

Proposal on the procedure and methodology for conducting thematic analysis

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The experts acknowledge the research that has been conducted so far and the publications made by NCEQE. The individual departments exchanged several ideas for thematic analyses with the experts and the experts are convinced that the potential for thematic analyses is substantial. The following is the proposal of Twinning experts on the procedure and methodology for conducting thematic analysis to be discussed during the mission and amended according to the needs and strategic objectives of the agency.

1. General

According to ENQA occasional report (2020) the approaches to thematic analysis include some or all elements listed below:

- systematic use of quality assurance reports for analysis;
- thematic reports on specific topics;
- additional gathering of information (via internal or external projects and possibly involving other parties such as other national institutions or bodies).

Findings from thematic analyses can contribute to reflection and improvement of policies and processes, e.g report on Accreditation of Master's Study Programmes in Law in the Republic of Moldova composed by EKKA.

2. Procedure of thematic analysis in NCEQE

Following, the procedure of thematic analysis in NCEQE is described (see also picture 1).

2.1. Conception: Agreeing on the main principles of thematic analysis in NCEQE

Before conducting any thematic analysis in NCEQE, it is important to agree on:

- what kind of thematic analysis NCEQE is conducting during a certain period of time (e.g. long-term and short-term planning of thematic analysis in all education sectors);
- how does the process look like - how are the topics of the analysis agreed and who is involved in the process.

2.2. Annual planning in departments (1): determination and justification of the need for the analysis

There are multiple options from what the need for the analysis may emerge. It might be a proposal from the ministry, feedback from stakeholders, discussions in the council or internal needs for development. In any of these cases, it is important to determine and justify, where does the need for the analysis come from and why it is important to conduct such analysis. What is the expected outcome of the analysis?

Each department should gather the needs together and plan the analysis/analyses in long or short-term.

- It is valuable to compile regular summaries of evaluations, assessments, accreditations or authorization results; also feedback for/of the experts; about the evaluation procedure by stakeholders. These summaries are valuable in determining

the gaps in the procedures, experts work, NCEQE work, assessment criteria etc and defining the topics and reasons why to do the thematic analysis.

- NCEQE and its departments should prioritize 3 topics and research questions for those topics which each department considers essential to be analyzed. Based on this list, the decision for the thematic analysis should be taken according to the decision-making process of the agency.
- It might be valuable to aim at conducting a joint analysis of all departments that address a common research question, such as “How to assess the performance of experts?”
- It is valuable to compile a one-page plan for the thematic analysis that includes all the analysis steps. This helps to get the holistic view of the planned analysis and helps to ensure the coherence of the analysis. The one-page plan could also be helpful in deciding what topic to choose for the analysis with the heads of the department. This plan should include the time-plan for the thematic analysis.

2.3. *Annual planning in departments (2): the resources needed for conducting the analysis are defined*

NCEQE should set itself realistic goals for conducting thematic analyses in light of the capacities in each department. The department should evaluate its human, time and financial resources for conducting the analysis.

NCEQE should use synergies and exchange between the departments in making use of available expertise of individual staff members. When needed, enabling (regular) trainings for staff members.

The experts recommend to avoid outsourcing tasks related to a thematic analysis as the benefit for the agency diminishes.

The frequency and the length of analyses in itself is not an indicator for quality.

2.4. *The director/ the coordinating council decides the topic of the analysis*

Based on the proposed topics, their needs and justification the director/the coordinating council decides the topic of the analysis.

2.5. *The department head appoints persons responsible for conducting thematic analysis*

There should be one person responsible for the thematic analysis and a team that helps with the analysis.

The agency/department needs to provide support structure for staff conducting the analysis. Support structure for conducting a thematic analysis could be:

- At the agreed period of time reducing the workload of the primary author and/or the team in order to conduct the analysis;
- Allocating a mentor and/or guide who is available to the author and who can answer strategic questions. It is recommendable to seek support from departments which have already carried out an analysis and thus provide mentoring to other department;
- Providing a template for the structure as a reference which includes guiding questions for designing and writing an analysis;

2.6. *The appointed team/person conducts the thematic analysis and prepares the report*

The appointed person/team conducts the thematic analysis on the agreed topic and based on the methodology agreed within the agency.

2.7. *The report will be discussed and revised in the department*

The people in the department give feedback to the report and revisions will be made by the person/team responsible for the analysis.

2.8. *The report will be discussed and revised in the agency*

The person/team presents the results of the thematic analysis at the agency and the results of the analysis will be discussed, when necessary changes in the report will be made according to the feedback.

2.9. *Approval of the report by the director/coordinating council.*

2.10. *Dissemination of the results among the stakeholders*

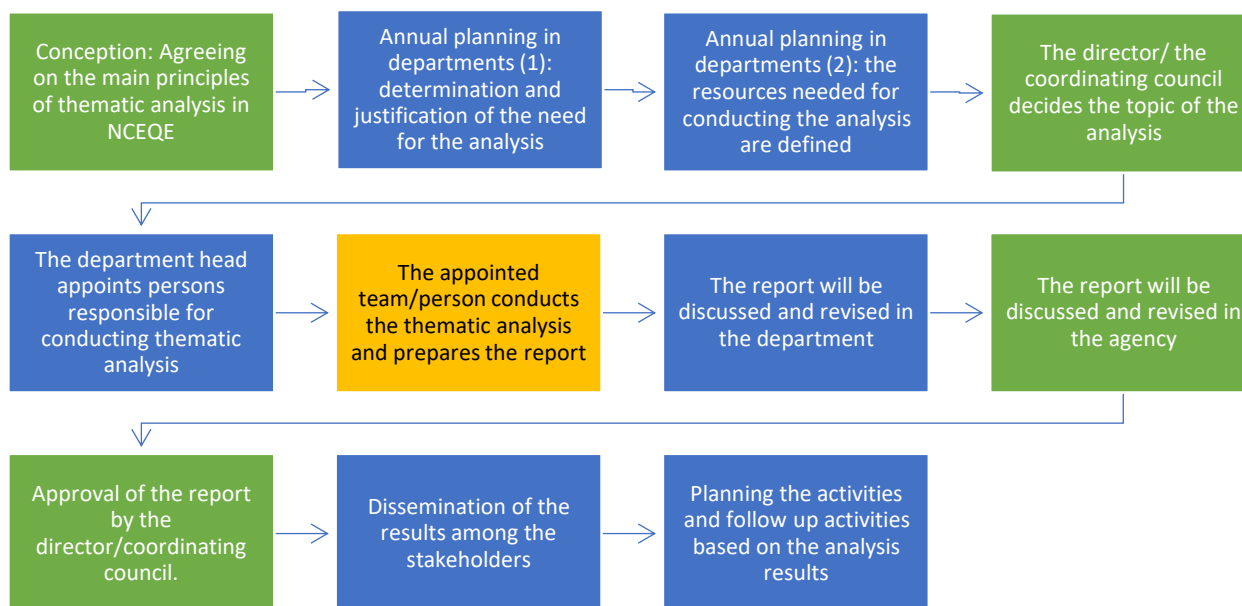
Use the results of the analysis to contribute to the further development of QA procedures by disseminating the analysis.

Results of thematic analyses should be shared within the agency and with stakeholders. In addition to publishing the analysis on the website, other channels can be used:

- NCEQE could use its annual conference to present and discuss results of its analyses with stakeholders.
- Newsletters of educational or other networks are useful.
- Results of an analysis may also be used to contribute to national or international conferences.
- NCEQE might also think about publishing analyses in English to widen the spectrum of recipients. This would also raise the visibility of the agency.
- Seminars for the stakeholders to discuss the results of the analysis have proven to be valuable.

2.11. *Planning the activities and follow up activities based on the analysis results*

After the dissemination of the analysis results, follow-up activities of the analysis should be agreed on and carried out.



Picture 1. Procedure of thematic analysis in NCEQE

3. Methodology for conducting a thematic analysis for the team/responsible person

Depending on the type of the thematic analysis the methodology for the analysis may vary. Here an example of thematic analysis methodology on specific topic is described through 5 activities (see picture 2):

3.1. *Describe the reason for the analysis*

Describe the problem and the grounds for the choice of the theme. Why it is relevant to conduct the analysis on the proposed topic? Give evidence why the topic is relevant - use previous research or analysis of the assessments on the chosen topic. What do previous research or analysis of the assessment results or feedback of stakeholders tell you? What problems or gaps the analysis will help to solve? To whom this analysis will be valuable for?

3.2. *Phrase the theme and research questions*

Choose a research question and topic that is relevant for the stakeholders, including the agency itself.

- Phrase the research question as precisely and focused as possible. The research questions should have a clear focus and must be specific enough to be well covered. Research questions should not be answerable with a simple “yes” or “no” or by easily found facts. They should instead require both research and analysis on the part of the writer. They often begin with “How” or “Why” or “What”.

When phrasing the research question, bear in mind the scope of the research and the resources available. Especially when conducting a thematic analysis for the first time, NCEQE should try to keep the scope of the analysis limited so that the finalization of the

analysis is manageable and realistic. The length of an analysis is not an indicator for quality.

- Consider your database when phrasing the research question. The data to be used is crucial for the feasibility of conducting a thematic analysis.
- In the long-run, when setting up or modifying documentation structures and internal databases NCEQE should consider that the data should be easily traceable and thus be available for analysis.

3.3. Define the database and outline the methodology

The database for the analysis should be clearly defined, i.e. the kind of data used. It should be outlined in the analysis. Ideally, data is available which can be analyzed for a thematic analysis. However, quite frequently, the data has to be modified or data has to be collected specifically for the analysis. If data is modified, this should be described in the analysis. When needed, new data should be collected.

Choose a methodology for the analysis of the database. Part of the analysis is the transparent outline of the methodology of the data analysis, e.g. statistical calculations or qualitative evaluations.

The data and methodology used should be relevant in responding the research question.

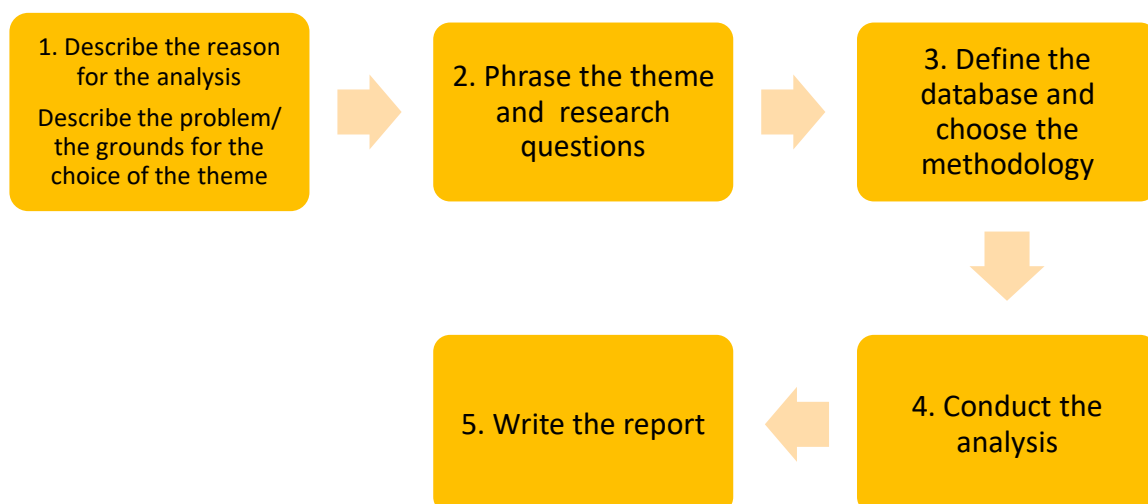
3.4. Conduct the analysis

Conduct the analysis and follow the research questions.

3.5. Write the report of the analysis

Agree on the structure of the analysis within your research team. Write the analysis based on the agreed structure. While writing the report bear in mind who will be the reader of this analysis and ensure the coherence of different parts of the report.

A good report is practical, clear worded and responds to the targeted problem.



Picture 2. Main activities of thematic analysis