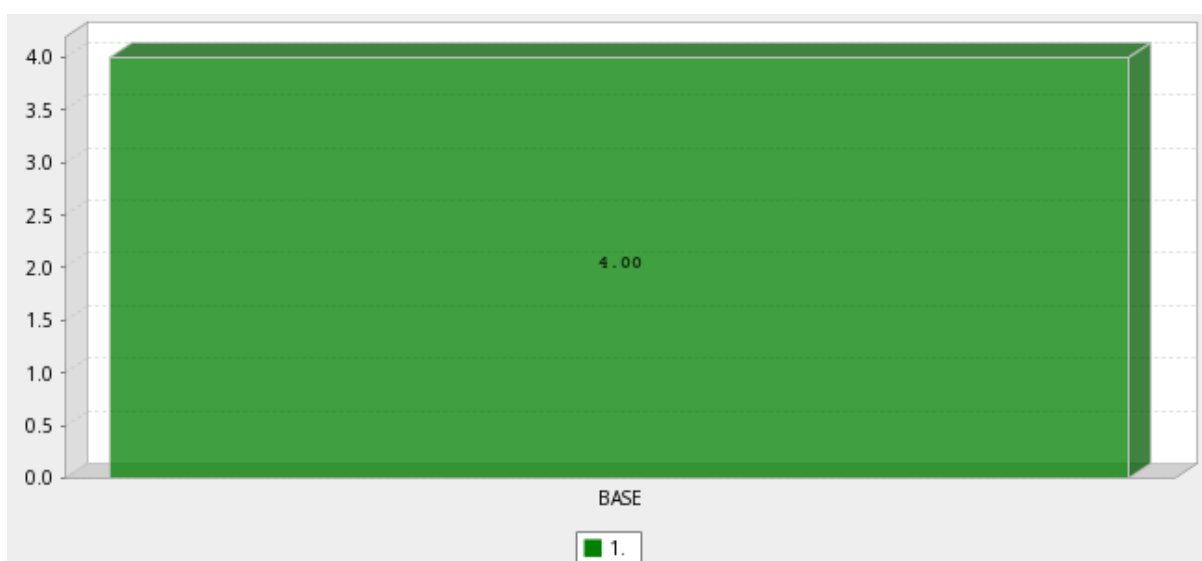
analysis and are making their first attempts in this direction, the latter were not able to fully acknowledge the objective of the process and were unable to carry out proper planning.

The survey results show that in order to ensure continuous communication between those involved in the accreditation process, VET institutions organized regular meetings, which were both in groups and individual, as well as working group sessions. These meetings served the purpose of discussions, updating data, conducting SWOT analyses, and summarizing the work done. Both face-to-face meetings and digital platforms, such as email, social media, and special online platforms, were used for communication purposes, which allowed for facilitating communication, obtaining feedback, and ensuring the circulation of documents and data.

Understanding the methodology for conducting self-analysis

To effectively organize self-assessment activities, it is very important for the staff to have a clear understanding of the methodology for conducting the self-assessment and the accreditation requirements. When asked to what extent educational institutions have mastered the methodology and requirements for implementing self-analysis, respondents gave an average score of 4 on a 1-5 point scale.

Figure 3. Perception of the self-assessment methodology and accreditation requirements by VET institutions, on a scale from 1 (do not understand at all) to 5 (completely understand).

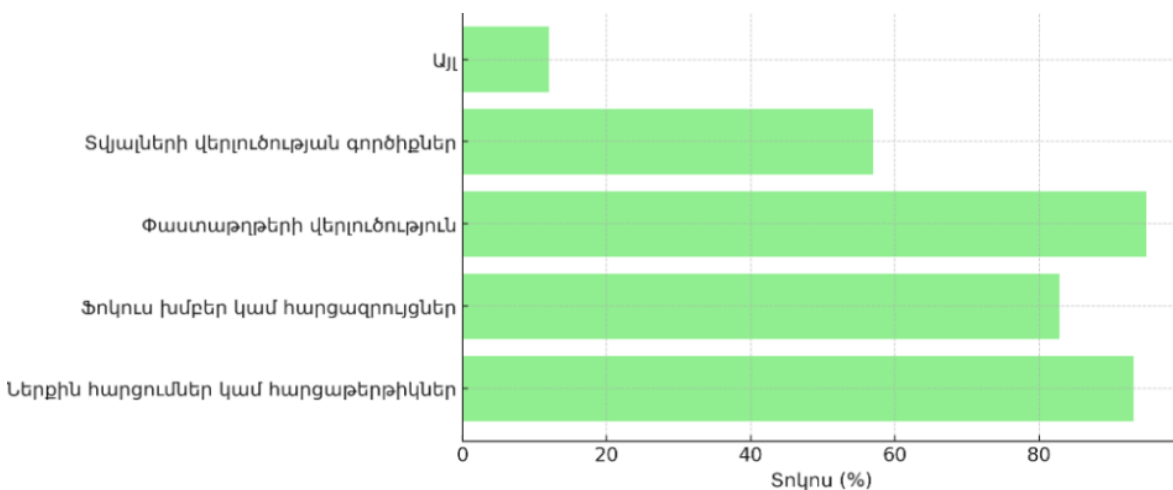


The survey data indicate that a significant portion of the staff fully or almost fully understands the process and has the necessary knowledge about the process. Within the framework of this research, those aspects that are perceived as most difficult by VET institutions were also studied and analyzed, it is observed that institutions mainly experience difficulties in the processes of data collection and analysis. The difficulties in consolidating and organizing data in one place were mainly noted, since before the accreditation process institutions did not have unified platforms for centralizing data. In many cases, difficulties also arose during the data analysis phase, given that institutions did not have much experience in this area. The next most frequently encountered difficulty was related to institutional accreditation standards and their understanding. Participants noted that the wording and requirements of the standards were sometimes too complex, which led to problems in their correct understanding. Another challenge has been ensuring the involvement of external stakeholders, mastering new terminology and tools, as well as issues of effective time management, which have also created obstacles in the accreditation process.

Selection of data collection methods and tools

To organize the self-analysis process more effectively, it is important to apply methods that will enable the analysis to yield objective data that will show the real state of the VET institution. Taking this into account, the survey also emphasized the importance of understanding from VET institutions what methods were used when conducting the self-analysis. The results show that the following picture is present in VET institutions.

Figure 4. Application of self-analysis methods and tools



The survey results show that internal surveys or questionnaires are the most commonly used method, at 93.10%. This is followed by document analysis (curriculums, policies, strategic plans) at 94.83%. Focus groups and interviews are used by 82.76%, and data analysis tools are used by 56.90%. The other option was indicated by 12.07%. The survey also addressed the tools used by VET institutions to conduct their analyses, which included:

- MS Excel
- Google Forms
- Google Analytics
- IBM SPSS
- AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT)
- Combining human and artificial intelligence.

Developing an improvement strategy based on self-analysis

Self-analysis is an important tool for VET institutions, which allows them to assess various aspects of their activities, understand their strengths, and identify areas for improvement that are necessary for the development of the organization. This process not only contributes to increasing the internal efficiency of institutions, but also contributes to the improvement of educational programs, management, teaching, and other important processes.

The results of self-analysis can be used to develop and implement strategies or improvement plans, providing a more accurate and informed basis for decision-making. Taking all this into account, the study also emphasized the extent to which VET institutions were able to develop an improvement strategy based on the results of their self-analysis.

The results show the following picture:

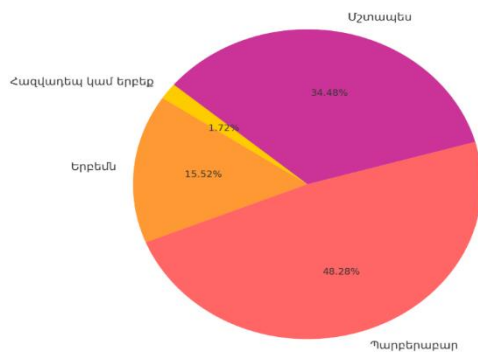


Figure 5. Application of self-analysis results in the process of developing an improvement strategy

Analysis of the survey results shows that the use of self-analysis results in the development and implementation of institutional strategies or improvement plans occurs with varying frequency. 1.72% indicated that self-assessment results are rarely or never used in planning processes, suggesting that some institutions have not yet fully integrated self-assessment into their strategic planning processes. 15.52% of participants indicated that the results of self-analysis are sometimes used in planning processes, and 48.28% of participants indicated that the results of self-analysis are regularly used in strategy development when developing institutional improvement plans. Moreover, 34.48% of respondents indicated that the results of self-analysis are constantly used during planning and strategy development. Overall, the survey results show that the results of self-analysis were regularly used in about 82.76% of cases, which indicates the importance of self-analysis and its great impact in institutional improvement plans. This indicator confirms that self-analysis is an important tool in the strategic planning process, contributing to increasing the efficiency of educational institutions and defining more sustainable development paths.

When asked what improvements have occurred in VET institutions as a result of the self-analysis, the results of the survey show that the self-analysis process has had a significant impact on the improvement of the management and educational processes of VET institutions. In particular, the following areas for improvement were noted by respondents:

Table 3. Improvement directions based on self-analysis

Examples of recent improvements or changes made as a result of the self-analysis process	Frequency of responses
Modernization of educational programs	21.0%
Improvements in strategic planning and management processes	17.0%
Improving the resource and logistical base	16.0%
Expansion of cooperation and inclusion in international processes	14.0%
Improved document flow	10.0%
Training and professional development	9.0%
Strengthening research and analysis	7.0%
Developing a quality assurance culture	7.0%

Thus, based on the results of the survey, it can be stated that, in the opinion of the majority of respondents, the results of the self-analysis had a primary impact on the improvement of the following areas:

1. Modernization of educational programs

A review of educational programs and teaching methods has been carried out, in an attempt to align them with the needs of the labor market. These improvements have also included expanding cooperation with employers and strengthening joint dialogue.

2. Improvements in strategic planning and management processes

In a number of educational institutions, strategic plans, management structure, employee job profiles, and employee functions are being made more specific.

3. Improving the resource and logistical base

Work has been carried out to improve the material and technical base: adding new laboratories, introducing digital technologies, as well as creating new simulation rooms, accounting for the library collection, and assessing the needs of lecturers and students.

4. Expansion of cooperation and inclusion in international processes

As a result of the self-analysis, great attention was paid to the involvement of external stakeholders, which contributed to the development of educational processes.

- New memoranda of understanding are being signed between VET institutions, benchmarking experiments are being carried out.
- Trainings are being organized to improve the level of foreign languages of stakeholders, both among lecturers and students.
- Steps are being taken to find foreign partners and participate in Erasmus+ programs.

5. Improved document flow

The documentation base of VET institutions has been coordinated and reviewed, ensuring the coherence of the processes being implemented.

6. Training and professional development

VET institutions have begun to initiate the organization of new professional training courses for teaching staff, within the framework of which numerous VET institutions also closely cooperate.

7. **Strengthening research and analysis**

VET institutions are trying to integrate a research component into educational programs, to activate research activities for both lecturers and students.

8. **Developing a quality assurance culture**

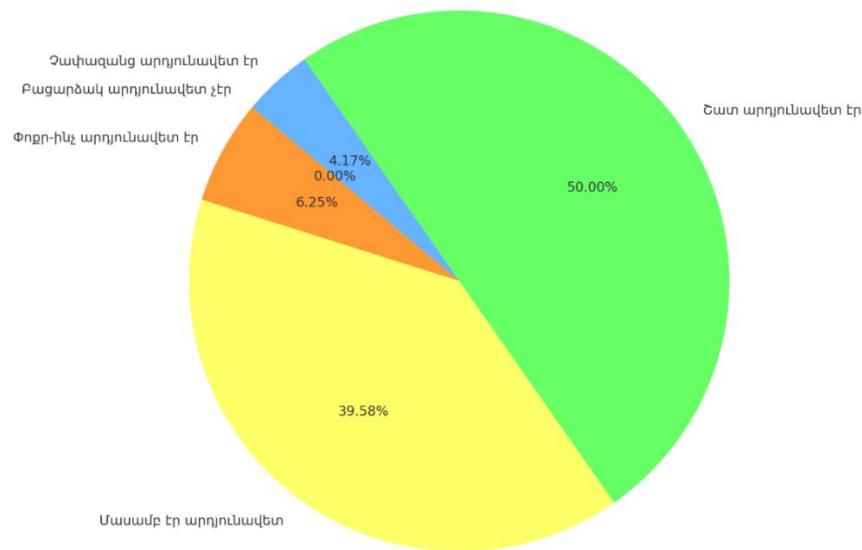
Quality assurance positions have been introduced in VET institutions, data collection and evaluation processes are actively implemented, such as lecturer evaluation, resource satisfaction, etc. A quality culture is being introduced in the departments.

Consultations provided for conducting self-analysis

The self-assessment process is a complex and multi-layered process, and educational institutions often need external consulting support. This need is especially pronounced during the preparatory stage of accreditation, when it is necessary to clearly understand the criteria, form a documentation base, and conduct a comprehensive analysis of the situation. The National Center for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education, in order to make the process systematic and effective, organizes four-day training sessions before the self-analysis implementation stage. During these sessions, the criteria set for the self-analysis, the list of necessary attached documents, the SWOT analysis methodology, etc. are presented. In addition, coordinators appointed by VET institutions have the opportunity to be in constant contact with ANQA staff, receiving ongoing support on technical aspects of the process: interpretation of the formats filled in the institutional questionnaire, clarification of criteria, etc. It is important to note that support does not apply to the content of the analysis and its direction.

In addition to the advice provided by ANQA, VET institutions receive some advice from VET institutions and universities that already have accreditation experience. As for the question of whether they have ever received external consultations on improving the self-analysis implementation processes and how effective they were, the majority of respondents, 83.03%, indicated that they had received such consultations, while 18.97% indicated that they had not. The latter indicator may also be due to the fact that some educational institutions still lack experience in engaging in accreditation processes. As for the question of how effective and guiding the consultations they provided were for them, the following picture emerges:

Figure 6. Effectiveness of external advice



As for the assessment of the effectiveness of the consultations, the most common answer was "It was very effective," accounting for 50% of the responses. This indicates that the consultations, in general, contributed to a more structured and effective organization of the self-analysis. The next highest option, "Partially effective" (39.58%), indicates that for some institutions the consultations were useful, but with limited applicability or partial clarity. At the same time, the option "It wasn't very effective" received only 4.17% of responses, which may indicate a certain lack of depth of content or relevance to specific needs of the consultations. Among the positive trends is that no respondents rated the consultations as "not effective at all" (0%), and only 6.25% indicated "it was somewhat effective".

Development of an improvement strategy

The main goal of conducting a self-analysis is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the activities of an educational institution to determine the current state of the organization, identify existing gaps, and areas in need of improvement. In particular, it provides an opportunity to identify the weaknesses and problems of the VET institution, as well as to substantiate the directions around which it is necessary to develop and implement appropriate improvement strategies. The question of the extent to which the VET institution has developed an improvement strategy based on the results of the self-analysis. The vast majority of surveyed institutions, 84.48%, indicated that they

have already developed an improvement strategy based on the results of their self-analysis or self-assessment. This indicator is a positive trend, indicating that institutions have an action plan aimed not only at identifying problems, but also at solving them. At the same time, 15.52% confirmed that they do not yet have such a strategy. As for the question of which areas have mainly seen improvements, the following indicators are available.

Table 4. Improvements resulting from self-analysis

Direction for improvement	Frequency of responses
Review and improvement of educational programs	41.86%
Staff capacity development	23.26%
Improving cooperation with employers	20.93%
Development of international cooperation	4.65%
Improving external relations	2.33%

Based on the analyzed data, it can be stated that the predominant direction in the improvement strategies developed by vocational education and training institutions is “revision and improvement of educational programs”, which covers 41.86% of the responses. This trend indicates that the modernization of educational content is considered a strategic priority for institutions. This process includes reviewing the modular structure of curricula, updating learning outcomes, and aligning them with labor market requirements. The second most frequently mentioned direction, “staff capacity development” (23.26%), emphasizes the fundamental role of human resources development. Particularly important is the development of professional capacities of teaching and administrative staff through training, continuing education, and the formation of digital and innovative skills. „Improving cooperation with employers”, which received 20.93% as the third most frequently mentioned direction, complements the above two areas. The primary goal of this direction is the systematic involvement of employers in the educational process, which contributes to the realistic design of programs, the enrichment of practical components, and the alignment of graduates' training with labor market expectations. Effective cooperation with employers is seen not only as a means of improving the quality of education, but also as an important factor in the placement and career development of graduates. Although “international cooperation” (4.65%) and

“improving external relations” (2.33%) directions were mentioned significantly less, their inclusion proves the aspiration of some institutions to expand the goal of partnership cooperation, both on local and international platforms. These areas are particularly important in terms of introducing educational innovations, exchanging international experience, and ensuring institutional recognition of institutions.

The implementation of improvement strategies is an important step towards quality management in vocational education institutions. However, the successful implementation of this process often encounters obstacles of various kinds that can reduce the effectiveness and impact of the strategies.

Table 5. Improvement strategy development challenges

Obstacle	Percent (%)
Limited financial resources	62.07%
Weak stakeholder engagement	50.00%
Insufficient staff capacity or limited time	32.76%
Resistance to change	15.52%
Insufficient or unclear data	13.79%
Other (details below)	10.34%

The majority, **62.07%**, noted the **limitation of financial resources**, which indicates a low level of financial stability of institutions. The lack of funding hinders both the expansion of logistical capabilities and the development of human resources. Under these conditions, strategic initiatives often do not reach the implementation stage, or are implemented slowly and incompletely.

Respondents identified **weak stakeholder engagement** as the next most important obstacle, at **50.00%**. The low level of participation of employers, students, alumni, and other stakeholders hinders the comprehensiveness and realism of strategy development and implementation. Passive involvement reduces the applicability of strategies, depriving them of the opportunity to be based on the real needs of the sector.

32.76% of respondents cited **limited staff capabilities and lack of time** as obstacles. The gap in professional capabilities, as well as staff workload and limited time resources, hinder the processes of developing and implementing improvement initiatives.

Resistance to change was also mentioned (15.52%). In some institutions, a conservative attitude towards change is observed, which complicates the implementation of reforms. Lack of data and lack of clarity (13.79%) were also considered as obstacles. This implies that the lack of quality data hinders the justification of strategic planning and impact assessment. Data-driven decision-making is an integral part of strategic management, and in its absence, strategies can become formal or irrelevant initiatives.

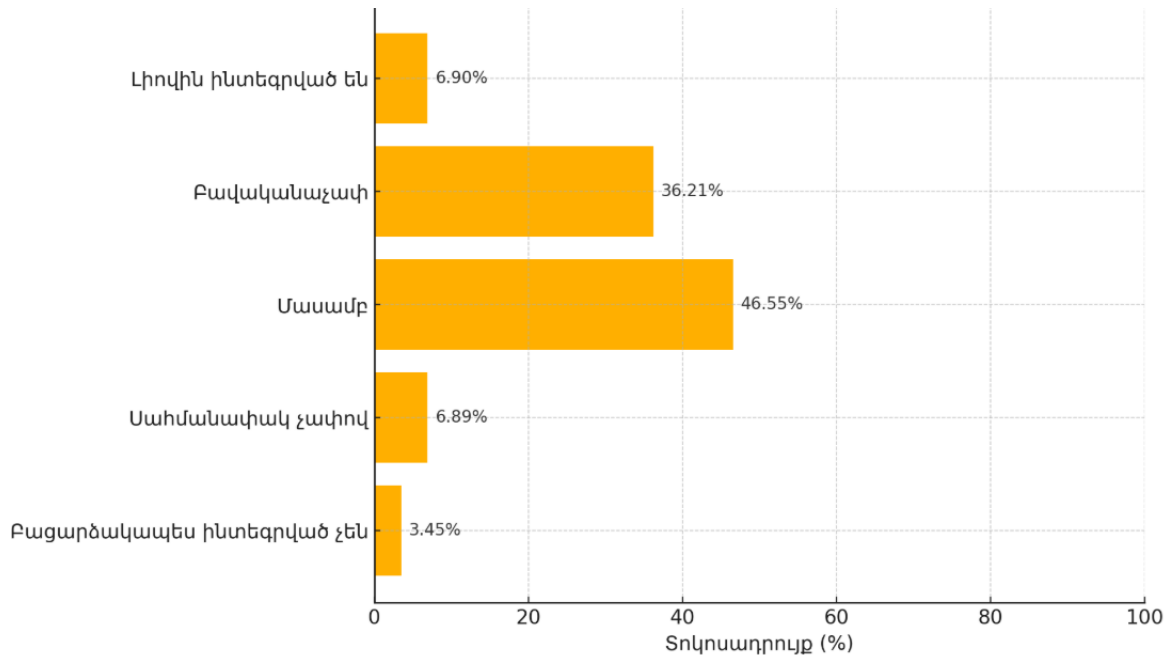
In addition to the above, 10.34% of respondents identified other factors that complement the main directions. Under the “Other” heading, institutions identified a number of specific barriers, including:

- Methodological uncertainty, as the development of improvement strategies is still a new process for a number of educational institutions, which was part of the accreditation process, and VET institutions do not have the relevant experience. In some cases, it is methodologically impossible to fully implement the development of strategies.
- Lack of motivation of employers, which reduces the effectiveness of external engagement.
- Difficulty in attracting sponsors, which is due to limited access to external financial sources.

Integration of digital capabilities and skills into VET programs

In the digital age, the effectiveness of education is not limited to subject knowledge alone. Today, the development of digital skills is very important for students, including the use of technological tools, data analysis, digital communication, and media literacy. These skills are necessary not only for learning, but also for further professional advancement. For this reason, it is important to assess the extent to which educational programs contribute to the formation of students' digital skills. The survey results show the following picture:

Figure 7. Development of digital competences in educational programs



The most common answer, “partially” (46.55%), indicates that digital elements are indeed being used in educational institutions, but at this stage their introduction is not yet complete and systematic. “Sufficient” integration was noted by 36.21%, which suggests that educational mechanisms that include a technological component have already been formed in a number of institutions. At the same time, only 6.90% of respondents chose “fully integrated”, which indicates that digital transformation has not yet reached its full implementation stage. It is also significant that 10.34% (total of “not integrated at all” and “to a limited extent” answers) believe that the digital component is almost absent in educational processes. These indicators generally point to the need for the integration of digital elements in the education system and its continuous development.

In an attempt to understand what are the main obstacles that hinder the use of digital technologies in VET institutions, the results of the analysis have yielded the following conclusions:

1. Shortage of material and technical resources

One of the most common reasons is the insufficient number or quality computers and related equipment, as well as the lack of digital resources. This circumstance significantly limits students' opportunities to apply and develop digital skills in the educational process. In addition, the infrastructure available in VET institutions does not always meet modern technological requirements.

2. Financial constraints

A significant portion of the responses point to the lack of financial and material resources as the main obstacle. This includes not only technical support, but also human resource development, for example, difficulties in attracting highly qualified specialists due to uncompetitive salaries.

3. Lack of capacity

It is also noted that lecturers have not received sufficient training in the use of digital tools. This circumstance hinders the effective and targeted use of technological solutions in the teaching process.

4. Features of educational programs

The limited inclusion of digital components is also justified by the content of state educational standards or programs. Some responses indicate that digitalization depends on a specific program or field, and not all educational areas require deep technological integration. Some of the responses mention that some professional fields, particularly the fields of art and music, do not require in-depth mastery of digital tools.

Recommendations for improving the accreditation and self-assessment process

Referring to the further improvement of the accreditation and self-analysis processes, the respondents presented their suggestions for increasing the efficiency of the processes.

Table 6. Recommendations for improvement in the field of accreditation and self-assessment

Improvement Directions	Percentage/%
Training and capacity building	32.1%
Exchange of experience and consultation	19.2%
Development of institutional accreditation criteria according to sectorial specifics arts, medicine, etc.	10.3%
Clarification of the methodology for conducting self-analysis and review of criteria	9.0%
External stakeholder engagement	7.7%
Localization and cooperation of international experience	7.7%
Improvement of the material and technical base	7.7%
Technological solutions and tools	6.4%

According to the analysis, the most frequently recommended direction concerns training and capacity building for VET staff (32.1%). This highlights the fact that the effective implementation of the process largely depends on the capabilities, knowledge of the processes, and methodological mastery of the individuals involved. Institutions need both local and centralized training, which should include both theoretical and practical components.

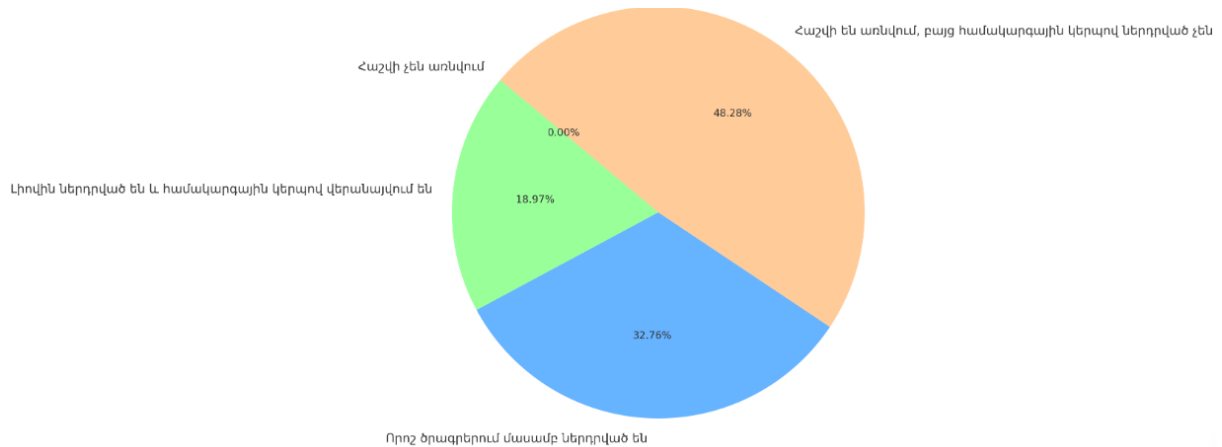
Exchange of experience and consultation (19.2%) are considered the most important factor, aimed at developing a common approach, disseminating best practices, and clarifying methodologies. The involvement of experts and ANQA representatives in working with institutions, in the formats of consultations and visits, is particularly important.

At the same time, a number of systemic issues are being raised. Some respondents emphasized the need to review the current standards (10.3%), taking into account the sectorial characteristics of institutions - medicine, art, etc. This implies the application of a differentiated approach to requirements at the state level and methodological clarification. Some responses also raised the need to clarify the methodology for interpreting standards (9%). The process of self-analysis is often perceived as complex and incompletely defined, especially for institutions operating in specialized fields. In this context, both the availability of methodological guidelines and the development of skills in their application are important. In addition, proposals were recorded aimed at expanding the involvement of external stakeholders (7.7%), localizing international experience and promoting cooperation (7.7%), as well as improving the logistical base and technological tools (6.4%).

Developing students' green, analytical and critical thinking in VET programs

Under the conditions of real-world ecological, economic and social challenges, the role of education in the promotion of sustainable development is becoming more and more important. Educational institutions have a key role in the process of forming students' "green" mindset, responsible consumption, and environmental awareness. In that context, it is especially important to integrate the components of green skills in educational programs, such as the wise use of resources, waste management and a responsible attitude towards the environment. And to the question of the extent to which components aimed at responsible use of resources, waste reduction or improving the efficiency of professional activity are implemented in MKY educational programs, we present the following results:.

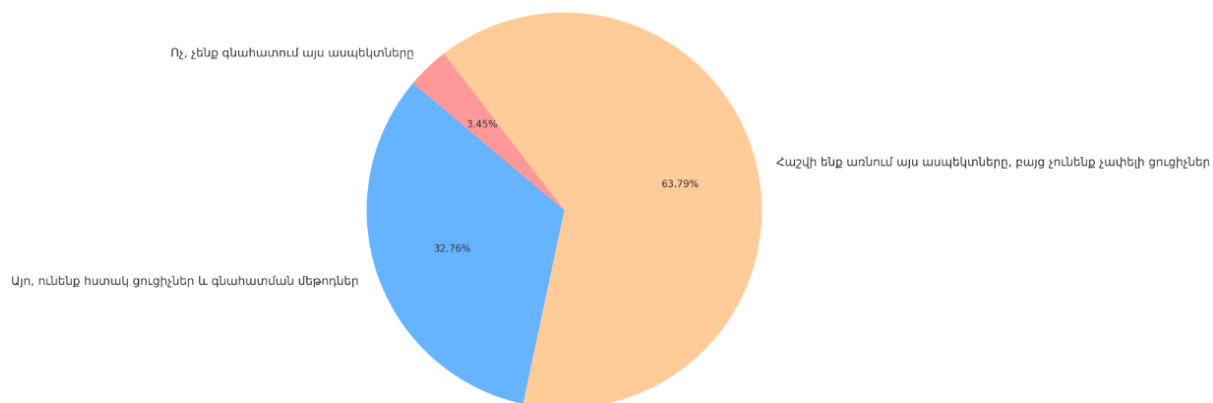
Figure 8. Integration of «Kanač» skills in educational programs



The data analysis shows that 48.28% of the respondents state that these directions are "calculated, but not systematically implemented", which speaks of the lack of methodological tools and political clarity for the implementation of "green skills". 32.76% of participants believe that these components are partially integrated in some programs, which may indicate that there are experiments in individual areas, but not full implementation. Only 18.97% indicated that these principles are fully implemented and are reviewed systematically. A positive trend can be seen in the fact that no one mentioned that these components are "not taken into account," which indicates an increase in general awareness.

The development of students' analytical critical thinking is also important in educational programs, which is also emphasized by the fifth requirement of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Armenia. And when asked to what extent VET institutions value the development of these abilities, the following picture emerges:

Figure 9 The importance of developing analytical and critical thinking skills in students



Based on the results obtained, it can be noted that the majority of respondents recognize the importance of critical thinking, digital skills, and sustainability components. However, they have not yet been systematically integrated into the CSPs, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the participants state that these aspects are only taken into account, but do not have clear assessment methods. Only a limited number of respondents indicated that they have clear indicators or systematic review mechanisms. A positive trend is that almost no one indicated that these elements were missing, indicating general acceptance.

Thus, it can be concluded that although there is an awareness of the need to develop digital, green and analytical skills in educational institutions, their full, systematic and measurable integration is still ahead. This reveals the need to develop strategic, methodological and institutional approaches to modernize educational programs.

CONCLUSIONS

Generalizing the research results, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The institutional accreditation process in VET institutions in the Republic of Armenia is implemented in a systematic manner, involving quality managers, professional groups and external stakeholders. The main role is given to data collection, analysis and stakeholder engagement. Most institutions have effectively allocated roles and responsibilities, but in some cases there is still room for improvement. Overall, the process is assessed as effective.

2. The results of self-analysis are widely used in VET institutions in the development and implementation of improvement strategies. This process has led to the modernization of educational programs, the revision of management and strategic plans, the improvement of the logistical base and document circulation, the expansion of international cooperation, the organization of trainings, and the development of a culture of quality assurance. The results indicate that self-evaluation has become an effective tool for the continuous improvement and sustainable development of institutions.

3. Although VET institutions generally recognize the importance of digital and green skills, their integration today is still unsystematic and partial. In this direction, there are simultaneously structural, capacity development, and resource barriers, including limitations in the logistical base, lack of training for teaching staff, methodological ambiguity, and limited training opportunities. Therefore, the full and effective introduction of digital and sustainability skills into the VET system requires a comprehensive and systemic approach, including programmatic reviews and comprehensive training initiatives.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

1. **VET** – Vocational Education and Training
2. **VEP** – Professional Education Program
3. **SWOT** – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
4. **ANQA** – National Center for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education