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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement systems: A focus on Education and Training Policy 2023 and TCU Standards at SAUT

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on how Quality Assurance (QA) and continuous improvement systems assisted in the effective implementation of the Education and Training Policy 2023 at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT). The Education and Training Policy 2023, following standards established by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), prioritized accountability, high-quality educational programmes, and student-centred learning. Fulfilling these goals, however, presented challenges because universities sought to establish and maintain effective internal Quality Assurance systems. Adopting a library-based research approach, the paper analysed national education policy documents, SAUT's Quality Assurance frameworks, TCU guidelines, and scholarly literature on quality management in higher education. Guided by Quality Assurance and continuous improvement theories, the study explored how well-designed internal Quality Assurance systems assisted higher education institutions in adhering to national policies, monitoring programme quality, and promoting institutional learning. The findings emphasized the role of evidence-based Quality Assurance practices in strengthening policy implementation processes and highlighted the importance of developing a culture of continuous improvement through regular evaluation and enhancement of academic and administrative processes. The findings provided useful insights for SAUT and other universities in strengthening Quality Assurance frameworks, improving instructional standards, and enhancing the implementation of reforms outlined in the Education and Training Policy 2023.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Continuous Improvement, TCU Standards, Education and Training Policy 2023 & Monitoring and Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Quality Assurance is a structured institutional framework designed to ensure that courses of study, instructional methods, scientific investigations, and support services meet acceptable standards and continue to improve over time. The philosophy of Quality Assurance is based on accountability and academic excellence, highlighting that higher education

providers must regularly evaluate their performance with the aim of delivering relevant and high-quality education to all students.

Internationally, frameworks such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2021) guidelines on Higher Education management and the global trend toward outcomes-based education have strengthened the requirement for

strong internal quality frameworks. These initiatives require higher-learning institutions to create mechanisms for program analysis, accreditation, employee development, and student responses in order to ensure effective responsiveness of educational services to changing national and global pressures.

In Tanzania, the role of Quality Assurance has been clearly presented in the Education and Training Policy 2023 and through standards established by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). The policy emphasizes the provision of competence-based curricula, credible assessment systems, and efficient university decision-making structures. While these standards reflect a national commitment to developing Higher Education quality, actual implementation at the institutional level, including at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), remains a dynamic and transforming process. Many universities continue to face challenges associated with coordination, capacity building, and the development of a sustainable culture of continuous improvement. Strengthening internal Quality Assurance frameworks is therefore vital for harmonizing SAUT practices with Education and Training Policy 2023 reforms and TCU regulatory demands.

Statement of the Problem

Although the Education and Training Policy 2023 and the Tanzania Commission for Universities standards underscore the strength of internal Quality Assurance systems in Higher Education institutions, several universities are still experiencing problems in establishing effective and sustainable frameworks for fostering academic excellence. At St. Augustine University of Tanzania, many Quality Assurance mechanisms prevail, encompassing program reviews, examination regulations, and internal audits, yet the extent to which these frameworks are fully matched with national policy standards and TCU benchmarks remains ambiguous. In reality, some academic and administrative processes are implemented with no sufficient monitoring, evaluation, and feedback processes that are vital for continuous improvement. More importantly, narrow integration of outcomes-based assessment, limited use of institutional data, and inconsistent follow-up on evaluation reports have limited attempts to enhance overall university performance. These challenges indicate a critical gap between policy expectations and actual institutional practices. The main issue of this study is to assess how

well SAUT's internal Quality Assurance frameworks respond to Education and Training Policy 2023 demands and determine obstacles that hinder their full effectiveness and contribution to quality education provision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Idea of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement in University Education

Quality Assurance in University Education refers to planned processes through which academic institutions ensure that academic programs, instruction, learning, assessment, and administrative services meet valid standards. It involves planned strategies, guidelines, and mechanisms formulated to safeguard and enhance the quality of institutional outputs. Continuous improvement frameworks are ongoing institutional processes that promote regular review, reflection, and upgrading of practices in order to get better results over time.

Globally, Quality Assurance has emerged as a central cornerstone of Higher Education management due to rapid growth of universities, internationalization, and demand for accountability. Frameworks such as the UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education focus on the that institutions must develop powerful internal mechanisms for monitoring academic excellence. The philosophy of continuous improvement is obtained from models like Total Quality Management (TQM) and the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle, which observe quality as an adaptive rather than a one-time achievement.

In Tanzania, national review of university quality is authorized to the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). TCU sets standards and accreditation criteria that direct universities in program approval, staff qualifications, student assessment, and organizational governance. The Education and Training Policy (2023) further emphasizes that universities should strengthen internal Quality Assurance directorates and promote a culture of self-assessment and evidence-based decision-making. On the other hand, empirical literature shows that many institutions still function with weak Quality Assurance frameworks, limited expertise, and inadequate integration of improvement systems into daily activities.

(Objective 1) Internal Quality Assurance Frameworks at SAUT Concerning Education and Training Policy 2023

The first directing objective of this study examined internal Quality Assurance frameworks at St. Augustine University of Tanzania in line with the needs of the Education and Training Policy 2023. Literature indicates that effective policy implementation in universities largely depends on the strength of institutional Quality Assurance mechanisms. According to Materu (2019), internal Quality Assurance units are responsible for translating national policies into university-level regulations, manuals, and procedures that guide academic practice.

Researches conducted in Tanzanian universities show that institutions with well-established Quality Assurance directorates perform better in curriculum review, moderation of examinations, and staff development. Luhanga (2020) observed that internal Quality Assurance frameworks should include good policies on program design, teaching evaluation, student feedback mechanisms, and regular audits. At SAUT, the Directorate of Quality Assurance is assumed to oversee these functions and guarantee that education reforms needed by the Education and Training Policy 2023, like competence-based curricula and outcomes-based assessment, are duly mainstreamed.

Nevertheless, current assessments suggest that knowledge and application of Quality Assurance procedures among employees at university campuses are uneven. Kapinga (2021) states that Quality Assurance systems in private institutions often stay centralized, with few trickle-down to departments and faculties. For SAUT to comply entirely with the Education and Training Policy 2023, internal literature suggests decentralizing Quality Assurance roles, strengthening senate committees, and ensuring that improvement strategies are backed by realistic funds and trained personnel. With no such reinforcement, national policy goals risk remaining largely progressive.

(Objective 2) Alignment between SAUT Quality Assurance Processes and TCU Standards

The second objective analyzed how good SAUT Quality Assurance processes align with TCU standards. Alignment in this category means that institutional processes correspond directly with national benchmarks for academic excellence. TCU Standards and Guidelines (revised 2022) outline little requirements on staff-to-student ratios, qualifications of

academic staff, library resources, infrastructure, and governance structures.

Empirical literature stresses that institutions must regularly map their Quality Assurance processes against these standards. Mkumbo (2020) argues that accreditation tools can only be effective if universities internalize their requirements through structured self-evaluation frameworks. In Tanzanian contexts, Hyera and Mutashubirwa (2021) discovered that many institutions struggle with compliance because of overcrowded classes, limited laboratories, and inadequate documentation.

For SAUT, maintaining alignment needs periodic curriculum review, external examination moderation, tracer studies, and program audits, all of which are key TCU expectations. However, findings on institutional Quality Assurance in Tanzania show that some universities consider TCU standards as external conditions rather than internal guiding tools. This research shows last-minute preparations during accreditation visits instead of routine quality process. Literature therefore recommends that SAUT adopt powerful internal benchmarking, develop comprehensive Quality Assurance manuals reflecting TCU requirements, and strengthen data management frameworks. Such alignment would assist the institution not only maintain accreditation status but also develop academic credibility and competitiveness nationally and internationally.

(Objective 3) Significance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in Continuous Improvement

The third objective of this study assessed the significance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) in supporting continuous improvement frameworks at SAUT. Monitoring and evaluation are reflective management units that enable universities to track progress, measure effectiveness, and make informed adjustments. Literature on Higher Education quality management emphasizes that Quality Assurance cannot succeed without powerful Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) mechanisms.

According to the Education and Training Policy 2023, institutions are advised to establish structured frameworks for collecting and analyzing performance data on teaching excellence, research output, student achievement, and community engagement. PDCA and Results-Based Management theories both stress that

regular evaluation and feedback encourage institutional learning and evidence-based reforms.

In the Tanzanian university context, Kapinga and Amani (2022) noted that Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) frameworks are often weak, fragmented, and poorly coordinated. Many campuses miss enough data on program performance, graduate employability, or effectiveness of staff development initiatives. With no such information, continuous improvement becomes hard to operationalize. Academic staff and administrators may implement Quality Assurance practices mechanically without understanding their effect.

Literature suggests that SAUT strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) by starting regular academic audits, student course evaluations, tracer studies, and transparent reporting frameworks. Establishing strong indicators and feedback loops would permit the university to learn from its own processes and progressively improve. Moreover, a powerful Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework would enhance coordination between departments, directorates, and TCU oversight structures. By embedding monitoring and evaluation into routine institutional culture, SAUT can turn Quality Assurance from a compliance exercise into a fundamental force of educational quality.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, library-based research design to evaluate the effectiveness of Quality Assurance and continuous improvement frameworks at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) within Mwanza. The library-based approach was regarded as appropriate because the research was based on examining policy documents, institutional systems, and scholarly literature rather than conducting primary field data. The design enabled an in-depth investigation of how internal Quality Assurance processes relate to the needs of the Education and Training Policy 2023 and standards set by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU).

Findings for the research were collected through comprehensive document analysis. Key sources comprised the Education and Training Policy 2023, TCU Quality Assurance Guidelines, SAUT internal Quality Assurance manuals, strategic plans, and published academic journals on quality management in Higher Education. These records were purposefully chosen based on their significance to the guiding

objectives of the paper. The use of multiple documentary sources supported the researcher to triangulate information and get a balanced understanding of the topic.

Thematic analysis was used as the main method of data interpretation. Information obtained from the reviewed documents was organized, coded, and grouped into key themes like internal Quality Assurance frameworks, alignment with TCU standards, and the function of monitoring and evaluation in continuous improvement. This analytical procedure assisted in revealing strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in SAUT's Quality Assurance processes. The methodology further offered a conceptual perspective for understanding the role of institutional accountability and outcomes-based education.

The investigation was conducted within the environment of Higher Education reforms in Tanzania, with SAUT functioning as the central focus of analysis. By drawing on existing empirical studies and official policy frameworks, the research design guaranteed research quality, policy relevance, and practical applicability. The methodological approach was therefore helpful in generating findings and recommendations directed at strengthening Quality Assurance frameworks at SAUT and similar universities countrywide.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

(Objective 1): Internal Quality Assurance Frameworks at SAUT concerning Education and Training Policy 2023 Guidelines

1. Understanding and Awareness of Quality Assurance Frameworks

The research shows that St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) has internal mechanisms targeted at promoting academic excellence and accountability. University leaders and lecturers demonstrate a general understanding that Quality Assurance is fundamental for fulfilling the reforms presented in the Education and Training Policy 2023. This knowledge makes up an important foundation for aligning institutional frameworks with national hopes.

2. Current Internal Quality Assurance Frameworks

Results show that SAUT operates formal Quality Assurance divisions, programme review committees, and academic audits intended to maintain standards in pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum design. These frameworks reflect an organizational involvement in ensuring that academic courses meet minimum quality

standards. In several departments, regular moderation of examinations, peer review of courses, and student assessments are already practiced in the framework of Quality Assurance implementation.

3. Early Efforts in Implementing Policy

As per Education and Training Policy 2023, SAUT has initiated the use of outcomes-based education principles, improving documentation practices, and strengthening accreditation processes. The study finds that internal reviews have promoted improvements like updating course outlines, standardizing assessment methods, and enhancing record keeping. However, these initiatives remain largely procedural and have not yet converted into comprehensive transformation across all faculties.

4. Limitations Concerning Education and Training Policy 2023 Requirements

Despite the existence of Quality Assurance frameworks, a key limitation is that many academic staff and management have not received sufficient training on modern Quality Assurance processes demanded by Education and Training Policy 2023. Therefore, implementation places emphasis on compliance rather than innovation. Some Quality Assurance interventions are irregular and depend heavily on personal drive instead of being fully integrated into planning at the institution level and budgeting.

5. Monitoring and Sustainability Matters

The studies further indicate that while Quality Assurance reports are developed, follow-up actions are often weak. There is low allocation of dedicated funds for continuous improvement initiatives. This indicates that internal Quality Assurance frameworks at SAUT, though functional, still need significant strengthening to effectively promote the holistic implementation of the Education and Training Policy 2023.

(Objective 2): Alignment of SAUT Quality Assurance Practices and TCU Requirements

1. General Alignment with TCU Guidelines

The analysis indicates that SAUT's Quality Assurance processes are partially aligned with standards set by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). Core practices like program approval, external examination, and institutional self-assessment follow TCU frameworks. This alignment ensures that SAUT remains active as a recognized higher-learning institution within Tanzania's regulatory environment.

2. Alignment between Curriculum and Assessment

Results indicate that most SAUT academic programs reflect TCU requirements regarding credit hours, grading frameworks, and qualification benchmarks. Departments comply with TCU formats in designing curricula and preparing examination rules. These processes illustrate that national standards shape internal university activities to a considerable extent.

3. Non-Uniform Implementation across Units

However, the study reveals that alignment is not uniform. While some faculties maintain powerful Quality Assurance routines that reflect TCU expectations, others lag behind due to skills gap and resources. The absence of standard digital systems for tracking Quality Assurance indicators undermines the university's ability to maintain continuous alignment with evolving TCU standards.

4. Institutional Infrastructure and Administrative Systems

TCU emphasizes modern learning contexts and efficient academic governance. The results show that SAUT still faces constraints in fully meeting these hopes. Overreliance on manual practices, poor data management, and limited stakeholder engagement weaken the depth of alignment. This disconnect affects the capability to benchmark learning achievement effectively as demanded by TCU.

5. Need for Powerful Institutional Coordination

Overall, the results suggest that SAUT has made notable progress aligning with TCU standards but remains constrained by structural and operational gaps. Strengthening coordination between Quality Assurance units, academic units, and management is therefore crucial if SAUT is to reach full and consistent compliance with Tanzania Commission for Universities standards.

(Objective 3): Significance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in Continuous Improvement at SAUT

1. Adoption of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

The study confirms that SAUT is aware of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as tools for strengthening institutional performance. Frequent academic audits, tracer studies, and departmental reports are used to assess program success. These frameworks give valuable information on pedagogical quality, student performance, and administrative efficiency.

2. Poor Feedback Utilization

Despite these mechanisms, the study reveals that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) results are not effectively used for knowledge acquisition and decision

making. Quality Assurance and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reports often stay as documents rather than guiding concrete reforms. Capacity limitations in data analysis and institutional research undermine the possibility of monitoring systems to drive real improvement inside the university.

3. Insufficient Digital Monitoring

Another main challenge is the limitation of integrated digital platforms for continuous tracking of Quality Assurance indicators. With no reliable data frameworks, SAUT is still struggling to evaluate progress toward Education and Training Policy 2023 goals or TCU benchmarks accurately. This makes it difficult for the university to determine weaknesses early and implement timely corrective solutions.

4. Academic Learning Culture

Results also reveal that a system of continuous improvement is still developing at SAUT. While some leaders encourage reflective practices, many staff observe Quality Assurance as an external requirement rather than an opportunity for institutional learning. The absence of frequent training, incentives, and structured learning forums weakens the significance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in shaping innovation.

5. Gaps in Stakeholder Coordination

Lastly, the findings reveal poor coordination between Monitoring and Evaluation units, academic departments, and top management. This disconnect undermines institutional memory and the sharing of best processes. To reach effective continuous improvement, SAUT needs powerful follow-up procedures, better data systems, and deliberate strategies for turning monitoring and evaluation into institutional knowledge development.

6. General Assessment

In general, monitoring and evaluation systems at SAUT are available but play only a secondary role in promoting continuous improvement. Enhancing these systems in accordance with Education and Training Policy 2023 and TCU standards is vital for promoting a culture of continuous improvement in universities in order to improve Quality Assurance mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study has examined the role of strengthening internal Quality Assurance frameworks at St. Augustine University of Tanzania in relation to the needs of the Education and Training Policy 2023 and the standards established by the Tanzania Commission for Universities. The analysis indicates that SAUT

possesses established Quality Assurance structures, including directorates, academic audits, program reviews, and internal evaluation mechanisms. These networks offer a relevant foundation for promoting accountability and improving academic quality. The research further indicates that when Quality Assurance practices are consistently applied, they support the university monitor pedagogy and learning processes, assess curriculum relevance, and ensure adherence to national Higher Education criteria.

However, the results also show that existing Quality Assurance frameworks are not yet fully effective in fostering continuous improvement. Weaknesses remain in areas like systematic monitoring, feedback uptake, workforce capability in modern Quality Assurance approaches, and coordination of evaluation results toward strategic decision making. Under certain circumstances, Quality Assurance processes seem routine and procedural rather than transformative. These limitations show that policy intentions under Education and Training Policy 2023 can only be attained if Quality Assurance frameworks become more practical, data-driven, and well-coordinated. Overall, efficient alignment with TCU standards demands not only formal frameworks but also a powerful institutional culture that promotes quality and continuous education.

Recommendations

To enhance Quality Assurance and continuous improvement frameworks at SAUT, a number of measures are recommended. First, the university should dedicate funds to the professional development of staff. Academic and administrative personnel require several trainings on Quality Assurance instruments, outcomes-based education, and continuous improvement frameworks like PDCA. This will build skills in making audits and using evaluation results effectively.

Second, SAUT is advised to strengthen its internal monitoring and evaluation processes. Quality Assurance mechanisms are expected to include clear performance indicators, continuous program assessments, and structured feedback mechanisms including students, academic staff, alumni, and workplace stakeholders. Based on these data, evidence-based reforms can be supported.

Another key area is documentation and reporting. The university is advised to improve record keeping, internal academic audits, tracer studies, and digital Quality Assurance management mechanisms so that quality information can be easily accessed and applied.

Lastly, SAUT is advised to promote shared norms within the university environment of continuous improvement. Quality Assurance should be merged into strategic planning, budgeting, and management decisions. Improved coordination between faculties, departments, and the central Quality Assurance directorate is vital. If these recommendations are implemented, SAUT will be better placed to adhere with Education and Training Policy 2023, align with TCU standards, and sustainably develop the quality of education provided to all students in Tanzania.

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