



# European Journal of Educational Research

Volume 13, Issue 3, 1139 - 1154.

ISSN: 2165-8714

<http://www.eu-jer.com/>

## The Practicability of Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Promoting Tanzanian Universities' Compliance

Daudi Mrema\* 

University of Rwanda,  
RWANDA

Irénée Ndayambaje 

University of Rwanda,  
RWANDA

Philothère Ntawiha 

University of Rwanda,  
RWANDA

Eugene Ndabaga 

University of Rwanda,  
RWANDA

Received: September 28, 2023 • Revised: December 7, 2023 • Accepted: January 5, 2024

**Abstract:** Compliance with any policies, laws and regulations, including university compliance with quality assurance mechanisms globally, depends on the practicability of those mechanisms. Like other countries, Tanzania has quality assurance mechanisms that require universities to comply. However, the existing audit reports have shown non-compliance cases to such mechanisms. This study sought to explore the practicability of the existing quality assurance mechanisms in promoting universities' compliance in Tanzania. The documentary reviews, interviews, and focus group discussions were used to collect data from the 4 universities and 46 students, academics, and quality assurance directors and officers as a sample size selected purposively. The data were analysed through content analysis. The findings revealed that the existing quality assurance mechanisms are generally practicable; however, there are quality assurance requirements with practicability challenges due to contextual factors. Such requirements include senior academics in administrative duties, academics' promotion, academics' recruitment, inclusive and participatory teaching approaches, requirements with extra financial costs, examination scripts' marking, and invigilation restrictions. This study concludes that the practicability challenges of some quality assurance mechanisms are one reason for non-compliance cases at some Tanzanian universities. It recommends that key stakeholders be involved in establishing mechanisms, and all contextual factors must be addressed to enhance practicability.

**Keywords:** *Practicability, quality assurance mechanisms, university compliance.*

**To cite this article:** Mrema, D., Ndayambaje, I., Ntawiha, P., & Ndabaga, E. (2024). The practicability of quality assurance mechanisms in promoting Tanzanian universities' compliance. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 13(3), 1139-1154. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.13.3.1139>

### Introduction

University compliance with quality assurance (QA) mechanisms worldwide depends highly on the practicability of those mechanisms. This dependence exists because the QA mechanisms which do not correspond to or fit in the existing higher education (HE) contexts can influence HE stakeholders (university administrators, academics, and students) to be reluctant to implement them (Ansah, 2015; Ramirez & Haque, 2016). In this vein, the establishment of both external (international and national) and internal (university/institutional) QA mechanisms must consider the inclusivity of all key stakeholders to obtain collaborative views for promoting their viability and compliance (Inter-University Council for East Africa [IUCEA], 2016).

Although it is not the main thesis of this article to delineate the meaning of QA mechanisms, in the context of this paper and according to some scholars, university QA mechanisms refer to the set of arranged standards, measures, principles, processes, methods, strategies, and guidelines to maintain and improve the quality of university education (Asiyai, 2022; IUCEA, 2015). These can be broadly classified into three processes—i.e., input, process, and output-related QA mechanisms. They are formulated by either external or internal QA agencies (Imaniriho, 2020). Moreover, the practicability of QA mechanisms refers to the acceptability and achievability of QA mechanisms across all intended HE contexts and needs (Ansah, 2015).

The literature worldwide, particularly in Africa, has shown that universities are not strictly adhering to the existing QA mechanisms (Alzafari & Kratzer, 2019; Asiyai, 2022; Machumu & Kisanga, 2014; Pham & Nguyen, 2020). As such, in the 2023 university rankings, out of the top 1,000 world universities, only 11 and 33 African universities are found in Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and Times Higher Education (THE) university rankings, respectively (THE, 2023; Top

\* **Corresponding author:**

Daudi Mrema, University of Rwanda, College of Education, School of Education, Rwanda. ✉ [dauidmrema665@yahoo.com](mailto:dauidmrema665@yahoo.com)

© 2024 The Author(s). **Open Access** - This article is under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



Universities, 2023). These statistics suggest that many African universities are not complying with the international QA mechanisms that jeopardise the academic capabilities of their graduates. The scholars (see Ansah, 2015; Khamis & Scully, 2020; Machumu & Kisanga, 2014; Ramírez & Haque, 2016) assert that the impracticability of the existing QA mechanisms within the intended HE contexts can influence university stakeholders to be reluctant to comply.

Due to non-compliance cases, deliberate efforts have been dedicated to punishing (i.e., closing or deregistering) the universities and/or their academic programmes (Lyer & Suba, 2019). For instance, the national QA agencies in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda from 2013 to date have been reported to suspend, close, and deregister universities and/or their academic programmes for non-compliance cases related to inadequate staffing level and learning facilities, possessing unqualified students and academics, as well as operating unaccredited academic programmes (Mrema et al., 2023; National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2023).

In the Tanzanian context, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) and universities manage (i.e., set and enforce) the national and institutional QA mechanisms, respectively. The TCU is the supportive, advisory, and regulatory agency for public and private universities in the country, formulated by the Universities Act No. 7 of 2005 (TCU, 2019a). It has accredited 54 universities as well as university colleges, campuses, and centres up to February 2024 (TCU, 2024). In performing its functions (i.e., support, advice, and regulation), TCU establishes, revises, and enforces compliance with the national QA guidebook (TCU, 2019c). Currently, the TCU is supervising the implementation of the national QA guidebook titled "Handbook for Standards and Guidelines for University Education in Tanzania", published in December 2019 as the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Such guidebook has been organised into seven main parts; each part has its several QA standards, and each QA standard has its several QA guidelines (as operationalisation of QA standard), hence making serial numbers (X.Y.Z) for citations where 'X' stands for the main part, 'Y' is a standard, and 'Z' is a guideline. The content of such a guidebook consists of the university QA standards along with input, process, and output stages as summarised below:

In the input stage, the TCU requires a minimum grade points average (GPA) of 3.5 out of 5.0 from the 1<sup>st</sup> degree and 4.0 out of 5.0 from the master's degree for a graduate to be employed as a university tutorial assistant (TA) and an assistant lecturer (AL), respectively (TCU, 2019a). Besides, for students to be admitted to undergraduate education, they should possess at least 2 principal passes (i.e., 'D' grade) from the advanced secondary education or a 'B' grade or 3.0 out of 5.0 GPA from the ordinary diploma or a 3.0 out of 5.0 GPA from the foundation certificate offered by the Open University of Tanzania. The maximum instructor-student ratio ranges from 1:50 (Social sciences) to 1:25 (STEM fields) and from 1:120 (Social sciences) to 1:30 (STEM fields) for conventional and distance learning universities, respectively (TCU, 2019a). The specific sizes and structures of the university buildings and their capacities have been provided for the university owners to comply with (TCU, 2019a).

In the process stage, the TCU insists on the existence of an inclusive teaching and learning, student-centred teaching and learning approach, examination moderation, students and academics' research publications in reputable journals, student assessment and evaluation by the instructors, as well as external examiners (EEs) and independent internal examiners (IIEs) (TCU, 2019a). For the output stage, TCU requires universities to conduct need assessments and market surveys when designing the new academic programmes for accreditation. Besides, during the review of the academic programmes, the graduate tracer study (GTS) is required for reaccreditation after 2 years once the academic programme delivery circle has ended (TCU, 2019a).

With such input, process, and output national QA mechanisms, researchers in Tanzania have been reporting universities' non-compliance cases such as very high resource (i.e., academic or physical resource)-student ratio, unqualified admitted students, traditional and non-inclusive teaching approaches, ineffective student learning assessment, irregular GTS and external examinations, and ineffective curricula reviews (Mgaiwa, 2018a; Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017; Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; Milinga et al., 2022; Mrema et al., 2023; Nyamwesa et al., 2020). Besides, through quality audit reports, the TCU has been taking punishments such as closure, suspension, and deregistration of universities and/or their academic programmes once it notices extreme non-compliance cases (TCU, 2019c). Also, warnings and allowing operations under supervision have been done for less extreme non-compliance cases (TCU, 2019c).

In a leap of seven years from 2015 to 2022, the TCU deregistered a total of 12 universities and university colleges, closed 28 universities, university colleges, campuses, and centres and banned 34 universities and university colleges from admitting new students for non-compliance cases related to mainly inadequate academics, learning facilities and funds as well as less meaningful teaching and learning activities (see Mgaiwa, 2018a; Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; Mrema et al., 2023; TCU, 2019c). Additionally, 832 admitted students were expelled from their studies because they missed the 2 passes required for their secondary education certificates (Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; Mrema et al., 2023). Furthermore, 107 students discontinued their studies following their respective universities' punitive measures against serious examination irregularity cases from 2012 to 2018 (TCU, 2019b). Such discontinuation cases are still reported to date but with combined factors of examination failures and irregularities (see TCU, 2023). Such statistics would mislead the readers if presented in this context.

Despite the devoted efforts in establishing, revising, and enforcing compliance with the national and institutional QA mechanisms as well as punishing non-complying universities and individuals, to date, the country is still experiencing both major and minor non-compliance cases which affect the quality of university education and graduates' academic capabilities (Mgaiwa, 2018a; Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; Mrema et al., 2023). The continuation of non-compliance cases implies that the punitive measures have not ended the problem because they are more reactive than proactive in tackling the root causes of the problem. To tackle the root causes of non-compliance cases, such causes and solutions must be well known. Thus, this study explored the practicability of the existing national and institutional QA mechanisms in promoting public and private universities' compliance in Tanzania. The guiding research question was: How practicable are the existing national and institutional QA mechanisms in promoting Tanzanian universities' compliance? It assumes that the unworkability of some QA mechanisms contributes to the existing non-compliance cases among universities in Tanzania.

## Literature Review

### *The Practicability of QA Mechanisms and its Outcomes on Universities' Compliance*

The empirical studies insist that external and internal QA agencies should involve all key players in developing QA mechanisms that will be workable (within HE contexts) to foster universities' compliance (Alzafari & Ursin, 2019; Khamis & Scully, 2020; Pham & Nguyen, 2020). As such, the relevance, practicability, and compatibility of QA standards to different local HE contexts and in meeting the current HE needs can be enhanced by the insightful contributions from different key stakeholders during their formulation (Ansah, 2015; Ramírez & Haque, 2016).

The IUCEA (2016) states that QA at university institutions is more complex than in manufacturing industries. The IUCEA further asserts that such complexity is ascribed to the presence of many different players, such as the government, employers, academics, parents, the public and students involved in university QA. Therefore, such different player viewpoints and the multidimensional aspect of educational quality make university quality a negotiation agenda (IUCEA, 2016; Rizos et al., 2022). Such negotiation is meant to establish high-quality (i.e., practicable) standards that will be accepted, owned, and implemented and oversee the production of academically capable university graduates (IUCEA, 2016).

University stakeholders in various countries have shown a culture of not complying with impracticable QA standards. For instance, Alzafari and Kratzer (2019) found that due to limited stakeholders' involvement in designing QA policies and training on implementing such policies in European universities, some academics have become reluctant and resistant to implementing some QA requirements. Such academics lack a sense of ownership, acceptance and understanding of those QA policies. They perceive some QA requirements could be perfectly workable if they were initially involved in drafting or trained on implementing them. Similarly, Ramírez and Haque (2016) found that private universities (PRUs) in Bangladesh are compelled to adhere to some QA standards, which are arbitrary and incongruent with their contexts. Such PRUs raised concerns about the excessive financial burden imposed on government training consultants and complete ownership of university land as demanded by the national HE regulatory agency. Further, such scholars argue that while the PRUs are forced to comply with those QA standards, they have been marginalised in establishing QA standards. Consequently, the PRUs resist complying with such standards.

Some QA standards in universities are found to be impractical or irrelevant within the existing local HE contexts and needs. Pham and Nguyen (2020) found that QA mechanisms relating to academics' quality in Vietnam must be revisited and revised to establish the minimum requirements for recruiting new academics and assessing their teaching performance. This revision will address the existing shortage of competent academics, poor-quality teaching, and academic recruitment favouritisms that the current QA mechanisms cannot solve. Thus, the QA mechanisms must be updated or reviewed regularly to meet the constantly changing needs. Such reviews must consider involving all key stakeholders and soliciting their opinions so that they become good ambassadors during implementation.

Cardoso et al.'s (2015) study in Portuguese HE reported that compliance with European standards and guidelines (ESG) about the quality of academics (i.e., academics' recruitment, motivation, development, performance appraisal and instructional support) was negatively affected by several factors. Such factors include national and institutional financial crises as well as misunderstanding and misinterpretation of such standards. Such misunderstanding and misinterpretation result from the exclusion of some stakeholders in the development of ESG and inadequate training on how stakeholders can implement ESG. The financial crisis is also reported as one of the key challenges affecting the effective implementation of some national and institutional QA standards in European countries (Alzafari & Kratzer, 2019), as well as the accreditation of university programmes in Mozambique (Zavale, 2022).

In Algeria, Wissam and Amina (2022) found that the main constraint to successful QA implementation in universities is the limited involvement of different stakeholders in developing QA documents. The scholars (see Alzafari & Kratzer, 2019; Uludağ et al., 2021) associate such stakeholders' marginalisation with the lack of leadership skills among QA leaders to balance stakeholders' interests, the reluctant nature of some stakeholders (students and academics) to

voluntarily participate in QA activities, and the lack of QA views for some stakeholders (students) due to inadequate QA awareness.

Furthermore, according to Khamis and Scully (2020), the East African QA frameworks borrowed some aspects from European universities while paying less attention to their regional settings. The class size aspect was absent, and other features (such as the quantity and quality of feedback, the overall level of student effort, the distribution of finances, and whether teaching is recognised, valued, supported, and funded) were covered only in part. It was also noted that academic standards appear to differ in relevance to teaching and learning and miss a scientific basis. Consequently, universities' compliance with such QA frameworks faces challenges. Machumu and Kisanga (2014) discovered that the incompetence of QA officers and the marginalisation of important stakeholders are the possible causes of the impracticability of QA standards in African universities.

Besides, in Tanzania, Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2017) noted that since some PRUs keep their QA policies as confidential tools, such tools have become unclear and unviable to users. The report recommended that this be addressed by promoting the stakeholders' access to and inclusive regular reviews of QA policies to enhance users' understanding, participatory reviews, ownership, acceptance, and compliance. Such practice of treating institutional QA documents with confidentiality and marginalising stakeholders in their setting makes the practicability of QA standards a questionable issue in some PRUs of Tanzania. Additionally, Mgaiwa (2021) noted the need for PRUs to support initiatives to institutionalise workable QA policies, engage and train key stakeholders, and hire trained QA staff to enforce compliance with QA standards successfully. Further, Nyamwesa et al. (2020) reported that one of the notable impacts of TCU quality standards on the universities in Tanzania is the excessive financial burden imposed on overall academic operations. Due to such financial cost implications, non-compliance cases caused by inadequate financial resources are inevitable.

Thus, it is important to note that the HE stakeholders' views on the practicability of the national and institutional QA mechanisms in the contexts of both public and private universities are still unknown based on the relevant empirical studies conducted in Tanzania. This study filled that knowledge gap by evaluating the HE stakeholders' views on the practicability of the national and institutional QA mechanisms in fostering compliance in both public and private universities of Tanzania. This study has theoretical and practical contributions to academia. By establishing a source of universities' non-compliance cases from the dimension of the practicability of QA mechanisms, the national QA agency, universities, researchers, and other practitioners will reflect on the national and institutional QA mechanisms with practicability challenges and their corresponding reasons for taking short and long term interventions to curb the problem.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theory informed the current study is the Capability Theory of Education, which borrows ideas from the capability approach to human development pioneered by Sen (1993). It states that any efforts to develop individuals should focus on attaining their abilities to be someone and to do something perfectly (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020). As such, individual learning must consider producing individual academic capabilities (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020). Human beings have intrinsic ambitions, freedoms, and interests to undertake a certain academic programme (Robeyns, 2017). In this case, achievement awards should be regarded as meaningful when the graduates hold the corresponding academic capabilities (Vaughan & Walker, 2012). The university has a key role in understanding students' goals and being a connecting bridge in the attainment of these goals (Vaughan & Walker, 2012). These theoretical ideas can be attained by establishing, enforcing, and evaluating the success of, QA standards in fostering meaningful learning and graduate academic capabilities. Since attaining graduate academic capability mainly depends on the universities' compliance with QA standards, establishing the QA standards has to consider all key stakeholders' views for enhancing practicability, acceptance and ownership of such QA standards in the implementation stage. As such, the practicability of the existing QA standards is inevitable for universities' compliance and graduate academic capability.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Approach and Design*

This study was guided by the qualitative research approach to understand the HE stakeholders' views on the practicability of the existing QA mechanisms in promoting universities' compliance in Tanzania. The approach involved exploring, analysing, and interpreting the key HE stakeholders' ideas, experiences, and opinions based on what, why, and how questions to draw a meaningful conclusion about the abovementioned phenomenon (Ary et al., 2018). For thorough knowledge of the phenomenon mentioned above, the multiple embedded case study design was employed to lead such inquiry with 4 cases and 4 sub-cases of analysis within each case (Yin, 2014). The selected cases are 4 anonymised public and private universities (i.e., 1, 2, 3 and 4) located in Dodoma, Dar es Salaam, and Mwanza regions of Tanzania. The sub-cases are the quality assurance directors (QADs), senior quality assurance officers (SQAOs), academics and students' cabinet members (SCMs) from such 4 universities.

### *Sampling Technique and Sample Size*

The selection of the cases and sub-cases was guided by purposive sampling, emphasising the important qualities of the samples, which were the most relevant, knowledgeable, and information-rich (Leavy, 2017). The selected 4 universities are those from the public (university 1 and 4) and private (university 2 and 3) lists that have received the most (university 1 and 3) and least (university 2 and 4) attention and punishment from the TCU for extreme non-compliance cases (at the university and student levels) between 2015 and 2022 (Mrema et al., 2023).

Besides, 1 QAD was chosen in each university due to being a head of university QA. Also, 2 SQAOs in each university were chosen for their seniority (i.e., working experience) in QA. About 2-3 academics in each university were chosen as the academic staff assembly chairperson (1 from each university; available in public universities [PUs] only) and the senior academics (in academic ranks) who have specialised in HE quality (2 from each university). The 6 SCMs from each university were chosen as the current and former presidents, ministers, and deputy ministers of education affairs. This sampling makes a sample size of 46, as shown in Table 1 hereunder:

*Table 1. The Sample Composition*

<b>Categories of Participants</b>	<b>Universities</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
QADs	01	01	01	01	<b>04</b>
SQAOs	02	02	02	02	<b>08</b>
Academics	03	02	02	03	<b>10</b>
SCMs	06	06	06	06	<b>24</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>46</b>

### *Data Collection*

The individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary reviews were the methods used to collect data. The QADs, SQAOs and academics were interviewed individually while the SCMs were in the FGDs. The interviews and FGDs were conducted via face-to-face and telephone interrogations using semi-structured schedules. A documentary review was done on the national (i.e., TCU) and institutional (i.e., 4 universities) QA documents. Such documents are The Universities Act No. 7 of 2005, the TCU quality guidebook of 2019, as well as almanack, prospectus, and examination regulations from the 4 selected universities. The main criterion for including and excluding the documentary data was the participants' observations on QA mechanisms with practicability challenges and non-compliance cases.

### *Data Analysis*

Utilising Leavy's (2017) five-step content analysis, the data from all three research methods were analysed manually for deeper understanding and insightful interpretation. First, the initial immersions into the research datasets, where interview, FGD and documentary review datasets were read for familiarisation with the overall research findings. Second, the identification of analysis units, where the sentences and paragraphs were selected as the critical units for analysing the datasets. Third, the deductive coding approach was employed by preparing an initial codebook, which was used to assign relevant codes to the datasets, and then the codebook was updated. Fourth, the frequency of the codes was assessed, where most appeared, and related codes were joined to form categories. The combination of relative categories formed the research themes corresponding to the questions. Lastly, the interpretation and presentation of the results, FGD and interview themes were interpreted by checking their frequency of occurrence across participants. The documentary review themes were interpreted by checking their correspondence to the FGD and interview themes and questions. After interpretation, the findings were presented in textual mode and supported by the respective extracts.

### *Trustworthiness of the Study*

Six strategies were employed to enhance the study's trustworthiness, from the research development to the data analysis. First, the sample representativeness was assured by including all key QA representatives (i.e., QAD, SQAOs, academics and SCMs) in public and private universities to get different viewpoints before concluding. Second, the research instruments (i.e., interview, FGD and documentary review guides) underwent quality review by 3 experts in HE quality and were finally improved. Third, the final improved research instruments were piloted at one university before actual research data collection for further quality checks. Fourth, during data collection and analysis, the data (primary and secondary), participants (QA members, academics and students), and methods (interview, FGD and documentary review) were triangulated to get bias-free findings. Fifth, after each interview or FGD session, the participant's responses were validated by summarising what was recorded and asking the participants to confirm the accuracy. Lastly, the datasets were inter-coded and intra-coded by 2 coders to get credible and dependable themes (Cohen et al., 2017; Denscombe, 2017).

*Ethical Considerations of the Study*

In rigorous adherence to ethical research aspects, four strategies were employed. First, the protocol for obtaining research permits was followed from the national to the participant levels. Second, before collecting data, each participant was asked to read the informed consent form, and upon being satisfied with it, they were asked to sign it. Third, participant and institution anonymity was protected from data collection to report writing. All participants were asked not to disclose their names; instead, the codes for universities (i.e., 1, 2, 3, and 4) and respective titles for participants were used in identification. Lastly, the confidentiality of data was assured by keeping research notebooks, audios, and transcripts in a locked file cabinet (Ary et al., 2018).

**Findings**

The key research question was: How practicable are the existing QA mechanisms in promoting universities' compliance? All participants were asked about: first, the overall practicability of the existing QA mechanisms, and second, to provide QA mechanisms with practicability challenges in their contexts and their corresponding reasons. The findings are presented hereunder:

*Overall Practicability of the Existing QA Mechanisms*

This study revealed that most participants (QADs, SQAOs, academics, and SCMs) believe the existing QA mechanisms are generally practicable. Further, there is no difference in the participants' responses about such general practicability views between national and institutional QA documents. This similarity might be caused by the fact that institutional QA mechanisms reflect the national QA mechanisms. The participants said:

*"The institutional and national QA guidelines are practicable and good for enhancing the university's quality. However, in our context some of the constituent colleges and other new colleges have failed to comply...." (QAD, University 4)*

*"It is 50-50, unlike PUs; PRUs are challenged with finance because we are depending on tuition fees per se." (SQA0-i, University 2)*

*"The guidelines are practicable, but some standards are too high to achieve, especially for small universities like us." (SQA0-ii, University 3)*

*"In my view, I see they are not adequately practicable in the context of PRUs. PRUs have been forced to do things that are difficult to comply with." (Academic-ii, University 2)*

*"We believe they are practicable because we have not received any serious complaints about implementation." (SCMs, University 1)*

The above quotes reveal a degree of satisfaction among the participants about the practicability of the national and institutional QA mechanisms. The statistics showed that 43 out of 46 participants said QA mechanisms are practicable, while 3 participants (1 SQA0 and 2 academics) said not adequately practicable. However, it was observed that both groups (43 and 3 participants) had some QA requirements with practicability challenges for some reasons.

*The QA Mechanisms with Practicability Challenges and Their Corresponding Reasons*

The participants were asked to point out QA mechanisms with practicability challenges and their corresponding reasons. Such QA mechanisms are classified into national and institutional ones:

*National QA Mechanisms*

The participants highlighted 5 national QA requirements from The Universities Act No. 7 of 2005 and the TCU quality guidebook of 2019 that have had practicability challenges and their underlying reasons. Such requirements are senior academics in administrative positions, academics' promotion, academics' recruitment, inclusive and participatory teaching approaches, and requirements with extra financial cost implications.

*Senior Academics in University Administrative Duties*

The study found that the Universities Act No. 7 of 2005 and TCU quality guidebook of 2019 require the use of senior academics (i.e., Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors, and Professors) in university administrative duties such as Deans, Principals, Deputy Principals, Deputy Vice Chancellors, and Vice Chancellors. Although the participants acknowledged such requirements are very useful at the top university level, their concern is how they can be complied with across all university levels (i.e., from the faculty to the top) and sizes (i.e., small, medium, and large universities) while the universities are challenged with the limited number of senior academics and inadequate funds to employ such academics. The participants highlighted:

*"...in our context, some of the constituent colleges and other new campus colleges have failed to comply with the supply of senior academic leaders because the majority of available staff are still juniors." (QAD, University 4)*

*"....for instance, some duties such as administrative positions.....need senior lecturers and above which is not easy to get in our context." (SQA0-ii, University 3)*

*"...the setbacks can be there because PRUs' operations are somehow different from PUs. ....we are instructed on employing Professors and using them to hold various leadership positions which are expensive for us." (Academic-iii, University 2)*

According to the TCU (2019a) and the Universities Act (2005), positions such as deans of the faculties and schools, directors of academic directorates and institutes, and deputy principals of the campus colleges should be headed by senior lecturers or above. Also, the principals of university colleges and campus colleges, deputy principals of university colleges, vice chancellors, and deputy vice-chancellors should be associate professors or professors.

*"1.2.3 The vice-chancellor and a deputy vice chancellor of every university shall be a senior academician as stipulated in the Universities Act Cap. 346 of the laws of Tanzania, where a senior academician shall mean a person at the rank of full professor or associate professor." (TCU, 2019a, p. 24)*

*"1.2.6 The academic position of a person appointed to the position of dean of a faculty/school, or director of an institute or directorate dealing with academic matters shall be senior lecturer or above." (TCU, 2019a, pp. 24-25)*

*"1.2.7 The academic position of a person appointed to the position of principal, provost, deputy principal or deputy provost of a college or university college shall be professor or associate professor." (TCU, 2019a, p. 25)*

*"1.2.8 The academic position of a person appointed to the position of principal of a campus college shall be a professor or associate professor, and for deputy principal of such a college shall be a senior lecturer or above." (TCU, 2019a, p. 25)*

#### *Academics Promotion Criteria*

The participants said that promoting academics, especially to senior positions, among other requirements, calls for supervising postgraduate students. This criterion was seen to be impracticable in some universities with no or limited number of postgraduate programmes and students. Owing to such challenges, some universities have been promoting their academics without considering that requirement, while some academics have been struggling to search for postgraduate students from other universities. The participants had these to say:

*"...promotion criteria for senior lecturers, associate and full professors need the supervision of the postgraduate students to completion which is very challenging for universities with a very limited number of postgraduate programmes." (Academic-iii, University 3)*

*"...also the requirements for promoting senior academics call for supervision of postgraduate students while are very few in some new colleges." (QAD, University 4)*

According to TCU (2019a), among the criteria for promoting a lecturer to a senior lecturer position, a senior lecturer to an associate professor, and an associate professor to a professor include the supervision to completion of at least 2, 3, and 4 postgraduate students, respectively.

*"(e) Should also have supervised/co-supervised to completion at least 2 postgraduate students [promotion to senior lectureship]." (TCU, 2019a, p. 196)*

*"(g) In addition, the staff member should also have supervised to completion of at least 3 postgraduate students [promotion to associate professorship]." (TCU, 2019a, p. 197)*

*"(f) In addition, the staff member should also have supervised to completion of at least 4 postgraduate students [promotion to professorship]." (TCU, 2019a, p. 198)*

Another participants' concern in academics' promotion was the issue of some academics' qualifications that TCU rejected for being regarded as having vertical qualifications. The participants said that as per the TCU, the vertical qualifications involve complete or slight differences in academic fields/areas of specialisation for undergraduate, master's, and PhD certificates and employment areas of specialisation. In contrast, the horizontal qualifications involve close relationships or similarities in those areas. They claimed that the existing requirements for academics to have horizontal qualifications have been misinterpreted by the TCU, which demoralises the ambition of academics to have multiple skills relevant to the main academic area of employment. The participants had these to cement:

*"...academics have been complaining about the issue of TCU requiring academics with horizontal qualifications. Some of the academics have been rejected while having experience of more than 10 years of teaching at the university level. We are disappointed to see those from PUs are not disturbed." (QAD, University 2)*

*"...Also, we are required to have academics with horizontal qualifications which are sometimes difficult to obtain. Academics with multiple skills within the same field are regarded to have vertical qualifications." (Academic-iii, University 2)*

*"Moreover, TCU needs to redefine what it means for the vertical qualifications because the promotions for some of our academics have been rejected for that reason while they have a very slight divergence which we perceive to be needed for academics' broad understanding of their fields." (SQA0-i, University 3)*

#### *Academics Recruitment Criteria*

The participants asserted that the existing entry GPA points for employing TA (3.5 out of 5.0) and AL (4.0 out of 5.0) limit the possibility of getting the required number of academics, especially from STEM fields. This limit happens because there are few graduates with such qualifications. Among those few, most graduates are employed by the PUs, making the PRUs scramble to employ qualified academics. Consequently, the PRUs are re-advertising jobs, employing unqualified STEM academics, and possessing inadequate academics. The participants said:

*"Moreover, the issue of minimum undergraduate and master's GPAs for recruiting academics at some points has been a barrier to getting enough pure science academics in our PRUs. You may find some are very good at serving as academics but are unqualified for having less than required GPAs." (QAD, University 3)*

*"Another challenging area is the GPAs for employing academics. We have observed the existing criteria make us re-advertise the job or employ unqualified academics due to the lack of qualified applicants especially in STEM fields." (SQA0-i, University 2)*

The above concerns have been raised before. The current TCU guidebook acknowledged that the implementation experience from the previous QA guidebook (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) showed the hardship of getting enough academics (TCU, 2019a, p. 154). Thus, the current guidebook harmonised the entry GPA from 3.8 to 3.5 out of 5.0 in employing TAs for both public and private universities. Also, the professor emeritus position was officially recognised to retain the highly demanded professors (TCU, 2019a, p. 154). While the TCU perceived such harmonisation as advantageous to the PUs, which were affected, the findings revealed that even PRUs had similar hardships.

Also, other participants from PRUs highlighted the impracticability of open academic recruitment as demanded by the TCU.

*"...universities need to, among others, establish objective and transparent systems for the recruitment and deployment of academic staff while considering issues such as communication and pedagogical skills of the teaching staff, besides academic qualifications and ethical issues...." (TCU, 2019a, p. 153)*

The participants claimed that PRUs are facing the serious challenge of high academics' turnover due to non-attractive pay relative to PUs owing to financial austerity they face. Consequently, PRUs face frequent academic gaps that call for immediate employment. Thus, since the open recruitment process is expensive (in terms of finance and time), they have been using a closed recruitment process, which is non-competitive. During interviews, one of the participants said:

*"...even the issue of the open recruitment process is somehow impracticable. You may ask why. But I will tell you we have a problem of academics' turnover especially in PRUs with insufficient financial stability. How can we afford the related costs of competitive recruitment?" (QAD, University 3)*

#### *Inclusive and Learner-Centred/Participatory Teaching Approaches*

In this area, the participants raised a concern that despite the TCU quality guidelines requiring academics to use inclusive and learner-centred teaching approaches, the approaches have received practicability challenges in arts-based programmes.

*"3.10.4 In order to implement student-centred.....every University shall: (a) take into consideration the diversity of students and their needs and enable them with flexible learning paths...and (b) encourage a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the lecturer.... emphasises the development of independent learning skills." (TCU, 2019a, p. 86)*

The participants said such requirements were correctly set, but their implementations encountered administrative challenges. The participants highlighted that:



*"We are also required to use an inclusive teaching approach to meet the different needs of learners. However, in my view, we are practically using an inclusive cheating approach because how can you identify and handle different students' learning needs for the courses with over 2,000 students taught by only two academics?" (Academic-ii, University 4)*

*"...the learner-centred approach has failed in our social science programmes that attract so many students in our PUs. Since we have an inadequate number of academics and physical resources, our campus has no practical sessions or students' seminars. ...Our learning approach has been too theoretical and we simplify students' assessments by administering multiple-choice tests and group assignments." (Academic-i, University 1)*

#### *QA Requirements with Extra Financial Cost Implications*

The participants raised several QA requirements whose practicability and compliance depend on the financial stability of universities. However, since their universities are highly dependent on tuition fees as their main source to finance every university operation, such QA requirements have faced practicability challenges. For instance, plagiarism software, independent examiners, research and publication, academic programmes' accreditation, QA representatives, ICT integration in the learning system, GTS, employing and retaining senior academics, optimum resource-student ratio, and modern and well-furnished/equipped physical infrastructures.

In controlling plagiarism cases from students and academics, the TCU quality guidebook requires "4.24.4 Every University shall acquire software or any other relevant means for the detection of plagiarism" (TCU, 2019a, p. 145). The participants asserted that a subscription fee for such plagiarism software is super expensive for PRUs to install. The study found that the two involved PRUs have been operating without that software, making them struggle to find alternative ways of detecting and controlling students' plagiarism cases. The participants said:

*"Another area is plagiarism software which is very expensive for us. It is why we have failed to install it in our university because we cannot afford the subscription fee. Consequently, we fail to control plagiarism in students' works." (Academic-ii, University 2)*

*"...we have failed even to pay the subscription fee for the plagiarism checker because it is too expensive. We wish the government could assist us with that burden as that software is important." (SQA0-ii, University 3)*

Besides, the universities have to use IEs and EEs to oversee the quality of examination setting, moderation, administration, marking, and results processing, as well as students' research works and the entire course delivery and relevance.

*"3.15.1 A University shall appoint an external examiner: (a) whose qualifications and experience are relevant to the academic discipline or profession he/she shall be assigned to examine and shall be a person of seniority in his/her field of study with relevant experience and sufficient knowledge of his/her subject area to assess students' knowledge and skills." (TCU, 2019a, p. 90)*

This study revealed that using such EEs in all university courses has financial implications that universities can hardly bear. Consequently, the involved PRUs have been hiring EEs to examine students' dissertations only. Likewise, since the guidebook stated that: "examiners must be academics with seniority" (see TCU, 2019a, p. 90), such ambiguity (i.e., seniority) has made the involved PRUs use mostly lecturers to minimise costs. The participants highlighted:

*"...frankly speaking, we used to have EEs, but for the last 5 years, right now, due to inadequate financial resources, we are using them for very few courses. We are relying on internal moderation. However, for all dissertations of postgraduate students, we are using EEs with PhDs from other universities within the country." (Academic-iii, University 2)*

*".....we have been using EEs for some teaching courses depending on our financial ability.....normally we use lecturers from other universities within the country to minimise expenditures in such tasks." (QAD, University 3)*

Also, the study has established that as a way of reducing the costs for the IEs, the involved public and private universities (except university 4, which is using EEs [from outside Tanzania] and IEs for all courses) have been regarding the respective course instructors performing the role of IEs when are marking their students' examination scripts which is not a real independent internal examination. One of the academics reported:

*"...we are not using IEs because every course will be examined by EEs. Instructors serve as internal examiners." (Academic-ii, University 1)*

Moreover, the academics disclosed that one of their demotivational factors in research and publications is the embedded costs they take on themselves with no or limited support from their employers. They further claimed they find the competition tough even if they opt for journals with no publication charges.

*"...research and publication costs for academics and postgraduate students are too expensive. We normally use journals with no article processing charges but face serious competition or long publication duration." (Academic-ii, University 2)*

Furthermore, concerning the academic programmes' accreditation, among other things, TCU requires the universities to have a list of employed academics qualifying to teach that new programme before they apply for programme accreditation.

*"2.5.2 A University applying for programme accreditation shall submit to the Commission... including the names and particulars of all academic staff adequate for offering the programme for the first and subsequent programme delivery cycles." (TCU, 2019a, p. 49)*

Interestingly, the participants from the PRUs were questioning how academics could be employed and paid salaries without being given teaching responsibilities when they applied for accreditation. The participants elaborated:

*"We have the challenge of inadequate financial resources because we highly depend on tuition fees. ....also, if we need to introduce new programmes, we should employ lecturers first before obtaining approval to run the programme." (QAD, University 2)*

*"...we are required to employ new academics for teaching new programmes before we have applied for accreditation and yet we are not allowed to admit students to that programme before we receive interim accreditation. How can we pay such jobless academics?" (QAD, University 3)*

TCU acknowledged the possibility of such staffing requirements increasing extra financial burden to universities. Thus, it requested that universities have at least the minimum staffing for that programme before granting the interim accreditation (TCU, 2019a, p. 48). However, the involved PRUs have shown their dissatisfaction with that requirement. Consequently, it can attract universities to cheat the TCU on the submitted list of academics and their qualifications.

On top of that, the universities are currently required by the TCU to select QA representatives/ coordinators at both school/college and departmental levels to form the university-level QA directorate. The participants from the QA units claimed that such a requirement had attracted extra financial obligations on paying allowances for doing QA tasks. They further asserted that compliance with such requirements is perceived as a misuse of financial and human resources for small universities with the smallest number of students, academics, and departments per college, school or faculty. Consequently, they decide not to comply. The QAD highlighted:

*"TCU needs all universities to have QA coordinators from each department which has financial implications, especially for very small universities with very few programmes or students in a certain department. Unfortunately, the reference for most of the standards is benchmarked from the University of Dar es Salaam [the biggest and oldest public university in Tanzania]." (QAD, University 3)*

Other requirements such integrating ICT in the learning system, GTS, employing and retaining senior academics, optimum resource-student ratio, modern and well-furnished libraries, laboratories, students hostels, and academics offices (i.e., computers, telephones, internet, and printers), as well as a personal office for every senior academic (TCU, 2019a), have attracted the need for enough funds for effective compliance. Consequently, the members of QA units asserted that they opt only for those with TCU audit pressure and university priorities depending on the available budget. As such, they further said that to comply with those requirements, they need multiple and sustainable sources of funds, which is really hard. The SQAQO explained:

*"...my brother, the TCU guidebook has several QA requirements that demand adequate financial investments while most of our institutions are very weak financially....for example, optimum physical resource-student ratio, well-furnished physical resources, and ICT integration. You may ask how compliance can be achieved." (SQAQO-ii, University 2)*

### *Institutional QA Mechanisms*

Among all involved universities, the participants from university 4 pointed out 2 main QA requirements from their institutional QA documents (i.e., examination regulations and almanack) with practicability challenges. Such requirements are marking of students' scripts and invigilation restrictions, which are elaborated hereunder:

### *Marking of Students' Scripts*

Participants questioned the short period allocated in the university almanack for marking the examination scripts without considering the existing academic-student ratio per course and the marking quality within the given time. They asserted that they have more students than the available academics. Consequently, they rush to finish the marking process within the given time with less consideration for the marking quality, which might invite quality issues. The participants said:

*"....right now, as you see, we are marking the scripts, and the almanack has given us two weeks to finish. This course has a total of 2,031 students and was assigned to only two instructors. ...how can we offer quality marking...? If we delay finishing the marking process, we may be regarded as irresponsible instructors." (Academic-iii, University 4)*

*"For our institutional regulations, we academics from the social science courses have been asking for an extension of the given period for marking final examinations from 2 to 3 weeks or more. As of now, we are marking day and night because of the very high number of students than instructors. We fail even to read word by word in marking students' essays to comply with time." (Academic-ii, University 4)*

*"I understand, but the university cannot extend marking time because the university almanack is so tight. We have been appealing to academics to devote the whole two weeks to marking only. The university has also asked for the government's permission to employ more academics." (QAD, University 4)*

According to the University 4 Almanac 2022/2023, marking university examination scripts for all courses is conducted for a maximum of 18 days only. This short time (as per the academics' views) may jeopardise students' justice in the marking process. The study also found that the same university uses both IIEs and EEs who re-examine the marking and result processing. However, the students from that university reported the changes in their results when IIEs and EEs completed their task, which implies instructors' marking anomalies. The SCM said:

*"We have experience with the changes in the semester results. We were once told it is because of the independent examiners' reports." (SCMs, University 4)*

### *Invigilation Restrictions*

The academics and students were of the view that some of the invigilation restrictions were useless and inhumane. Because of that view, such restrictions have received practicability challenges in their university. For instance, students' prohibition to borrow materials inside the examination room is one of the invigilation restrictions. The participants argued that strict compliance with that regulation is inhuman because some students encounter such needs beyond their control, which may contribute to their examination failure for such unthoughtful regulation. The participants highlighted:

*"...we have this university examination regulation that restricts our candidates from exchanging materials such as rulers, pens, and calculators during the examination time. Some of us have been ignoring to comply with that regulation because some students may fail due to such unexpected incidents." (Academic-i, University 4)*

*"...some students may find their pens and calculators are not working inside the examination rooms, and some academics have been denying them to borrow from their fellows. This is inhumane indeed." (SCMs, University 4)*

According to the university 4 examination regulations (found in their prospectus of 2022), students are not allowed (for any reason or through any means) to borrow any material, such as pens, rulers, and calculators, in the examination room.

## **Discussion**

This study explored the practicability of the existing QA mechanisms in fostering Tanzania universities' compliance. The findings revealed that the existing QA mechanisms are generally practicable; however, some QA requirements have practicability challenges in their HE contexts. Despite such requirements intended to improve HE quality, the study found several contextual factors that affect their practicability and compliance in the intended HE areas. Such requirements could be well practicable if they were set in other ways or if such contextual factors were either absent or addressed. Thus, all such requirements do not completely mean they are useless and were set wrongly.

Based on the reported concerns or views about the shortage of senior academics for administrative duties in public and private universities, two critical questions could be asked: First, was there any scientific consideration of the existing correlation among academic qualification ranks, administrative duties, and performance? Second, when establishing that requirement, did the TCU consider the number of senior academics in the country or per university? The TCU's (2019b) report revealed that PRUs have had unqualified top administration because of inadequate senior academics. Such a report implies that TCU probably underestimated the problem's existence in PRUs only and overlooked its existence in PUs (especially at new colleges). Owing to the shortage of senior academics in some countries, such as South Africa, their attrition for better pay across various universities becomes uncontrollable, which creates a scramble for qualified administrators (Samuel & Chipunza, 2013). The empirical studies in Tanzania show that the shortage of senior academics is associated with lack of academics' publication culture (Fussy, 2019), socio-academic distance between senior and junior academics, limited academic mentorship (Mgaiwa & Kapinga, 2021), and inadequate funds to employ and sustain senior academics (Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017; Peter, 2014). Thus, to achieve total compliance

with such requirements, it will take some time for the existing junior academics to grow to senior ranks and universities to have financial stability as far as the abovementioned factors are concerned.

Besides, this study underscores that the demand for postgraduate supervision in academics' promotion is a good requirement for enhancing and assessing academics in research coaching skills. However, it is worth noting that many universities in Tanzania have been expanding undergraduate rather than postgraduate programmes, resulting in a smaller number or absence of postgraduate students (Komba & Chiwamba, 2017; TCU, 2019b, 2023). Besides, the existing postgraduate students have faced the challenge of delayed completion, which demotivates others to join (Komba & Chiwamba, 2017). Thus, strict compliance with such supervision requirements can contribute to a shortage of senior academics due to the limited number of postgraduate students. In contrast, leniency can contribute to non-compliance cases on one side and an increasing number of senior academics on the other.

Furthermore, the rejected academics' promotions due to vertical qualifications have twofold implications; first, there is an ambiguity on what line differentiates vertical and horizontal qualifications from the TCU quality guidelines. Such ambiguity is one of the reasons for unsatisfactory compliance with QA standards, as the standard becomes unclear to the users (Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017). Second, there can be double standards in enforcing such guidelines between public and private universities. This argument comes because the two involved PRUs have shown dissatisfaction with the TCUs' reactions compared to PUs. In line with Ramírez and Haque's (2016) study, they asserted that PRUs globally have been mistreated by their national quality regulatory agencies compared to PUs.

Moreover, as it was found in the current study that some job posts for STEM academics have been re-advertised for missing qualified applicants, such practice might be caused by the increasing demand for academics (due to the HE massification policies) that does not match the existing supply of qualified graduates to work back as academics in universities (Khamis & Scully, 2020; Kipchumba, 2019; Shabani et al., 2014). Further, the use of non-competitive academics' recruitment due to high academic turnover in the PRUs is known in the literature of Tanzania. As such, Peter (2014) found that the PRUs in Tanzania are challenged with very high academic turnover rates and financial instabilities. Consequently, the PRUs ignore the required competitive recruitment approach in responding to such challenges. The non-competitive recruitment approach attracts favouritism and incompetent academics, hence affecting the quality of education and graduates' academic capabilities (Peter, 2014; Pham & Nguyen, 2020).

Similar to what was found in this study, Khamis and Scully (2020) reported that the main constraint of implementing a learner-centred approach in East African universities is the increasing uncontrolled resource (academic/physical)-student ratios. Apart from that constraint, other scholars (see Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; Peter, 2014) have established that implementation challenges of inclusive and learner-centred approaches are also associated with the existing incompetent academics that cannot use such approaches effectively; instead, they value finishing the modules even without achieving the learning outcomes. Consequently, some universities have had very limited or no students' seminars, practical activities, individualised students' assessments, classroom interactions (teacher and students) and monitoring of students' learning progress, which promote rote learning and negatively affect graduates' academic capabilities (Milinga et al., 2022).

This study also revealed several QA mechanisms not being implemented because they are costly to universities with serious financial austerities. As such, Alzafari and Kratzer (2019) and Ansah (2015) reported that some universities in Africa and Europe have failed to comply with QA standards due to financial crisis. Similarly, other studies in Tanzania found that while the unsustainability of the sources of finances for the PUs have led to compliance uncertainties and put HE quality questionable (Mgaiwa, 2018b), the overdependence on tuition fees has affected the PRUs' financial stability to comply with all QA standards (Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017). Also, Nyamwesa et al. (2020) state that some TCU standards have increased the financial burden on universities while striving to comply. This study underscores that while attaining HE quality is expensive, universities must incur some necessary costs.

For the independent examiners, the issue of underrating the role of the IIEs in university 1, 2 and 3 is incorrect. It is incorrect because both IIEs and EEs are working on several areas, including re-examining examination setting, moderation, administration, marking and results processing, as well as checking course relevance, whether the learning resources used are appropriate and up-to-date, and compliance with universally agreed principles of examining (Asiyai, 2022; Odhiambo, 2018). So, each examiner has unique work that improves the quality of respective course delivery as long as they work independently. On top of that, as the involved PRUs are neither hiring EEs for all courses nor using IIEs at all due to financial reasons, the marking quality is threatened, and graduates' academic capabilities can be questionable. As such, Odhiambo (2018) reported that due to the financial inability to use EEs annually in Kenyan universities, some students are caught by EEs that were supposed to repeat a course or an examination by the time they graduated. Also, Mgaiwa (2018a) and Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2017) found that financial instabilities constrain the use of EE systems in Tanzanian PRUs. Consequently, the quality of the course delivery, marking, and graduates are jeopardised.

Regarding plagiarism software expenses, someone could ask how the originality of research works can be easily checked in such PRUs without plagiarism software in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Thus, deliberate effort is needed to control the quality of research, especially in such PRUs. Although using such software is regarded more reactive than proactive

approach, it can detect plagiarism cases caused by intentional and unintentional factors (Sibomana et al., 2018). Lastly, despite the inadequate academics' research and publications can be attributed mainly to a lack of publication culture (Fussy, 2019), the issue of financial costs should not be underestimated. Both research and publications are expensive once you want quality research outputs. While investing in research and publications assists in academics' promotions, it is uneasy for academics with insufficient salaries to use their pocket money for research and publications if they have not satisfied their basic needs (Fussy, 2019; Peter, 2014). Thus, academics need financial support for research from their employers or states to comply with research and publication requirements.

For the institutional QA mechanisms, this study found that since the academics have been rushing to comply with the given marking time, the IIEs and EEs' reports have noted unfair marking or grading in students' marked scripts. Someone can ask: What about the justice of students whose scripts were marked by instructors unfairly, and neither IIE nor EE has sampled them? Also, what if some students graduate after passing their examinations with incorrect markings (i.e., by overlooking), and neither IIE nor EE has noted them? Ahmed and Pollitt (2011) insist that to attain valid markings, the instructors have to be given enough time to evaluate students' scripts correctly. This study cautions that if there is neither optimal academic-student ratio nor time flexibility on marking scripts for bigger classes, the enforced compliance to such marking time requirement may be achieved but compromises the marking quality and academic capabilities of students or graduates.

### Conclusion

The study explored the practicability of the existing national and institutional QA mechanisms in promoting Tanzania universities' compliance. This study revealed that the existing QA mechanisms are generally practicable; however, some national and institutional QA requirements have practicability challenges caused by their corresponding HE contextual factors. Such requirements are senior academics in administrative positions, academics' promotion, academics' recruitment, inclusive and participatory teaching approaches, those with extra financial costs, examination scripts' marking, and invigilation restrictions. Such practicability challenges of some national and institutional QA mechanisms contribute to non-compliance cases among QA stakeholders in Tanzania. Thus, the study asserts that one of the reasons for the existing non-compliance cases in Tanzania is the practicability challenges of some national and institutional QA mechanisms. Besides, these practicability challenges and non-compliance cases threaten the quality of HE and the future academic capabilities of graduates in Tanzania.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that first, external and internal QA agencies worldwide should ensure that establishing and revising the external and internal QA mechanisms is very participatory to all key HE stakeholders to get their viewpoints before the final draft is approved for implementation. Doing so will promote the practicability, as well as stakeholders' understanding, acceptance, and ownership of, the established QA mechanisms for effective universities' compliance and quality improvement. Second, the external and internal QA agencies should issue circulars and conduct training to university stakeholders to clarify the QA requirements with ambiguities (e.g., vertical and horizontal qualifications as well as specific EEs' qualifications) and unsatisfactory understanding (e.g., inclusive and participatory teaching approaches for big classes), respectively, to foster universities' compliance. Third, there is a need to regularly audit and strike a balance between the number of admitted students and current university resources capacity (i.e., optimal resource-student ratio) for promoting practicability of, and compliance to, the inclusive and participatory teaching approaches as well as high-quality marking of students' examination scripts within the very short provided time for timely feedback. Last but not least, universities must keep strategising for multiple, reliable and sustainable sources of funds to promote their financial stability, which can enhance compliance with QA mechanisms with extra financial cost implications. Other researchers can explore the influence of other factors, such as the challenges of QA enforcement practices contributing to universities' non-compliance cases.

### Limitations

Since this study used the qualitative approach, its main limitation is the failure to generalise the findings to a wide population. However, since detailed descriptions of the cases, sub-cases, and findings have been provided, the readers can generalise these findings through case-by-case (i.e., naturalistic generalisation).

### Disclosure Statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

### Funding

This study received no financial support.

### Authorship Contribution Statement

Mrema: Concept and design, data acquisition, data analysis and interpretation, drafting the manuscript, and critical revision of the manuscript. Ndayambaje: Concept and design, technical support, supervision, reviewing and final approval. Ntawiha: Concept and design, technical support, supervision, reviewing and final approval. Ndabaga: Concept and design, technical support, supervision, reviewing and final approval.

### References

- Ahmed, A., & Pollitt, A. (2011). Improving marking quality through a taxonomy of mark schemes. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 18(3), 259-278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2010.546775>
- Alzafari, K., & Kratzer, J. (2019). Challenges of implementing quality in European higher education: An expert perspective. *Quality in Higher Education*, 25(3), 261-288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2019.1676963>
- Alzafari, K., & Ursin, J. (2019). Implementation of quality assurance standards in European higher education: Does context matter? *Quality in Higher Education*, 25(1), 58-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2019.1578069>
- Ansah, F. (2015). A strategic quality assurance framework in an African higher education context. *Quality in Higher Education*, 21(2), 132-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2015.1084720>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C. K., & Walker, D. A. (2018). *Introduction to research in education*. Cengage Learning.
- Asiyai, R. I. (2022). Best practices for quality assurance in higher education: Implications for educational administration. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 25(5), 843-854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1710569>
- Buli-Holmberg, J., & Jeyaprathaban, S. (2016). Effective practice in inclusive and special needs education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 31(1), 119-134.
- Cardoso, S., Tavares, O., & Sin, C. (2015). The quality of teaching staff: Higher education institutions' compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance—the case of Portugal. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 27, 205-222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-015-9211-z>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>
- Denscombe, M. (2017). *The good research guide: Research methods for small-scale social research projects* (7th ed.). Open University Press.
- Fussy, D. S. (2019). The hurdles to fostering research in Tanzanian universities. *Higher Education*, 77, 283-299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0276-8>
- Imaniriho, D. (2020). Collaboration in quality assurance in Rwandan higher education: Realities, issues, approaches and challenges. *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research*, 1-6. <https://bit.ly/3uTa4mB>
- Inter-University Council for East Africa. (2015). *A road map to quality: Handbook for quality assurance in higher education. Revised and combined Volume 1 & 2: Guidelines for internal and external programme assessment*. IUCEA/DAAD.
- Inter-University Council for East Africa. (2016). *A road map to quality: Handbook for quality assurance in higher education. Volume 5: Principles, practices, and management of external quality assurance in East Africa*. IUCEA/DAAD.
- Khamis, T., & Scully, S. (2020). Questioning the efficacy of quality assurance frameworks for teaching and learning: A case study from East Africa, quality in higher education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 26(1), 3-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2020.1728836>
- Kipchumba, S. K. (2019). African perspective of the challenges and prospects of massification of higher education. *Editon Consortium Journal of Curriculum and Educational Studies*, 1(3), 131-145. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecices.v1i3.105>
- Komba, S. C., & Chiwamba, S. V. (2017). Towards improving the supervision of postgraduate students in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 6(2), 29-40. <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2016.1548>
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. The Guilford Press.

- Lyer, K. R., & Suba, A. (2019). Closing Academic space: Repressive state practices in legislative, regulatory, and other restrictions on higher education institutions. *The International Centre for Not-For-Profit Law*. <https://bit.ly/3GMpZpj>
- Machumu, H. J., & Kisanga, S. H. (2014). Quality assurance practices in higher education institutions: Lesson from Africa. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(16), 144-156. <https://bit.ly/47WNlok>
- Mgaiwa, S. J. (2018a). Operationalising quality assurance processes in Tanzanian higher education: Academics' perceptions from selected private universities. *Creative Education*, 9(6), 901-918. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2018.96066>
- Mgaiwa, S. J. (2018b). The paradox of financing public higher education in Tanzania and the fate of quality education: The experience of selected universities, *Sage Open*, 8(2), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018771729>
- Mgaiwa, S. J. (2021). Leadership initiatives in response to institutional quality assurance challenges in Tanzania's private universities. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(9), 1206-1223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1860203>
- Mgaiwa, S. J., & Ishengoma, J. M. (2017). Institutional constraints affecting quality assurance processes in Tanzania's private universities. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 15(1), 57-67. <https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v15i1.1491>
- Mgaiwa, S. J., & Kapinga, O. (2021). Mentorship of early career academics in Tanzania: Issues and implications for the next generation of academics. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 6(1), 114-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2021.1904433>
- Mgaiwa, S. J., & Poncian, J. (2016). Public-private partnership in higher education provision in Tanzania: Implications for access to and quality of education. *Bandung: Journal of the Global South*, 3(6), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40728-016-0036-z>
- Milinga, J. R., Kibonde, E. A., Mallya, V. P., & Mwakifuna, M. A. (2022). Addressing the social loafing problem in assessment practices from the perspectives of pre-service teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(6), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2022v47n6.1>
- Mrema, D., Ndayambaje, I., Ntawiha, P., & Ndabaga, E. (2023). Punitive measures against non-compliance with quality mechanisms in East African higher education institutions. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 32-44. <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2023v04i02.0273>
- Mtawa, N. N., & Nkhoma, N. M. (2020). Service-learning as a higher education pedagogy for advancing citizenship, conscientisation and civic agency: A capability informed view. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 5(1), 110-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2020.1788969>
- National Council for Higher Education. (2023). *Public notice*. <https://unche.or.ug/public-notice/>
- Nyamwesa, A. M., Magambo, E. F., & Onyango, D. O. (2020). Impact of external quality assurance practices on higher education institutions in Tanzania: A review paper. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 191-196. <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2020v01i03.0059>
- Odhiambo, G. (2018). The role of Kenyan universities in national development. *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, 4(3), 191-209. <https://doi.org/10.32865/fire20184324>
- Peter, S. (2014). Academic staff capacity in private universities in Tanzania. *Papers in Education and Development*, (32). <https://bit.ly/3xayo4k>
- Pham, H. T., & Nguyen, C. H. (2020). Academic staff quality and the role of quality assurance mechanisms: The Vietnamese case. *Quality in Higher Education*, 26(3), 262-283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2020.1761603>
- Ramírez, G. B., & Haque, H. M. J. (2016). Addressing quality challenges in the private university sector in Bangladesh: From policy formulation to institutional implementation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 22(2), 139-151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2016.1198177>
- Rizos, S., Sfakianaki, E., & Kakouris, A. (2022). Quality of administrative services in higher education. *European Journal of Educational Management*, 5(2), 115-128. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eujem.5.2.115>
- Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Open Book Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0130>
- Samuel, M. O., & Chipunza, C. (2013). Attrition and retention of senior academics at institutions of higher learning in South Africa: The strategies, complexities and realities. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 35(2), 97-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2013.11893151>

- Sen, A. (1993). Capability and well-being. In M. Nussbaum & A. Sen (Eds), *The quality of life* (pp. 30-53). Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198287976.003.0003>
- Shabani, J., Okebukola, P., & Oyewole, O. (2014). Quality assurance in Africa: Towards a continental higher education and research space. *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 1(1), 139-171. <https://doi.org/10.6017/IJAHE.V1I1.5646>
- Sibomana, E., Ndayambaje, I., & Uwambayinema, E. (2018). Plagiarism in higher education environment: Causes and solutions. *Rwandan Journal of Education*, 4(2), 15-23. <https://bit.ly/3uUG7m5>
- Tanzania Commission for Universities. (2019a). *Handbook for standards and guidelines for university education in Tanzania* (3rd ed.). Tanzania Commission for Universities. <https://bit.ly/3IMF4IJ>
- Tanzania Commission for Universities. (2019b). *State of university education in Tanzania 2018*. Tanzania Commission for Universities. <https://bit.ly/3Ppftcz>
- Tanzania Commission for Universities. (2019c, December). Four years of TCU success. *TCU Magazine*, 1(1), 9-13. <https://bit.ly/3Ijcp7l>
- Tanzania Commission for Universities. (2023). *VITALSTAS on university education in Tanzania 2022*. <https://bit.ly/3TGJGGw>
- Tanzania Commission for Universities. (2024). *University institutions approved to operate in Tanzania as of February 22, 2024*. <https://bit.ly/3vm6HoT>
- Times Higher Education. (2023). *World university rankings 2023*. Retrieved on August 07, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/46WmYgT>
- Top Universities. (2023). *QS world university rankings 2023*. Retrieved on May 02, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/48ewb5d>
- Uludağ, G., Bardakçı, S., Aşaroğlu, M. D., Çankaya, F., Çatal, S., Ayvat, F., Koçer, A., Yıldırım, S. A., & Elmas, M. (2021). Investigation of the higher education students' participation in quality assurance processes based on the theory of planned behaviour: A case of Turkey. *Quality in Higher Education*, 27(3), 338-356. <https://doi.org/mm42>
- Universities Act, No. 7, Cap. 346. URT. § 34-41 (2005). <https://bit.ly/3Toib4W>
- Vaughan, R. P., & Walker, M. (2012). Capabilities, values, and education policy. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 13(3), 495-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2012.679648>
- Wissam, B., & Amina, C. (2022). Academics' perceptions of constraints to quality assurance implementation in higher education in Algeria. *Economics and Culture*, 19(1), 17-29. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jec-2022-0002>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zavale, C. (2022). Challenges of accreditation in an African university: Reflections from the Eduardo Mondlane University, in Mozambique. *Quality in Higher Education*, 28(2), 236-260. <https://doi.org/mm4z>