



## Evaluation of compliance with quality assurance standards of tertiary institutions in the Gambia

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### Abstract

This study evaluated the compliance of tertiary education institutions in The Gambia with the standards set by the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA). Recognizing the critical role of quality assurance in fostering educational excellence, institutional credibility, and national development, the research examined compliance across six key areas: availability and functionality of institutional quality assurance units, admission criteria, qualifications of trainers, adequacy of physical facilities, and moderation of internal assessments. A concurrent mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative data from questionnaires administered to 11 institutional heads and 22 trainers across 19 accredited institutions, with qualitative insights from interviews with NAQAA officials. Findings revealed varying levels of compliance: while admission criteria (70%) and trainer qualifications (95%) showed high adherence, the availability and functionality of quality assurance units (60%), adequacy of physical facilities (55%), and internal moderation practices (60%) reflected moderate compliance, with significant gaps in infrastructure and resourcing. Qualitative evidence highlighted discrepancies between policy expectations and institutional realities, particularly in resource-limited private institutions. The study concludes that although NAQAA standards have enhanced awareness and fostered partial compliance, systemic challenges persist. Addressing these requires stronger government support, improved infrastructure, and capacity building for quality assurance units. The findings provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, institutional leaders, and stakeholders to strengthen quality assurance practices, sustain credibility, and align tertiary education in The Gambia with global standards. #

**Keywords:** Compliance, quality assurance standards, tertiary education, The Gambia

### Introduction

Education is crucial for individual and national growth, fostering practical knowledge and skills (Rai, 2024) [29]. It progresses from preschool to primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Tertiary education, or higher education, is provided by formal institutions like universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools (Wang, 2024 [33]; World Bank, 2024) [35]. In The Gambia, post-secondary education is classified into tertiary and higher education institutions (Yonemura, 2019) [37]. Tertiary institutions include non-degree awarding institutions like vocational skills acquisition centres and apprenticeship centres, while higher education institutions are degree-granting universities.

The goals of the tertiary education system in The Gambia are to lead individuals to

Self-fulfilment, personal development and the pursuit of life-long learning. Additionally, it has to adequately address the provision of skills for critical analysis and independent thought; the preparation of patriotic citizens and leaders for diverse, global environments; and mediate the creation of a highly productive and professional labour force. (The Republic of The Gambia, 2014, p.5) [32].

The quality assurance of tertiary education in The Gambia is crucial for achieving educational excellence and fulfilling societal needs. Quality assurance practices are essential for maintaining and enhancing the quality of education, scholarship, and infrastructure (Shepherd, 2025) [30]. They can be internal or external and are determined within the education policy framework of national or sub-national

governments (Wysocka *et al.*, 2022) [36]. In The Gambia, post-secondary education is under the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST). To regulate the activities of this category of educational institutions, the National Training Authority (NTA) was established in 2005 as an arm of moherst. To address the shortcomings of NTA, the focus on attainment and enhancement of quality assurance in post-secondary education institutions in The Gambia led to the enactment of the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (Naqaa) Act of 2015 (The Republic of The Gambia. (2014) [32]. It was enacted to create a comprehensive quality assurance Authority for tertiary and higher education institutions. The Act stipulates standards for institutional and program carrying capacity, qualifications for institutional heads, curriculum content and quality, physical facilities, governance structure, admission requirements, health and safety, internal quality assurance processes, space requirements, financial resources, and land available for exclusive use of the institution. However, only privately owned tertiary institutions undergo the registration process through Naqaa. It is imperative to critically investigate the implementation of the Naqaa Act and its impact on quality assurance practices within Gambian tertiary institutions to ensure their functionality, continuity and success The Republic of The Gambia. (2014) [32].

Quality assurance in tertiary institutions involves adherence to national or state benchmarking of minimum educational standards, aiming to improve academic and non-academic outcomes and achieve government goals (Adjibolosoo, 2017) [1]. In The Gambia, there are inconsistencies in tertiary institutions' operations, leading to non-compliance with the

NAQAA Act. This study investigates the level of compliance with quality assurance standards between 2015 and 2023. The findings will be useful to policy makers, accrediting officials, proprietors, students, and other stakeholders in tertiary institutions in The Gambia. The study focuses on technical, vocational, and professional certificate awarding institutions offering courses like Accounting, Banking and Finance, Business Management, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Electrical installation, Travel and Tourism. The study will inform evidence-based policy interventions aimed at enhancing the quality, relevance, and sustainability of tertiary education in The Gambia and will be relevant to future researchers. This study focuses on tertiary education institutions in The Gambia.

By centring on this specific geographical region, the research sought to uncover the unique challenges, advancements, and changes as regards quality assurance practices in The Gambian tertiary education institutions. The temporal scope allowed for an exploration of both short-term fluctuations and long-term trends in quality assurance practices in the study area. By examining quality assurance practices over this timeframe, the study captured the evolving trajectory and dynamics of quality assurance within Gambian tertiary institutions.

The main purpose of this study was to assess the compliance level of tertiary education institutions with NAQAA set standards in terms of:

1. availability of institutional quality assurance units;
2. functionality of institutional quality assurance units;
3. admission criteria;
4. qualification of trainers;
5. quality and adequacy of physical facilities (library and learning resources); and
6. Institutional moderation of internal assessment; and

What is the level of The Gambian tertiary education institutions compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of?

1. availability of institutional quality assurance units;
2. functionality of institutional quality assurance units;
3. admission criteria;
4. qualification of trainers;
5. quality and adequacy of physical facilities (library and learning resources); and
6. Institutional moderation of internal assessment?

Assessment is a systematic field that evaluates various types of information to determine the effectiveness of student knowledge, teachers' experiences, and resource availability (Agrawal, 2019) [2]. It is centred on student development, program evaluation, and gauging the effectiveness of educational activities. Quality is a timeless principle that has been valued and pursued by societies throughout history, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries (Ahmad & Rizvi, 2025) [3]. Quality in tertiary education can be understood through five major lenses: excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation (Al-amin, 2024) [4].

Various monitoring systems have been developed to monitor the quality of education, including quality control, quality assurance, and quality audit (Alonzo *et al.*, 2021) [5]. Quality assurance requires a holistic approach that involves high-level commitment and extensive re-education of staff.

It seeks to effect desired modifications and enhancements in standards, pedagogy, learning, execution, curriculum, infrastructure, facilities, and instructional and non-instructional personnel (Andersson *et al.*, 2012) [6].

Quality assurance (QA) is a systematic process that ensures products, services, or processes meet predefined standards of quality, consistency, and reliability (Banik & Mitra, 2021) [7]. It plays a critical role in ensuring customer satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, and regulatory compliance. The 14 Points for Management provide fundamental principles for achieving quality and operational excellence (Barlan, 2023) [8].

Tertiary institutions play a central role in the educational ecosystem and societal development of nations around the world (Brady & Bates, 2015) [9]. They provide advanced learning opportunities beyond the secondary level, serve as engines of research, innovation, and knowledge creation, and drive scientific discovery, technological advancement, and socio-economic development. They also promote social cohesion, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement within their communities through intellectual exchange, cultural diversity, and community outreach (Bull & Gibney, 2022) [12]. Higher education has the potential to expand socioeconomic progress and human capital development in a country (Chen, 2023) [13]. By upholding rigorous quality standards, tertiary institutions can enhance their credibility, attract students and faculty, and contribute to national and global educational excellence (Daunizeau, 2013) [14].

Tertiary institutions play a crucial role in driving societal progress, innovation, and cultural and civic engagement (Elassy, 2015) [16]. The 2009 World Conference on Higher Education endorsed measures to address the evolving dynamics of higher education and research for social advancement and development (Fishman, 2023) [18]. However, the deterioration of higher education quality in Africa has been attributed to factors such as reduced per-unit expenses, rapid student enrolments, substandard quality of students admitted to universities, insufficient standards of academic and research infrastructure, inadequate pedagogical training for academic personnel, deficient governance, restricted capacity of quality assurance mechanisms, lack of quality assurance agencies, and frequent university closures due to strikes. Quality assurance (QA) in higher education includes actions and processes aimed at monitoring, evaluating, and improving the quality of educational programs, services, and outcomes. Accreditation is an essential element of QA, providing formal acknowledgment that an institution or programme adheres to specific established quality criteria. The evolution of QA over time emphasizes the need for transparency and uniformity in educational quality, especially in a globalized environment.

In Gambia, the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA) oversees the quality assurance process for tertiary institutions, focusing on accreditation and regulatory framework, curriculum relevance and development, and curriculum alignment with national development objectives, global industrial trends, and labor market demands (Fatajo & Sawaneh, 2022) [17]. A holistic approach involving government agencies, institutional leaders, faculty members, students, and external stakeholders is needed to foster a culture of quality and continuous improvement (Hassan & Ali, 2016) [20]. Implementing QA in tertiary education requires a proactive,

student-centered approach that balances the need for standardization with the desire for institutional autonomy. By embracing a proactive, student-centered approach, institutions can ensure their long-term relevance and impact in a global society (Helmold, 2023) <sup>[21]</sup>.

The study by Olanrewaju Ibrahim *et al.* (2021) <sup>[28]</sup> found a significant relationship between quality assurance practices and academic staff effectiveness in South-west Nigerian Polytechnics. Other studies have found similar results in other tertiary education institutions, such as Indonesia, where accreditation activities are essential for quality assurance (Hou *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[22]</sup>. Internal quality assurance units are compulsory mechanisms adopted by these institutions for monitoring, evaluating, and improving academic and administrative standards (Inyo & Githii, 2022) <sup>[23]</sup>.

The study also highlights the importance of adopting ISO 9001 standards, implementing Total Quality Management (TQM), using knowledge management, and conducting institutional audits to improve academic programs and university output (Jatsho *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[265]</sup>. However, the absence of technology, library resources, personnel, and labs in quality assurance units makes it difficult to carry out efficient quality assurance tasks. Administrative factors also influence quality education in public schools in Kenya, with quality assessment of teaching and learning being complemented by quality assessment of administrative support (C. L. Jones *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[26]</sup>. Challenges encountered by tertiary education institutions in implementing quality assurance practices include external factors like accreditation, affiliation, and institutional academic audits, internal factors like availability of qualified staff, and external factors like institutional pressures (Kayyali, 2024) <sup>[27]</sup>.

Institutional theory helps explain the adoption, maintenance, and evolution of quality assurance practices in Gambian tertiary institutions as a form of compliance with the NAQAA Act. Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of balancing the interests of different groups to achieve organizational legitimacy and success (Sowe, 2023) <sup>[31]</sup>. Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) helps understand how tertiary institutions manage their relationships with external stakeholders, including government agencies, accreditation bodies, funding agencies, and industry partners, to access critical resources necessary for quality assurance implementation and sustainability (Wilkins, 2018) <sup>[34]</sup>. Understanding the dynamics of resource dependence can inform policy and practice interventions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of quality assurance mechanisms within Gambian tertiary institutions.

## Method

The study adopted a concurrent parallel mixed-method research design, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously to gain a deeper understanding of quality assurance practices in tertiary institutions in The Gambia. The target population consisted of 19 registered and accredited non-degree awarding institutions in The Gambia, offering courses in Accounting, Banking and Finance, Business Management, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Electrical installation, Travel and Tourism. The study used a purposive sampling technique to select institutions, with only eleven institutional heads and two

trainers from each institution responding to the questionnaire. Eight members of staff of the Technical Department of NAQAA under different units were also purposively identified and interviewed as participants. Three sets of research instruments were used to gather data: a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire, an interview guide, and a checklist. The questionnaire aimed to assess the quality assurance practices of tertiary institutions, while the interview guide aimed to verify the availability and adequacy of quality assurance units and infrastructure. The questionnaire and checklist were drawn using the specifications of the NAQAA Act and The Gambian tertiary and higher education national policy as guides. The responses generated from these instruments were used to answer the research questions raised in the study.

The study aimed to validate the quality assurance practices in the Gambia's tertiary education system. The instruments were reviewed by experts in educational management and tests and measurement, and the researcher was asked to correct ambiguous items and rework items for appropriate compliance with the NAQAA Act. The questionnaire was tested repeatedly in three tertiary institutions, resulting in a reliability index of 0.82.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative instruments, with the researcher conducting member checks and an auditing approach to ensure the reliability of the qualitative data. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 11 institutional heads and 22 trainers across 19 tertiary institutions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns and ideas emerging from the interviews, and measures to enhance credibility included member checking and maintaining an audit trail following Bryman's (2017) <sup>[11]</sup> model.

The study also employed a scoring and categorization system to interpret various aspects of institutional performance, applying statistical benchmarks to group responses into meaningful categories. This integrated approach to data analysis ensured that the study captured both the breadth of institutional practices and the depth of individual stakeholder experiences, producing a rich and nuanced understanding of quality assurance practices in The Gambia's tertiary education system.

## Results

What is the level of tertiary education institutions' compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of: availability of institutional quality assurance units; functionality of institutional quality assurance units; admission criteria; qualification of trainers; quality of physical facilities (library and classrooms); adequacy of physical facilities (library and classrooms); and Institutional moderation of internal assessment?

To answer this question, responses of the institutional administrators and trainers to items relating to level of tertiary education institutional compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms availability of institutional quality assurance units (4 items), functionality of institutional quality assurance units (5 items), admission criteria (6 items), qualification of the trainers (6 items), quality and adequacy of physical facilities (8 items), and institutional moderation of internal assessment (8 items) were coded and the results are presented in terms of frequency counts, minimum and maximum values, mean and standard

deviation, percentages and bar charts as shown in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the key measures of NAQAA set standards in terms of number of items, minimum values, maximum values, mean values and standard deviation, respectively. For Availability of Institutional Quality (No of items = 4, N = 33, Min = 4, Max =8, Mean = 5.6 and standard deviation = 1.60). For Functionality of Institutional Quality Assurance Units (No of items = 5, N = 33, Min = 6, Max =10, Mean = 7.95 and

standard deviation = 1.76). For Admission Criteria (No of items = 6, N = 33, Min = 11, Max =14, Mean = 12.70 and standard deviation = 1.26). For Qualification of Trainers (No of items = 6, N = 33, Min = 8, Max =11, Mean = 10.30 and standard deviation = 0.86). For Quality and Adequacy of Physical Facilities (No of items = 8, N = 20, Min = 13, Max =19, Mean = 15.40 and standard deviation = 1.14). For Institutional Moderation of Internal Assessment (No of items = 8, N = 33, Min = 8, Max =16, Mean = 13.05 and standard deviation = 1.12).

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics across the NAQAA Set Standards

S/N	NAQAA Set Standard	No of Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Availability of IQAU	4	33	4	8	5.60	1.60
2	Functionality of institutional quality assurance units	5	33	6	10	7.95	1.76
3	Admission criteria	6	33	11	14	12.70	1.26
4	Qualifications of trainers	6	33	8	11	10.30	0.86
5	Quality and adequacy of physical facilities	8	33	13	19	15.40	1.14
6	Institutional moderation of internal assessment.	8	33	8	16	13.05	1.12

Table 2 shows the level of availability of institutional quality assurance units, functionality of institutional quality assurance units, admission criteria, qualification of trainers, quality and adequacy of physical facilities and institutional moderation of internal assessments in the Tertiary Institutions in The Gambia. In order to categorise the scores into low and high levels of compliance in terms of availability of institutional quality assurance units, the statistics in Table 1, showing Min = 4, Max =8, Mean = 5.6 and standard deviation = 1.60 were used. Scores between 0 and 4 (mean minus 1 standard deviation) were categorised as low and scores between 5 and 8 were categorised as high. Hence, Table 2 shows that 13 of the respondents representing 40% claimed that their institutions did not have institutional quality assurance units, while 20 of the respondents representing 60% claimed that their institutions had institutional quality assurance units. This shows a high compliance level with NAQAA set standards in terms of availability of institutional quality assurance units.

The level of functionality of institutional quality assurance units in the Tertiary Institutions in the Gambia is also indicated in Table 2. In order to categorise the scores into low and high levels of functionality of institutional quality assurance units, the descriptive statistics in Table 1 Showing Min = 6, Max = 10, Mean = 7.95 and standard deviation = 1.76 were used. Scores between 0 and 6 (mean minus 1

standard deviation) were categorised as low and scores between 7 and 10 were categorised as high. Hence, Table 2 shows that 13 of the respondents representing 40% claimed that the level of functionality of institutional quality assurance units in the tertiary institutions was low, while 20 of the respondents representing 60% claimed that the functionality of institutional quality assurance units was high. This shows that in most of the institutions (60%), the level of compliance with NAQAA Act in terms of functionality of the available Quality Assurance Units was high.

Table 2 further shows the level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of admission criteria used in the Tertiary Institutions in the Gambia. In order to categorise the score into low and high levels of admission criteria, the descriptive statistics in Table 1 showing Min = 11, Max = 14, Mean = 12.70 and standard deviation = 1.26 were used. Scores between 0 and 11 (mean minus 1 standard deviation) were categorised as low and scores between 12 and 14 were categorised as high. Hence, Table 2 shows that 10 of the respondents representing 30% claimed that the level of institutional compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of admission criteria was low, while 23 of the respondents representing 70% claimed that the institutional level of compliance in terms of admission criteria was high.

**Table 2:** Result on the Level of Compliance

S/N	Level of Compliance	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Availability of Institutional Quality Assurance Units	0-4 (Low)	13	40
		5-8 (High)	20	60
		Grand Total	33	100
2	Functionality of Institutional Quality Assurance Units	0-6 (Low)	13	40
		7-10 (High)	20	60
		Grand Total	33	100
3	Admission Criteria	0-11	10	30
		12-14	23	70
		Grand Total	33	100
4	Qualification of the Trainers	0-9	2	5
		10-12	31	95
		Grand Total	33	100
5	Quality and Adequacy of Physical Facilities	0-14	15	45
		15-20	18	55
		Grand Total	33	100

6	Institutional Moderation of Internal Assessment	0-12	13	40
		13-16	20	60
		Grand Total	33	100

Additionally, the institutional level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of qualification of the trainers in the Tertiary Institutions in the Gambia is also indicated in Table 2 To categorise the score into low and high levels of qualification of the trainers, the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 Showing Min = 8, Max = 11, Mean = 10.30 and standard deviation = 0.86 were used. Scores between 0 and 9 (mean minus 1 standard deviation) were categorised as low and scores between 12 and 14 were categorised as high. Hence, Table 2 shows that 2 of the respondents representing 5% claimed that the institutional level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of qualification of trainers was low, while 31 of the respondents representing 95% claimed that the institutional level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of qualification of trainers was high.

The level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of quality and adequacy of physical facilities in the Tertiary Institutions in the Gambia is also given in Table 2 To categorise the score into low and high levels of quality and adequacy of physical facilities, the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2 showing Min = 13, Max = 19, Mean = 15.40 and standard deviation = 1.14 were used. Scores between 0 and 14 (mean minus 1 standard deviation) were categorised as low and scores between 12 and 14 were categorised as high. Hence, Table 2 shows that 15 of the respondents, representing 45%, claimed that the level of compliance in terms of quality and adequacy of physical facilities was low, while 18 of the respondents, representing 55%, claimed that the quality and adequacy of physical facilities was high.

The level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of institutional moderation of internal assessment in the Tertiary Institutions in the Gambia is also indicated in Table 2 To categorise the score into low and high levels of quality and adequacy of physical facilities, the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 showing Min = 8, Max = 16, Mean = 13.05 and standard deviation = 1.12 were used. Scores between 0 and 14 (mean minus 1 standard deviation) were categorised as low and scores between 13 and 16 were categorised as high. Hence, Table 2 shows that 13 of the respondents, representing 40% claimed that institutional level of compliance with NAQAA set standards in terms of institutional moderation of internal assessment was low, while 20 of the respondents representing 60% claimed that institutional level of compliance in terms of institutional moderation of internal assessment was high.

**Qualitative Analysis: Level of Institutional Compliance with NAQAA Set Standards**

**1. Availability of Institutional Quality Assurance Units**

All the participants agreed that:

*The level of institutional compliance with possession of quality assurance units is moderate. Some (The Director of Technical Department and the Head of the Quality Assurance Unit) of the participants went on to say that "this may be because it is not a pre a prerequisite for obtaining approval though it is weighty factor for re accreditation".*

The results obtained through the analysis of qualitative data did not corroborate what was found through the analysis of

the quantitative data. This might have resulted from the fact that the quantitative data was a result of self-evaluation of within-institution stakeholders.

**2. Functionality of institutional quality assurance units**

All participants agreed that the level of compliance in terms of functionality of institutional quality assurance units was low. This is contrary from the results indicated by the analysis of quantitative data. On deeper probe, participants 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 claimed that:

*"Whenever we query poor functionality of institutional quality assurance units, institutional representatives always respond that the government should support institutions more to be able to get skilled staff and other resources that will enhance the functionality of the quality assurance units".*

**3. Admission Criteria and Qualifications of Trainers**

On the level of compliance of institutions with admission criteria and qualification of trainers, all participants claimed a high level of compliance. Further probe led to participant 3 saying,

*"This is likely to be because noncompliance with these standards by any institution will result in closure of such defaulting school".*

The submission of the quantitative data tallies with that of the qualitative data.

**4. Quality and adequacy of Physical Facilities**

All participants agreed that the level of compliance in terms of quality and adequacy of physical facilities (Library and learning resources) was low. Participant 3 further indicate that:

*"most of the private institutions are cited in rented properties, because of this, they do not have enough funds and space to comply strictly with this standard".*

**5. Institutional moderation of Internal Assessment**

All participants confirmed a high level of compliance with this standard. This tallies with what the analysis of quantitative data presented.

**Discussion**

The findings from this study provide insight into the level of compliance of tertiary education institutions in Gambia with the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA) set standards. The study examined compliance in key areas, including the availability and functionality of institutional quality assurance units, admission criteria, qualifications of trainers, quality and adequacy of physical facilities, and institutional moderation of internal assessment. The results indicate varying levels of adherence across these standards. The results show that 60% of institutions have a high level of availability of institutional quality assurance units, while 40% report a low level of availability. This aligns with the findings of Grace Ahenkan Arthur & Alfred Kuranchie (2022) [19] who observed that institutions in Ghana had established quality assurance departments, leading to a high level of awareness and

implementation of quality assurance concepts. However, similar to the Ghanaian context, the challenges reported in this study suggest that while quality assurance units exist in some institutions, they may not be fully functional due to resource limitations.

Ekpoh and Asuquo (2020) <sup>[15]</sup> similarly reported moderate implementation of quality assurance strategies in Nigerian universities, highlighting the ongoing struggle to ensure full compliance with quality standards. The functionality of quality assurance units showed a mean score of 7.95 out of 10, suggesting that while most institutions have operational quality assurance mechanisms, their effectiveness may vary. Grace Ahenkan Arthur & Alfred Kuranchie (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> highlighted challenges such as inadequate resources, lack of technological infrastructure, and insufficient personnel, all of which could contribute to variations in functionality. Regarding admission criteria, the mean score of 12.70 out of 14 indicates a high level of compliance. This suggests that institutions are largely adhering to set admission requirements, which is crucial for maintaining academic standards. Jancey & Burns, (2013) <sup>[24]</sup> emphasized the role of administrative factors in shaping quality education, reinforcing the importance of strict admission policies as part of institutional quality assurance. In terms of trainer qualifications, the study found a relatively high mean score of 10.30 out of 11, suggesting that most institutions employ well-qualified trainers. This finding is consistent with Ekpoh and Asuquo's (2020) <sup>[15]</sup> study, which highlighted faculty quality as a critical factor in ensuring quality education. However, Grace Ahenkan Arthur & Alfred Kuranchie (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> findings about inadequate staff and resources in some institutions suggest that while qualifications may be met on paper, institutions might still face challenges related to faculty availability and professional development.

The findings of this study carry important implications for policymakers, regulators, and education stakeholders in The Gambia. First, the observed gaps in the functionality of institutional quality assurance units (IQAUs) highlight the need for policy reforms mandating the establishment and operation of fully resourced IQAUs in all tertiary institutions. Without such units, compliance with NAQAA standards remains superficial and inconsistent. Second, the persistent inadequacy of physical facilities suggests that investment policies must prioritize infrastructure development, particularly in libraries, laboratories, and ICT facilities. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) and targeted government subsidies can be leveraged to improve infrastructure in resource-constrained private institutions. Third, given the high compliance with admission criteria and trainer qualifications, policymakers should build on this strength by creating continuous professional development frameworks to maintain academic quality. Structured training, accreditation for trainers, and performance-based incentives can further enhance staff effectiveness. Fourth, the inconsistencies revealed between self-reported compliance (quantitative data) and regulator perspectives (qualitative data) point to the necessity of stronger monitoring, auditing, and accountability mechanisms. NAQAA should institutionalize periodic external reviews, integrate digital monitoring systems, and enforce transparent reporting practices to reduce reliance on self-evaluation alone. Finally, since quality assurance is both a regulatory and developmental process, there is a need to reframe

quality assurance policy as a driver of lifelong learning and national competitiveness. Embedding quality assurance into The Gambia's broader human capital and economic development agenda will not only strengthen institutional performance but also ensure that tertiary education makes a meaningful contribution to the country's social and economic transformation.

## Conclusion

This study assessed the compliance of tertiary education institutions in The Gambia with the quality assurance standards set by the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA). The results demonstrate that while institutions generally adhere to admission requirements and employ qualified trainers, significant gaps remain in the functionality of quality assurance units, adequacy of physical facilities, and consistent moderation of internal assessments. These findings suggest that although NAQAA standards have created a framework for accountability, challenges such as limited resources, infrastructural constraints, and weak institutional capacities continue to hinder full compliance. Overall, the study highlights the need for a more robust, supportive, and holistic approach to quality assurance that ensures institutions not only meet minimum requirements but also cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and relevance in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

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