



ALL-AFRICA STUDENTS UNION  
UNION PANAFRICAINNE DES ETUDIANTS  
UNIÃO DOS ESTUDANTES DE TODA A ÁFRICA  
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Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
German Academic Exchange Service

# THE ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENTS IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES

## PRE- DISSEMINATION PROJECT

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Harmonisation, Quality Assurance  
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## FOREWORD BY THE AASU SECRETARY GENERAL

A central pillar of the All-Africa Students Union's advocacy has been our belief that students are not merely recipients of education but are fundamental stakeholders and co-creators in the academic community. We have consistently championed the cause of meaningful student engagement in all spheres of higher education governance, with Quality Assurance (QA) being one of the most critical.

Yet, our assertions regarding the tokenistic and fragmented state of student participation have persistently faced a challenge: the need for robust, continent-wide evidence. Though grounded in the unequivocal lived experiences of our members, we recognised that convictions alone are insufficient to drive the systemic change we seek. The lack of comprehensive data has long created a void in policy dialogues, allowing institutional inaction to persist.

It is, therefore, with immense pride that we present this seminal report, "The Engagement of Students in African Higher Education Quality Assurance Practices." This study is a direct response to that evidence gap. For the first time, we have consolidated the voices of students, institutional QA leaders, and national QA agencies from 26 African countries into a single, powerful body of evidence. The findings within these pages validate our long-held concerns but, more importantly, they move the conversation from anecdote to analysis, from assertion to actionable recommendation.

This body of work is not an end but a beginning. It is a foundational resource we intend to expand upon and use to inform a new wave of targeted advocacy, capacity-building initiatives, and policy dialogue. We envision this report becoming a vital tool for our partners, university administrations, national QA agencies, ministries of education, and regional bodies, as they work to translate the aspirations of frameworks like the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) into tangible reality.

Bringing this ambitious project to life would not have been possible without generous support and tireless collaboration. AASU extends its deepest gratitude to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and OBREAL Global for their steadfast belief in this endeavour. We also acknowledge with sincere appreciation the dedication of our AASU research and coordination team, Jemilatu Mamshie Bawa, Dr John Paul Kosiba, Bismark Amefianu Kudoafor, James Kodjie, Samuel Sasu Adonteng, Sampson-Graves George, Kelvin Nii Adotey Saka, and Abraham Ohene, whose expertise, persistence, and commitment were indispensable in bringing this report to fruition.

As we disseminate these findings, we issue a call to action. Let us move beyond rhetoric and work collectively to build inclusive, responsive, and effective QA systems. Let us formalize student representation, invest in sustained capacity building, and create genuine feedback loops. By embracing students as true partners in quality assurance, we do not just improve education; we empower a generation to safeguard and lead the transformation of African higher education for today and tomorrow.

In solidarity,



**Peter Kwasi Kodjie**

Secretary-General

All-Africa Students Union (AASU)

## FOREWORD GERMAN ACADEMIC EXCHANGE SERVICE / DAAD

Stakeholders in Higher Education around the globe agree: Quality higher education cannot exist without the meaningful inclusion of those it exists to serve. Students are not just beneficiaries of higher education systems, but key actors within them. This includes the domain of quality assurance, where student engagement can serve as a catalyst for transparency, relevance, and trust in academic provision.

It is in this spirit that the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) welcomes the present study by the All-Africa Students Union (AASU) on "The Engagement of Students in African Higher Education Quality Assurance Practices". Carried out within the framework of the EU-funded HAQAA3 initiative, this research provides important insight into the current state of student involvement in Africa's higher education quality assurance systems – both internal and external. It highlights achievements as well as challenges, and it offers a starting point for further discussion with all the stakeholders in Higher Education on how quality assurance can become more inclusive. The study contributes to an ongoing continental and global conversation on how to embed student agency in quality enhancement processes.

The DAAD believes that the active involvement of students is essential to the legitimacy and effectiveness of quality assurance. Their lived experience in classrooms, laboratories, lecture halls, and digital learning spaces gives them a unique vantage point on what "quality" means in practice. When given meaningful opportunities to participate in shaping academic environments – from course evaluation to programme review, from institutional governance to national QA agencies – students can play an important role in building relevant and future-oriented higher education systems.

This belief is deeply rooted in the DAAD's own identity. Founded in 1925 by a student, the DAAD has grown into the world's largest funding organisation for international exchange and academic cooperation. Over the course of its 100-year history, the DAAD has maintained a strong commitment to student participation – including within its own structures. Today, student representatives hold seats in the DAAD's Executive Committee and remain key partners in shaping our strategic priorities.

In this regard, the DAAD is proud and honoured to have accompanied and supported AASU during the implementation of this study. The collaboration reflects our shared commitment to a higher education landscape that is participatory and grounded in dialogue and exchange. We congratulate AASU on the successful completion of this important work and look forward to further initiatives and projects.

We are confident that the findings and recommendations presented in this report will spark further academic discussion and encourage concrete actions that elevate the role of students in the continuous pursuit of quality in higher education.

**Tobias Wolf**  
Head of Section

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## ABSTRACT

The quality of higher education in Africa is a strategic necessity for the continent's transformation of its socio-economy through knowledge generation and international competitive advantage. Accordingly, student QA is not an ornamental or symbolic plaything, but it is fundamental for good governance and institutional legitimacy of higher education. The research aimed at investigating whether students are engaged in QA processes in African higher education institutions (HEIs) and to what extent they are engaged. Leveraging on a mixed-methods design, the study combines survey responses from 149 respondents, 109 (students), 31 (HEI) and 9 (NQAA) from 26 African countries and 22 in-depth qualitative interviews with students (10), HEI administrators (2) and NQAA staff (10). Results indicate an uneven profile of student participation in QA, focused mostly on the internal level (by means of course evaluations or feedback surveys) rather than external QA reviews or decision-making bodies. Students reported participating in QA primarily to improve academic quality and to exercise their academic rights.. Simultaneously, barriers exist, including the low profile of QA, logistical challenges, tokenistic engagement, and high levels of student churn. More importantly, there are limited formal structures for student involvement in most universities, and in those universities where such structures do exist, they are inconsistent and tend to lack institutional ownership. Actionable strategies for enhancing student engagement, such as formalising aspects of participatory frameworks and tailored Quality Assurance & Evaluation (QAE) training , use of digital technologies, and tracer studies on alumni. The study emphasises the need to reposition students as co-producers of quality education, as espoused in the African Union's vision for an Inclusive and Transformative Higher Education system along the lines allowed for in the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) and the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM).

**Keywords:** Student Engagement; Quality Assurance; Higher Education Institutions; Student Participation; African Quality Rating Mechanism; African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Increasing Africa's higher education quality is essential for the continent's long-term economic and social development, knowledge production, and international competitiveness. The expansion of higher education institutions, burgeoning student numbers, and the diversification of academic programs in Africa in the past few decades have brought about new demands for quality assurance that is both secure and reliable (Swanzy et al., 2018). Therefore, recognising quality's importance, the commission has established its own comprehensive frameworks such as the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) and Africa Standards Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA). They are designed regardless of the state's specific situation to promote transparency, comparability, and a more general environment of quality across member states.

AQRM evaluates in the 2018 report cultivates institutional self-assessment, and leads African universities to set 'internal quality control indicators' as a result. Including governance, research, teaching and community involvement, all these forms of academic and administrative effectiveness have their own metrics with which the system works (African Union Commission, 2018). However, despite its comprehensive scope, the AQRM has been criticised for underexploring one critical component, student participation in QA processes. This omission is concerning, given that students are not only the primary stakeholders in higher education but also valuable contributors to quality enhancement through their lived experiences and evaluative perspectives (Okpa et al., 2020).

Current literature emphasises that 'quality' in higher education is multi-faceted. Baryeh (2009), outlines five different perspectives on this: Outstandary, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation and empowerment. These concepts all justify student involvement, but may also be used to change which stage of the university is perceived and realised. Gola (2003) further stresses that quality in higher education must align with broader societal expectations, labour market needs, and student aspirations, necessitating an inclusive QA framework that captures the voices of learners themselves.

Student participation in QA is not a peripheral or token activity, as Okpa et al. (2020) argue. In addition to making institutional governance more effective and therefore more legitimate, student participation in institutional governance, feedback mechanisms, and policy formulation also leads to greater success in the academic sphere. The processes reveal academic potential, build leadership skills in individuals, and inculcate a spirit of community responsibility. How they democratise the society benefits educational decision making, students' involvement enhances the name of Quality by agents rather than just consumers for whom facilities are provided.

ASG-QA (2017) formalises it by positing that student involvement is to be included in each QA dimension: from the development of policies right through programme review and monitor of performance (HAQAA Initiative, 2017).

Such standards are consistent with worldwide trends toward inclusive QA cultures, emphasising improvement rather than mere compliance. However, every African system of higher education in practice shows a wide range in its treatment of students. While in Kenya and Zimbabwe, for example, progress is being made towards the establishment of student representations on QA committees and other governance organs, some countries still regard students as passive respondents, confined to satisfaction surveys at the end of the semester (Munyae & Kigwilu, 2020; Nyenya & Rupande, 2014).

The difference between policy ideals and institutional realities presents a substantial research gap. For example, while AQRM and ASG-QA provide some practical guidance on improving student engagement experience for undergraduates, few studies exist showing how the best teaching methods and preferred types of school climate may be different between national and campus levels. The research samples currently available indicate that students' participation is often symbolic or limited due to structure, culture or lack of information. At United States International University-Africa, Munyae & Kigwilu (2020) reported that young people hold formal roles, but the limits such as unreliable access to data, disadvantaged decision-making power, and little chance to be trained while they are working. These patterns are found in other African settings as well, where student involvement is reactive rather than proactive, focused on evaluations rather than co-creation of quality frameworks (Okpa et al., 2020).

Also, capacity building is still a neglected area in quality assurance reform initiatives. As Ayoo et al. (2020) point out, for QA systems to work and live in peace, all parties, including students, must be given the tools of training for this awareness is grow within them, and an organisation supports them with due facilitation. Without these conveniences, it is students who would needlessly miss opportunities to contribute towards better quality.

It is also important to situate student engagement within broader theoretical perspectives. Stensaker & Matear (2024) outline three paradigms for understanding student participation in QA: the legal framework, public interest, and partnership perspectives. According to the legal perspective, universities confront certain things through contract-based requirements, formal or informal, that in principle require students to sit on the committees of academic departments and governing boards. This model usually assigns students specific rights and duties, but very little actual power to influence the big issues (Stensaker & Matear, 2024). On the other hand, the public interest perspective. In the public interest model, students are mainly regarded as external reviewers, and their satisfaction or discontent is a vital index of the quality of institutions. Here, students contribute mainly through evaluative surveys and satisfaction measurements, acting as passive respondents rather than active participants in QA governance (Garwe, 2021). The most transformative of the three, perspective Partnership perspective treats students as co-creators and equals in quality assurance processes. This perspective values student participation.

It demands, among other things, shared governance based on collaboration, mutual respect and responsibility in decisions which affect university life generally (Munyae & Kigwilu, 2020). Nevertheless, even though this perspective has its adherents across continents, many institutions in Africa still tend to work mainly under one of the first two paradigms rather than allowing student engagement to produce any transformative results (Batizani & Mpundu, 2024a; Okpa et al., 2020).

At the country level, evidence from our mapping shows wide variation in how students are positioned within QA, typically concentrated in internal surveys and consultative roles, with far less influence in decision-making. Despite structures in Nigeria for QA mechanisms at university level (IQA), however, it is mainly the province of administrators and faculty, with students left to fill out surveys or make occasional appointments (Asuquo & Onyinye, 2022). In Tanzania, teacher training colleges are trying to get students involved in QA processes as well. But rigid institutional culture and unclear policy make this difficult (Shahanga et al., 2022). In Zimbabwe, universities have set up more formal mechanisms for student involvement. Despite not always being fully effective, these nevertheless exist. However, they are powerless to improve the current state of quality assurance, since there is no continuity of application within institutions themselves (Garwe, 2021). In Zambia, little institutional capacity serves to reinforce many of the difficulties. Regarding student unions, student life, and academic support systems (compared with what is available on campus), infrastructure (in terms of computing facilities and library space more generally) is sparse. If student participation in quality assurance is to be made enduring or sustainable, policies must be put into place to help it endure beyond initial bursts of enthusiasm (Bwalya, 2023).

Beyond institutional constraints, student apathy and lack of knowledge about QA processes also contribute to low participation. Several studies have shown that many students do not fully understand or are unaware of the existing structures for quality assurance; thus, they are hardly in a position to make any meaningful contribution to them. Furthermore, weak channels of communication, little formal introduction to quality assurance, and few incentives for staying on the same governance path all contribute to student leaders losing their enthusiasm (Munyae & Kigwilu, 2020; Nkala & Ncube, 2020).

Yet the advantages for both institutions and students have been enormous where the involvement of students is established and maintained in meaningful ways. Institutions that have implemented inclusive QA practices report improvements in academic quality, curriculum relevance, student satisfaction, and institutional credibility (Munyae & Kigwilu, 2020; Stensaker & Matear, 2024). The educational experience is significantly improved by such engagement; students build leadership capacity and critical thinking, and accountability skills. This provides a solid foundation for participation in civic affairs as well as their future professional development.

## 1.1 Research Problem

Despite the growing policy emphasis on inclusive and participatory quality assurance in Africa, there remains a significant empirical and conceptual gap concerning student engagement (African Union Commission, 2018; Ayoo et al., 2020; Beerkens, 2020; HAQAA Initiative, 2017). While students are frequently cited as stakeholders in QA frameworks, their participation's depth and impact remain under-examined and poorly understood. In many institutions, student engagement is limited to symbolic gestures or fragmented feedback mechanisms, rather than being integrated into institutional governance and QA policy development. Given these realities, this study examines students' engagement within QA practices in African HEIs, explicitly addressing the question, "Are students engaged in Quality Assurance (QA) processes in African higher education, and to what extent are they engaged?" By analysing existing practices, identifying key barriers, and exploring best practices from diverse institutional contexts across Africa, this study aims to contribute empirical insights. The study proposes actionable recommendations to foster meaningful, effective, and sustainable student engagement in QA practices, enhancing overall educational quality and institutional effectiveness within African higher education.

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore student participation in quality assurance (QA) across African higher education institutions (Clark, 2017). Using different data sources, the qualitative approach helped us explore the phenomenon within a particular context. It was important as it helped us to conduct an in-depth exploration of the topic under study. This technique in the report was appropriate as we wanted to gain concrete, in-depth, and contextual knowledge about a real-world, specific subject. Thus, we can explore key meanings, characteristics, and implications of the case under study. This research technique helped us to use the exploratory technique in the identified institutions and respondents of the study. The Quantitative approach helped us acquire knowledge that can be used to understand the social world through the interpretation of data numerically. As Moeller et al. (2016) explained, the quantitative study provides objective information and data that can be communicated clearly through statistical numbers. In this area of focus, the empirical analysis and reflections on student engagement in higher education quality assurance processes were revealed through descriptive statistics to show how students are engaged in quality assurance processes.

### 2.2 Participants

The study participants encompassed key stakeholders across 26 countries (see Table 1), including undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions, Heads/officers of Quality Assurance (QA) at selected universities, and Heads/officers working within National Quality Assurance Agencies (NQAA). As the primary beneficiaries of higher education, students have a vested interest in the quality of their educational experiences.

Their involvement in QA processes is essential for ensuring they are relevant, responsive, and effective in meeting their needs. Also, Heads/officers of university QA units are responsible for implementing and overseeing QA mechanisms within their institutions. Their perspectives are crucial for understanding how student participation is integrated into institutional policies and practices. NQAA Heads/officers are pivotal in shaping the national QA frameworks. Their insights are essential for understanding the policy frameworks that govern student participation in QA and identifying opportunities for strengthening this involvement.

**Table 1. Regional Breakdown of Participants**

North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa
1.Egypt	1.Ghana	1.Republic of Congo (Brazzaville)	1.Kenya	1.South Africa
2.Morocco	2.Nigeria		2.Tanzania	2.Malawi
3.Tunisia	3.Senegal		3.Uganda	3.Namibia
	4.Gambia		4.Ethiopia	4.Zambia
	5.Burkina Faso		5.Burundi	5.Mozambique
	6.Côte d'Ivoire			6.Eswatini
	7.Togo			7.Botswana
	8.Niger			8.Mauritius
	9.Cape Verde			

These diverse participants represent individuals with varying levels of engagement and perspectives on quality assurance in higher education, making their input essential for understanding the current status of student participation in QA across the African continent. The mapping study will focus on the following countries, selected based on their accessibility, willingness to participate, and demonstrable progress in internal and external quality assurance (IQA/EQA) development.

### 2.3 Sampling

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select participants from each target group. The selection of countries and institutions for this study was guided by the accessibility of data through various data collection methods, demonstrated willingness to participate and share information, and a track record of progress in developing and implementing both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms (See Table 2).

**Table 2. Details of Participants**

Method	Participants	Sample
<b>Quantitative</b>	Students	109
	NQAAs	9
	HEIs	31
<b>Total</b>		<b>149</b>
<b>Qualitative</b>	Students	10
	NQAAs	10
	HEIs	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>

This strategic selection ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences, including the different linguistic and geographic locations, contributing to our understanding of student participation in QA across the African context. The specific number of participants from each was determined based on the feasibility of data collection and the need for diverse representation across the selected countries and regions.

## 2.4 Data Sources and Collection

The study employed primary and secondary sources to help and enhance the understanding of student participation in quality assurance (QA) in African higher education.

Primary data were collected by administering online surveys to a broad sample of students, student organisations, QA agencies, and higher education institutions (HEIs) representatives across the selected regions and countries. These surveys aim to capture quantitative and qualitative data on awareness, participation levels, perceived benefits and challenges, and recommendations for improvement. Following the surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including students, QA officials from agencies and universities, and university administrators from 11 selected countries across the five regions. These interviews provided flexibility in exploring emerging themes and gaining insights into the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by different actors in QA.

Secondary data for this study included examining existing policies, procedures, guidelines, and reports from national and sub-regional QA agencies to identify existing frameworks, mandates, and best practices for student involvement. Furthermore, a thorough academic literature review, including research papers, reports, and studies, was conducted to synthesise existing knowledge and contextualise the study's findings.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. This involved the familiarisation of the transcribed interviews (data), generating initial codes, charting, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns, key themes, and salient insights related to student participation in quality assurance (QA) processes.

Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27. The data analysis in a quantitative study implies applying the logic statistically to a set of well-cleaned and well-programmed data. The study used descriptive statistics, namely percentages, means, and standard deviations, to analyse the data. The data was also presented in tables for straightforward interpretation.

Do you want to add the discussion with stakeholders at the SARUA conference in Lusaka? Which helped to refine the data analysis?

## 2.6 Ethical Consideration

We ensured that the data collected was only used for the study and was not shared with anybody else to maintain confidentiality and respect respondents' rights. Also, we ensured that each participant gave their informed consent. The participants were made aware that their participation was voluntarily, even if they were compelled to do so by the nature of this study.

## 3.0 Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 Demographic Profile

#### 3.1.1 Geographic Representation

Table 3 shows a wide geographical distribution of student respondents, with 21 countries in East, Western, Southern, North Africa, and Central Africa participating. Among students, Ghana provided the most excellent representation (17.4%); then came Tanzania (11.0%) and Nigeria (9.2%). Other countries that were well represented included South Africa (7.3%), Egypt (5.5%), Gambia (5.5%), Malawi (5.5%) and the Ivory Coast (5.5%). Though this diversity increases the generalizability of outcomes, the prevalence of responses from a few countries suggests potential accessibility or knowledge disparities in quality assurance engagement.

In terms of representing HEIs, the geographical distribution also takes on a pan-African aspect, with universities from no fewer than 12 different countries participating. Tanzania had the most HEI responses (19.4%), but Burkina Faso, Tunisia (16.1% each) and Togo (12.9%) also showed significant proportions. The HEI data represent Anglophone and Francophone countries, which reflect the continent's linguistic diversity in higher education systems.

Among NQAAs, representation was more evenly distributed, with each of the nine countries contributing one respondent (11.1%). This deliberate mix of quality assurance authorities from various national contexts, such as Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Namibia and Eswatini, provides balance for examining regulatory frameworks and practices in QA policy enforcement across Africa.

This broad geographic distribution is consistent with the findings of Nkala and Ncube (2020), who stress that institutional frameworks and national policies matter in determining the extent and effectiveness of student participation in QA procedures throughout African higher education landscapes.

**Table 3. Country Profile of Survey Respondents  
Students**

Country	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Republic of Congo (Brazzaville)	1	.9
Burkina Faso	3	2.8
Côte d'Ivoire	6	5.5
Egypt	6	5.5
Eswatini	1	.9
Ethiopia	1	.9
Gambia	6	5.5
Ghana	19	17.4
Kenya	3	2.8
Malawi	6	5.5
Mozambique	5	4.6
Namibia	5	4.6
Niger	1	.9
Nigeria	10	9.2
Senegal	5	4.6
South Africa	8	7.3
Togo	4	3.7

Tunisia	1	.9
Uganda	5	4.6
Tanzania	12	11.0
Zambia	1	.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### HEIs

Tanzania	6	19.4
Egypt	1	3.2
Malawi	1	3.2
Burundi	1	3.2
Togo	4	12.9
Burkina Faso	5	16.1
Morocco	1	3.2
Ghana	2	6.5
Kenya	1	3.2
Tunisia	5	16.1
Nigeria	3	9.7
Uganda	1	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### NQAAs

Senegal	1	11.1
Ghana	1	11.1
Tunisia	1	11.1
Morocco	1	11.1
Namibia	1	11.1
Nigeria	1	11.1
Tanzania	1	11.1
Egypt	1	11.1
Eswatini (Swaziland)	1	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey (2025)

### 3.1.2 Academic Levels of Students

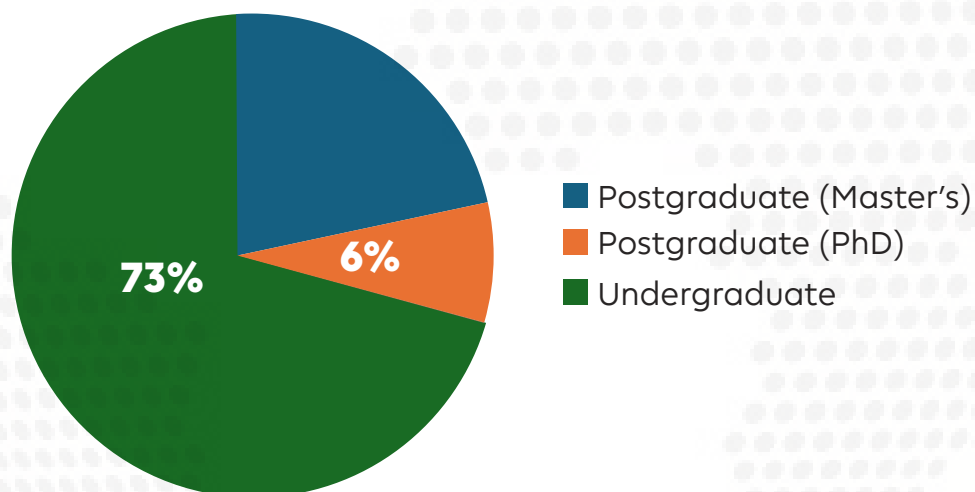
As Table 4 shows, most % of our student respondents were undergraduates, 72.5%, while 21.1% were master's level and merely 6.4% PhD students. The overwhelming presence of undergraduates among respondents reflects a general pattern found within African HEIs where undergraduate programs dominate teaching as much as they do institutional provisions. However, this may also affect student engagement. Many undergraduates lack the qualification-heavy experience or knowledge of government policy required for meaningful participation in quality assurance processes (Batizani & Mpundu, 2024b).

**Table 4. Academic Profile of Students**

Degree Level	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Postgraduate (Master's)	23	21.1
Postgraduate (PhD)	7	6.4
Undergraduate	79	72.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey (2025)

### Frequency



Source: Field Survey (2025)

This imbalance suggests a need for capacity-building initiatives that empower undergraduate students with the knowledge and tools required for effective participation in QA mechanisms, as recommended by Lawal et al. (2021), in their review of QA practices in Nigeria.

### 3.1.3 Profile of HEI and NQAA Respondents

Within HEIs, a majority of the respondents (64.5%) held leadership positions as Heads of Quality Assurance, followed by academic staff (22.6%) and QA committee members (9.7%) (see Table 5). This concentration of QA professionals suggests that the survey captured informed insights into institutional QA operations and decision-making structures. It also reflects the trend that Seyfried & Pohlenz (2020) observed, who noted that QA effectiveness often hinges on leadership support and cross-functional collaboration within institutions.

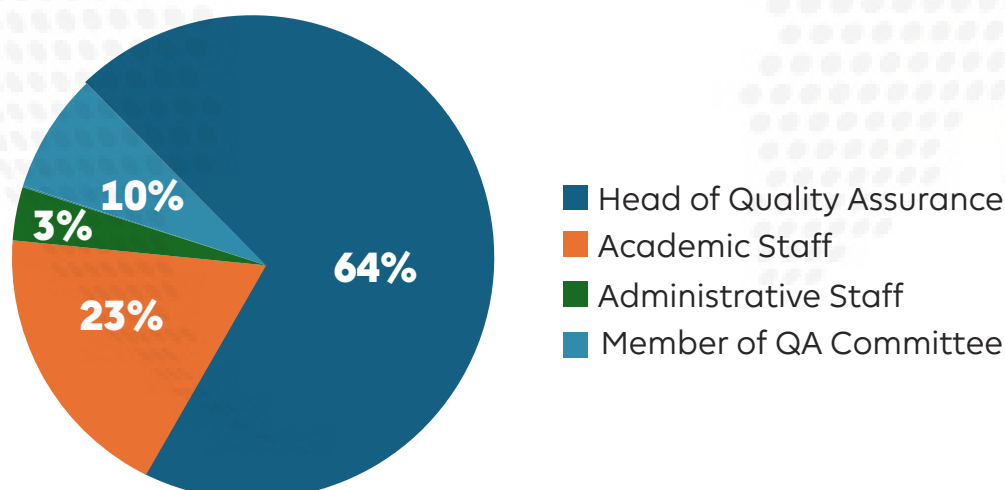
For NQAAs, nearly half (44.4%) of the respondents were Directors, with others holding roles such as Deputy Director, Head of Department, Senior Manager, and Officer (see Table 5). This reinforces the strategic perspective of the data, capturing the views of individuals who are directly involved in shaping national QA frameworks and monitoring institutional compliance.

**Table 5. Position of Respondents in HEIs and NQAAs**

Degree Level	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Head of Quality Assurance	20	64.5
Academic Staff	7	22.6
Administrative Staff	1	3.2
Member of QA Committee	3	9.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey (2025)

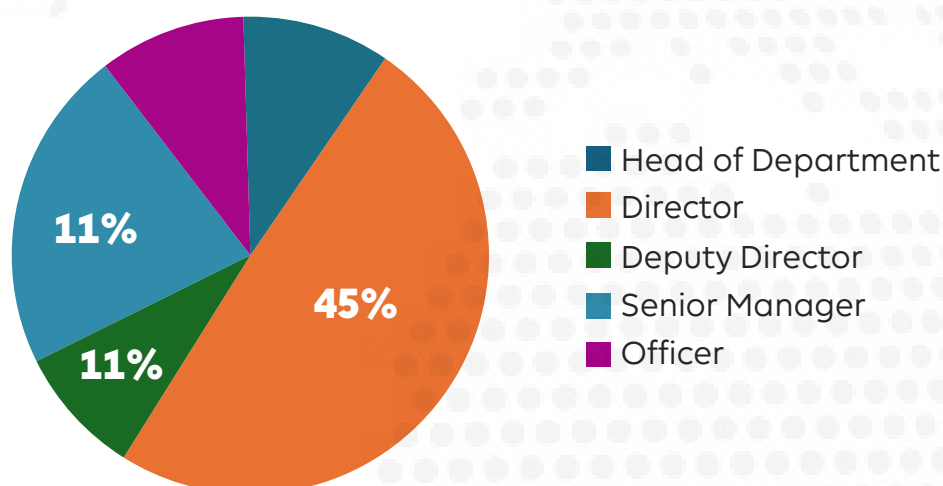
### HEIs Frequency



## NQAAs

Head of Department	1	11.1
Director	4	44.4
Deputy Director	1	11.1
Senior Manager	2	22.2
Officer	1	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Frequency



Source: Field Survey (2025)

### 3.1.4 Interview Sample Composition

Ten students were interviewed from nine countries, including Ghana, Namibia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Zimbabwe. This diversity adds qualitative depth to the quantitative survey findings, capturing nuanced experiences and national perspectives. Additionally, HEI interviews involved two senior QA officers from Ghana and Botswana, while NQAA interviews included representatives from eight countries, with roles ranging from Chairperson to Accreditation Officer (see Table 6). This triangulation across student, institutional, and agency perspectives is essential for validating findings and developing context-sensitive recommendations.

**Table 6. Profile of Interviewed Respondents**

Country	Frequency	Role
<b>Students</b>		
Ghana	1	Student
Namibia	1	Student
Guinea Bissau	2	Student
Gambia	1	Student
Cameroon	1	Student
Zambia	1	Student
Madagascar	1	Student
Côte d'Ivoire	1	Student
Zimbabwe	1	Student
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>HEIs</b>		
Ghana	1	Director For Quality Assurance
Botswana	1	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement.
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	

## NQAAs

Senegal	1	Administrative and Technical Coordinator
Egypt	1	Chairman
Namibia	2	Deputy Director For Quality Assurance Head of The Secretariat
Mauritius	1	Head of Regulatory Affairs and Accreditation Division
Zambia	2	Director of Technical Services Expert in National Qualification Framework
Cape Verde	1	Accreditation Officer
Mozambique	1	Directorate for Promotion
Ghana	1	Head of Accreditation for Programmes

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The inclusion of student voices in both surveys and interviews reflects the growing consensus in literature that students must be viewed as partners in QA, not merely as data sources (Stensaker & Matear, 2024). However, as Batizani and Mpundu (2024) observe in their Malawian case study, genuine engagement is often constrained by institutional culture, limited resources, and tokenistic practices.

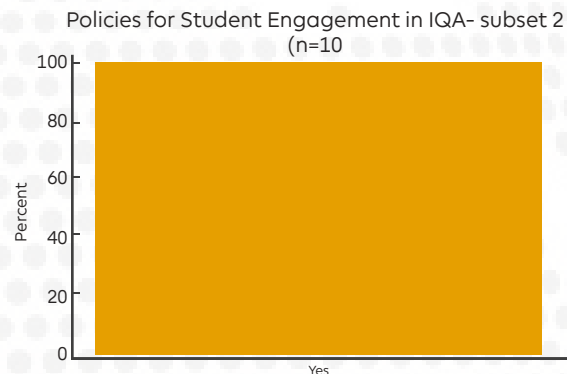
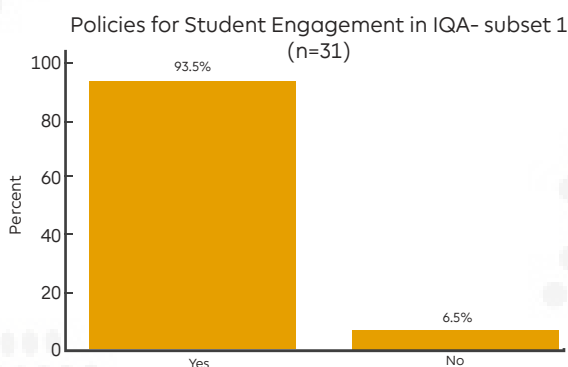
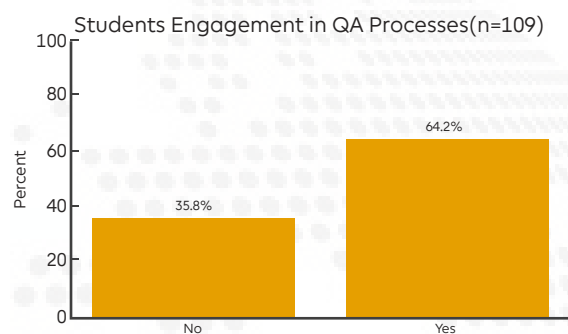
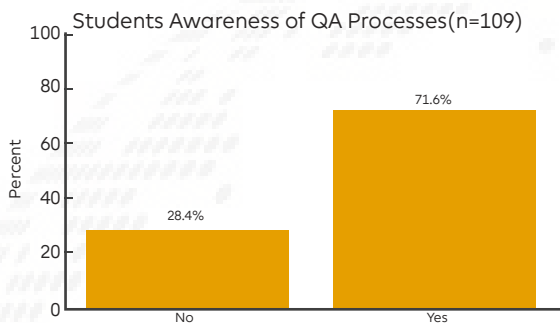
## 3.2 Students' Engagement in Higher Education Quality Assurance Processes

### 3.2.1 Awareness and Scope of Student Engagement

As shown in Table 7, approximately 71.6% of surveyed students reported awareness of QA processes in their institutions, yet only 64.2% indicated participation in QA activities. This gap between awareness and actual engagement was echoed in student interviews. A student remarked, “We evaluate teachers before exams, but I do not know if it changes anything,” suggesting a perception of limited impact from their feedback. Indeed, participation is often restricted to end-of-semester course and lecturer evaluations, which, although vital, offer a narrow window for influence and are typically disconnected from broader institutional decision-making.

This reactive mode of engagement mirrors findings in the literature, where student involvement is often confined to data provision rather than active partnership in shaping QA policies and practices (Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017; Stensaker & Matear, 2024). The empirical analysis by Batizani and Mpundu (2024) similarly identifies that student involvement tends to be minimal and tokenistic, especially in contexts where institutional QA cultures are still emerging.

### Students' Engagement in QA Processes



### 3.2.2 Institutional and Regional Participation

Table 8 underscores a cross-national variation in student engagement in QA. In countries like Tanzania and Burkina Faso, all respondents reported participation in QA activities, whereas participation was notably lower in countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia. These differences are mirrored in the qualitative findings, which show that while students from Anglophone and Lusophone countries participate in internal QA and stakeholder consultations, students in Francophone nations such as Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Niger often lack formal avenues for involvement.

Such disparity reflects broader systemic issues in African HE systems. Nkala and Ncube (2020) attribute this to the absence of institutional structures dedicated to inclusive governance, particularly in institutions governed by outdated legislative instruments. They argue frameworks must evolve to enable meaningful student participation in QA beyond mere representation.

**Table 8. Crosstabulation of Country and Student Participation in QA activities in their institution**

Country	Ever participated in any Quality Assurance activities		Total
	No	Yes	
Burkina Faso	0	3	3
Cote d'Ivoire	5	1	1
Republic of Congo (Brazzaville)	0	1	1
Egypt	2	4	4
Eswatini (Swaziland)	0	1	1
Ethiopia	0	1	1
Gambia	2	4	4
Ghana	9	10	10
Kenya	2	1	1
Malawi	3	4	4
Mozambique	2	5	5
Namibia	1	4	4
Niger	0	1	1
Nigeria	6	3	3
Senegal	0	3	3
South Africa	4	4	4
Togo	1	2	2
Tunisia	0	2	2
Uganda	1	5	5
Tanzania	0	11	11
Zambia	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>109</b>

Source: Field Survey (2025)

### 3.2.3 Representation Without Influence

Despite positive reports on policy availability, where 93.5% of aware students confirmed their institution had policies on student engagement in QA (see Table 7), the qualitative evidence suggests a lack of power-sharing. A QA directorate representative reported that although the Student Representative Council (SRC) President attends university council meetings, “QA decisions are made without us.” This exemplifies what Stensaker and Matear (2024) describe as “formal inclusion without functional influence.”

The presence of students on governance boards does not automatically equate to agency. Effective engagement requires students to have a seat at the table and a voice that shapes decisions. This echoes Seyfried and Pohlenz’s (2018) call for QA systems that empower students as co-creators of quality, rather than passive consumers or compliance agents.

### 3.2.4 Consultative Platforms and Feedback Loops

Feedback from national QA agencies (NQAAs) and HEIs further suggests that students occasionally are involved in consultative forums and developing evaluation tools. One NQAA official noted: “Students participate in consultations to resolve issues and contribute to developing evaluation tools...” However, as another respondent noted, “Students contribute to self-evaluation reports but are not part of accreditation panels,” highlighting a critical gap between input provision and decision-making power.

Such feedback loops, while necessary, are insufficient if they do not result in visible actions or institutional responsiveness. As Batizani and Mpundu (2024) pointed out, the challenge lies in transforming QA from a compliance-focused exercise to one rooted in continuous improvement and inclusivity.

The analysis indicates that student engagement in QA remains largely reactive, limited to course evaluations and consultations, rather than proactive, such as participation in accreditation reviews or strategic planning. This reactive involvement does not empower students to influence structural improvements in teaching, curriculum development, or institutional policy, reinforcing concerns raised by Okpa et al. (2020) and Ayoo et al. (2020) on the need to cultivate participatory governance in African HEIs. Bridging the gap between representation and influence will be key to fostering a quality culture that values students as partners rather than mere informants. Institutional reforms, regional collaboration, and national QA policies must converge to enable students to play their rightful role in enhancing higher education quality across Africa.

### 3.3 The Extent to which Students are Engaged in Quality Assurance Processes

#### 3.3.1 Varied Modes of Engagement Among Students

Among the student respondents, participation in QA processes through structured roles such as student representatives ( $M = 0.33$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ), consultations ( $M = 0.31$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ), and student unions ( $M = 0.17$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ) was relatively low. However, more students reported involvement through feedback surveys ( $M = 0.48$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ), which aligns with global trends indicating that surveys are the most common and accessible forms of student input (Stensaker & Matear, 2024).

Further analysis reveals moderate engagement through evaluative mechanisms such as surveys at the end of the semester ( $M = 2.84$ ), programme/course evaluations ( $M = 2.92$ ), and institutional reviews ( $M = 2.71$ ). This suggests students are more involved in post-experience feedback than real-time participatory decision-making or governance (see Table 9).

These findings align with Batizani and Mpundu (2024), who argue that student involvement often remains tokenistic, with limited influence on strategic QA decisions despite participation in data-gathering mechanisms like surveys and feedback forms.

**Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of the Extent to which Students are Engaged in QA Processes**

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Students Responses</b>					
As a student representative	109	.00	1.00	.3303	.47248
Through feedback surveys	108	.00	1.00	.4815	.50199
Through student consultations	109	.00	1.00	.3119	.46542
Through student unions	107	.00	1.00	.1682	.37583
Surveys at the end of each semester	109	1	5	2.84	1.256
Surveys on programmes or courses	109	1	5	2.92	1.203
Surveys at the end of the study programme	109	1	5	2.91	1.175

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
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### Students Responses

Participating in institutional reviews or evaluations	109	1	5	2.71	1.196
Representing student interests on QA committees	109	1	5	2.81	1.251
Engaging in discussions on curriculum development and improvement	109	1	5	2.84	1.234
Contributing to external QA reviews (national/international)	109	1	5	2.55	1.266

### NQAAs Responses

External review panels for institutional audits	9	1	5	2.33	1.803
Providing feedback for institutional accreditation processes	9	1	5	3.11	1.833
Providing feedback for programme/course accreditation processes	9	1	5	4.00	1.500
Participating in discussions on the development of quality assurance frameworks	9	1	5	3.11	1.269

## NQAAs Responses

Engaging in national or regional QA conferences/ workshops	9	1	5	3.56	1.130
Representing student interests on QA committees or boards	9	1	4	2.44	1.014

## HEIs Responses

Student unions or associations	31	.00	1.00	.2258	.42502
During orientation programs	31	.00	1.00	.4839	.50800
Via internal newsletters or emails	31	.00	1.00	.0968	.30054
As members of the internal	31	.00	1.00	.3548	.48637
Through feedback surveys	31	.00	1.00	.7097	.46141
As representatives on QA	31	.00	1.00	.4839	.50800
In focus groups	31	.00	1.00	.5161	.50800
Through student unions/ associations	31	.00	1.00	.6774	.47519

Source: Field Survey (2025)

### 3.4.2 Student Involvement Through Institutional Structures

Institutional data from HEIs demonstrate some integration of students into QA processes via “feedback surveys” ( $M = 0.71$ ), “focus groups” ( $M = 0.52$ ), and “student union structures” ( $M = 0.68$ ). However, information dissemination via “internal newsletters or emails” is minimal ( $M = 0.10$ ), reflecting poor communication pathways that hinder active engagement.

Interestingly, “orientation programs and committee representation” recorded moderate means ( $M = 0.48$  each), suggesting that while institutions recognise the value of student voice, formal inclusion remains uneven and not fully embedded (see Table 9). This supports Nkala and Ncube's (2020) findings that institutional structures often prioritise procedural involvement without building robust mechanisms for sustained student empowerment.

### 3.4.3 NQAAs' Perspectives: Stronger Engagement at the Programmatic Level

NQAAs indicated relatively higher student engagement in “providing feedback for programme/course accreditation” ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) and “attending QA conferences/workshops” ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). However, participation in “external review panels” ( $M = 2.33$ ) and “QA committees” ( $M = 2.44$ ) remains low (see Table 9).

**Table 10. Descriptive Statistics of the Extent to which Students are Engaged in QA Processes**

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Students Responses</b>					
As a student representative	109	.00	1.00	.3303	.47248
Through feedback surveys	108	.00	1.00	.4815	.50199
Through student consultations	109	.00	1.00	.3119	.46542
Through student unions	107	.00	1.00	.1682	.37583
Surveys at the end of each semester	109	1	5	2.84	1.256
Surveys on programmes or courses	109	1	5	2.92	1.203
Surveys at the end of the study programme	109	1	5	2.91	1.175

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
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### Students Responses

Participating in institutional reviews or evaluations	109	1	5	2.71	1.196
Representing student interests on QA committees	109	1	5	2.81	1.251
Engaging in discussions on curriculum development and improvement	109	1	5	2.84	1.234
Contributing to external QA reviews (national/international)	109	1	5	2.55	1.266

### NQAAs Responses

External review panels for institutional audits	9	1	5	2.33	1.803
Providing feedback for institutional accreditation Processes	9	1	5	3.11	1.833
Providing feedback for programme/course accreditation processes	9	1	5	4.00	1.500
Participating in discussions on the development of quality assurance frameworks	9	1	5	3.11	1.269
Engaging in national or regional QA conferences/workshops	9	1	5	3.56	1.130
Representing student interests on QA committees or boards	9	1	5	2.44	1.014

## HEIs Responses

Student unions or associations	31	.00	1.00	.2258	.42502
During orientation programs	31	.00	1.00	.4839	.50800
Via internal newsletters or emails	31	.00	1.00	.0968	.30054
As members of the internal	31	.00	1.00	.3548	.48637
Through feedback surveys	31	.00	1.00	.7097	.46141
As representatives on QA	31	.00	1.00	.4839	.50800
In focus groups	31	.00	1.00	.5161	.50800
Through student unions /associations	31	.00	1.00	.6774	.47519

Source: Field Survey (2025)

This discrepancy between participatory roles and consultation feedback confirms the trend that student involvement is often more symbolic than functional in external QA activities (Beerens, 2020; Stensaker & Matear, 2024).

Overall, student engagement in QA appears more prevalent in feedback collection mechanisms than in strategic or decision-making roles. The low means for “representation in QA committees” and “involvement in curriculum development” ( $M = 2.81$  and  $M = 2.84$ , respectively) highlight missed opportunities for co-creating educational quality with students as partners (see Table 9). This supports existing literature emphasising shifting from passive consultation to active partnership (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Stensaker & Matear, 2024). Quality assurance efforts that merely extract student feedback risk reinforcing a consumerist approach, whereas meaningful engagement fosters shared ownership and continuous improvement (Beerens, 2020; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2020). Efforts to broaden and deepen engagement, particularly by leveraging institutional and national structures, are critical for advancing inclusive, responsive, and sustainable QA systems in African higher education.

### 3.4 Factors that Facilitate Student Participation in QA Processes

#### 3.4.1 Structural and Institutional Enablers

The quantitative findings show that among student respondents, “increased awareness and information” ( $M = 0.7431$ ) and “greater representation” ( $M = 0.6606$ ) ranked highest among the facilitating factors. This indicates that students are more likely to participate in QA when they are well-informed and structures that legitimise

their voices exist. Similarly, “training on QA processes” ( $M = 0.5780$ ) and “clear communication” ( $M = 0.6147$ ) underscore the importance of capacity building and transparent channels in nurturing student engagement (see Table 10). These align with Nkala and Ncube’s (2020) findings, which suggest that a lack of structured platforms and poor dissemination of information weakens student participation in QA structures.

HEIs reinforced these findings by emphasising the importance of “active student unions” ( $M = 0.8710$ ) and “training for students” ( $M = 0.8387$ ). These institutions see organised student leadership as a central driver of engagement, with strong support from “institutional leadership” and “clear communication” (both  $M = 0.7097$  and  $0.6452$ , respectively). Active student unions often serve as intermediaries, coordinating between students and institutional leadership, translating informal student concerns into formal QA inputs.

**Table 10. Descriptive Statistics of Factors that Facilitate Student Participation in QA Processes**

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Students Responses</b>					
Increased awareness and information	109	.00	1.00	.7431	.43893
Training on QA processes	109	.00	1.00	.5780	.49616
Greater representation	109	.00	1.00	.6606	.47571
Clear communication	109	.00	1.00	.6147	.48892
<b>HEIs Responses</b>					
Strong institutional policies	31	.00	1.00	.6452	.48637
Active student unions	31	.00	1.00	.8710	.34078
Training for students	31	.00	1.00	.8387	.37388
Institutional leadership	31	.00	1.00	.7097	.46141
Clear communication	31	.00	1.00	.6452	.48637

## HEIs Responses

Improved course offerings	31	.00	1.00	.6129	.49514
Better student services	31	.00	1.00	.7097	.46141
Increased student awareness	31	.00	1.00	.5161	.50800

## NQAAs Responses

Strong institutional policies	9	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.00000
Active student unions	9	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.00000
Support from QA agencies	9	1.00	2.00	1.1111	.33333
Training and capacity building	9	1.00	2.00	1.1111	.33333
Open communication channels	9	1.00	2.00	1.1111	.33333

Source: Field Survey (2025)

### 3.4.2 Policy-Level Support and External Agency

From the NQAAs' perspective, all respondents unanimously agreed that "strong institutional policies" and "active student unions" were vital to effective student involvement. Notably, they also cited "training and capacity building" and "open communication channels" (M = 1.1111 each) as essential (see Table 10). These views highlight a recognition of students as "information-rich" contributors whose insights are crucial for data-driven programme reviews and educational reform.

One NQAA representative noted, "Our standards require student input, but sustaining participation is hard when students graduate every 2–3 years." This reflects the structural challenge of engagement continuity due to the transient student population. As a solution, some agencies have introduced mechanisms to institutionalise participation, such as student ambassador initiatives, to build long-term awareness and leadership in QA across cohorts.

### 3.4.3 Student Motivations and Perceptions

Qualitative insights further enrich this understanding by revealing students' intrinsic motivations. Students are not passive participants; they see QA as a vehicle for self-advocacy and academic empowerment. As one student emphasised: "If we do not speak up, nothing changes. Our feedback can fix broken systems." Another student framed participation as a right, adding, "Pursuing academic rights and freedoms motivated me to participate... it benefits our service delivery."

This echoes Batizani and Mpundu's (2024) observation that students view QA as a mechanism for institutional accountability and an avenue for pursuing social justice and academic equity. These motivations are amplified when students perceive that their contributions are acted upon, thus linking feedback loops and visible responsiveness as critical factors for sustained engagement.

While motivation among students is evident, the qualitative data also highlights disparities in institutional readiness. In countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Mauritius, inconsistent support structures and limited institutional buy-in hamper sustained participation. This confirms findings from Stensaker and Matear (2024), who argue that effective student engagement must move beyond tokenism toward a partnership model, where students participate and influence QA outcomes through co-creation and collaborative governance. HEIs and NQAAs must align structural readiness with student motivation to advance student participation in QA.

### 3.5 Factors Hindering Student Participation in QA Processes

#### 3.5.1 Lack of Awareness and Understanding

70.6% of students cited "lack of information or awareness" as a primary impediment to engagement (Mean = 0.7064) (see Table 11). This finding is reinforced by the students who viewed QA merely as a feedback survey mechanism. As one student remarked, "Many students think QA is just surveys. They do not see its link to their education quality." This awareness gap reflects a broader issue of insufficient induction into QA structures and a failure to communicate the relevance of QA to students' academic and professional futures (Beerken, 2020; Stensaker & Matear, 2024).

**Table 11. Descriptive Statistics of Factors that Hinder Student Participation in QA Processes**

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Students Responses</b>					
Lack of information or awareness	109	.00	1.00	.7064	.45750
Limited opportunities	109	.00	1.00	.4037	.49290
Lack of institutional support	109	.00	1.00	.3853	.48892
Student apathy	109	.00	1.00	.4679	.50127
Time constraints	109	.00	1.00	.3119	.46542

Items	N		Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
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### HEIs Responses

Lack of students' interest	31	.00	1.00	.6452	.48637
Students are not well informed about QA	31	.00	1.00	.6774	.47519
Limited institutional resources	31	.00	1.00	.6774	.47519
Time constraints	31	.00	1.00	.7742	.42502
Poor communication	31	.00	1.00	.4516	.50588
Inconsistent participation	31	.00	1.00	.4839	.50800
Resistance from the academic staff	31	.00	1.00	.4194	.50161

### NQAAs Responses

Lack of student awareness	9	1.00	2.00	1.2222	.44096
Resistance from HEIs	9	1.00	2.00	1.3333	.50000
Limited resources	9	1.00	2.00	1.5556	.52705
Student apathy	9	1.00	2.00	1.3333	.50000
Time constraints	9	1.00	2.00	1.5556	.52705

Source: Field Survey (2025)

### 3.5.2 Instrument Limitations and Ineffective Feedback Loops

Another major challenge relates to the limitations of QA instruments, particularly student surveys. While 48.1% of students indicated participation through feedback surveys, this mode often restricts the scope of their contributions (see Table 11). A QA officer noted, "Surveys ask about exams, not overcrowded classrooms or missing lab equipment." This reflects a disconnect between the instruments used and the realities students experience, leading to inadequate capture of critical issues such as infrastructure deficits or learning environment quality. These findings are consistent with Seyfried and Pohlenz's (2020) critique that superficial QA tools risk being perceived as bureaucratic rather than transformational.

### 3.5.3 Institutional and Structural Barriers

HEIs and NQAAs also face resource and structural limitations. HEIs highlighted “limited institutional resources” (Mean = 0.6774) and “time constraints” (Mean = 0.7742) as key barriers, while NQAAs cited logistical and continuity challenges (see Table 11). One NQAA representative explained, “Training students is resource-intensive. They leave just as they become competent.” The short tenure of student representatives, coupled with a lack of systematic capacity-building programs, hinders the development of institutional memory and limits long-term impact. Nkala and Ncube (2020) argue that the overreliance on rigid structures and one-size-fits-all frameworks often prevents institutions from tailoring QA structures to promote inclusive and continuous student participation.

### 3.5.4 Student Apathy and Low Institutional Support

Students’ “limited motivation” (Mean = 0.4679) and “institutional neglect” (Mean = 0.3853) compound the problem (see Table 11). Even when opportunities exist, the absence of incentives and recognition may deter active involvement. This is also reflected in the survey finding that only 16.8% of students engage through unions, an underutilised platform that could otherwise foster peer mobilisation for QA activities. Stensaker and Matear (2024) note that student engagement shifts from passive to active when institutions recognise students as informants and partners in decision-making authority.

### 3.5.5 Short-Termism and Lack of Continuity

The issue of continuity was emphasised across all groups. Due to the transient nature of student tenures, investments in training often dissipate without long-term benefit. NQAAs and HEIs lack mechanisms to ensure institutional retention of knowledge and skills passed on to students during their brief periods of active participation. This disrupts the sustainability of student involvement and contributes to inconsistent representation in QA activities. These observations support Seyfried and Pohlenz’s (2020) conclusion that even well-intentioned QA reforms fail to yield systemic improvements without stable structures.

Stensaker and Matear (2024) argue that “persistent partnerships” are only possible when institutions invest in developing students’ capacity, legitimacy, and agency within QA frameworks. Without addressing the intertwined structural and perceptual barriers, student involvement risks remaining tokenistic, undermining the potential of QA to drive transformative improvements in African higher education.

## 3.6 Strengthening Student Involvement in QA to Improve the Quality of Higher Education

### 3.6.1 Capacity Building and Sensitisation

Participants emphasised that the absence of consistent sensitisation and orientation significantly hinders student engagement in QA. Students and QA officers recommended regular training and awareness initiatives to demystify QA procedures and strengthen students’ roles. As one student remarked, “QA orientation should be

mandatory and consistent. We, as students, need to know our rights to demand better and our roles in quality assurance to contribute better.” This aligns with Batizani and Mpundu (2024), who observed that minimal awareness and limited access to QA information inhibit student involvement in Malawi.

Awareness campaigns and institutional efforts to disseminate QA-related knowledge via orientations, handbooks, and student-staff forums were widely supported. These approaches reinforce arguments by Stensaker and Matear (2024), who assert that building student capacity and making institutional quality work visible are preconditions for inclusive QA cultures.

### 3.6.2 Structural Inclusion and Formal Representation

A recurring recommendation across all stakeholder groups was the need to formalise student involvement in institutional and external QA structures. A student representative articulated: “Students should be included as panel members in the local quality assurance committee at the university.” Similarly, a QA agency official emphasised: “We need to formalise the student representation in committees in decision-making... include the students in quality assurance and accreditation committees.”

This aligns with findings by Nkala and Ncube (2020), who underscore the importance of institutional and legislative reform to enable structural student inclusion. Stensaker and Matear (2024) also argue that persistent partnerships between students and institutions require codified spaces for participation, rather than ad hoc or symbolic involvement. Formal inclusion in QA governance signals a shift from passive consultation to active student partnership in shaping academic quality.

### 3.6.3 Feedback Mechanisms and Communication Channels

Students consistently reported that while their feedback is solicited, its impact on institutional decisions is often unclear or uncommunicated. HEIs and QA agencies acknowledged this shortcoming and highlighted the need for more structured and transparent feedback loops. In particular, HEIs suggested leveraging tracer studies of students and alumni to extend feedback mechanisms beyond graduation, broadening the scope of QA practices.

Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018) stress that QA effectiveness is predicated on actionable feedback mechanisms that include students as informants and co-analysts of academic quality. Such systems enhance institutional responsiveness, credibility, and student trust in QA processes.

### 3.6.4 Policy Integration and Governance Reform

Participants also recommended codifying student engagement within institutional and national QA policy frameworks. One QA expert suggested: “There should be mentorship and peer support... peer support programmes where senior students or alumni, or quality assurance experts can guide others in the quality assurance processes.” This vision goes beyond representation and moves toward institutionalised mentorship cohorts and quality assurance fellowships, offering students structured pathways to participate and grow within QA systems.

This call resonates with literature advocating for QA's rights-based and participatory models (Garwe, 2021; Jongbloed et al., 2008), where engagement is not an optional courtesy but a mandated institutional duty. Integrating peer-led mentorship systems and co-developed student QA policies contributes to sustainable engagement and cultural change within institutions.

### 3.6.5 Technology and Social Media as Enablers

An emergent theme, especially from HEI respondents, was using social media and digital platforms to reach and engage students. One institutional QA officer noted, “We use social media to reach students. They will not come to us, so we go to them.” Another added: “It is crucial to leverage technology... engaging them through social platforms, websites, and networks like Facebook.”

Digital tools were essential for real-time communication, virtual engagement, and accessible QA literacy. These insights support the argument by Klemenčič (2015) that student engagement must adapt to the digital behaviours of the current student generation. Institutions should invest in digital QA ecosystems that blend feedback, training, and participation via online platforms.

### 3.6.6 Promotion of Student-Led Initiatives

The respondents recommended encouraging student-led QA initiatives like peer evaluations, student QA clubs, and QA mentorship networks. This grassroots approach complements top-down reforms and reflects a bottom-up model of quality development. Munyae and Kigwilu (2020) emphasise that co-curricular and extracurricular activities are crucial avenues for fostering student ownership of quality outcomes. Moreover, this student-as-partner approach allows learners to define quality within their unique academic and cultural contexts.

While many institutions acknowledge the value of student input, systemic constraints, ad hoc practices, and communication failures remain. Embedding student engagement in QA through policy, structure, and inclusive pedagogy offers a pathway toward sustainable quality enhancement. The insights gained underscore the urgent need for African HEIs to move from consultative to co-constructive QA models, in which students are equal stakeholders.

## 4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusion

The study examined the engagement of students across African higher education institutions in practices of quality assurance (QA), revealing the opportunities and persistent challenges that make up this continent's QA landscape. The survey discovered that while students' involvement in QA processes is increasingly recognised as crucial to ensuring more open governance and improving educational quality, whether it actually happens or not varies among institutions or programs and is often for show only.

But students' participation often takes no formal institutional structure, much less any meaning at all. They are relegated to completing questionnaires or which amount to little more than course evaluations. It may be that Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Kenya have moved forward in enlisting student participation through internal QA mechanisms. But external QA is just starting to take off in these countries. The survey found fresh evidence: as countries are rolling out new QA mechanisms across the continent, there is significant variation from one region to another. Francophone nations in particular have no systematic structure for student involvement.

Students are driven by their passions to take part in QA: to shape their own education, assert their academic rights, and improve the institutional environment. Getting them involved is hampered, however, by a series of pressing problems-- incomplete awareness, lip service to participation, lack of adequate training, no support structures other than those which exist within their own shallow pool of friends and acquaintances, and leadership terms that are far short of leadership learning. Periodically, QA instruments like questionnaires simply omit key experiential issues such as crowded classrooms and inferior lab facilities. As a result, there tends to be a disconnect between the frameworks for QA that descend from on high and students' actual states of life.

To achieve student Quality Assurance, students not only have to be included in procedures. They must also have a say in the money they pay, too. As internal and external, formative and summative QA come together, meaningful student participation requires reforms that break through structures obstructing and go on to implant student voices throughout every aspect of Quality Assurance. This need, if fulfilled, will be especially important as African higher education settles itself in with Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa. For it is only by getting students into the QA act now that sustainable development, equity among countries, and educational quality can be realised.

## 4.2 Recommendations

### Formalise Student Representation in QA Structures

- HEIs and NQAAs should institutionalise student participation in QA governance by mandating student representation on internal QA committees, programme review panels, and accreditation boards.
- Policies must go beyond informal consultation to provide clear terms of reference, voting rights, and capacity-building support for student representatives.

### Mandate QA Orientation and Training for Students

- Introduce compulsory QA induction sessions for all first-year students and annual training for elected student leaders to enhance understanding of QA principles, tools, and responsibilities.
- Partner with regional bodies such as the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the All-Africa Students Union (AASU) to deliver standardised QA training toolkits.

### Develop Inclusive and Responsive QA Instruments

- Redesign student surveys to capture context-specific learning conditions, such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate lab equipment, and faculty-student interaction.
- Utilise quantitative and qualitative tools (e.g. focus groups, suggestion boxes, mobile apps) to gather diverse student feedback beyond academic content.

### Strengthen the Role of Student Unions in QA

- Equip student unions with technical support and resources to coordinate structured feedback loops between the student body and QA offices.
- Encourage student-led QA audits or peer review mechanisms at departmental and faculty levels.

### Institutionalise Tracer Studies and Alumni Feedback Loops

- HEIs and NQAAs should incorporate systematic tracer studies of recent graduates to evaluate academic programmes' long-term relevance and impact.
- Integrate alum voices into programme reviews and curriculum development to ensure continuous quality improvement.

## Leverage Technology for Accessible and Scalable QA Engagement

- Deploy digital platforms, mobile applications, and SMS-based systems to collect real-time student feedback.
- Use social media campaigns and online dashboards to disseminate QA results and showcase how student input has influenced policy or academic reforms.

## Promote Regional and Continental Policy Alignment

- The African Union, through the ASG-QA and AQRM, should encourage member states to embed student participation standards into national QA frameworks.
- Establish an African Student Quality Assurance Forum under the auspices of the All-Africa Students Union (AASU) and the Association of African Universities (AAU) to foster peer learning and regional collaboration.

## Ensure Continuity Through Institutional Memory Mechanisms

- Create QA engagement handover toolkits and archiving systems within student councils to preserve institutional memory beyond annual leadership transitions.
- Establish mentorship models where outgoing student leaders train incoming ones on QA participation protocols and priorities.

### 4.3 Study Limitations

While the study draws data from diverse African countries and higher education institutions (HEIs), representation is uneven across linguistic and regional blocs. For instance, Francophone Africa countries were underrepresented compared to Anglophone and Lusophone regions. This may limit how much the findings reflect the full continental diversity of QA structures and student engagement practices.

The study relied heavily on self-reported data from students, QA officers, and institutional leaders. As with all perception-based data, there is a risk of social desirability bias, selective memory, or misinterpretation of QA concepts by respondents. While triangulation was attempted through both surveys and interviews, objective measures of student engagement (e.g., attendance records on QA committees or documented policy inputs) were not systematically analysed.

### 5.2 Future Research

There is a need for long-term, comparative studies across multiple African regions and linguistic blocs to assess how student engagement in QA evolves and what institutional or policy reforms lead to more inclusive and effective participation. Also, future research should examine whether and how student participation in QA leads to measurable improvements in learning environments, student satisfaction, curriculum quality, or graduate outcomes.

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