

Academics' Understanding and Perceived Usefulness of Internal Quality Assurance Inputs at State University of Zanzibar

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ABSTRACT

Although internal quality assurance (IQA) is expected to support teaching improvement in higher education, its effectiveness depends on how academics understand, evaluate, and use the inputs it generates. This study examined academics' understanding and perceived usefulness of IQA inputs for teaching improvement at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA). The Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, and Beliefs (KAPB) model provided the analytical framework. The study employed a qualitative embedded single-case study design, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, comprising two heads of the IQA Office, eight heads of departments, and 20 academic staff members, together with institutional documents. Data were analyzed thematically. Three main findings emerged. First, academics' understanding of IQA inputs was uneven. Some recognized multiple mechanisms and connected them to teaching improvement, whereas others associated IQA mainly with curriculum compliance or examination control. Second, academics expressed mixed attitudes and beliefs about the usefulness of IQA inputs, shaped by whether they experienced them as developmental support or bureaucratic oversight. Third, the translation of IQA inputs into teaching improvement was inconsistent because of irregular feedback, limited follow-up support, and uneven departmental engagement. The study concludes that IQA inputs at SUZA were regarded as potentially useful but were not consistently translated into teaching improvement. This uneven translation reflected differences in academics' understanding, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as irregular feedback and insufficient follow-up support.

KEYWORDS: internal quality assurance; quality assurance inputs; teaching improvement; higher education; academic engagement; academics' experiences

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Internal quality assurance (IQA) has become an important institutional mechanism for monitoring, supporting and improving teaching and learning in higher education, especially as universities face growing demands for accountability, relevance, employability and improved student learning (Elken & Stensaker, 2018; Komotar, 2020; Krooi et al., 2024). In practice, IQA involves evidence generated through mechanisms such as student evaluations, peer reviews, curriculum reviews, assessment moderation, external examiner reports, graduate tracer studies, program self-assessments and institutional audits. These inputs can inform teaching improvement when their purposes, people and processes are coherently aligned and when academic staff can interpret and act on the resulting evidence (Krooi et al., 2024; Lucander & Christersson, 2020). Their presence does not, however, automatically improve teaching. Quality assurance systems may strengthen accountability and institutional reporting without producing meaningful changes in classroom practice (Cheng, 2011; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Newton, 2000). IQA inputs may function either as developmental resources that support reflective teaching or as procedural requirements that academics comply with without integrating into pedagogical practice. Their usefulness depends not only on availability but also on academics' understanding of their purpose, perceptions of their relevance, and willingness and institutional capacity to use them.

Academics' engagement with IQA is shaped by institutional culture, communication, participation, feedback mechanisms, professional support and opportunities for collective ownership. Recent research indicates that sustainable quality cultures depend on aligning formal structures with the social conditions through which academics interpret and enact improvement (Legemaate et al., 2022; Rahnuma, 2020). Faculty participation is particularly important because IQA becomes developmental when academics help interpret evidence and connect it to program and classroom decisions (Pham, 2022). Shurgaia (2015) similarly argues that acceptance of IQA depends on academics' understanding of its purpose and procedures, while Krooi et al. (2024) show that module evaluation, program evaluation, student assessment and peer feedback can support improvement when embedded in coherent institutional processes. Yet, IQA may become overly centralized, bureaucratic or compliance-oriented when academics are not meaningfully involved in interpreting and using quality-related feedback (Credo & Mngarah, 2024; Kimaro & Kapinga, 2021; Mtitu, 2025). In such cases, IQA risks becoming a symbolic exercise rather than a mechanism for continuous teaching improvement.

In Tanzania, universities have institutionalized IQA systems in response to regulatory requirements and wider higher education reforms. Yet recent studies continue to identify inadequate staffing, weak academic audits and self-assessment, limited academic participation, and uneven implementation (Bilal & Manning, 2020; Kimaro & Kapinga, 2021; Mtitu, 2025). SUZA provides a useful setting for examining this issue. As Zanzibar's largest and most diverse public university, it has institutionalized student evaluations, curriculum reviews, program self-assessments, external examiner reports, peer feedback, and institutional monitoring. Although intended to strengthen teaching quality and academic standards, these inputs are understood and used unevenly. Some academics regard them as developmental resources, whereas others engage with them mainly as administrative requirements.

This situation points to a critical gap between the intended functions of IQA inputs and how academics interpret and use the information they generate. Existing studies have largely examined IQA structures, policies, quality cultures, and implementation challenges (e.g., Kimaro & Kapinga, 2021; Legemaate et al., 2022; Mgaiwa, 2018; Mtitu, 2025). Comparatively less attention has been given to how academics understand particular IQA inputs, judge their usefulness, and translate them into teaching practice. This gap is particularly important because academics are the central

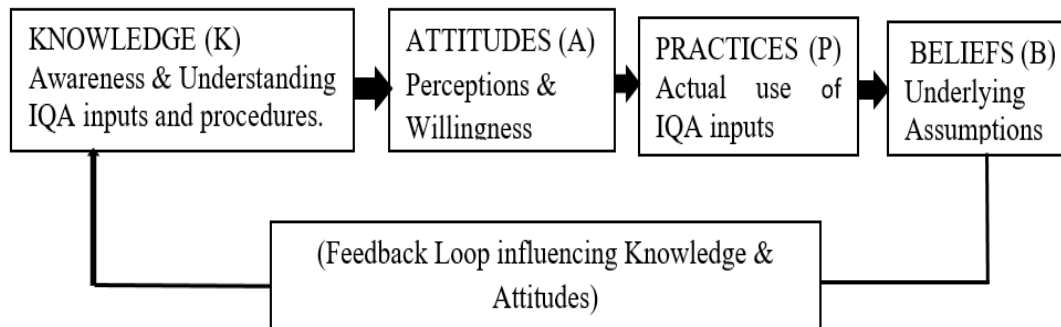
actors who convert institutional quality frameworks into everyday pedagogical decisions, including course planning, teaching delivery, assessment design, student engagement and curriculum improvement. If academics do not clearly understand IQA inputs, regard them as useful, believe in their relevance or receive sufficient institutional support to apply them, IQA may generate reports, recommendations and feedback without consistently improving teaching. Evidence on how academics at SUZA interpret and use IQA inputs remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining academics' understanding of, and perceived usefulness of, IQA inputs for teaching improvement.

Against this background, this study examined academics' understanding and perceived usefulness of IQA inputs for teaching improvement at the State University of Zanzibar. The study was guided by the following main research question: *How do academics at the State University of Zanzibar understand and perceive the usefulness of internal quality assurance inputs for teaching improvement?* Three sub-questions further guided the study:

1. How do academics understand IQA inputs intended to support teaching improvement at SUZA?
2. How do academics perceive the usefulness of IQA inputs for improving teaching practices?
3. How do academics use IQA inputs to improve their teaching practices?

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, and Beliefs (KAPB) framework as a sensitizing analytical lens to examine academics' engagement with IQA inputs. It focuses on what academics know about IQA, how they evaluate particular inputs, what they believe about IQA's



legitimacy and consequences, and how they act on the information generated. These dimensions were examined as contextually related rather than as a fixed causal sequence.

Figure 1

Analytical Application of the KAPB Model to Academics' Understanding and Use of IQA Inputs for Teaching Improvement

Note. Adapted from Xie et al. (2024) and refined by the authors for the present study.

The figure shows that IQA inputs do not automatically lead to improvements in teaching. Rather, their influence depends on how academics understand them, perceive their usefulness, believe in their relevance, and integrate them into their teaching practice.

The KAPB framework treats knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices as related but analytically distinct dimensions (Fishbein et al., 1993; Xie et al., 2024). In this study, knowledge refers to academics' understanding of IQA inputs, their purposes, and their relationship to teaching improvement. Attitudes concern positive or negative evaluations of particular inputs, whereas beliefs refer to underlying convictions about their legitimacy, credibility, and likely consequences (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Practice concerns how academics use IQA inputs to revise teaching, assessment, course content, or pedagogical approaches. These distinctions enabled the analysis to separate academics' immediate evaluations of IQA activities from their deeper assumptions about the institutional purpose and value of quality assurance.

Although KAPB approaches originated largely in public-health and social-behaviour research, they have been adapted to examine knowledge, attitudes, and practices in educational settings (Chan & Luk, 2022; Noyes et al., 2022). This study uses KAPB as a sensitizing analytical framework rather than assuming a linear progression from knowledge to practice (Launiala, 2009). It examines how academics understand IQA inputs, evaluate their relevance, form beliefs about their legitimacy, and use them within prevailing institutional conditions. Teaching improvement is viewed as a contextually mediated process shaped by academics' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices, as well as the institutional support available for acting on IQA evidence.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed, subjective and shaped by human meanings and experiences. This paradigm was appropriate because the study sought to understand how academics at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) interpret, negotiate and use internal quality assurance (IQA) inputs for teaching improvement within their institutional context. Because IQA processes involve human judgment, professional experience, institutional culture, and context-specific interpretation, an interpretivist orientation enabled the researchers to capture academics' nuanced understandings, perceptions, and practices in relation to IQA inputs. The interpretivist paradigm also positioned the researcher as an active participant in knowledge construction. This required continuous reflection on the researcher's assumptions, positionality and possible influence on data generation and interpretation. Such reflexivity was important because the study focused on participants' meanings and experiences rather than measuring IQA implementation through predetermined quantitative indicators.

Research Design

A qualitative, embedded single-case study design was adopted, with SUZA as the main case and academics, departments, schools, and the IQA Office serving as embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018). This design was suitable because the study examined a contemporary institutional process within its real-life context, where the boundaries between IQA policy, academic practice, departmental mediation and institutional support are not always clearly separable. SUZA was deliberately selected because it is Zanzibar's largest and most diverse public university, with established IQA structures and an ongoing institutional agenda to strengthen teaching quality. This made it a relevant case for examining how IQA inputs are understood, perceived and used across

different organizational levels. The embedded case study design allowed the researchers to examine both institution-wide IQA dynamics and unit-specific experiences across departments, schools, academic staff and the IQA Office. This design was also useful for understanding how IQA inputs move from formal institutional structures into academics' teaching practices. Previous educational research has also shown the value of case study designs in examining how institutional practices are experienced, negotiated and enacted within specific social and organizational settings (Authors, 2013, 2018, 2024).

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The study employed purposive sampling to select information-rich participants directly involved in the coordination, interpretation, and use of IQA inputs at SUZA. The study included 30 participants. These comprised two Heads of the IQA Office, eight Heads of Departments (HoDs) and 20 academic staff members drawn from eight schools. The sample was considered appropriate for a qualitative case study because the aim was to generate an in-depth, context-specific understanding rather than statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Table 1
Summary of Participants

Participant category	Sampling strategy	Number of participants	Selection criteria
Heads of the IQA Office	Criterion purposive sampling	2	Current and former Heads with direct knowledge of IQA coordination and institutional history
Heads of Departments	Criterion purposive sampling	8	At least one HoD from each school, selected based on departmental responsibility for teaching and IQA-related processes
Academic staff	Quota sampling and purposive selection	20	Academics from eight departments across eight schools, selected by teaching experience, academic rank, discipline and engagement with IQA processes
Total		30	

Criterion Purposive Sampling

Criterion purposive sampling was used to select participants with formal responsibility for, or direct involvement in, IQA processes at SUZA. This approach was appropriate because the study required participants with specialized knowledge and experience in IQA coordination, implementation and use. Previous studies have also used it to capture expert and experience-based perspectives within specific institutional and community contexts (Pesambili, 2018, 2025a, 2025b, 2026). This category comprised two Heads of the IQA Office and eight HoDs. Although the study initially planned to interview one Head of the IQA Office, both the current and former Heads were included because the current Head had recently assumed office. Including both participants ensured continuity and depth of insight into the development and implementation of IQA practices at SUZA. The eight HoDs, with at least one drawn from each school, were included because they link

university-level IQA processes with departmental teaching, assessment and program-level practices. As key informants, the Heads of the IQA Office and HoDs provided insights into the institutionalization of IQA, the communication of IQA inputs and the extent to which these inputs informed teaching improvement across departments.

Quota Sampling

Quota sampling was used to ensure representation of academic staff across SUZA's schools, departments and academic ranks while retaining the depth-oriented logic of qualitative inquiry. The academic staff sample comprised 20 academics from eight departments across eight schools. Specifically, two academics were selected from each of four departments, and three from each of the remaining four, for a total of 20 academics. Academics were selected based on their teaching experience and exposure to IQA processes. Preference was given to those with at least 10 years of university teaching experience because they were more likely to have encountered various curriculum reforms, teaching evaluation processes, and IQA feedback cycles. Within each quota, participants were purposively selected to reflect variation in academic rank, disciplinary background and engagement with IQA activities. Academic staff were well-positioned to explain how IQA inputs were understood, perceived, and used in relation to course delivery, assessment, student engagement, and professional development.

Data Collection Methods

Two data collection methods were used: semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two Heads of the IQA Office, eight HoDs and 20 academic staff members. The method was selected because it allowed the researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions and interpretations while maintaining consistency across participant categories (cf. Authors, 2025a, 2025b; Authors, 2021). The semi-structured format also allowed probing of emerging issues and clarification of participants' responses. The interview guide covered participants' understanding of IQA inputs, their perceptions of the usefulness of such inputs, their experiences of using IQA-related feedback in teaching, and the institutional conditions that supported or constrained the use of IQA inputs. The questions were informed by the KAPB model, particularly its focus on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices. For example, participants were asked how they understood IQA inputs, whether they regarded them as useful for teaching improvement, how they used them in their teaching, and what beliefs or institutional experiences shaped their responses to IQA processes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and supplemented with field notes. The interviews generated detailed accounts of SUZA's IQA structures, implementation processes, and academics' engagement with IQA inputs, including student evaluations, peer-related feedback, curriculum review processes, program self-assessment, and institutional quality assurance guidelines.

Document Analysis

Document analysis examined the formal design, implementation, and reporting of IQA processes at SUZA. Documents were purposively selected for their relevance to IQA inputs, teaching improvement, program review, academic support, and feedback mechanisms. They included SUZA quality assurance policies; the Strategic Plan 2023/24–2027/28; program and institutional self-assessment reports; student evaluation reports; the 2024 graduate tracer study; records of student representative meetings; academic staff promotion guidelines; and relevant Tanzania Commission for Universities documents. The documents were coded deductively against the research questions and inductively for emerging issues concerning IQA communication, feedback, teaching evaluation, program review, staff support, follow-up, and teaching improvement. Documentary evidence was then compared with interview findings to identify convergence, contradiction, qualification, and institutional issues not raised by participants. This approach treated documents as institutional products rather than neutral accounts of practice and enabled comparison between formal expectations and reported enactment (Brailas et al., 2023; Gan & Meyen, 2022).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach of familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). The analysis combined deductive attention to KAPB with inductive coding consistent with the study's interpretivist orientation. Interview transcripts were checked against the recordings and read repeatedly alongside field notes. Documents were initially examined separately to preserve their analytical contribution before being compared with interview evidence. Meaningful segments were coded line by line. KAPB provided provisional categories, but knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices were kept analytically distinct. Knowledge codes captured awareness and understanding of IQA inputs; attitudes captured favorable or unfavorable evaluations of particular inputs; beliefs captured underlying assumptions about their legitimacy, credibility, and developmental or controlling purposes; and practices captured reported actions in teaching. Inductive codes included delayed feedback, limited follow-up, unclear reporting lines, workload pressure, departmental mediation, and weak institutional support.

We developed related codes into themes through repeated comparison across transcripts, documents, research questions, and the KAPB framework. We examined documentary and interview evidence for convergence, contradiction, and qualification, as well as institutional issues not mentioned by participants. For example, we compared formal provisions for feedback and follow-up with academics' accounts of delayed dissemination and limited departmental action. Themes were refined for coherence, distinctiveness, and evidential support; overlapping themes were merged, and unsupported claims were removed. Themes were treated as interpretive constructions rather than objective categories discovered in the data. A reflexive diary and supervisory discussions were used to examine analytical decisions, including the possibility of privileging formal institutional intentions over academics' experiences. Reflexivity supported analytical transparency without constituting a separate reflexive thematic-analysis methodology.

Table 2*Illustration of Coding and Theme Development*

KAPB component	Sample initial codes	Subthemes	Final themes
Knowledge	Awareness of IQA policy; familiarity with student evaluation; understanding of programme review; limited knowledge of feedback procedures	Uneven awareness of IQA inputs; varied understanding across academic units	Academics' understanding of IQA inputs
Attitudes	Favourable or unfavourable evaluations of specific IQA inputs; perceived relevance; experienced support or burden	Evaluative responses to particular IQA activities	Academics' perceived usefulness of IQA inputs
Beliefs	IQA as legitimate developmental support; IQA as bureaucratic control; trust or scepticism about feedback credibility and consequences	Underlying assumptions about legitimacy, credibility and developmental purpose	Beliefs shaping academics' engagement with IQA
Practice	Revising assessment; adjusting course content; responding to student feedback; changing delivery approaches; limited use of reports	Pedagogical use of IQA inputs; inconsistent translation into practice	Use of IQA inputs for teaching improvement
Cross-cutting institutional conditions	Delayed feedback; weak follow-up; workload; limited communication; departmental mediation	Barriers and enabling conditions	Institutional conditions shaping IQA use

Ethical Considerations

The University of Dar es Salaam granted ethical approval through the Office of the Vice Chancellor on 23 July 2024 (Ref. No. AB.3/12(B)), and SUZA granted permission to conduct the study at the institution. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary participation, right to withdraw, and intended use of the findings. The researchers obtained written or verbal informed consent before each interview. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by removing identifying information, using broad role-based labels, and securely storing the data for access only by the research team.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses findings on academics' understanding, perceived usefulness, and use of IQA inputs for teaching improvement at SUZA. The findings are organized into three themes: uneven understanding, ambivalent perceptions of usefulness, and limited translation of IQA inputs into teaching improvement.

Theme 1: Uneven Understanding of IQA Inputs among Academics

Academics demonstrated varying levels of understanding of IQA inputs. Some recognized multiple mechanisms and their relevance to teaching, whereas others associated IQA mainly with examinations or curriculum compliance or remained uncertain about its purpose and institutional structure. Such uneven understanding shaped academics' capacity to recognize and use IQA inputs for teaching improvement. Some academics described IQA through concrete activities they observed in their daily academic work. For example, one academic from the School of Languages associated IQA with student evaluations, surveys, classroom visits and external examiner reports:

Student evaluations are a crucial activity in Quality Assurance, during which students are given forms to complete to share their opinions on instruction and other areas that need work. IQA occasionally distributes surveys at the end of each semester. Unannounced classroom visits are another practice. I recall an IQA officer unexpectedly showing up in my class while I was teaching. External examiners also review our examination documents annually, offer reports and make recommendations for improvement. Feedback is given verbally and in writing, and we act on it (Academics 1: Languages, 8 August 2024).

This account demonstrates practical awareness of several IQA inputs, including student evaluations, classroom observations, and external examiner reports. However, the participant described IQA mainly through monitoring activities encountered in practice rather than through a broader account of its developmental purpose. The reference to surveys being distributed only "occasionally" raises questions about their regularity. At the same time, the claim that academics acted on feedback does not show what changed in teaching or whether action was followed up. SUZA's academic regulations and strategic plan confirm the formal presence of assessment review and institutional monitoring. However, they make the route from feedback to pedagogical change less clear (State University of Zanzibar, 2021a, 2023b). The documents confirm the mechanisms while qualifying the participant's implied feedback loop. Recognizing IQA inputs should not, by itself, be equated with their meaningful pedagogical use, which depends on alignment among purpose, people, and process (Krooi et al., 2024).

The "unannounced classroom visits" reveal a further tension between quality development and institutional control. Classroom observation may generate useful evidence, but its developmental value can weaken when academics experience it as an unexpected inspection rather than as collaborative inquiry followed by constructive dialogue. The encounter can shape both an immediate unfavorable attitude toward observation and a broader belief that IQA is controlling rather than developmental. Academics' understanding of IQA is thus formed not only by formal purposes but also by how its mechanisms are enacted in practice (Credo & Mngarah, 2024; Soud et al., 2026).

Other academics understood IQA mainly through its role in curriculum development and review. For instance, one participant stated:

The Quality Assurance Unit at this university handles all activities, particularly academic work and teaching. In maintaining the curriculum, they are directly involved in developing or reviewing the curriculum. They are the ones who observe us (Academics 2: Natural Sciences, 7 August 2024).

Similarly, another academic explained:

What I understand is that when a curriculum is being developed, the IQA team must be involved, and their goal is to ensure that the curriculum meets required quality standards. This activity takes place both during the development and review of the curriculum (Academics 3, Computer Science, 31 July 2024).

Another participant added:

The IQA office guided us on TCU frameworks for curriculum development and reviews, which clearly state that to start a new programme, you need certain things, such as a specific number of permanent staff; otherwise, the programme will not be approved (Academic 4, Education, 16 August 2024).

These quotations show that many academics associated IQA with curriculum quality and compliance with Tanzania Commission for Universities requirements. This understanding is valid because curriculum review and program evaluation can maintain standards, regulatory alignment, and program relevance. SUZA's program self-assessment report and strategic plan confirm formal roles for program review and academic standards, but also give IQA a wider remit spanning evaluation, academic support, and improvement (State University of Zanzibar, 2023a, 2023b). The documents confirm participants' curriculum-related knowledge while revealing its partiality: their accounts foregrounded approval requirements more than the use of review evidence to change teaching. Curriculum review becomes developmental only when its findings inform program and pedagogical decisions (Krooi et al., 2024).

While this understanding is not incorrect, it is partial. It risks reducing IQA to documentation and external compliance rather than viewing it as a continuous process that supports teaching, assessment, feedback and professional learning. Heads of Departments confirmed the same pattern. One HoD observed:

I am not sure whether it is a directorate or a department of quality assurance at SUZA. The quality assurance officer attends and assesses how we develop our curricula to comply with TCU guidelines. Normally, an IQA officer attends during curriculum review or development. They guide us to ensure compliance with TCU guidelines (Head of Department 1: Education, 5 August, 2024).

The HoD recognized IQA's role in curriculum development but was uncertain about its institutional location. This uncertainty contrasted with the strategic plan's formal positioning of quality assurance within university governance (State University of Zanzibar, 2023b). The discrepancy points less to an absence of structure than to weak visibility and communication across academic units. Such uncertainty matters because academics are less likely to use IQA inputs meaningfully when responsibilities, procedures, and relationships with academic departments remain unclear (Kimaro & Kapinga, 2021; Shurgai, 2015).

Another HoD raised a more explicit concern about limited knowledge:

You might even find that if you ask five lecturers what quality assurance means, many would not be able to answer. I know quality assurance exists, but there is a lack of knowledge about it (Head of Department 2: Tourism, 12 August 2024).

The HoD's judgment cannot establish how widespread limited knowledge was, but it reinforces the variation evident across the interviews. Bilal and Manning (2020) similarly found that university educators could be generally aware of quality assurance while lacking detailed understanding of its processes. Formal policies and evaluation tools cannot contribute fully to teaching improvement if academics do not understand their purpose or how to interpret their outputs. In KAPB terms, the gap concerned depth of knowledge rather than simple awareness of IQA's existence. Limited procedural understanding could, in turn, produce passive or inconsistent engagement without necessarily indicating opposition to quality assurance.

Another form of narrow understanding involved associating IQA with examinations. One academic explained:

The unit is mainly active during exam sessions. We receive guidelines before setting exams, detailing what should and should not be included. Quality Assurance staff are involved in this (Academics 2: Natural Sciences, 7 August 2024).

The account positions IQA as most visible during examinations. SUZA's academic regulations equally give detailed attention to assessment and external examination (State University of Zanzibar, 2021a), confirming the strong formalization of this function. Yet the strategic plan assigns IQA broader responsibilities for institutional and teaching improvement (State University of Zanzibar, 2023b). Documentary and interview evidence diverged on lived breadth: IQA was institutionally wider than the compliance points through which some academics encountered it. Examination oversight may strengthen fairness and consistency, but when it dominates academics' experience, IQA can appear episodic and regulatory rather than continuous and pedagogically supportive. This distinction helps explain why formally comprehensive systems may still have limited influence on teaching practice (Cheng, 2011; Mtitu, 2025).

Overall, academics' knowledge ranged from broad recognition of student evaluations, observations, external examiner reports, curriculum review, and feedback to narrower associations with program approval and examinations. The documents confirmed the formal breadth of IQA but also showed that this breadth was not consistently visible in academics' accounts. However, partial understanding narrowed which inputs academics recognized as relevant and how they connected those inputs to teaching improvement.

Theme 2: Ambivalent Perceptions and Beliefs about the Usefulness of IQA Inputs

Academics expressed mixed views about the usefulness of IQA inputs. Their attitudes reflected immediate favorable, skeptical, or resistant evaluations of particular activities, whereas their beliefs concerned the legitimacy, credibility, and broader purpose of IQA. Some valued specific mechanisms while remaining skeptical about institutional intentions and follow-up.

Positive perceptions were evident among participants who viewed IQA as a mechanism for maintaining standards and ensuring that teaching met institutional expectations. For example, one academic stated:

What I understand is that universities themselves take measures to ensure their products are valuable, perhaps to meet certain standards. That is what I understand by Quality Assurance. Thus, when I say IQA, I mean internal activities, such as how academic staff, for example, ensure that what they teach meets those standards, and what SUZA itself is doing to ensure those standards are met (Academics 5, Languages, 8 August 2024).

The participant expressed a favorable attitude toward maintaining standards and a broader belief that IQA was internally legitimate rather than merely externally imposed. The account also placed some responsibility for quality on academic staff. However, it remained aspirational: it identified what IQA should accomplish without showing how particular evidence had changed teaching. Evidence from Ethiopia similarly indicates that academics may value IQA in principle while criticizing limited engagement at operational levels (Tamrat, 2022). A general endorsement of standards should not be treated as evidence that IQA inputs are experienced as useful or translated into practice. The distinction illustrates why attitudes toward particular goals and beliefs about the wider system must be analyzed separately.

Similarly, some academics saw IQA as covering multiple dimensions of academic work, including teaching, assessment and classroom management. One participant explained:

The IQA inputs at SUZA focused on various areas. For example, some activities evaluate how students are taught in the classroom. Some focus on how students are assessed. The activities I feel involve IQA include those related to managing teaching activities (Academics 7: Education, 17 August 2024).

The participant evaluated IQA favourably because it addressed teaching, assessment, and the management of classroom activity. This broad perception moved beyond viewing IQA solely as examination control. Yet the account still described areas of evaluation rather than what happened after evidence was collected. It demonstrates perceived relevance and potential usefulness, not teaching improvement itself. IQA becomes developmental when academics can interpret evaluation evidence, participate in decisions arising from it, and adjust teaching with appropriate support (Hsu, 2023; Malunda et al., 2021).

However, academics' perceptions of usefulness were shaped by how IQA was implemented. When IQA was experienced as irregular, top-down or focused mainly on monitoring, some academics interpreted it less positively. For example, one participant commented:

One key IQA activity involved student evaluations, during which forms were distributed to gather students' views on teaching and other areas for improvement. IQA sometimes administers surveys at the end of each semester through questionnaires. The IQA officer once visited my class unexpectedly while I was teaching. They observed aspects like classroom arrangement and provided feedback after the visit (Academics 6: Education, 21 July 2024).

This account combines recognition with reservation. The participant acknowledged student evaluations, surveys, and classroom observation as potentially useful sources of teaching evidence, but the unexpected visit also positioned IQA as inspection. The issue is not that unannounced observation is inherently ineffective; rather, its meaning depends on whether its purpose is clear and whether it is followed by specific, dialogic support (Krooi et al., 2024; Martin, 2018). Without such engagement, academics may comply with observation while withholding professional ownership. The quotation thus demonstrates an unfavorable attitude toward implementation

without necessarily implying disbelief in the value of classroom observation itself (Credo & Mngarah, 2024; Newton, 2000).

The perception of IQA as compliance was also evident in relation to examination guidelines. One HoD noted:

I have observed that many academics demonstrate a thorough understanding of the IQA examination guidelines, successfully incorporating them into their assessment procedures to maintain impartiality and openness. Nonetheless, some academics still tend to see these rules as merely administrative requirements rather than crucial instruments for improving the integrity of our testing procedures (Head of Department 2: Education, 5 August 2024).

The HoD clearly distinguished two responses to the same input. Some academics held a favorable attitude toward examination guidelines because they supported fairness and transparency, whereas others evaluated them as an administrative burden. These attitudes reflected different beliefs about whether the guidelines served assessment integrity or institutional control. SUZA's academic regulations confirm that examination procedures were formally specified (State University of Zanzibar, 2021a). However, documentary clarity cannot establish whether academics regarded them as credible or developmental (Soud et al., 2026). Their usefulness depended on reflective engagement and professional support rather than procedural adherence alone (Lucander & Christersson, 2020; Mtitu, 2025).

Another HoD raised a similar concern:

Although IQA test guidelines are clearly specified, departments interpret and implement them differently. While some academics respect these norms to maintain exam quality and integrity, others find them difficult to implement, either because of a lack of awareness or because they are perceived as cumbersome. This disparity highlights the need for increased training and communication to enable effective and uniform execution of rules, which will ultimately improve student outcomes and academic performance (Head of Department 3: Languages, 7 August 2024).

This account shifts explanation from individual disposition to institutional conditions. The same rules were accepted, resisted, or misunderstood across departments, suggesting that communication, training, and local support shaped attitudes and beliefs. Student representative and tracer records reported continuing concerns about grading and academic responsiveness (State University of Zanzibar, 2021b, 2024), qualifying the HoD's expectation that clearly specified rules would automatically produce consistent outcomes. These documents do not show that examination guidelines were ineffective, but they reveal that formal clarity had not eliminated uneven student experiences. At SUZA, consistent implementation required alignment among IQA purpose, the academics expected to act, and the processes supporting action (Krooi et al., 2024).

Institutional capacity also shaped academics' beliefs about the usefulness of IQA. One academic raised concern about the staffing of the IQA unit:

I understand that IQA at SUZA has a specific unit responsible for quality control in teaching. However, the IQA unit has very few staff, so its effectiveness is not as good as it should be (Academics 8: School of Health, 7 August 2024).

The participant linked IQA's effectiveness to the unit's staffing, while the term "quality control" framed its role as regulatory oversight rather than collaborative development. The strategic

plan records expanding programs and accountability demands (State University of Zanzibar, 2023b), lending institutional context to the perceived capacity gap. Limited staffing could restrict monitoring, feedback, and academic support, but staffing alone does not determine effectiveness. The organization of quality work, staff expertise, and relationships with academic units are also important (Lucander & Christersson, 2020; Erittu & Turri, 2023; Kimaro & Kapinga, 2021). The participant's account consequently identifies both a material constraint and a legitimacy problem: an under-resourced unit perceived mainly as controlling may struggle to secure academics' confidence in its developmental role.

The findings also revealed differences between central and school-level IQA arrangements. One academic from the School of Health explained:

In the SoH, I am part of the IQA team, but this does not directly relate to the central IQA unit at SUZA. We conduct our own QA activities and do not report to them (Academics 9: School of Health, 7 August 2024).

The quotation points to fragmentation between central and school-level IQA arrangements. Localized quality work may strengthen ownership and respond to discipline-specific accreditation needs, particularly in professional programs. However, the absence of reporting to the central unit restricted institutional learning and risked uneven standards across schools. This practice sat uneasily with the institution-wide quality arrangements set out in the strategic plan (State University of Zanzibar, 2023b), so the documents contradicted coordination in enactment rather than the existence of formal structures. Faculty engagement and horizontal coordination are necessary for decentralized initiatives to inform improvement beyond the unit in which they originate (Erittu & Turri, 2023; Pham, 2022).

IQA officers, however, described the system in more comprehensive and developmental terms. One IQA officer explained:

IQA inputs involve a cycle of activities, such as setting standards and benchmarks, including defining learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and teaching quality expectations. They also include monitoring and data collection through various means, such as course reviews, student surveys, and classroom observations. In addition, IQA involves analyzing and evaluating the collected data to identify areas that meet or fall short of established standards, and providing constructive feedback to faculty and administrators, along with recommendations for improvement. Most importantly, IQA reviews and refines inputs based on feedback and ongoing university needs (IQA officer 1: 29 July 2024).

The officer articulated a coherent improvement cycle linking standards, data collection, evaluation, feedback, and refinement. SUZA's program self-assessment report and strategic plan confirmed the formal architecture of review, monitoring, and reporting (State University of Zanzibar, 2023a, 2023b). However, the documents specified these functions more clearly than the dissemination of feedback to individual academics, departmental follow-up, or demonstrable changes in teaching. When compared with academics' accounts of irregular communication and support, the documents qualified rather than corroborated the official portrayal. The discrepancy does not mean that the cycle was absent; it distinguishes the designed cycle from its uneven enactment. This gap is analytically important because IQA effectiveness depends on connections among purpose, people, and process, not simply the formal presence of each component (Krooi et al., 2024; Malunda et al., 2021).

Another IQA officer reported growing engagement among academics but also acknowledged uneven departmental involvement:

I have noticed that a growing number of SUZA academics have actively incorporated quality assurance measures into their teaching and assessment activities and have supported IQA inputs over the past few academic cycles. However, involvement levels still differ across departments, with some academics using these procedures to drive academic success and others still viewing them as standard administrative duties (IQA 2: 1 August 2024).

The officer's account confirmed that attitudes and beliefs were not uniform across departments. Some academics reportedly valued particular IQA procedures as resources for academic improvement, while others regarded them as administrative work. However, the claim of growing engagement represented an institutional assessment rather than direct evidence of changed teaching. Student representative and tracer records reported uneven academic engagement, responsiveness, and grading across programs and cohorts (State University of Zanzibar, 2021b, 2024), qualifying any uniform narrative of progress. Positive attitudes toward particular inputs could coexist with skeptical beliefs about institutional capacity and follow-up. Developing a quality culture requires changes in both formal mechanisms and collective engagement, not evidence collection alone (Hsu, 2023; Rahnuma, 2020).

Theme 3: Limited Translation of IQA Inputs into Teaching Improvement

The use of IQA inputs for teaching improvement was uneven. Although some academics reported adjusting their teaching or assessment in response to feedback, its dissemination and follow-up were often irregular, leaving implementation largely to individual initiative. The central challenge was not the absence of IQA inputs, but a weak process for translating feedback into pedagogical action.

Some academics reported receiving direct feedback from supervisors. One participant stated:

Sometimes, we also receive feedback directly from our supervisors, who may call us and say, "I have observed how you teach, but there is an area that needs improvement" (Academic 8, School of Health, 7 August 2024).

The account confirms that supervisory feedback occurred and was directly related to classroom practice. However, "sometimes" indicates that it was occasional rather than systematically embedded, while the unspecified "area" for improvement leaves unclear whether guidance, dialogue, or follow-up accompanied the comment. SUZA's promotion guidelines revealed an issue not raised directly in interviews: engagement in IQA was implicit within general expectations for teaching and professionalism rather than stated as a specific responsibility or incentive (State University of Zanzibar, 2022). This ambiguity may help explain why feedback depended heavily on supervisors' and academics' initiative. Its presence alone did not demonstrate teaching improvement; its developmental value depended on being specific, dialogic, continuous, and linked to subsequent action (Williams, 2024).

Another participant described the problem more directly:

Although feedback is given, there is little follow-up support. We are left to figure out how to implement IQA recommendations on our own, which has

led to confusion and inconsistent application (Academic 11, School of Education, 16 August 2024).

The account locates the problem in the transition from feedback to action. Academics received recommendations but lacked the mentoring, departmental dialogue, or professional development needed to interpret and apply them. Implementation was largely left to individual academics without adequate support, contributing to confusion and inconsistent practice. Institutional documents similarly specified monitoring and reporting more clearly than the pathway through which feedback would reach individual academics and receive departmental follow-up (State University of Zanzibar, 2023a, 2023b). This documentary silence qualified official claims of a complete improvement cycle. Limited use of IQA inputs did not necessarily reflect resistance; it also stemmed from insufficient institutional scaffolding to convert recommendations into pedagogical action (Malunda et al., 2021; Williams, 2024).

The gap between formal IQA structures and practical teaching improvement was also evident in relation to the timing of evaluations. One academic observed:

Evaluations are frequently limited to specific periods, such as end-of-semester exams, leaving gaps in monitoring teaching activities throughout the semester. This reactive approach fails to address issues such as absenteeism and lecturers' insufficient preparation (Academics 4: Education, 16 August 2024).

The account presents evaluation as episodic and reactive. End-of-semester findings may inform later courses but cannot readily improve teaching while current students are experiencing it. The participant's reference to absenteeism and preparation also frames IQA partly as monitoring academic performance, although continuous improvement requires more than intensified oversight. Student representative records documented continuing concerns about academic engagement and responsiveness that were not prominent in staff interviews (State University of Zanzibar, 2021b). These records do not establish that evaluation timing caused the concerns, but they reveal student-experience problems that periodic evaluation had not resolved. Formative IQA requires timely evidence, multiple perspectives, and opportunities for academics and departments to respond during teaching (Hsu, 2023; Williams, 2024).

Institutional accounts from IQA officers presented a more comprehensive picture of the available mechanisms. One IQA officer stated:

The IQA framework is a cornerstone of our commitment to academic excellence. We have implemented a robust system that encompasses multiple mechanisms to evaluate teaching effectiveness and program quality. These include, but are not limited to, student feedback surveys, peer review activities, curriculum audits and external examiner reports (IQA 1 Officer, 29 August 2024).

The officer's account confirms that SUZA possessed multiple mechanisms for generating evidence about teaching and program quality. The strategic plan, program self-assessment report, and academic regulations independently confirmed the presence of review, monitoring, assessment, and external examination arrangements (State University of Zanzibar, 2021a, 2023a, 2023b). However, the documents did not demonstrate that each input reached academics or produced identifiable teaching changes. They confirmed the system's formal architecture while qualifying its description as "robust". The critical issue was not the number of mechanisms but the strength of the connections between evidence, interpretation, support, and action (Krooi et al., 2024).

Synthesis across Themes

The findings show that the formal presence of IQA inputs did not ensure their pedagogical use. Academics' knowledge shaped which inputs they recognized, while their attitudes and beliefs influenced how they judged their relevance and legitimacy. Translation into practice depended on timely feedback, departmental dialogue, resources, and follow-up. Documentary evidence confirmed SUZA's formal IQA architecture but qualified accounts of complete feedback cycles and revealed ambiguous responsibilities and uneven student experiences. The usefulness of IQA inputs depended on the interaction between formal arrangements, academic participation, and collective ownership (Hsu, 2023; Legemaate et al., 2022; Rahnuma, 2020).

Conclusions and Implications

This study examined academics' understanding, perceived usefulness, and use of IQA inputs for teaching improvement at SUZA. Three principal findings emerged. First, academics' understanding of IQA inputs was uneven. Some recognized multiple mechanisms and connected them to teaching, assessment, and curriculum improvement, whereas others encountered IQA mainly through curriculum approval, examinations, or administrative monitoring. Documents confirmed that SUZA's formal IQA remit was broader than these visible activities, revealing a gap between institutional design and academics' practical understanding. Second, academics expressed mixed attitudes and beliefs about the usefulness of IQA inputs. Some valued feedback, curriculum review, and examination guidelines for maintaining standards and improving practice. Others experienced IQA as irregular, supervisory, fragmented, or insufficiently responsive to academic needs. favorable attitudes toward particular mechanisms could coexist with skeptical beliefs about institutional intentions, capacity, and follow-up. Third, the translation of IQA inputs into teaching improvement was inconsistent. Some academics reported using feedback to revise teaching or assessment, but others received delayed, generic, or unsupported recommendations. Documents confirmed the formal monitoring and reporting architecture but provided less evidence of systematic feedback dissemination, departmental follow-up, and demonstrable teaching changes. They also revealed ambiguous academic responsibilities and uneven student experiences that interviews did not fully articulate. The study concludes that IQA inputs at SUZA were regarded as potentially useful but were not consistently translated into teaching improvement. This uneven translation reflected differences in academics' understanding, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as irregular feedback and insufficient follow-up support.

The findings bear four important implications for policy, institutional practice, and future research. First, SUZA needs to clarify the developmental purpose of IQA and academics' responsibilities within it, including through relevant institutional policies and guidelines. Regular orientation should connect particular IQA inputs, such as student evaluations, external examiner reports, and curriculum reviews, to practical teaching improvement.

Second, feedback should reach academics promptly and be accompanied by constructive dialogue, mentoring, targeted professional development, and documented follow-up. IQA evidence should inform academic development activities and practical improvement plans, not merely communicate performance judgments.

Third, departments and schools require clearer roles in interpreting IQA evidence, supporting academics, coordinating responses, and documenting changes in teaching while

remaining connected to the central IQA office. This would strengthen institutional coordination without concentrating responsibility solely at the central level.

Fourth, future research should examine how particular IQA inputs translate into changes in teaching and assessment, and whether the patterns identified at SUZA occur across other Tanzanian universities. Research incorporating student perspectives could also establish whether reported improvements are reflected in students' experiences of teaching.

Addressing these areas would strengthen the feedback-to-action process and foster a more participatory and pedagogically meaningful quality culture.

Author Contributions

Soud Hamad Ali: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing. Joseph C. Pesambili: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing. Mpoki J. Mwaikokesya: Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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Informed Consent

Written or verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality restrictions.

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Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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