

Students' Involvement in Internal Quality Assurance Practices for Employability in Nigerian Universities: Implications for Education Leadership

Tunji Sherif Onakoya (1*)

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1 Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of South Africa, Muckleneuk, South Africa

*Corresponding Email Address: onakots@unisa.ac.za

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Abstract:

Quality within the realm of university efficiency can be determined by an economic indicator—the employability of graduates. This study assessed students' involvement in internal quality assurance to promote employability and graduate employment in Ogun State, Nigeria. The Theory of Student Agency, as proposed by Klemencic in 2015, serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. Three research questions were raised and answered. The researchers used the descriptive study design. Three hundred ninety-one (391) postgraduate students were selected through purposive sampling from one federal, one state, and three private universities in Ogun State. The study employed the Internal Quality Assurance Practices Questionnaire (IQAPQ) as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was used to investigate students' involvement in IQA practices, considering the dimension of graduate employability. The study's findings revealed that students were not adequately involved in the majority of the processes and tools related to employability. Students' involvement in IQA practices related to employability was not significantly different across private, state, and federal universities. Additionally, there was a notable difference in students' involvement in IQA practices related to employability across the humanities, social sciences, and science disciplines. The study recommends that university management integrate employability-related quality assurance practices into university quality policies.

Keywords: *student involvement, quality assurance practices, employability, higher education, academic disciplines*

مشاركة الطلاب في ممارسات ضمان الجودة الداخلية لفرص التوظيف في الجامعات النيجيرية: الأثر المترتبة على القيادة التعليمية

الملخص:

يمكن تحديد ان جودة الأداء الجامعي يمكن أن تحدد من خلال مؤشر اقتصادي، ألا وهو قابلية الخريجين للتوظيف. وعليه فقد قيّمت هذه الدراسة مشاركة الطلاب في ضمان الجودة الداخلية لتعزيز قابلية الخريجين للتوظيف في ولاية أوجون، نيجيريا. هذا وتعد نظرية فاعلية الطالب، كما اقترحها كليمينسيك في عام ٢٠١٥، بمثابة الأساس النظري لهذه الدراسة. وتم طرح ثلاث أسئلة بحثية والإجابة عليها. استخدم الباحثون المنهج الوصفي وقد قاموا باختيار ٢٩١ طالب دراسات عليا من خلال تحديد عينات قصديّة من جامعة اتحادية واحدة، وجامعة ولاية واحدة، وثلاث جامعات خاصة في ولاية أوجون. تمثلت أداة الدراسة الحالية في استخدام استبيان ممارسات ضمان الجودة الداخلية (IQAPQ) لجمع البيانات. وقد استخدم الاستبيان لدراسة مشاركة الطلاب في ممارسات ضمان الجودة الداخلية، مع مراعاة بُعد قابلية الخريجين للتوظيف. وقد كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب لم يشاركوا بشكل كاف في معظم العمليات والأدوات المتعلقة بالتوظيف. ولم تكن مشاركة الطلاب في ممارسات ضمان الجودة الداخلية المتعلقة بالتوظيف مختلفة بشكل ملحوظ بين الجامعات الخاصة والحكومية والفيدرالية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، لوحظ اختلاف ملحوظ في مشاركة الطلاب في ممارسات ضمان الجودة الداخلية المتعلقة بالتوظيف بين تخصصات العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية والعلمية. وتوصي الدراسة بأن تدمج إدارات الجامعات ممارسات ضمان الجودة المتعلقة بالتوظيف ضمن سياسات الجودة الجامعية. الكلمات المفتاحية: مشاركة الطلاب، ممارسات ضمان الجودة، قابلية التوظيف، التعليم العالي، التخصصات الأكاديمية

* قسم الأسس التربوية، كلية التربية، جامعة جنوب أفريقيا، موكلينوك، جنوب أفريقيا

البريد الإلكتروني للمؤلف المراسل: onakots@unisa.ac.za

Introduction

University leaders have a role in supporting and contributing to the quality of higher education in Nigeria. As such, university leaders must ensure that internal and external quality assurance mechanisms are in place to deliver quality education that meets required and acceptable standards (Asiyai, 2020). This standard should lead to the production of graduates who can make a positive contribution to the socio-economic development of society. The requirement is for the university to establish educational programs that produce graduates who are well prepared for the labor market and to provide the resources necessary to ensure quality assurance in these programs.

Quality within the realm of university efficiency has been linked to an economic indicator—the employability of graduates. The reason is that graduate unemployment has attracted the attention of industries, academia, government, and other stakeholders concerned about improving the quality of the university system (Oshinyadi, 2019). Universities are constantly under intense pressure to meet the expectations of their stakeholders regarding quality. These concerns have been raised about various aspects, including marketization, privatization, massification, diversification, loss of public support, globalization, internationalization, and the creation of new technologies (Ansah, 2015). Quality assurance is also a result of universities attaining academic excellence to stay relevant in a globalized world (Ekpoh & Asuquo, 2020).

Employability is essential for individuals to secure and retain a job in a dynamic and highly competitive labor market (Römogens et al., 2020). Employability is a set of skills and competencies that university graduates can develop to enhance their chances of employment and achieve success in their chosen professions, ultimately benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy. To this end, graduating students are expected to portray the status of employable graduates. Similarly, universities are expected to pursue skills development for graduate employment (Fraser et al., 2021).

The extent to which students are trained and educated to utilize their capacities, skills, attributes, and knowledge to attain and secure employment in the labor market can be shaped by internal measures deployed within the university system. These measures are integrated into the Internal Quality Assurance System of Universities (Oshinyadi, 2019). Internal quality assurance (IQA) is a higher education management method that addresses all activities that prevent stakeholders' expectations of quality from being realized (Essel et al., 2018). When a higher educational institution conducts its assessment using internal staff to see if policies and procedures established to ensure quality meet the criteria, this is known as Internal Quality Assurance (IQA). This contrasts with External Quality Assurance (EQA), which occurs when external organizations (such as the government, parastatals, or commercial agencies) evaluate the quality of output from the higher education institution. Periodic quality evaluations,

audits, or accreditation awards may be part of the external quality assurance process (Fedeli, 2017).

Quality assurance in Nigerian universities was a result of the developments in the university education sector mandating countries to establish national quality assurance agencies and authorities; these developments include massification, privatization, marketization, diversification, institutional restructuring, emerging modes of delivery, accountability demands, globalization, corruption, and fraud and dubious quality assurance practices (Mireku & Bervell, 2024).

Martin (2018) proposed that internal quality assurance-related instruments be utilized to monitor graduate employability, the physical environment, and student assessment systems. Employability-related quality standards place a strong emphasis on various aspects related to the productivity of a university graduate. Employer involvement in program development, program relevance for the labor market, and consideration of graduate employment rates are the most prevalent aspects of employability-related quality standards (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA, 2015). Students may also participate in universities' Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) procedures. The United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency reported some benefits for students' participation in the Internal Quality Assurance of the university system.

"The strengths identified by the student representative bodies primarily focused on giving students a voice and allowing them to comment upon quality and standards and the student experience (QAA, 2011, p. 10)."

Martin (2018) also observes that most university staff, particularly those who do not hold leadership positions, and students are not informed about quality assurance activities, including the design of quality assurance policies and tools for their implementation. Students are traditionally considered the primary consumers of the educational system, especially in universities, where they are expected to be major stakeholders and consumers (Cardoso et al., 2017). As such, they should be involved in the university's IQA process. However, stakeholder involvement in the quality management process is a critical factor in its success. Internal quality assurance makes a difference because it can support recognition mechanisms, transparency, and the development of good practices in higher education.

The engagement of internal stakeholders is likely to foster a culture of excellence within academic programs. According to Fedeli (2017), involving students in quality assurance can impact both Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA) processes. In terms of IQA, various tools are designed to promote student participation in internal groups and committees responsible for the institution's self-assessment.

This involvement includes responding to questionnaires, compiling reports, and participating in focus groups or seminars. Additionally, students are encouraged to attend formal meetings with external evaluators during their periodic visits. On the

EQA side, the emphasis is placed on confirming student involvement in the planning and design of assessments, where they serve as members of external agencies' committees and actively participate in evaluating the external agencies themselves (Fedeli, 2017).

The outcome of this study will provide students with knowledge about the numerous quality tools for employability and how they can impact the quality assurance process in higher education. The findings of this study would also serve as a starting line for the revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance by the university leadership in Nigeria. Olutola and Adekunle (2020) have confirmed that Nigeria's education quality is poor. Nigerian universities cannot compete effectively with universities in other parts of the world in terms of research, usage of new technologies, and employability skills. Given this, the research is concentrated on evaluating the extent of student engagement with internal quality assurance mechanisms and their impact on employability within universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. Consequently, the study aimed to determine the degree of students' participation in internal quality assurance processes concerning employability in universities. The study also sought to investigate potential variances in the level of involvement between private, state, and federal universities, as well as variations in involvement related to students' academic disciplines.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are students involved in internal quality assurance practices related to employability in universities?
2. Is there any difference in students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in private, state, and federal universities?
3. Is there any difference in students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in humanities, social sciences, and science-based disciplines?

Literature Review

The level of students' self-reflective, deliberate acts and interactions with their environment is referred to as student agency. This is graphically represented in Figure 1. Student agency relates to students' actions and interactions throughout their educational journey. This theory includes flexible interpretations of a student's volition or will (agentic orientation), their approach to decision-making regarding actions and interactions in relation to the past, present, and future, and their perceived capability or power (agentic possibility) to attain desired outcomes within a specific context of actions and interactions. Moreover, it also involves students actively engaging in self-reflection and critical thinking (Klemencic et al., 2015).

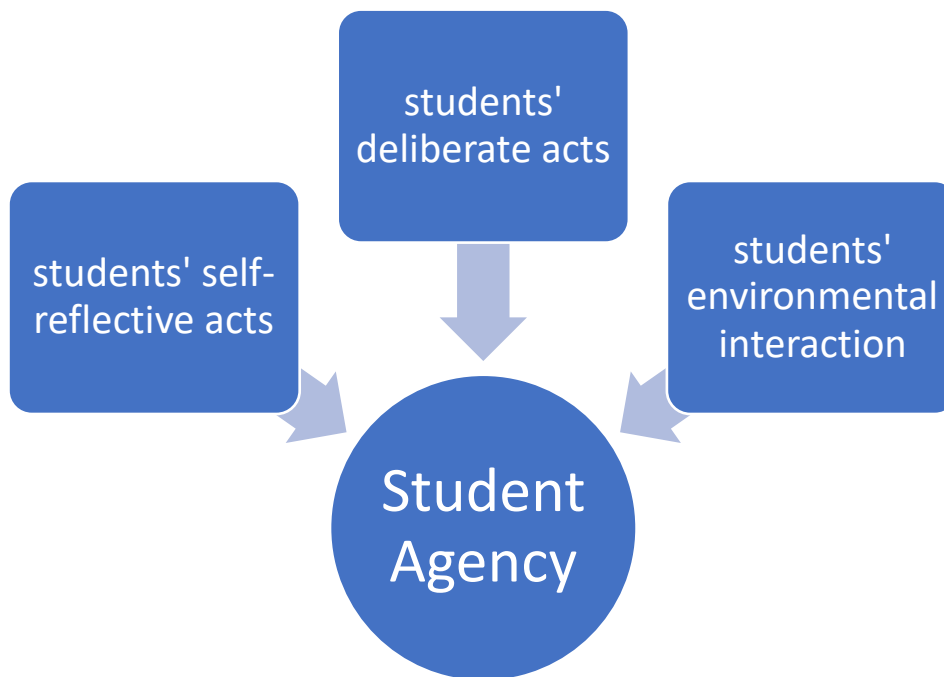


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for student agency

Original:

Individual students or groups of students can create their own student agency by working independently or in collaboration with others, utilizing resources and ideas within a specific socio-structural and relational framework (Biesta, 2008). According to Biesta, agency is not a trait possessed by students but a quality of self-reflective and intentional action and connection. From an agentic perspective, students are envisioned as self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflective (Bandura, 2006). Students' agency is shaped, but not defined, by the degree to which they possess certain tendencies. For example, students may engage in simulation exercises of professional interviews with recruiting agencies on campus without considering a definite desired outcome of that activity or being able to foresee all of the possible consequences of the action entirely. The students might think the exercise is part of the school's co-curricular activities but are unaware of its potential relevance after graduation. This practice of involving students in IQA practices, if well-managed, can improve the university's IQA, as feedback obtained from such exercises can be used to identify the employability skills possessed by students and allow them to contribute to the university's IQA.

Most universities, from inception, design and implement various internal activities to ensure that specific agreed-upon performance standards are met by setting Internal Quality Assurance units within the universities, coupled with periodic quality assurance supervision spearheaded by the Nigerian Universities Commission. Some of these measures are:

- **Skills Development and Practice:** While acknowledging the significance of extrinsic motivators in acquiring practical skills, Zhang et al. (2021) emphasize the need for teachers to focus more on internal motivators. To enhance the employability of university graduates, the university's writing and career services centers offer a range of services, including skill development and training, effective personal development planning, and tutoring. Through this support system, university students can learn crucial skills in writing, presentation, interpersonal connections, teamwork, and communication through the programs offered by these centers.
- **Jobs and Career Fair:** Career fairs are important occasions to increase graduates' employability. In a Harvard Business Review article, Agrawal (2014) asserts that career fairs enable students and businesses to build networks and learn about available job openings. A university's placement center, public relations department, and student representative council may collaborate to organize yearly job fairs, career workshops, and career events. To educate graduating students about the job-search process.
- **Attachments, Internships, and Practicum:** The extent to which industrial attachments, practicums, or internship programs are implemented in the hospitality business, according to Arroyo (2019), has a substantial impact on the graduates' level of job performance. The graduates' level of job performance improved with the length of the program's implementation term. Through industrial attachment, internship, and practicum experiences, students have the opportunity to apply some of the topics they have learned during lectures and assignments under the guidance of professionals.
- **Student Satisfaction Survey:** The university/faculty level frequently conducts an annual student satisfaction survey of the teaching and supervisory process following the conclusion of the academic year (once a year). This survey offers students the opportunity to evaluate and share their opinions and observations about teaching and the overall academic environment.
- **Pre-Employment:** As part of the university's quality assurance system, the development of pre-employment testing, also known as a mock employment test, is a key component. Pre-employment training, often referred to as simulated employment, aims to familiarize graduating students with the types of examinations that various organizations and businesses administer during job searches and employment interviews. The Mock Employment Test, which consists of the Primary Mental Ability Test and Personality Factor Questionnaire, is typically given by the university's counselling and testing department. The Counselling and Testing department may create a Made Test to cover English ability, general information, natural science, mathematics ability, logical reasoning, abstract reasoning, filing, coding, and speed and accuracy. Potential graduates will take the MADE tests when they are developed and have undergone content validation.

We observed that Elassy (2013), Essel et al. (2018), Boateng (2014), and Daguang and Yanjie (2018) have contributed to the debate on enhancing graduate employability through an internal quality assurance system in higher education. Elassy's (2013) research on a model of student involvement in quality assurance systems shows a decline in student involvement in institutional quality assurance across different academic disciplines. In another study, Essel et al. (2018) assessed students' experiences with internal quality assurance practices in private higher education institutions in Ghana. The researchers discovered that, despite students' improved knowledge of Internal Quality Assurance, they were not satisfied with their level of involvement in IQA issues and the leadership's commitment to quality in general. However, students expressed high satisfaction with the state of learning resources and the competence of the academic staff.

Essel et al.'s (2018) study recommends that IQA systems adequately involve students in promoting a quality culture. Boateng (2014) identified student involvement, lack of effective coordination, weaker emphasis on strategic planning and quality management, and a dominant culture not open to change and improvement as barriers to the effective implementation of internal quality assurance practices. Empirical findings of a study conducted by Daguang and Yanjie (2018) found that there are significant differences in the levels of involvement in different IQA activities by members of academic and administrative staff in different disciplinary fields, with different ranks, with or without leadership functions, with varying lengths of service, and with different educational backgrounds. In an international survey by Martin and Parikh (2017), several IQA tools and processes were identified that enhance graduate employability. These tools were curriculum development, curriculum review, internship quality monitoring, graduate tracer studies, employer surveys, alum involvement in curriculum review, discussions with employers during program reviews, employers' presentations, simulations of professional interviews with students, and tracking graduates through administrative data.

Alaniska et al. (2006) identified difficulties and issues involving students in quality assurance processes. However, it is not just institutional practices that cause difficulties for students; the researchers suggested that students are under more pressure than ever, with more than half reporting that they work, and three-quarters reporting that they need to work to pay for essentials.

Method

The descriptive research design of the survey type was employed for this study. The target population consisted of 17,492 postgraduate students from 13 universities (1 federal, 2 state, and 10 private universities) in Ogun State. The researchers considered this set of students as graduates and deemed them employable. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 1 federal, 1 state, and 3 private universities. The study

used Taro Yamane's formula to draw the representative sample size. The Yamane's formula is represented as:

$$n = \frac{N}{\{1 + N (e)^2\}}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = research population

e = research error (5%)

$$n = \frac{17492}{\{1 + 17492 (0.05)^2\}}$$

$$n = 391$$

Three hundred and ninety-one (391) respondents were randomly selected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of the samples by university type. The researchers designed the instrument used for this study. The instrument is a structured questionnaire tagged '*Internal Quality Assurance Practices Questionnaire*.' The instrument was structured to investigate whether students were involved in IQA tools or practices that take into account the dimension of graduate employability. Senior researchers in the field of educational leadership and management validated the instrument. The test-retest method of reliability of the instrument was conducted using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation to obtain a .84 reliability coefficient. Data collected on student involvement in Quality Assurance (QA) processes were subjected to descriptive statistics, including the mean, and inferential statistics, such as Analysis of Variance.

Results

The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The majority, 58.1% of the respondents, were females, and 41.9% were males. More than half of the respondents, 59.8%, were from state universities, 21.2% were from private universities, and 18.9% were from federal universities. Respondents from social science-based disciplines were the most dominant among the students (40.9%), followed by students in the sciences (35.8%) and the humanities (23.3%).

Table 1: Respondents' characteristics

	F	%
Sex		
Male	164	41.9
Female	227	58.1
University Type		
Federal	74	18.9
State	234	59.8
Private	83	21.2
Discipline		
Humanities	91	23.3
Social Science	160	40.9
Science	140	35.8

Research Question 1: To what extent are students involved in internal quality assurance practices related to employability in universities?

Table 2: Mean scores showing the level of students' involvement in IQA practices related to employability

IQA Tools and Practices	% Responses				
	HI	MI	SI	NI	\bar{X}
Curriculum Validation and Evaluation	11.3	20.5	35.5	32.7	2.10
Practicum or On-the-Job Training	43.0	18.4	20.2	18.4	2.85
Mock Employment Test (Pre-Employment)	14.3	20.5	32.5	32.7	2.16
Jobs and Career Fair	7.2	22.5	40.7	29.7	2.07
Graduate Tracer Study	7.2	13.3	40.7	38.9	1.89
Enhancement of academic programmes	22.5	46.0	22.3	9.2	2.82
Monitoring of student assessments	22.5	13.3	33.5	30.7	2.28
Employer surveys	9.2	24.6	30.4	35.8	2.07
Curriculum review involving alumni	11.3	27.6	43.7	17.4	2.33
Monitoring the quality of internships	22.5	37.9	25.3	14.3	2.69
Job market analysis	4.1	30.7	30.4	34.8	2.04
Skills development and practice	8.2	21.5	33.5	36.8	2.01
Enterprise and entrepreneurship	11.3	39.6	18.2	30.9	2.31
Development of dual certification	16.1	28.6	30.7	24.6	2.36
Simulations of professional interviews with students	5.1	14.3	23.3	57.3	1.67
<i>Grand Mean</i>	<i>2.24</i>				

Note. Figures are in percentages; HI= Highly Involved; MI= Moderately Involved; SI= Slightly Involved; NI= Not Involved

Table 2 indicates that students were generally *slightly involved* in University Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) practices on graduate employability (2.24). A few IQA

practices with moderate student involvement were practicum or on-the-job training (2.85), enhancement of academic programs (2.82), and monitoring of internship quality (2.69). Table 2 also confirms that Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) practices are slightly involved in curriculum validation and evaluation (2.10), mock employment tests (2.16), jobs and career fairs (2.07), employer surveys (2.07), curriculum review (2.33), job market analysis (2.04), enterprise and entrepreneurship (2.31), and development of dual certification (2.36). Other IQA practices, such as graduate tracer studies (1.89), skills development and practice (2.01), and simulations of professional interviews with students (1.67), have not involved university students in their development.

Figure 2: Extent of students' involvement in IQA practices for employability



Figure 2 presents this information on a bar chart

Research Question 2: Is there any difference in students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in private, state, and federal universities?

Table 3: *Students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in private, state, and federal universities*

University Type	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Federal	74	32.49 ^a	.930	8.002
State	234	34.35 ^a	.558	8.533
Private	83	32.77 ^a	.983	8.952
Total	391	33.66	.432	8.547

Note. ^{abc} = means on the same column with different superscripts differ significantly ($p < 0.05$); *S.E.* Standard Error of mean

Table 3 shows that the mean score of students' involvement in employability IQA practices in federal universities (mean = 32.49; *S.E.* = .930) was not different from those of state (mean = 34.35; *S.E.* = .558) and private (mean = 32.49; *S.E.* = .983) universities. This means there is no difference in students' involvement in IQA practices related to employability across private, state, and federal universities.

Research Question 3: Is there any difference in students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in the humanities, social sciences, and science-based disciplines?

Table 4: *Students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in the management, humanities, and engineering-based disciplines*

University Type	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Humanities	91	25.82 ^a	.579	5.519
Social Science	160	34.60 ^b	.772	9.765
Science	140	37.69 ^c	.365	4.315
Total	391	33.66	.432	8.547

Note. ^{abc} = means on the same column with different superscripts differ significantly ($p < 0.05$); *S.E.* Standard Error of mean

Table 4 shows that the mean score for students' involvement in employability IQA practices in science-based disciplines was the highest (mean = 37.69; *S.E.* = .365). This was followed by those in social science-based disciplines (mean = 34.60; *S.E.* = .772) and humanities-based disciplines (mean = 25.82; *S.E.* = .579). These results indicate a difference in students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in the humanities, social sciences, and science-based disciplines.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that students were not adequately involved in the majority of the processes and tools proposed for employability in the survey questionnaire. The practicum, which involved training graduating students at an off-campus agency, was a major quality practice with a high level of student involvement. This was followed by the quality practice of enhancing academic programs, which involves student course assessment, student satisfaction surveys, workload

assessments, student progression studies, program evaluation by academic staff or students, and program monitoring based on statistical indicators. Students were also involved in the QA practice of monitoring the quality of the internship program. This practice involves the effective supervision of interns and the utilization of external supervisors or industry-based mentors.

The understanding of students' involvement in IQA practices has become clear in this study. It is evident from the findings of this study that students were not much involved in many quality assurance and enhancement activities. Although a certain number of students participate in quality practices such as the development of dual certification, entrepreneurship, mock employment tests, jobs, and career fairs, employability-related quality tools are not limited to the teaching and learning process because the quality of university education is also influenced by other external factors. The surface assessment of this finding suggests that universities are facing resource constraints when implementing such quality processes in their quality assurance system.

The findings of this study do not show positive affirmation but show students' self-reflective and intentional action. In other words, if the finding of this study reflects students' self-reflective and intentional action toward their association with institutional quality practices as propounded by the Theory of Student Agency, it would, therefore, imply that students prefer to be involved in social movements within the university system with less consideration of what their involvement in QA practices could bring to their future employment status. This statement collaborates with the views of Moyo & Boti (2020), who show that students are not aware and as such do not take participation in IQA as important when in school. Furthermore, Palomares's (2014) study concluded that most students see higher education as a way to advance their personal growth for active and broad participation in society and not merely for employment. However, Alaniska et al. (2006), in their study, found that the constant financial difficulties most students face restrain them from being involved in institutional quality practice.

The findings of this study also revealed that students' involvement in IQA practices on employability is not different in private, state, and federal universities. This finding suggests that universities of all types face similar challenges in developing an integrated approach to IQA practices without compromising students' participation in the quality process. This confirms the postulation of the theory of student agency (Klemencic, 2015), which promotes the existence of students' self-reflection and interactions with their environment. A study by Martin and Lee (2017) on internal quality assurance and employability disagrees with the difference in the level of involvement of stakeholders in the quality assurance process. The researchers concluded that private and specialized universities tend to have a more proactive approach to employability compared with public and comprehensive HEIs, where a more traditional academic culture is often valued above employability-related discourses.

In addition, the findings of this study, which showed a difference in students' involvement in IQA practices on employability in humanities, social sciences, and science disciplines, confirm the empirical findings of Daguang and Yanjie (2018). Their study discovered differences in the levels of involvement in different disciplinary fields. Also, Martin and Lee (2017) emphasized that even within a university, each faculty and discipline took different approaches to employability, with the more practical faculties and disciplines (social sciences and science disciplines) having more closely associated their programs with employability than the humanities. All these findings are clear-cut manifestations of students' poor involvement in quality assurance at the institutional level.

Implications for education leadership

As shown in the findings above, students in the Nigerian university system are not adequately involved in Internal Quality Assurance, which significantly contributes to university graduates not having the needed skills for employability. A mismatch between graduate skills and industry-needed skills often causes graduate unemployment (Kadir et al., 2020). Education leaders in Nigerian universities must acknowledge this and address the gap by seeking ways to increase graduate student participation in quality assurance practices to ensure that universities produce more holistic graduates that fit into the ever-competitive labor market.

On the other hand, the study also highlights that practicums involving the training of graduating students at an off-campus agency, establishment, and teaching practice scheme had a higher level of student involvement; education leaders can use these models to understand what works well in these approaches and replicate it to enhance students' participation in other areas of the university study experience. Educational leaders may also develop the positive nature of the practicum experience and its employability-focused initiative in enhancing student employability skills; this might involve having partnerships with external agencies, providing ample training, and facilitating real-world experiences like that of the University of Johannesburg.

Educational leaders are expected to give room for open communication channels with the collection of periodic data from students in assisting them in making informed decisions, which can assist in curriculum implementation modification, pedagogical discourse, and making changes that align with students' aspirations and contemporary societal needs. This would lead to the development of students' leadership skills (Abbasi et al., 2011) and an educational and cultural shift where students would actively participate in the educational process rather than being passive recipients of education. This has been found to be confirmed by Asiyai (2015), who states that students are customers in the education industry who are striving to get the best education; as such, students must be made an integral part of the success of any educational institution, and university administrators must include students in the participative decision-making of the institution. Short and Greer (2002) implied that

this empowerment of students would lead to shared decisions and increase their choices and responsibilities for their own learning. Students can gain the skills, knowledge, values, and attributes needed for productive and viable living in society through participation in institutional decision-making. This situation would lead to the holistic development of the students after graduation and make them more marketable in the labor market.

In summary, educational leaders must create an environment that fosters student engagement and leverages successful practices, emphasizing students' participation in IQA and employability skills development and initiatives. This would be achieved through strategic planning, communication, and a commitment to continuous improvement in school leaders' collaboration with students to make them marketable and improve their employability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that students' agency theory postulates that students should be active participants in education policy who should participate in shaping their learning experiences and future opportunities. This view reinforces students' important role in shaping educational institutional quality processes, significantly enhancing graduate employability. Whenever students are engaged in contributing to IQA practices, they influence their learning environments by giving insights that make educational quality policies more relevant and effective. However, this study found that student involvement remains minimal in IQA practices. This limited engagement undermines the principles of student agency, which encourages students' participation to act purposefully and contribute to their educational content. IQA practices designed without student participation risk being misaligned with graduates' needs.

Ensuring students' meaningful participation in IQA policy formulation and implementation is needed to enhance students' employability. Including student agency within the IQA framework will enhance a culture of shared responsibility for academic quality improvement. A culture of good academic quality cannot thrive in universities if students remain sidelined in decision-making processes. Students' active involvement in IQA would ensure that educational programs are theoretically sound and practically beneficial to such students. Therefore, universities must change from a top-down approach to a participatory model where students co-create quality assurance practices. This shift will strengthen the overall impact of IQA practices in universities and lead to a more proactive, employability-focused university education system. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made for practice and further research:

1. Regardless of the kind or specialty, all universities should incorporate employability-related quality assurance processes and tools into their quality policies.

2. To raise the standard of university education, departmental and faculty leaders should make sure that students participate in internal quality control and decision-making at all levels.
3. University management should assist quality assurance staff by providing training in the creation of a more student-oriented QA system in order to improve graduate employability at the institutional level.
4. Students' participation in quality assurance processes should be systematically documented in order to encourage a quality culture throughout all universities.

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