

ACADEMICS' PERCEPTIONS OF CONSTRAINTS TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALGERIA

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Abstract

Research purpose. This paper aims to explore Algerian academics' perceptions of constraints to quality assurance recently implemented in higher education.

Design / Methodology / Approach. Data was collected through a survey. An online questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale was distributed to the Algerian academics through a snowball sampling method. In total, 121 answers were collected and treated using descriptive statistics.

Findings. The analysis reveals that academics perceived constraints in all dimensions examined in this study. The main constraints were: the low involvement of different stakeholders in quality assurance projects, the weakness of internal and external communication, the absence of evidence of compliance with the national standard, the lack of involvement of academics in the development of action plans and the lack of follow-up.

These constraints seem to hinder the quality assurance implementation process at the Higher Education Institutions (of the sample). These results may represent a challenge for institutions.

Originality / Value / Practical implications. The study is original in that it examines a recent subject that is little dealt with in Algeria. The main contribution of this research is an analytical discussion of perceptions of academics about quality barriers encountered in Higher Education Institutions, leading to a significant enrichment of the literature.

Keywords: Higher education; Quality assurance; Academics; Constraints; Perception.

JEL codes: I23

Introduction

In an evolving and complex environment, many elements have stimulated a profound process of change in the public sector. Indeed, the New Public Management (NPM), born in Great Britain at the beginning of the 1980s, challenged the way the public sector operated, which was considered rigid, non-innovative and with an overly centralized hierarchy (Amar & Berthier, 2007). Its main idea is that it was possible to transpose private sector management methods to the public sector (Amar & Berthier, 2007) and thus reorient the management of public organizations towards performance, transparency and accountability (Sanni-Yaya, 2005).

The New Public Management (NPM) has changed public organizations in general and pushed the development of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in particular throughout the world. In Europe, NPM has brought about new modes of governance influenced by intergovernmental agreements for Higher Education (HE), such as the Bologna Process (Manatos, 2017), as a framework that defines the European space for HE. This intergovernmental initiative, signed in 1999, accelerated the introduction and development of an institutionalized Quality Assurance (QA) system (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018).

The Bologna Process or the LMD system (Licence-Maîtrise- Doctorat), as it is called in France and the Francophone countries of West Africa, was adopted by African universities in 2003 in order to align

and harmonize their practices with those of universities in the North (Charlier, Croché, & Ndoye, 2009). (European Commission, 2010-2013)

In Algeria, the LMD system was officially adopted in 2003. This new reform included requirements related to quality and standardization. Nevertheless, it was only in 2010 that the Quality Assurance (QA) project was born with the creation of the Commission for the Quality Assurance Implementation in Higher Education (CIAQES). It has been implemented through a set of actions that have outlined the legal and regulatory framework.

The first actions carried out by CIAQES in 2011 were the name and training of pilots at the level of all the institutions, i.e., Quality Assurance Units (QAUs) chaired by Quality Assurance Managers (QAMs). Between 2014 and 2016, a National Reference for quality assurance in higher education (RNAQES) was created, approved and popularized. It is primarily inspired by European standards and the Maghrebian institutional self-assessment reference created during 2010-2013 in the framework of the European project AqiUmed (Internal Quality Assurance in Mediterranean Universities), in which Algeria took part (European Commission, 2010-2013). Also, a self-assessment guide has been developed. These two support documents were made available to all institutions in order to carry out the institutional self-assessment operation launched in 2017.

In 2018, 18 institutions benefited from external evaluation expertise, and during the same year, the HEIs developed and transmitted their institutional projects based on the assessment results.

Therefore, we can say that significant efforts have been made over the past ten years to establish a QA system in HEIs in Algeria. Nevertheless, like any new project, we assume that it has faced implementation constraints. From this perspective, the research question was formulated as follows: "*What are the main constraints to QA implementation in HEIs in Algeria?*"

In order to answer this question, a questionnaire was developed and administered to a sample of 121 academics directly involved in the QA project in their institutions. This study is exploratory in nature, as it addresses a new issue in Algeria for which there is still limited research available. Indeed, very few studies have been conducted on the perception of constraints to QA in Algeria, as the operation has only recently been launched. The few studies available have explored the constraints encountered from the QAMs' perspective (Belimane & Chahed, 2021; Musette, 2022).

Literature review

Beginning in the 1990s, the notion of quality, which was used in the context of production and product compliance, spread from industry and business to the public sector, including higher education (Woodhouse, 2004). It has since become a key topic of discussion in the literature.

The term quality has different meanings and has been defined in various ways (Cheng & Tam, 1997). It has been described as pluralistic (Pham & Starkey, 2016), polysemous (Scharager Goldenberg, 2018) and elusive, dynamic and changing (Schindler et al., 2015). We find, therefore, that there is no consensus on a single, common, comprehensive definition of quality in HE.

However, we find in the literature some attempts to define the concept. Some are general but can be adapted and transposed to the education sector; others are specific to its objectives.

We borrow the definition from (Schindler et al., 2015) that QA is "*A set of processes, policies, or actions carried out externally by quality assurance agencies and accreditation bodies or internally by the institution*". This definition emphasizes actions taken both inside and outside the HEI. Indeed, we distinguish two types of QA (internal and external), depending on the individuals involved in its implementation and assessment and on the goals sought by the institution. External goals are aimed at compliance and externally imposed accountability, and internal goals are aimed at improving internal processes and strengthening institutional self-regulation (Martin, 2019). Our research focuses on Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) based on assessment, monitoring, and improvement activities.

Internal quality assurance: Conceptualizing the implementation process

Several dimensions, deriving from relevant literature, are used to reflect the IAQ process:

Planning:

Any process or activity requires planning of the expected progress and all the steps to be implemented. Indeed, the quality process is not launched on a whim but must be planned (Ritchie & Dale, 2000). Empirical studies have shown that not planning the process and not knowing where to start can hinder its success (Ritchie & Dale, 2000; Tari, 2010; Tari, 2011).

Planning is primarily about timing, choosing the right people to carry out the process, and choosing which approach to take. This planning is essential in order to allow for prior technical and human preparation (Balbaster Benavent, Cruz Ros, & Moreno-Luz, 2005). Thus, it must anticipate whether QA will be implemented locally in individual functions or throughout the organization (Aly, 1997).

Communication:

Communication refers to the process of sharing information among individuals/employees in the organization (Keng Boon & all, 2007a). The QA approach must be fully explained and communicated throughout the organization (Balbaster Benavent, Cruz Ros, & Moreno-Luz, 2005; Mishra, 2013/2). Its objectives, approaches, and results must be communicated internally and externally.

The study conducted by (Ahmed, Yang, & Dale, 2003) demonstrated that open communication and feedback between structures is essential for the success of a self-assessment and is considered the second priority after management commitment. Indeed, it is a source of motivation for the members of the organization (Jain, Jain, & Triandis, 1997) and the development and maintenance of a quality culture (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008).

Self-assessment:

The self-assessment process requires methodological rigour in collecting, analysing, and processing data and information, as this makes the conclusions drawn and the strengths and weaknesses identified in different areas valid and relevant (CNA, 2008).

The data collection methods used for self-assessment activities depend primarily on the approach adopted (Teo & Dale, 1997). This choice involves deciding whether to centralize or decentralize the operation. Centralization, as opposed to decentralization, is the extent to which self-assessment is deployed at higher levels of the organization (Balbaster Benavent, Cruz Ros, & Moreno-Luz, 2005). These authors explained that in the early stages of the QA project, the institution typically uses self-assessment at higher levels - a high degree of centralization - to learn about its major problems. Nevertheless, as the project matures and major problems are resolved, the institution tends to scale down the self-assessment to lower structural levels-decentralization-to get more detail and identify more minor problems.

The self-assessment process should result in a report (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, & Pârlea, 2007) that typically details the strengths of the organization and the opportunities for improvement identified by the assessors (Matthew, Ford & Evans, 2006).

Developing action Plans:

Once the self-assessment is completed, and areas for improvement are identified, the organization defines specific actions to attempt to eliminate, or at least diminish, these weaknesses (Hillman, 1994; Balbaster Benavent, Cruz Ros, & Moreno-Luz, 2005). The action plan defines corrective actions, and then the institution must be able to establish its priorities among all the actions identified (Black & Crumley, 1997).

The development of the action plan is not an isolated exercise by the self-assessment committee or the institution's leadership. It must involve those responsible for the various activities so that the proposed actions are feasible.

Monitoring and Improvement:

The effectiveness of self-assessment is measured by the improvement that is generated. This can be verified through a regular monitoring process. Monitoring is "*A continuing function that uses systematic data collection on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds*" (OCDE, 2002). It involves monitoring the implementation of action plans that have been developed.

Effective monitoring must be initiated and led by top management and cannot be delegated to lower-level employees (Matthew, Ford & Evans, 2006) who generally lack the strategic perspective and authority to implement such changes (Wruck & Jensen, 1994). However, management must allocate the necessary resources and time to implement the improvement actions and, therefore, produce results (Balbaster Benavent, Cruz Ros, & Moreno-Luz, 2005).

This step of monitoring and reviewing the implementation of improvement actions is usually the last in the entire process, and a new process can then begin (Balbaster Benavent, Cruz Ros, & Moreno-Luz, 2005).

Academic perceptions of quality:

This research aims to explore the constraints encountered as perceived by the academics directly involved in the IQA process. Perception can be defined as "*the process that allows the individual to become aware of the elements that characterize his environment and relate them to his own frame of reference*" (Le Duff, 1999). Therefore, the notion of perception is closely linked to that of the stakeholder's experience. Indeed, perception gives meaning to experience (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001), which gives it a cognitive dimension.

As central stakeholders in the improvement of teaching and learning, academics are probably the most qualified to assess the effects of IQA (Tavares et al., 2017). Indeed, they have been recognized for decades as essential actors with legitimate authority to express their views (Middlehurst, 1992). However, some research has revealed that academics are not frequently consulted and involved in the process of quality implementation and self-assessment (Cardoso & al, 2013), and they are not much solicited to give their views regarding it (Barandiaran-Galdós et al., 2012).

Academics may take a stance toward quality management that varies from a favourable attitude, acceptance, and support to resistance or neglect and lack of concern (Manatos, Rosa, & Sarrico, 2015).

A limited amount of research has demonstrated positive attitudes toward QA on the part of academics. The study conducted by (Kleijnen & all, 2011) showed a positive stance of academics in Dutch HEIs towards quality management. Indeed, they believe that quality management leads to improvement and not just control. The authors considered these results as striking, as they are in contrast to the literature that rather indicates a negative attitude of academics towards quality. Moreover, in the Portuguese context, academics also seem to show acceptance and support for quality management (Rosa, Sarrico, & Amaral, 2012; Cardoso & al, 2013). The literature shows that these academics are generally those directly involved in QA activities and have a more in-depth knowledge of the quality management system and a more optimistic view of its activities (Rosa, Tavares, & Amaral, 2006; Manatos M., 2017).

In addition, the positions reflecting academics' resistance to QA can be interpreted as arising from some concerns they have regarding its implementation (Cardoso & al, 2013). Indeed, the literature shows that academics tend to resist quality, as they often associate it with an administrative and financial burden, a bureaucratic and time-consuming process (Harvey, 2006; Stensaker et al., 2011; Elassy, 2015). Thus, they perceive it as disjointed from their academic work (Harvey & Williams, 2010) and believe it distracts their attention from the fundamental aspects of academic life, namely teaching and research (Harvey, 2006). Moreover, they perceive it as an approach to compliance with requirements, monitoring and control rather than continuous improvement and excellence (Houston, 2010; Cardoso & al, 2013).

Research methodology

The empirical data used in this study were collected through a survey of the perceptions of Algerian academics about the constraints to IQA encountered in their HEIs.

Target Population:

All academics directly involved in IQA in their institutions were eligible to participate in our research. They are academics who have been members of the Self-Assessment Committees (SACs) and QAUs. In what follows, the term “*Project Teams*” will be used to refer to the members of both the QAUs and the SACs.

Sampling Method:

Given the geographic dispersion of the target population and the lack of a reliable sampling base, the "network" or "snowball" sampling method was chosen. It is a non-probabilistic sample first introduced by (Coleman, 1958) and (Goodman, 1961). Its principle is to distribute the questionnaire to a small number of people who satisfy the eligibility criteria and to ask them to pass it on to other people with a similar profile in their circle. These new profiles are then asked to pass on the questionnaire to others, and so on.

This is called snowballing because the sample size increases as the social connections of the initial respondents increase like a ball rolled down a slope and gets bigger. This method was considered to be the only one that would yield a substantial sample size.

Method:

The questionnaire was chosen as the data collection instrument. It was composed of two parts: the first part is the demographic data, and the second part is the dimensions focusing on academics’ perceptions as identified in the theoretical framework. Overall, there are 16 items which are emerged from the literature.

The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree). Then, the responses were mapped using interpretation scale (table 1).

Table 1. Interpretation scale (Source: Developed by the authors)

Likert scale	Average class	Degree of agreement
1	[01 – 1.80]	Very low
2	[1.80 – 2.60]	Low
3	[2.60 – 3.40]	Medium
4	[3.40 – 4.20]	High
5	[4.20 – 05]	Very high

To test the reliability of items in the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha test was performed, and a pilot study was conducted. The questionnaire was presented to a group of 20 people from the target population. The results show that the Cronbach’s Alpha of the 16 items in the questionnaire is 0.924, which is higher than 0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that the questionnaire is reliable for measuring academics' perceptions.

Perceptions are collected using the online questionnaire that was distributed to the academics using the sampling method chosen. A questionnaire was sent by email to a sample of teachers concerned by the study. Their email addresses were given to us by the QAMs. Some academics responded to the questionnaires and forwarded them to their colleagues and contacts. Others gave us the email addresses of new people to whom we sent requests for collaboration, and so on.

Goodman pointed out that data obtained through a snowball sampling procedure can be used to make statistical inferences about various aspects of relationships present in the population (Goodman, 1961).

Research results

A total of 121 academics answered the questionnaire from November 2020 to January 2021. These participants belong to 45 institutions, representing 42% of all HEIs in Algeria (the total number of institutions is 106, including 52 universities, 13 university centres, and 41 higher schools).

The responses from the pilot study (n=20) were included in the overall study, as they demonstrated the reliability of the data and did not result in any adjustments or modifications to the questionnaire.

Demographic Data:

Table 2. Respondents' distribution (Source: Developed by the authors from the SPSS data)

		Nbr	%
Region (geographic location)	Centre	54	45%
	East	49	40%
	West	18	15%
Institution type	University	81	67%
	School	32	26%
	University Centre	8	7%
Sex	Female	38	31%
	Male	83	69%
Number of years of experience	Less than 5 years	23	19%
	Between [05 and 10 years old [31	25,6%
	Between [10 and 20 years old [44	36,4%
	20 years and more	23	19%
Discipline	Economic, management and commercial sciences	27	22%
	Science and Technology	21	17%
	Mathematics and Computer Science	17	14%
	Languages and Literature	16	13%
	Natural and Life Sciences	12	10%
	Science of the material	8	7%
	Humanities and Social Sciences	6	5%
	Earth and Universe Sciences	4	3%
	Law and political science	4	3%
	Architecture, urban planning and city professions	4	3%
	Sciences and techniques of physical and sports activities	2	2%

Table 2 indicates that the respondents are mainly from universities and are distributed between different regions. They are predominantly men (69%). Concerning the experience, more than half of the respondents have held positions in their HEIs for more than five years. Table 2 also indicates heterogeneity in relation to the respondents' discipline.

Descriptive results:

Given the exploratory objectives of the study, the academics' responses were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Items (Source: Developed by the authors)

<i>Dimension</i>		<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Degree of agreement</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Rank</i>
<i>Planning</i>	1	Insufficient preparation of the IQA process	3.56	High	71.2%	4
	2	Low involvement of institutions' managers and administrative staff in the project teams	3.60	High	72.0%	3
	3	Low involvement of academics in the project teams	3.67	High	73.4%	2
	4	Low involvement of students in the project teams	3.73	High	74.6%	1
<i>Communication</i>	5	Reluctance of academics to share information	3.84	High	76.8%	2
	6	Lack of feedback to evaluate actors on their performance in terms of quality	3.85	High	77.0%	1
	7	Lack of external sharing of self-assessment results	3.82	High	76.4%	3
<i>Self-assessment</i>	8	Implementation of the process without sufficiently precise planning	3.64	High	72,8%	2
	9	Absence/non-availability of the evaluated parties during the self-assessment	3.46	High	69,2%	3
	10	Absence of documented evidence to verify compliance with the standard criteria	3.74	High	74,8%	1
<i>Developing Action Plans</i>	11	The action plans are not drawn up by the evaluated structures, following the self-assessment	3.70	High	74,0%	2
	12	The actions defined do not allow the removal of the detected non-conformities	3.68	High	73,6%	3
	13	Academics are not involved in the development of action plans resulting from the self-assessment	3.81	High	76,2%	1
<i>Monitoring & Improvement</i>	14	The results of the self-assessment are not used to improve the institution's performance	4.20	Very high	84,0%	2
	15	Lack of follow-up on the status of implementation of improvement actions by institutions' managers	4.21	Very high	84,2%	1
	16	Lack of resources allocated to monitoring the implementation of improvement actions	4.11	High	82,2%	1

Table 3 presents questions asked about the perception of constraints. It appears that academics view the barriers related to the *Monitoring and Improvement* dimension as those that seriously undermine the IQA process.

Discussion and conclusions

The results indicate that academics agree that there are barriers in all dimensions of IQA of varying importance. To test whether academics' perceptions differed significantly, we used the nonparametric statistical test *Wilcoxon One-Sample Test* (because the sample data did not follow a normal distribution) (Table 4).

Table 4. Wilcoxon single sample test (Source: Developed by the authors from the SPSS data)

Dimension	Observed median	Ws test statistics	Sign. (Bilateral)	
Planning	3.75	6.238	0.000	Significant
Communication	4.00	7.896	0.000	Significant
Self-assessment	3.67	6.603	0.000	Significant
Developing Action Plans	3.67	6.665	0.000	Significant
Monitoring & Improvement	4.00	9.250	0.000	Significant
Total	3.81	8.546	0.000	Significant

The Wilcoxon test results were significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$ for all dimensions)

Planning:

As a reminder, HEIs have entrusted the mission of quality planning, implementation and assessment to two particular bodies, namely the SAC & the QAU (project teams). These two bodies were made up of representative members of internal actors. The involvement of academics is a strong point in the literature and an element that should facilitate the adaptation of quality processes to the needs of the communities through the establishment of a common language (Scharager Goldenberg, 2017). However, the academics questioned felt that they were not sufficiently involved (level of agreement 73.4%).

Regarding students, academics confirmed the low involvement of students who should be considered as actors directly involved in the implementation of change (Nguyen, 2016) and as the second main stakeholder at the heart of the teaching and learning process (Barandiaran-Galdós et al., 2012; Elassy, 2015; Nguyen, 2016).

The low involvement of institutions' managers in project teams seems to have also hindered the success of the process (level of agreement 72%). Indeed, managers are the QA practitioners at the top of the hierarchy (Pham & Starkey, 2016). Their role as initiators, leaders, and stewards of quality is considered an important factor in the adoption and implementation of the QA initiative in universities (Mulu, 2012). For the purposes of this study, we define university leaders as heads of institutions (rector or director), vice-rectors, assistant directors, and deans of faculties.

In addition, the non-involvement of the administrative staff was reported. They are professional administrators and managers with expertise in functional areas such as student life services, finance and human resources (Gordon & Whitchurch, 2007). These actors, although not directly involved in academic and research work, have an impact on teaching-learning processes and curriculum development (from the perspective of experts interviewed by (Alzafari & Kratzer, 2019)).

Regarding planning activity, the approach to be followed was indicated by the ministry with a bi-monthly follow-up of the operation progress. Nevertheless, each institution had to develop its own provisional schedule in order to ensure that the operation was well organized and that its objectives were achieved within the set deadlines. However, it seems that the procedures were not sufficiently prepared and planned. The insufficient preparation for the process was a significant obstacle from the academics' point of view. This finding corroborates that obtained by (Mulu, 2012), who considered the lack of solid preparation as one of the major challenges for the implementation of quality initiatives.

Communication:

Academics reported that evaluated actors lacked feedback on the results of the evaluation of their practices (level of agreement 77%). In addition, they reported the stakeholder's reluctance to share information related to HEI practices (level of agreement 76.8%). This reluctance was perceived during the conduct of the self-assessment surveys.

Therefore, this could have a negative impact on the involvement of internal stakeholders in future IQA processes. These actors are reluctant at the base and risk becoming more so with a lack of visibility on the results obtained.

Regarding external communication, academics thought that the communication of self-assessment results externally was also an important obstacle to the success of the IQA process (76.4%). Indeed, the literature emphasizes transparency and information sharing with stakeholders for effective QA (Mulu, 2012).

External communication was limited to the transmission of self-assessment reports to the ministry. This seems obvious, as HEIs were required to communicate the results of their self-assessment. However, we looked at the HEIs' websites and noted that very few HEIs had made their reports visible and accessible online (only 05 HEIs). Other HEIs do not even have a dedicated QA section on their websites. Sometimes a space is reserved for QA, but it is not up to date. This problem seems to stem from a lack of information-sharing culture within the HEIs.

Self-assessment:

Academics interviewed pointed out the absence of documented evidence to confirm compliance with the criteria of the standard and note the practices (level of agreement 74.8%).

Thus, they feel that the process implementation was done without sufficiently precise planning (level of agreement 72.8%). It seems that the evaluators were only referring to the schedules communicated by the ministry and carrying out the operational tasks.

Academics also reported the absence/non-availability of the evaluated parties during the evaluation (level of agreement 69.2%). This could be due to their workload or to the lack of motivation and commitment of these actors.

All of these elements led to a multiplicity of time spent on the operation, which was, at the base, considered insufficient (Belimane & Chahed, 2021).

Developing action plans:

Following the self-assessment, all the HEIs proceeded to develop action plans. This step was essential and should have served as a basis for developing the establishment projects. However, academics felt that their lack of involvement in developing the action plans was the most crucial obstacle of the dimension (level of agreement 76.2%). We infer that their mission was limited to carrying out the evaluation work and providing the results and conclusions to the institutions' managers. They were not involved in the decision-making that resulted from this work.

In addition, academics believe that the action plans are not developed by the structures evaluated (level of agreement 74%). Indeed, the first obstacle implies the second. The majority of academics were not involved in developing the action plans, so they did not know if they were developed or not.

Furthermore, academics confirmed that the actions defined did not make it possible to eliminate the non-conformities detected (level of agreement 73.6%). Indeed, the non-involvement of the evaluating academics can explain the non-adaptation of the proposed actions to the reported non-conformities.

Monitoring and improvement:

The academics confirm the non-use of the self-assessment results & the lack of follow-up of the progress by the institutions' managers (levels of agreement 84%, 84.2%, respectively). Therefore, we infer that the results of the self-assessment were not systematically used for improvement.

It appears that the self-assessment was conducted in response to a request from the ministry. Indeed, Harvey has explained that when an approach is based on the obligation to respond to external pressures, improvement objectives and initiatives become a secondary function of the monitoring and oversight process (Harvey, 1995). This seems to be the case with HEIs in Algeria that adopt an approach based on meeting external requirements.

Another reason for the lack of follow-up on implementing action plans seems to be the lack of resources, as confirmed by academics (level of agreement 82.2%). We emphasize here the problem of limited autonomy granted to HEIs, which considerably limits the missions of managers and prevents them from allocating the resources necessary for the implementation of improvement measures (Belimane & Chahed, 2021).

The current study explored the constraints that inhibit IQA implementation in HEIs in Algeria. The data was obtained through a survey of a sample of 121 academics directly involved in the project in their institutions. This sample was drawn through a snowball sampling method.

The results show an explicit agreement that there are multiple barriers to the implementation of IQA in HEIs in Algeria in all dimensions examined in this study. The main constraints were: *the low involvement of different stakeholders in the QA project, the weakness of internal and external communication, the absence of evidence of compliance with the national standard, the lack of involvement of academics in the development of action plans and the lack of follow-up.* This last constraint was perceived as the most blocking the IQA process.

Although academics' perceptions are of varying importance, they are not dependent on certain academic characteristics such as gender (Mann Whitney test; $p= 0.656$) and the number of years of experience (Spearman test; $p= 0.195$).

We believe our research has important and original contributions. On the theoretical level, it will serve to enrich the literature on QA practices in HE. On a practical level, it will show managers and all interested parties in the HE sector (especially internal actors) with constraints to overcome to better design and implement an IQA approach.

A limitation of this study is that it was conducted with a small number of academics. Future work should build on this study by expanding the sample beyond other actors.

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