



The Challenge of Ensuring Quality in Higher Education in Algeria: Examining the Reality and Exploring Solutions "Reality and Exploring Solutions"

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ABSTRACT

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Higher education institutions aspire to establish a robust quality assurance framework, underscoring their dedication to delivering top-tier outcomes (including student success, research excellence, and community engagement) that positively influence society. This study is designed to shed light on the challenges associated with implementing the quality assurance system in Algeria, pinpointing the key barriers that have hindered the effective adoption of the quality assurance standards within Algerian universities. To achieve this objective, a descriptive analytical approach has been employed, by analyzing and reviewing previous researches and studies related to the use of quality assurance systems in Algerian universities to come out with proposals and procedures to invigorate the application of these systems in the realm of higher education in Algeria.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Obstacles, Solutions.

1- Introduction:

Higher education is considered as one of the most important educational stages in human life. In addition, it is one of the most important sectors that any society aspires to when endeavoring a life style. Considering the challenges and ongoing changes confronting the higher education sector that may have adverse effects on the quality of services provided by higher education institutions, most countries have sought to adopt systems to ensure the quality of higher education, so that their universities can face various internal and external challenges, and provide quality outputs through which the parties benefiting from their services will be satisfied.

Algeria is one of the countries that have taken an interest in the project of applying the quality assurance system in higher education institutions. This is evident in its establishment of the National Committee for Implementing the Quality System in Higher Education (CIAQES) in 2010 (Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique, 2014) To implement the quality system in higher education With the aim of supporting and encouraging Algerian higher education institutions to spread and develop a culture of quality in them.

To achieve this, a national reference (RNAQES), was prepared to ensure the quality of higher education in higher education institutions, In a manner that facilitates the enhancement of their performance according to global best practices, while also supporting their self-assessment and external evaluation by peers within the context of continuous quality improvement.

2- Literature review

2.1 The concept of quality in the field of higher education:

In general, the research literature on quality in higher education indicates that it can be defined According to the following entries (Martin & Stella, 2011, p. 9):

- 1- Quality means excellence in the inputs, processes, and outputs of the higher education system;
- 2- Quality in the sense of fitness for purpose;
- 3- Quality in the sense of ensuring the satisfaction of the beneficiaries and stakeholders concerned;

4- Quality in the sense of securing minimum standards (alignment with standards).

In Algeria, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific research has adopted the entrance of securing minimum standards (harmonization of standards), as an appropriate concept for the quality of higher education in the Algerian university, where the (CIAQES) has prepared a set of standards that must be respected to achieve quality in the Algerian university (Ministère de l'enseignement supérieure et de la recherche scientifique, 2023)

2.2 The concept of Quality Assurance in higher education:

Quality Assurance (QA) in education has been described as encompasses all the policies, standards and mechanisms for value creation through good leadership, coordination and senior management commitment (Tetteh, Amoako-Gyampah, & Twumasi, 2021, p. 14). The concept of QA is inextricably tied to the concepts of quality assessment and management, and the following table below highlights the key differences between them.

Table 01: Different meanings of Quality Assurance.

term	The pivotal question	the goal	activity
Quality Evaluation	How do we measure quality?	Quality measure	Implementation of the evaluation
Quality Assurance	How do we guarantee quality?	Showing that we have quality	Quality check
Quality Management	How do we achieve quality?	Quality Management	Implementation of quality procedures and culture.

Source: (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2012, p. 8)

In general, we distinguish between two forms of quality assurance: internal quality assurance and external quality assurance.

1. Internal Quality Assurance: Is a set of practices carried out by the institution of higher education in order to improve the quality of its services and compliance with standards» (Martin & Lee, 2019, p. 76)

2. External Quality Assurance: A set of practices carried out by an external body, generally independent, usually called the Evaluation / Accreditation Agency, which aims to make the results of higher education institutions transparent and objective (SIMEN & YAOU KAKA, 2020, p. 161)

Through these definitions, higher education quality assurance can be defined as: a set of practices, whether internal or external, that allow respect for the minimum requirements that must be adhered to, whether they are goals or standards.

2.3 The process of quality assurance in Algerian universities (2008/2023).

The introduction of quality assurance in in Algeria universities will be deemed rather recent, as The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research organized an international conference on June 1 and 2, 2008, titled "Quality assurance in higher education between reality and requirements," in which he was joined by expert university academics from the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Union, and the Maghreb countries. Generally, the process of adopting quality assurance at Algerian institutions can be divided into five basic stages:

2.3.1 The stage of forming a quality assurance policy:

The creation of quality assurance policies in universities began at the guardian ministry level through the following:

A. determining the goal of **improving the quality of higher education outputs;**

B. Preparing the National Reference for Quality Assurance in Algerian Higher Education Institutions (RNAQES) as outlined in the following table:

Table 02: Reference for Quality Assurance in Algerian Higher Education Institutions

Reference				
Domains	Fields	References	Criteria	Evidence
1. Training	06	14	53	182
2. Research and innovation	03	16	58	160
3. Governance	05	23	59	208
4. Life in higher education and scientific research institutions	03	07	16	69
5. Infrastructure	5	13	22	70
6. Relations with the socio-economic	03	07	33	114

environment				
7. International cooperation	03	11	25	102
8. University social responsibility and sustainable development	03	13	43	136
Totals	31	104	309	1041

Source : (Ministère de l'enseignement supérieure et de la recherche scientifique, 2023)

C. Selection **the evaluation mechanism** as an appropriate option to achieve the goal of continuous improvement of the higher education quality outputs;

D. The scope of **the higher education system** as a whole has been identified as an area of higher education quality assurance.

2.3.2 The stage of internal quality assurance and self-assessment.

After defining the general policy for quality assurance at the central level, higher education institutions officials work to ensure quality within their institutions, to achieve the satisfaction of both internal and external stakeholders. In this context, decision-makers in Algerian higher education institutions **established cells** to ensure quality at the level of their institutions and provided them with appropriate human resources and composition. In addition, and in accordance with Resolution No. 36 of January 15, 2017, which aims to require all Algerian higher education institutions to carry out **self-evaluation** and report submissions within a maximum period of 6 months, these institutions have begun to apply this to achieve the goal of continuous improvement in the quality of their outputs.

2.3.3 External quality assurance.

The external quality assurance system is the complementary link that gives credibility to the self-evaluation procedure carried out by the institution of higher education. Some of the Algerian universities that conducted the self-evaluation process for all fields stated by the National Reference for Quality Assurance in Higher Education witnessed external evaluations of peers in the second quarter of 2018. This resulted in an external evaluation report that clarified the strengths and weaknesses of these universities.

2.3.4 University project preparation:

In light of each of the self- and external evaluation reports, decision-makers in higher education institutions should prepare the university project or rather the university's strategy to improve the quality of its outputs. This strategy includes business plans for each university season, And the assessment of what has been implemented occurs at the onset of the following season. To activate this step, the heads of quality assurance cells at the level of higher education institutions benefited from training courses specific to how to prepare the university project and its requirements.

2.3.5 Continuous improvement in the quality of services of higher education institutions:

Various Algerian universities have established quality assurance cells at the faculties level to ensure the implementation of the university project according to an annual work plan and a phased self-assessment of what has been implemented, to identify deviations, find out their causes and treat them.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Study problem:

Although the Algerian authorities are aware of the necessity and inevitability of applying the quality assurance system in Algerian higher education institutions, there has been limited progress in implementing it since the establishment of the National Committee for the Implementation of the Quality System in Higher Education. This lack of progress can be attributed to a variety of obstacles. These obstacles encompass issues related to central administration, administrative aspects, and resistance to change by individuals. In light of these multifaceted challenges, this modest research aims to address the following problem:

What is the problem of implementing the quality assurance system in Algerian universities, and how can it be solved?

3.2 Research purpose:

In this study, a descriptive analytical approach was adopted. Through the use of this approach, we aim to collect, analyze and review previous research and studies related to the problem of applying the quality assurance system in Algerian universities in an objective manner that enables us to know the obstacles and factors for the success of the application of quality assurance systems in Algerian universities.

4. Results:

4.1 -Obstacles:

Studies conducted on QA in the higher education within the Algerian context have highlighted specific constraints that arise during the implementation and self-assessment of quality. These constraints can be

categorized as follows: those pertaining to the central level within the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, those at the level of Algerian higher education institutions, and those affecting individuals:

4.1.1 -Central Obstacles:

In this context, (Reggad & Lakikza, 2016, p. 118) study, which included an interview with officials of the quality assurance cells in Algerian universities, revealed that the main reason for not moving forward with the implementation of the quality assurance system is due to the lack of commitment of the Ministry's senior management to the will in several aspects, including:

- Lack of clarity in the policy of applying the quality assurance system;
- The leadership's lack of keenness to document the policy of implementing the quality assurance system;
- The leadership is not keen on continuous communication with quality assurance officials;
- The leadership's lack of attention to quality assurance system awareness in higher education;
- The leadership's lack of keenness to involve stakeholders in defining the policy for implementing the quality assurance system;
- Centralization of the decision-making process for the implementation of the quality assurance system.

4.1.2 Administrative Obstacle:

In this regard, (Benhacine, 2023, p. 88) study revealed the inability of Algerian universities to provide the resources necessary to implement this project in accordance with the required standards. On the other hand,

According to (Belimane & Chahed, 2021, p. 435) study, there are several administrative difficulties, including:

- The lack of belief of senior management in the quality assurance system in higher education;
- Failure to integrate the quality assurance cell within the organizational structure of the institution;
- The powers granted to the Quality Assurance Officer by the senior management are insufficient to perform his duties;
- Instability of quality assurance cell member;
- Lack of training programs for the administrator and members of the Quality Assurance Cell;
- Lack of keenness of the senior management of the institution to follow up the extent of progress in implementing the guarantee system quality out.

4.1.3 Behavioral Obstacles:

In relation to Behavioral Obstacles, (Musette & Kherbach, 2017, p. 54) indicated resistance to change project for a variety of reasons, like

- Fear of the evaluation process;
- Fear of going the extra mile;
- Fear of losing power;
- Preference for stability;
- Fear of not being able to respond to the nature of new tasks;
- Feeling of job (alienation participation).

4.2 Factors for the success of the implementation of the quality assurance system in Algerian higher education institutions.

Researchers in the quality of higher education in Algeria have unanimously agreed on the necessity of providing a set of requirements for the successful implementation of the quality assurance system in Algerian universities.

According to (Kouraiiche, 2019, p. 345) study, the most important success factors are recommended:

- Sensitization and awareness of decision makers higher education quality assurance system;
- The development of tools and methods;
- The periodic evaluation. While (Zaraa & Bourahli, 2018, p. 297) study focused on:
- Establish effective information systems;
- Adopting adequate incentive systems;
- Establishing appropriate training programs. Regarding (Reggad S. , 2017, p. 100) study, it indicated very important and essential success factors from the point of view of the heads of quality assurance cells which are:
- Supporting senior management in the process of implementing the quality assurance system;
- Linking state support to institutions keen to implement the quality assurance system;
- Participation of stakeholders in the process of applying the quality assurance system (entrusting the principle of participation);
- Focus on effective communication process;
- Find out the causes of resistance to the application of the quality assurance system to mitigate it;
- Opening the door to competition between higher education.

5. Discuss the results:

The application of the quality assurance system in Algerian higher education institutions faces a number of obstacles at all levels, and the following is an explanation of this:

5.1 At the central level in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research:

The continuous change and instability of decision-makers at the level of the Ministry of Will does not materialize the project of the quality assurance system of higher education. The strategic direction towards improving the quality of higher education outputs by adopting the quality assurance system changes with the change of the Minister of Higher Education. Therefore, there is no clear policy for applying the quality assurance system and it is not documented or issued laws or constitutional decrees about it to impose compulsory implementation. Also, the aspect of information about the project, quality standards and procedures, and awareness of them is very weak, and there are no current developments on how to establish or the embodiment of the quality assurance system of higher education in Algeria;

5.2 At the level of Algerian higher education institutions:

The implementation of the quality assurance system in Algerian universities differs according to the belief of the decision-makers in quality in higher education.

5.3 At the level of individuals:

There is great resistance on the part of the employees of higher education institutions to applying the quality assurance system as a result of their lack of sensitivity to it, its promise to involve them in defining its standards, the absence of incentives to implement it, and the weakness or lack of training courses that enable its effective implementation.

Among the factors for the success of the implementation of the quality assurance system in Algeria, we find the need for:

1. Formalizing the quality assurance system in Algerian higher education institutions by documenting it and thus clarifying its policy and imposing its mandatory application to improve the quality of higher education outputs;
2. Involving internal and external stakeholders in the preparation of quality standards, avoiding resistance to change and ensuring the development of appropriate standards for the Algerian environment;
3. Intensive awareness of the quality assurance system and its importance through various media and communication to facilitate and accelerate the process of its implementation;
4. Opening academic majors in the quality of higher education and benefiting from its graduates in this field for continuous improvement in the quality of higher education;
5. Providing adequate incentives to higher education sector employees, including professors and administrators, to encourage the implementation of the quality assurance system and to provide quality outputs.

6. Conclusion:

Upon what has been said, we conclude that the implementation of the quality assurance system in Algerian higher education institutions has not yet witnessed progress, due to the presence of a number of obstacles at the central level in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the level of Algerian higher education institutions, and the individuals. Based on the findings, some of the following suggestions can be made:

- Intensive sensitization of the quality assurance system implementation project, highlighting its necessity to all stakeholders;
- Spreading the culture of quality assurance at the institution level on an ongoing basis, such as issuing a periodical magazine concerned with ensuring the quality of higher education and opening majors in this field;
- The commitment of senior management at all levels to the process of implementing the quality assurance system and following up its progress;
- The need to draw up and document the quality assurance system implementation policy to facilitate the tasks of quality assurance officials;
- Participation of internal and external stakeholders in a governance framework that takes into account the needs of all parties;
- The need to structure the quality assurance cell at the level of the institution and provide the necessary means for it.

Incorporating these suggestions may contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the quality assurance system and improving the chances of success in achieving the goals of higher education in Algeria

- **Training and Development:** Organize workshops and training sessions for quality assurance staff and faculty to enhance their skills and knowledge of the quality assurance system.
- **Regular Evaluation:** Conduct periodic evaluations of the effectiveness of the quality assurance system and provide regular reports on progress and challenges faced.
- **International Collaboration:** Establish partnerships with international educational institutions to exchange experiences and best practices in quality assurance.
- **Student Involvement:** Activate the role of students in quality assurance processes by creating student committees that contribute to the evaluation of educational programs and their quality.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Improve technological and informational infrastructure to support the quality assurance system, including the creation of digital platforms for data collection and analysis.
- **Community Engagement:** Open channels of communication with the local community and employers to gather feedback on the quality of education and workforce needs.
- **Standardized Metrics:** Establish clear standardized metrics for measuring quality in higher education that align with international standards.
- **Encouraging Innovation:** Support research and innovative projects aimed at improving educational quality and providing new solutions to existing challenges.

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