An exploration of the effects of Internal Quality Assurance Practices on Academic Work: A Case of Two Universities in Uganda

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Abstract: *This paper examined the extent to which internal quality assurance (IQA) practices are contributing to the enhancement of academic work. The study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods design. Data was collected using survey questionnaires and key informant interviews from a total of 321 respondents selected using stratified random sampling from two universities. The principle of reciprocal determinism underpinned the conceptualization of the research variables, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The Pearson regression analysis of the data showed that IQA practices could enhance teaching and learning by 12.6% and research by about 15.9%. However, a one-sample difference in the mean t-test confirmed the null hypothesis that the current IQA practices have no significant effect on university-community engagement. We, therefore, concluded that IQA practices have provided an operational framework that facilitates the academic staff to teach and do research while community engagement and other areas of university operations receive little attention. The more IQA practices reciprocate with the working lives of academic staff, the more such practices are seen to enhance academic processes. Therefore, universities need to widen the scope of the current IQA practices in practical terms through inter-departmental cooperation towards a holistic quality agenda.*

Keywords: *IQA practices, Academic staff, Reciprocal determinism, Academic work, Contribution*

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1. Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) measures have been part of the higher education (HE) system since the medieval era, evolving into explicit practices in the mid-19th century due to various changes in the field (Niyonzima, 2019; Swanzy, 2016; p. 9; Marvil, 2013, p. 8). These changes include the massification of HE, private HE, market models, cross-border HE, changes in the labor market, reduced public funding, advancements in communication technologies,

increased demand for transparency and accountability, and the implementation of New Public Management principles. In Uganda, like elsewhere in the world, QA emerged due to global and socioeconomic forces and the recognition of declining HE quality (Ssentamu et al., 2014). The concept of QA gained popularity in the 20th century, with HEIs in the USA and Europe implementing explicit QA models, initially focusing on accreditation, audit, and assessment. By the beginning of the 21st century, QA practices had spread worldwide, including in Uganda (Altbach,

Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). The worldwide spread of QA is characterized by an explosion of new agencies to evaluate and monitor HE quality. In 2001, Uganda instituted the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) as the national Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Universities in Uganda cooperated with the NCHE to develop and implement their own internal quality assurance (IQA) practices. Institutional IQA practices are intentional activities and procedures designed to guarantee the quality of education offered by an institution (Martin, 2018; Andleeb & Jusoh, 2020; Pham et al., 2022).

1.1 Problem statement

Whereas the Government of Uganda, through the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), is responsible for assuring the quality of university education, it is the universities themselves, particularly the academic staff and students, who can guarantee quality through the development and implementation of IQA practices (IUCEA, 2010, p. 6; NCHE, 2014). The purpose of IQA practices is to ensure quality teaching, assessment, research, and community engagement (Matovu, 2017). Therefore, universities in Uganda have developed and implemented IQA practices in a bid to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, research, and scholarship. However, a dearth of knowledge exists about the effectiveness of such IQA practices on the triple missions of universities in Uganda. Whereas there are studies on how university academic staff have implemented IQA practices, the extant studies are still limited in the Ugandan context. Studies tended to focus on stakeholders, particularly students and employers, rather than the contribution of IQA practices to academic work (Nabaho et al., 2017). Apparently, even though IQA practices are being implemented in universities, reports of poor pedagogic skills among teachers, ill-prepared graduates, missed and shortened lectures, and low research output still exist (Malunda & Atwebembeire, 2019, p. 3; Atwebembeire et al., 2018, p. 72). This raises doubt about the effectiveness of the current IQA practices being implemented in universities and the overall preparedness of university graduates for life after school (Bunoti, 2012; Malunda & Atwebembeire, 2019; Atwebembeire et al., 2018). Currently, we know little about the extent to which the implementation of IQA practices in universities is enhancing academic work. Given that the mode of implementing IQA practices appears to be lacking a comprehensive methodology that can guarantee the successful implementation of such practices by the academic staff to enhance quality (Jarvis, 2014; Leiber et al., 2015; Matovu, 2017) and the fact that the general subject of quality assurance in universities is still under-researched and under-theorized (Martin, 2018, 26; Nabaho et al., 2016, p. 41; Krause, 2012, p. 285), it is difficult to ascertain whether the implementation of IQA practices in universities is enhancing academic work. This called for an empirical investigation to establish the extent to which IQA practices contribute to the enhancement of academic work. Hence, the study tested the following hypotheses:

1. Null hypothesis 1: There is no significant effect of the current IQA practices on teaching and learning in universities.

2. Null hypothesis 2: There is no significant effect of the current IQA practices on research and publication in universities.

3. Null hypothesis 3: There is no significant effect of the current IQA practices on university-community engagement.

2. Literature review

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which IQA practices contribute to academic work. Academic work, as used in this research, refers to the three core functions of a university. First, universities implement their curricula through teaching and learning activities where students are tutored in different disciplines. This is a way of disseminating desired knowledge, skills, and values. Secondly, universities conduct research in pursuit of new knowledge or inventions. The results of university research activities are normally published through conferences, public lectures, exhibitions, and journals. Thirdly, modern universities are involved in community engagement, which is a collaborative interaction deemed mutually beneficial to both the university and the people of the community where the university is located or any other interest group (Short, 2002; Healey, Jenkins, Lea, 2014; Lorenzo & Francesca, 2020; Kesten, 2021). However, a lot more is expected from the university academic staff than teaching, research, and community engagements. As Kyvik (2015) explained, the role of a university academic staff is "the sum of formal regulations as well as informal norms and expectations on the holder of the position from the state, the institution, colleagues, students, and society at large". This then means that the scope of academic work extends beyond the traditional core functions of teaching, research, and community engagement to include administration and supervision of such work within the university context. Academic work is largely the preoccupation of the academic staff. As defined by the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act [UOTI Act (2001)], Section (51), Subsection (2), university academic staff includes all staff recruited for purposes of teaching, conducting research, and any other person as defined by the University Council to be an academic staff. When an academic staff member becomes an administrator in an academic institution, administration becomes an academic work (Hsu, 2017). Furthermore, Usher (2024) asserts that academics also secure funding by successfully obtaining

grants and other external sources of funding, similar to senior administrators who act as intermediaries between academia and the outside world.

2.1 The conceptual framework

This paper examined the extent to which the implementation of IQA practices has contributed to the academic work at the case universities. The paper conceptualizes the implementation of IQA practices as an independent variable (IV), which can determine the extent of enhancement of academic work as the dependent variable (DV). The implementation of IQA practices, like any other public policy, is a subject of both intrinsic and extrinsic human behaviors. This is because human behavior toward something is directly dependent on perceptions. Perception provides a way of understanding the environment, and understanding is the means by which people act (Dhiman, 2023; Dijksterhuis & John, 2001; Bandura, 1986). That notwithstanding, Human perception is influenced by past experiences, attentional capacity, emotional state, and evolutionary biases (Alsabbagh, 2024). These are external factors.
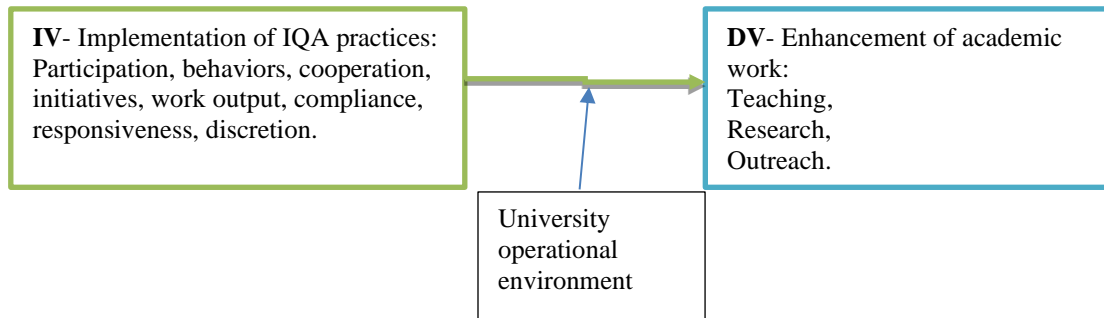

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing interrelationships among university environment, , implementation of IQA practice and academic work; adapted from Bandura (1986)

2.2 The theoretical basis of human behavior during policy implementation

The study was underpinned by the principles of triadic reciprocal determinism. Triadic reciprocal determinism is a human behavior model that has its roots in the social cognitive theory of human behavior (Bandura, 1986). Reciprocal determinism is a theory by psychologist Albert Bandura that suggests a person's behavior is influenced by individual factors and the environment (Cherry & Lustik, 2023). Reciprocal determinism is a central concept in Bandura's social learning theory, which consists of three factors: the individual, their environment, and the behavior itself. Bandura's theory shifts from a behavioural perspective to a social-cognitive approach, emphasizing the bidirectional relationship between individuals, their behaviors, and the environment. The theory suggests that individuals can influence their situation and circumstances through their choices and behaviours (Cherry & Lustik, 2023). This means human behaviors are determined by individuals' cognitive processes as well as environmental stimuli. That is, human behaviors are largely the consequences of instinctive characters and environmental influences. The principle of reciprocal determinism provides that human beings will behave positively toward external factors that they perceive positively. This is because perception creates expectation, and as such, perception became a precursor to human behavior.

Beer & Nohria's (2000) study highlights the importance of human factors in the success or failure of new policies in organizations. They emphasize the cognitive, affective, and physical behavioral patterns of individuals in organizations, which influence their attitudes and perceptions toward change processes (Deaconu, Rasca & Manolescu, 2010; Khaw et al., 2022; Dhiman, 2023). The unconditional participation and goodwill of academic staff are very important for the successful implementation of IQA practices in universities. The university environment, including physical surroundings, facilities, work relations, and policies governing academic staff, plays an important role in determining the successful implementation of IQA practices. The environment can either enable or inhibit behavior modification, leading to either favoring or opposing policy responses from the implementers.

Human behavior-control mechanisms are influenced by psychological environments, including imposed, selected, and constructed environments. In the context of IQA practices, academic staff may find leeway in dealing with these environments by developing conscious or subconscious coping strategies (Osman, 2010 ; Erasmus, 2014; Yuan,et al., 2022; Chang, et al., 2024). This leeway is referred to as the discretion and autonomy of street-level bureaucrats, who have the freedom to decide the quantity and quality of service during policy implementation. This can be seen as the freedom to decide what is implemented, how it is implemented, and making choices among possible alternatives within the policy framework. The net effect of

these discretions and autonomy is the quality of the policy output and its impact. In this study, street-level bureaucrats are university academic staff directly involved in the implementation of IQA practices, highlighting the importance of these behaviors in shaping the quality of policy output and its impact.

2.3 The contribution of IQA practices to academic work

Sullivan's (2017) research found that the implementation of internal quality assurance procedures in universities resulted in a shift towards a more adaptable and responsive culture. Recent research has substantiated that engaging in IQA (Internal Quality Assurance) practice enhances the ability of graduates to enhance the quality of their work and increases their chances of being employed (Sesay & Fofanah, 2023). Universities tend to shifted their priorities towards achieving quality assurance (QA) criteria rather than prioritizing their fundamental academic functions (Hsu, 2017).Hsu (2017, p. 228) found that:

"In contrast to the positive perspectives of QA held by senior academics at the managerial level, many academic staff tended to report that the requirements of QA, such as the extra paperwork to quantify teaching and learning, as well as publishing specific publications in a science database (SSCI and SCI), do not improve their academic work."

There are divergent views on whether IQA practices enhance the quality of academic work or serve the ritual of accountability. Efforts to make universities more efficient and cost-effective tend to compromise quality improvement. Both Groen (2017) and Harvey (1998) have independently argued that, while accountability can lead to improvement in teaching and learning, it may damage learning by diverting institutions' attention away from improving learning to compliance. The institution's focus shifts from improving teaching to improving performance on indicators that are visible to external stakeholders.

Cardoso et al. (2013) note that while academic staff consider the impact of IQA on academic work moderately positive, administrators think the impact of IQA practices on academic work is fully positive. The same state of indecisiveness about the effect of IQA practices on teaching and learning, research, and community engagement has been reported by Njie et al. (2017), who found that university quality managers believe that QA is improving quality, and the "majority of academic staff agree that attempts are being made but with either the wrong strategies or insufficient efforts." Levi, Stensaker, and Harvey (2015) say that the IQA practices don't seem to

have a more complete method that can produce empirically reliable knowledge about how to manage university quality. These observations support their claim. However, both academic and administrative staff in universities do agree that the effect of IQA practices on teaching and learning seems more positive as compared to research and innovation (Stensaker et al., 2011; Ewell, 2010).

One of the justifications for the institutionalization of QA in universities was the declining public funding of universities (Swanzy, 2016; p. 9). However, several authors have acknowledged the huge costs that come with implementing QA practices (Kis, 2005; HEFCE, 2005; Lemaitre et al., 2011). At universities, QA has both direct and indirect costs. Academic staff perceive QA costs as a burden and a diversion of resources from academic work (Cardoso et al. 2013). Similarly, Harvey (1998) observed that academic staff associate QA costs with bureaucratic reporting and compliance, which do not align with the true essence of academic work. Thus, academic staff often perceive QA as a hindrance to their academic work. For example, in their 2016 study of the implementation of IQA practices in Portuguese universities, Tavares, Sin, Videira, and Amaral (2016) found that IQA practices have only led to awareness about quality issues in teaching and learning but no substantive practical improvements in teaching and learning. This view supports Ewell's (2010) findings that, after 20 years of the QA movement in the USA, there is evidence that QA is now more intentional and focused on teaching and learning, but evidence of student learning due to QA remains elusive.

According to Pushpakumara et al. (2023), a systematic review of the literature on the implementation of internal quality assurance practices in higher education found that there is need for a reliable model for developing an information system that can ensure effective quality assurance. In universities, QA practices can be costly and time-consuming, affecting highly skilled individuals and academic staff. This can lead to psychological unrest and mistrust, stealing time from teaching and research duties. Travers (2007) argues that bureaucratic quality assurance processes can lead to a culture of compliance without creativity, causing universities to operate at the same threshold. Quality assurance (QA) is a new socially constructed norm in higher education, focusing on benchmarking, accountability, and customer service. Institutions at national levels share these values, leading universities to adhere to the same QA norms. This may prevent universities from being centers of excellence and innovation guided by their respective missions.

Generally, the existing literature suggests that more research is still needed to deepen the understanding of the impact, costs, effectiveness, and human factors involved in

the implementation of IQA practices in higher education institutions.

3. Methodology

The study utilized a multi-case mixed method design to evaluate the effectiveness of Quality Assurance (QA) practices in enhancing academic work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin., 2018).). The research involved quantitative data collected from academic staff through questionnaires, and qualitative data from quality assurance officers and academic registrars through key informant interviews. The selected universities, one public and one private, had been in existence for at least ten years and had been implementing IQA practices for at least five academic years. The universities had mature IQA systems and a good representation of all academic disciplines. The sample size of 384 from a population of 2,532 was estimated using the Confident Interval method, with a proportionate sample size of 248 for university U1 and 136 for university U2. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, presented, and analyzed concurrently. The analysis was based on mean scores of a 5-point Likert scale, Pearson correlation, and R-square regression analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The contribution of IQA practices to academic work

The study assessed the contribution of IQA practices to academic work in universities using a 5-point Likert scale. The mean score was 3.0, with values below 3.0 indicating low contribution, and values above 3.0 indicating significant contributions. An average score of 3.0 signified a moderate contribution, while a score of 5 indicated a very high contribution. The responses from the staff are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Academic staff rating on the contribution of IQA practices on academic work.

Dimensions of academic work	N	mean	Std. Deviation	skewness
1. Improved university profile and ranking	311	3.45	1.206	-.362
2. This resulted in Improved Teaching and Learning	314	3.44	1.290	-.630
3. Improved assessment of the learning process	313	3.42	1.133	-.252
4. Increased level of achievement for the university mission	308	3.35	1.142	-.198
5. Increased Research and Publication	312	3.33	1.104	-.278
6. Enhanced the level of personal academic profile	310	3.26	1.206	-.173
7. Increased frequency of service delivery to the community	305	3.02	1.043	-.064
8. Increased quality of service delivery to the community	307	2.99	1.111	-.059

The study reveals that IQA practices significantly contribute to academic work, with the highest score of 3.45 for improving university profile and ranking. The next highest score was 3.44 for teaching and learning improvement and 3.42 for assessment of the learning process. These confirm that IQA practices do enhance university rankings and teaching in universities. The research, publication, and achievement of university missions were moderately rated with mean scores of 3.33 and 3.35, above the mean score of 3.0, indicating that IQA practices contribute to these aspects. The data also indicates that the frequency and quality of service to the community are the least improved aspect of academic work, with mean scores of 3.02 and 2.99 respectively. The quality of service delivery to the community is below average, suggesting that current IQA practices do not significantly enhance university-community engagement. Similarly, the impact of IQA practices on the personal profiles of academic staff is low, with a mean of 3.26. These statistics corroborate well with data from key informants in Table 2.

Table 2: Perceived contribution of IQA practices to academic work by ARs and QAOs

Dimension of Academic work	QA1	AR1	QA2	AR2
Teaching and learning	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Research and publication	Somehow positive	Negative, the improvement is due to the research unit, not QA	Seemed not decided	Neither, Nor
Community engagement	No impact	Not much	Outreach is the work of another department. Not the QA office.	No Impact

Key informants agree that IQA practices enhance teaching and learning but not community engagement. They are divided on the contribution to research and publication. QA2 suggests the concept of QA needs broadening.

"QA is a wide thing; so far, we are limited to teaching and learning. Areas not touched by IQA: student feeding, estate, health and sanitation, hostels, but the QA department is always called upon whenever there is a problem.

The study reveals that there are areas where IQA practices are not fully implemented or have not been designed, with current practices primarily focusing on bringing students into universities and tutoring them in various curricula. All the key informants describe IQA activities in their universities, starting with good recruitment processes for staff and students and enforcement of good teaching and learning practices, QA1 describing best research practices.

"QA started biting; all publications have to first pass the QA office. Staff started embracing QA to publish because the QA office organizes research funds, collects inventory of research and publications, organizes research workshops, and supports staff with anti-plagiarism testing." QA1 stated.

The quality assurance office is allegedly carrying out tasks that are the responsibility of the academic registrar, according to the interviewees AR1 and AR2. As AR1 explained,

"AR's office gives course outlines, receives feedback from students, schedules examinations and lectures organizes and supervises internship programs, and conducts exam moderations and invigilation."

Therefore, the academic registrar's office organizes workshops, seminars, and academic-related meetings because of this AR1 and AR2 suggest that QA offices handle policy interpretation, while the academic registrar's office handles academic work.

"QA is supposed to provide strategic oversight and interpret policy for us (AR's office). But we don't see it." AR1 stated.

While AR2 notes that:

"QA is more of AR work; it should be integrated into the AR department... or maybe to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of QA."

The organizational structure of university offices can influence the contribution of IQA practices to academic work. The relationship between the academic registrar's office and the quality assurance office can either support or hinder the effectiveness of IQA practices. Both offices, though not answerable to each other, were answerable to the same higher authority and performed similar activities independently.

4.2.0 Measuring the Degree of association between the IQA practices and academic work

This research used a t-test to examine the association between IQA practices (IV) and academic work (DV) and practices' impact using Pearson correlation and R-squire tests.

Table 3: One-Sample t-Test

Perceived contribution of IQA policy	Test Value = 3.0 (hypothetical mean based on 5 point Likert scale)						
	T	df	Sample mean	P value. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						L[1]	U[2]
1. Improved university profile and ranking	6.628	310	3.453	.000	.453	.32	.59
2. This resulted in Improved Teaching and Learning	5.991	313	3.426	.000	.436	.29	.58
3. Improved assessment of the learning process	6.635	312	3.425	.000	.425	.30	.55
4. Increased level of achievement for the university mission	5.438	307	3.354	.000	.354	.23	.48
5. Increased Research and Publication	5.282	311	3.330	.000	.330	.21	.45
6. Enhanced the level of personal academic profile	3.768	309	3.258	.000	.258	.12	.39
7. Increased frequency of service delivery to the community	.384	304	3.023	.701	.023	-.09	.14
8. Increased quality of service delivery to the community	-.103	306	2.993	.918	-.007	-.13	.12

The degree of association was measured using the adjusted Pearson R-square values. A one-sample t-test was performed on each response to test if there was a significant difference between the hypothetical mean of 3.0 and the sample means; result in Table 3. Based on the data in Table 3 and the qualitative data, the study found that current IQA practices do affect teaching and learning, research, and publication in universities, but not community engagement. For community engagement, the mean differences were close to zero, indicating no significant effect. The study then tested the nature and extent of IQA

4.4 The Pearson correlation between the IQA practices and teaching and learning

The Pearson correlation has been used to test for association between continuous monitoring of students' performance, use of peer evaluation and self-evaluations, regular curriculum reviews, students' evaluation of academic staff, and the teaching and learning process. The results are summarized in table 4.

Table 4: Summary correlations between improved teaching and learning and selected IQA practices

Independent variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	p-vale Sig. (2-tailed)
Continuous Monitoring of Students' Performance	0.322	0.104	0.101	0.000
Use of Self-Evaluation	0.231	0.053	0.050	0.000
Use of Peer-Evaluation	0.218	0.048	0.045	0.000
Regular Curriculum Reviews	0.082	0.007	0.004	0.150
Student evaluation of academic staff	0.175	0.0031	0.028	0.001

Table 4 above gives a Pearson correlation coefficient R = 0.322, implying a weak positive association between continuous monitoring of student's performance and the teaching and learning process. A p-value of 0.000 was obtained, which is less than the p-value of 0.01 at a 99% confidence interval. This provides further support for the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant

effect of IQA practices on teaching and learning. The adjusted value of R^2= 0.101 in Table 4 of the model summary above means that only 10.1% of the variance in teaching and learning can be attributed to continuous monitoring of students' performance while the other 89.9% is attributable to other factors.

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[1] L = Lower

[2] U = Upper

The Pearson correlation coefficient between the association between the use of self-evaluation and the improvement in teaching and learning; R = 0.231 with a p-value of 0.00 which is less than 0.001 at 99& confidence level. The corresponding adjusted R^2 = 0.050. This implies that when the results of the self-evaluation of staff are implemented, the teaching and learning processes in academic work are likely to improve by about 5.0%. The use of peer-evaluation results was also positively associated with the improvement in the teaching and learning process (R = 0.218, adjusted R^2, = 0,045, p<0.01). Thus taking appropriate action on peer-evaluation results would lead to improvements in academic work by about 4.5%.

The use of results from students' evaluation of staff was also positively associated with the teaching and learning process. Table 4.4, gives R = 0.175 with the adjusted R^2, = 0.028, p =0.001<0.01 (p-values are significant at 95% confidence interval on two-tail test). Therefore, when the results of students' evaluation of staff are acted upon, the teaching and learning processes in academic work are likely to improve by about 2.8%. Regular curriculum reviews on the other hand had a correlation coefficient of R= 0.082 and the adjusted R^2 = 0.004; p=0.000<0.005. Therefore, regular curriculum reviews would by at least 0.4%

The combined effect of all these attributes of the effect of the IQA practices on teaching and learning when analyzed together (pooled mean) show that they could increase the teaching and learning dimension of academic work by 11.0% as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of independent variables when analyzed together on teaching and learning

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.355[a]	.126	.110	1.233	.126	7.921	5	274	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Resulted in increased monitoring of students' performance, led to regular curriculum reviews, Resulted to use of peer-evaluation results improvement, Resulted to use of student evaluation results of staff for improvement, Resulted to use of self-evaluation results for improvement.

4.5 The Pearson correlation between the IQA practices and Research

Data was analyzed to determine the extent to which regular curriculum reviews, monitoring of student progress, students' evaluation of academic staff, and self and peer reviews can lead to improved research and publication. The relationship was tested using the Pearson correlation and the extent of the contribution of IQA practices was measured using the R-square values. These are tabulated in Table 6 which gives the nature and extent of association between the independent variable; the IQA practices in the list and the dependent variable; research and publication.

Table 6: Model Summaries R-square test for research and publication

Independent variable.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Peer review of academic programs	.313	.098	.095	1.048
Self-review of academic programs	.365	.133	.130	1.027
Monitoring of students' performance	.393	.154	.152	1.008
Students' evaluation of staff	.097	.097	.090	1.008
Regular curriculum reviews	.135	.018	.015	1.091

The results in Table 6 show that staff participation in peer reviews was positively correlated with research and publication; R= 0.313. The adjusted R^2= 0.095 means conducting peer reviews of academic programs would improve university research by about 9.5%. Meanwhile, self-reviews also had a positive correlation with research and publication of 0.365 and an adjusted R^2 value of 0.130. This R-square value means conducting academic self-reviews would improve research and publication by about 13.0%. Mentoring of students' performance was also seen to improve the research aspect of academic work by 15.2%; R=0.393 with adjusted R^2 = 0.152.

Regular curriculum reviews were positively associated with the improvement in reach and publication with a correlation coefficient of 0.135 and an adjusted R-square

value of 0.015. Thus, regular curriculum reviews would improve research and publication by at least 1.5%. The data equally show that students' evaluation of academic staff as an IQA practice would improve the research dimension of academic work by at least 9.0%. These percentage improvements generally present relatively low contributions of the tested IQA practices on research and publication. However, when analyzed together, they have a pooled effect of 15.9% contribution to research and publication; as shown in table 7.

Table 7: Combined effect of the independent variable on research and publication

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.417ᵃ	.174	.159	.997	.174	11.437	5	271	.000	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Led to students evaluating staff, resulted in increased monitoring of students' performance, led to regular curriculum reviews, Resulted in use of peer-evaluation results improvement, Resulted in use of self-evaluation results for improvement

Source: Primary data, 2019

These quantitative tests confirm the qualitative information provided by the key informants in Table 7 where all the interviewees (key informants) tend to agree that IQA practices are improving teaching and learning, moderately improving research and publication but with no significant effect on community engagement.

4.6 Summary of the findings

The study examined the contribution of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) practices to academic work in universities. The results showed that IQA practices significantly contribute to teaching and learning, research, and university publication (Sesay & Fofanah, 2023; Njie et al. (2017). The highest-rated aspect was the improvement of university profile and ranking, followed by teaching and learning improvement and assessment of the learning process. However, IQA practices had a limited contribution to community engagement. These results confirm that community engagement should not be mandatory for academic staff and shouldn't be penalized for not getting engaged in it(Lorenzo & Francesca, 2020). The study also found that the implementation of IQA practices varied across different operational sectors in universities largely driven by human factors in policy implementation (Chang, et al., 2024). The cooperation among the offices of academic registrars, university research units, and quality assurance offices was identified as a crucial factor in facilitating the contribution of IQA practices to scholarly work.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study assessed the perceived contribution of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) practices to academic work from the perspectives of teaching staff, academic registrars, and quality assurance officers.

5.1 Conclusion

The results showed that IQA practices can improve teaching and learning, research, and publication, but not much to community engagement.

The observed positive effect of IQA practices on teaching and research could be attributed to policy enforcement mechanisms by university management, or reciprocal behaviours by academic staff towards IQA practices. It could also be attributed to the evolution of IQA practices into a quality assurance culture (Martin, 2018). Internal quality assurance practices are part of university organization policies that come with management controls to ensure compliance from the implementers. Clear guidelines on teaching and research can improve the quality of academic work, such as regulations on lecture attendance, quality controls during recruitment, security of examinations, and online monitoring of lectures. Interviews revealed that IQA practices are largely related to teaching and learning, with some respondents preferring to have research questions answered by the head of the research unit in their university.

The contribution of IQA practices to research output can be explained by the fact that IQA practices have directly provided supportive mechanisms to enhance research and publication. Interviewees AR1 and QA2 attributed the improvement in their respective university rankings to quality assurance practices. The results are supported by earlier studies that indicated the impact of QA on teaching and research is generally positive. If IQA practices can lead to innovations, they are very relevant in universities' research agenda, as research and innovation are what distinguish university education from other levels of education.

The implementation of (IQA) practices in universities can have both positive and negative impacts. The most significant benefit is the improved university image, which can attract local, national, and international recognition. Academic staff often rate improvement in university profiling and innovation as the top contribution of IQA practices to academic work. The presence of the QA directorate also provides a platform to mobilize funding for research activities, which are used by academic staff directly in their research work.

However, the data shows that IQA practices have a negligible contribution to community engagement, which is consistent with earlier studies that have pointed out that IQA practices in universities have a limited contribution to the enhancement of university outreach services. Most universities tag academic promotions largely to research and publications, with community engagement contributing only 5% to the promotion of academic staff. There is little emphasis on community engagement, and there has been no serious effort toward addressing and promoting career development through community engagement activities. This has made the academic staff pay little attention to community engagement compared to research and research.

However, the benefits associated with the implementation of IQA practices are significant, as quality assurance has evolved from being a simple institutional artifact to espoused shared quality values. This research found that academic staff are positive about quality assurance practices, suggesting that quality assurance values are being infused into academia, leading to an institutional quality culture.

The implementation of IQA practices in universities has been recognized as crucial for enhancing teaching, learning, research, and publication. These practices provide an operational framework for academic staff, guiding their actions and balancing the institution's mission and individual goals. However, IQA practices are not fully incorporated into all operational sectors, particularly in areas such as student feeding, security, and health during internship programs.

Similarly, notwithstanding the improvement in teaching, learning, research, and publication, the extent to which IQA practices can enhance academic work in general is highly dependent on the University's administrative structure. The cooperation among the offices of the academic registrars, the university research units, and the quality assurance offices appears to be a prerequisite factor to facilitate the contribution of IQA practices to academic work.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Contribution of IQA practice to students' welfare: Since the quality of student feeding, their security and health can potentially affect the way they: learn, which in turn affects academic quality. It is high time universities expanded the scope of IQA practices to include students' feeding, health, and security. Currently, the management of the quality of these activities in universities is latent and indirect. Clear internal policies on the management of these aspects need to be put in place for both on-campus and for students on field attachments.

2. Contribution of IQA practices to inter-departmental cooperation: The academic work in universities is a core business of three university offices; the academic registrar's office, the research unit, and the quality assurance office. For effective contribution of the IQA practices to academic work, there is a need for a strong good working relationship among these offices. Particularly, the cooperation between the quality assurance office and the office of the academic registrar to improve teaching and learning; and the cooperation between the quality assurance office and the research unit for IQA practices to positively impact reach and publication. Equally important is the cooperation between the QA offices and the offices of public relations. It is recommended that these two offices work together to improve the quality and frequency of university-community engagement. Whereas the current IQA practices appear to be supporting teaching and research, the effect of IQA practices on community engagement seems negligible. Therefore, Universities need to review their modes of university-community engagement within the current IQA policy implementation frameworks.

3. Integration of human factors into IQA practices: It is also known that university IQA practices have to be implemented by academic staff for such practices to be effective. Therefore, based on the principle of reciprocal determinism, the design of IQA practices should provide reciprocal benefits to academic staff. This can be achieved if the IQA practices are developed and implemented through a process of constructive dialogue between academic staff and the university management. A state of mutual benefits between the academic staff and the enhancement of academic work can foster staff commitment to the implementation of IQA practices and subsequently, the extent to which such practices enhance academic work.

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