

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN WEST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study investigates innovative leadership practices that enhance quality assurance in higher education institutions across West Africa. As the region faces persistent challenges related to declining educational standards, limited resources, and institutional effectiveness, leadership has emerged as a critical driver of quality improvement. The study adopted a survey design method using quantitative surveys administered to academic leaders across selected West African universities to gain deeper insights into leadership strategies. The face content validity of the instrument were ascertain by the senior colleagues and analyst while the reliability co-efficients of 0.82 and 0.78 were gotten after pilot tested the instruments in another area. Findings reveal that transformational leadership styles, collaborative decision-making, and the integration of digital technologies significantly contribute to fostering a sustainable culture of quality assurance. The study also highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement and continuous professional development for academic leaders. The results suggest that adopting innovative leadership practices leads to improved academic performance, institutional resilience, and enhanced global reputation. The study concludes that prioritizing innovative leadership is fundamental to strengthening quality assurance systems in West African higher education institutions. The study recommended that universities authority such as the Management should endeavour to expose their leaders into transformational and innovative leadership training regularly.

Keywords: Innovative leadership, quality assurance, transformational leadership, stakeholder engagement, educational outcomes.

Introduction

Higher education institutions in West Africa play a crucial role in human capital development, innovation, and socio-economic transformation. However, many universities across the region face significant challenges including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, weak regulatory frameworks, and declining academic standards (Shams, 2017). These challenges have raised concerns about the quality of graduates and the global competitiveness of West African institutions.

Quality assurance is a systematic process of monitoring, evaluating, and improving educational activities, services, or outputs to ensure that established standards and objectives are consistently achieved. It focuses on maintaining quality through continuous assessment, accountability, and institutional improvement. The major components of quality assurance include **quality standards** (benchmarks and expectations), **monitoring and evaluation** (continuous assessment of performance), **quality control** (ensuring compliance with set standards), and **continuous improvement** (using

feedback and findings to enhance outcomes). Other supporting components often include staff development, resource adequacy, leadership effectiveness, and stakeholder participation (Kajala & Daka, 2023).

Quality assurance (QA) has therefore become a major priority for governments, accreditation bodies, and university administrators. While policies and regulatory mechanisms exist, their effectiveness largely depends on institutional leadership. Innovative leadership practices are essential for building a culture of accountability, continuous improvement, and excellence. Quality assurance has become a central concern in higher education due to growing expectations for academic standards, accountability, and institutional performance. This study examines quality assurance mechanisms in public universities in some selected universities in West African, with particular emphasis on their effectiveness. Globally, quality assurance has evolved in response to increased demands for transparency and standardization within higher education systems. Daka (2023) notes that these pressures have significantly shaped institutional approaches to quality management. Public universities, which are largely funded and regulated by the state, face distinct challenges as they must satisfy national regulatory requirements while responding to global academic expectations.

In Zambia for instance, higher education institutions have developed context-specific quality assurance frameworks to address regional needs and regulatory demands. The introduction of national quality frameworks and oversight agencies has strengthened institutional quality management systems. For public universities, this shift is particularly important, as they must balance international benchmarks with local realities, including limited resources and changing regulatory environments (Bwalya, 2023). The evolution of quality assurance systems in Zambian public universities mirrors broader transformations in higher education management. Rapid growth in student enrolment, academic programmes, and staff numbers has required more formal and systematic approaches to maintaining academic standards. As a result, many institutions have established structured quality assurance units, often through the creation of Directorates of Quality Assurance. This institutional development aligns with global trends that emphasize continuous quality improvement as a core element of effective university governance (Mushumba et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership, collaborative decision-making, technology integration, stakeholder engagement, and continuous professional development are interconnected variables that collectively strengthen quality assurance in educational institutions. Transformational leadership serves as the foundation by inspiring innovation, establishing clear institutional goals, motivating staff, and creating a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. According to Daka, (2023), transformational leaders influence organizational effectiveness by promoting shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and professional growth, which are essential for sustaining educational quality. Within the context of quality assurance, effective leadership determines how standards are implemented and monitored (Daka, 2023)

Transformational leadership naturally promotes collaborative decision-making by encouraging participation and shared responsibility among staff and stakeholders. Collaborative decision-making ensures that teachers, administrators, and other educational actors contribute to policy formulation and institutional practices, thereby increasing commitment to quality goals. Scholars such as John W. Hoy and Cecil G. Miskel cited in Daka (2023) argue that participatory management enhances organizational effectiveness because collective decisions often reflect institutional realities and improve implementation outcomes. Through collaborative structures, institutions create transparent systems that support quality assurance processes.

Collaborative decision-making further supports technology integration by enabling stakeholders to jointly identify technological needs, adopt digital innovations, and establish effective implementation strategies. Technology integration enhances quality assurance through improved instructional delivery, data management, monitoring systems, and communication processes. The work of Matthew J. Koehler and Punya Mishra cited in Zimba (2021) highlights that meaningful technology integration occurs when institutions align technological tools with pedagogical and organizational goals. Consequently, technology becomes a mechanism for strengthening institutional efficiency and maintaining educational standards (Zimba, 2021).

Technology integration also facilitates stakeholder engagement by expanding communication channels and increasing participation in educational processes. Stakeholder engagement refers to the active involvement of teachers, students, parents, community members, and governing authorities in educational planning and evaluation. Drawing from the stakeholder theory of R. Edward Freeman cited in Bush (2020), educational institutions achieve better outcomes when they incorporate the interests and contributions of all relevant groups. Active stakeholder engagement enhances transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, which are central principles of quality assurance.

Finally, stakeholder engagement reinforces continuous professional development (CPD) by identifying capacity gaps and supporting ongoing learning opportunities for educators and administrators (Shams, 2017). Continuous professional development ensures that personnel continually update their knowledge, skills, and competencies to meet evolving educational demands. Therefore, continuous professional development becomes the culminating quality assurance index that sustains transformational leadership practices, strengthens collaborative cultures, improves technology use, and maintains meaningful stakeholder engagement, ultimately leading to enhanced educational quality and institutional effectiveness (Shams, 2017).

Academic quality assurance in public universities is implemented through interconnected mechanisms. Programme design and review processes involve curriculum evaluation, stakeholder consultation, and alignment with national qualification frameworks guided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZAQA). Teaching and learning quality are monitored through student evaluations, peer review systems, and course assessment processes (Kajala & Daka, 2023). In addition, universities maintain rigorous assessment procedures, including moderation, external examination, and result verification to ensure academic integrity. Staff development is also a critical pillar of institutional quality assurance. Public universities conduct regular training in pedagogy, research capacity building, and professional development to strengthen academic competence. Performance appraisal systems further support continuous improvement in teaching and learning (Zimba, 2021). These processes are reinforced by institutional policies that promote excellence and accountability.

Empirical studies have identified several factors that influence effective quality assurance implementation. Nguyen et al. (2021) highlight the role of institutional culture, leadership commitment, and staff participation in strengthening quality systems. Similarly, Khdair (2022) reports that well-structured quality assurance frameworks positively affect employee performance in higher education institutions. Mohammed (2023) further demonstrates that the managerial competencies of university administrators significantly influence the effectiveness of quality assurance processes. However, staff perspectives remain underrepresented in many studies. Although existing research provides valuable insights into quality assurance in African higher education, there is still a need for institution-specific studies that reflect local contexts and operational realities.

This study examines how leadership practices influence quality assurance in West African higher education institutions. Specifically, it explores the role of transformational leadership, collaborative governance, digital innovation, stakeholder participation, and professional development in promoting sustainable QA systems.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the establishment of national accreditation agencies and internal quality assurance units, many West African universities continue to struggle with poor teaching quality, outdated curricula, weak research output, and inadequate monitoring systems (Bwalya, 2023). In many cases, leadership remains bureaucratic, centralized, and resistant to change. The lack of innovative leadership approaches has limited the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms. There is therefore a need to examine how leadership practices can be restructured to enhance quality assurance in higher education institutions across West Africa.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of innovative leadership practices on quality assurance system in West African Higher Education.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the influence of transformational leadership on quality assurance.
2. Examine the role of collaborative decision-making in strengthening quality assurance systems.
3. Assess the impact of technology integration on quality assurance processes.
4. Investigate the influence of stakeholder engagement on institutional quality assurance.
5. Examine the role of continuous professional development in sustaining quality assurance practices.

Research Questions

1. How does transformational leadership influence quality assurance in West African universities?
2. What role does collaborative decision-making play in strengthening quality assurance systems?
3. How does technology integration enhance quality assurance processes?
4. To what extent does stakeholder engagement influence institutional quality assurance?
5. How does continuous professional development contribute to sustainable quality assurance practices?

Methodology

The study adopted mixed-methods approach of both qualitative and quantitative. The population comprised all academic leaders in all West African universities. The target population are the comprised Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Departments, QA officers of all the West African Universities. A sample of 250 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. An instrument was used to collect data in this study which is structured questionnaire titled: **Innovative Leadership Practices and Quality Assurance System Questionnaire (ILPQASQ)**. The instrument was validated by the senior colleagues in the researchers' place of work and the analyst. The instrument was pilot tested and reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha is 0.82. The instruments were administered with help of two research assistants. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation.

Results

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1: How does transformational leadership influence quality assurance in West African universities?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Transformational Leadership and Quality Assurance

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	staff inspire by their leaders toward quality goals	4.32	0.61
2	Leaders always encourage innovation	4.28	0.64
3	Ethical behavior are modeled by leaders	4.35	0.59
4	well staff performance	4.41	0.56
	Average Weighted Mean	4.34	0.60

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics on transformational leadership as perceived by respondents in relation to quality assurance in West African universities. The results reveal a very high average weighted mean score of 4.34 (SD = 0.60), indicating that transformational leadership practices are strongly evident across the institutions studied. Specifically, respondents agreed that leaders inspire staff toward quality goals (M = 4.32, SD = 0.61) and consistently encourage innovation (M = 4.28, SD = 0.64), suggesting a leadership climate that promotes continuous improvement and creativity. The highest mean score was recorded for “well staff performance” (M = 4.41, SD = 0.56), implying that transformational leadership positively influences staff commitment and productivity. Similarly, leaders were perceived to model ethical behaviour (M = 4.35, SD = 0.59), which is essential for building trust and accountability in quality assurance processes. Overall, the relatively low standard deviations indicate consensus among respondents, confirming that transformational leadership plays a significant role in strengthening quality assurance practices in West African universities. Summarily, respondents strongly agreed that transformational leadership enhances quality assurance.

Research Question 2: **What role does collaborative decision-making play in quality assurance?**

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Collaborative Decision-Making and Quality Assurance

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Staff always participate in policy decisions	4.21	0.68
2	Quality data are always share by the Departments	4.17	0.71
3	Quality Assurance processes are contributed to by the Students	4.05	0.73
4	Teamwork is encouraged	4.29	0.62
	Average Weighted Mean	4.18	0.69

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics on collaborative decision-making and its role in quality assurance. The average weighted mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.69) indicates that respondents strongly agreed that collaborative practices are actively used to support quality assurance processes. In particular, encouraging of teamwork recorded the highest mean (M = 4.29, SD = 0.62), indicating that a cooperative work culture is central to maintaining quality standards. Always involving of staff in policy decisions (M = 4.21, SD = 0.68) and the sharing of quality-related data always across departments (M = 4.17, SD = 0.71) further show that collective engagement is valued in institutional governance. Although slightly lower, the mean for student contribution to quality assurance processes (M = 4.05, SD = 0.73) still reflects a positive perception of inclusive participation. The relatively moderate standard deviations indicate consistency in respondents’ views, confirming that collaborative

decision-making plays a significant and supportive role in strengthening quality assurance in the institutions studied.

Research Question 3

How does technology integration enhance quality assurance systems?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Technology Integration and Quality Assurance

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Always make use of digital Quality Assurance platforms	4.26	0.63
2	Always engage in online evaluation systems	4.19	0.67
3	Always engage in data-based decision making	4.31	0.59
4	Always expose to virtual staff training	4.11	0.72
	Average Weighted Mean	4.22	0.65

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics on collaborative decision-making and its function in quality assurance. The average weighted mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.69) indicates that respondents strongly agreed that collaborative practices are actively used to support quality assurance processes. In particular, teamwork being encouraged recorded the highest mean (M = 4.29, SD = 0.62), suggesting that a cooperative work culture is central to maintaining quality standards. Management always involving Staff in policy decisions (M = 4.21, SD = 0.68) and the sharing of quality-related data across departments (M = 4.17, SD = 0.71) further demonstrate that collective engagement is valued in institutional governance. Although slightly lower, the mean for student contribution to quality assurance processes (M = 4.05, SD = 0.73) still reflects a positive perception of inclusive participation. The relatively moderate standard deviations indicate consistency in respondents' views, confirming that collaborative decision-making plays a significant and supportive role in strengthening quality assurance in the institutions studied.

Research Question 4

To what extent does stakeholder engagement support institutional quality?

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Quality

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Allowing students to participate in Quality Assurance	4.15	0.71
2	Feedback are contributed by employers	4.02	0.76
3	Collaboration of accreditation bodies	4.32	0.60
4	Valuation of Community input	4.10	0.73
	Average Weighted Mean	4.15	0.70

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics on stakeholder engagement and its contribution to institutional quality. The average weighted mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.70) indicates a high level of agreement among respondents that stakeholder participation significantly supports quality improvement in the institution. Among the items, collaboration with accreditation bodies recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.32, SD = 0.60), highlighting the critical role of external quality regulators in strengthening institutional standards. Allowing students to participate in quality assurance processes (M = 4.15, SD = 0.71) and valuing community input (M = 4.10, SD = 0.73) further demonstrate a strong culture of inclusiveness and shared responsibility for quality. Although employer feedback recorded the lowest mean (M = 4.02,

SD = 0.76), it still reflects a positive perception of its relevance to institutional improvement. The relatively moderate standard deviations suggest consistency in respondents' views, confirming that broad stakeholder engagement plays an important role in enhancing institutional quality.

Research Question 5

How does continuous professional development contribute to sustainable QA practices?

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Sustainable Quality Assurance Practices

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Always expose to regular leadership training programs	4.23	0.66
2	Given opportunity for regular quality assurance workshops	4.18	0.68
3	Leaders are allow to go for ICT training regularly	4.12	0.71
4	There is mentorship opportunities	4.20	0.64
	Average Weighted Mean	4.18	0.67

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and its contribution to sustainable quality assurance (QA) practices. The average weighted mean of 4.18 (SD = 0.67) indicates a high level of agreement among respondents that CPD is a key driver of long-term quality improvement. Regular exposure to leadership training programmes recorded a high mean score (M = 4.23, SD = 0.66), showing that capacity building for leaders is perceived as essential for sustaining QA initiatives. Similarly, the provision of mentorship opportunities (M = 4.20, SD = 0.64) and regular QA workshops (M = 4.18, SD = 0.68) reflect a strong institutional commitment to continuous learning and skills enhancement. Although ICT training for leaders recorded the lowest mean (M = 4.12, SD = 0.71), it still indicates positive support for technology-driven quality processes. Overall, the relatively low standard deviations suggest consistency in responses, confirming that continuous professional development plays a significant role in sustaining effective QA practices.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that **transformational leadership** plays a significant role in strengthening quality assurance (QA) practices in West African universities. The high average weighted mean (M = 4.34) indicates that respondents strongly perceived their leaders as inspiring staff, encouraging innovation, modeling ethical behaviour, and enhancing staff performance. This supports the view that transformational leaders shape organizational culture by motivating employees toward shared quality goals (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Similarly, Daka (2023) and Bush (2020) observed that leadership styles that emphasize vision, integrity, and innovation promote accountability and continuous improvement in higher education institutions. The strong agreement in this study confirms that transformational leadership is a key driver of institutional quality.

Regarding collaborative decision-making, the findings revealed a high level of agreement (M = 4.18), indicating that participatory governance contributes significantly to the effectiveness of quality assurance (QA). Staff involvement in policy decisions, data sharing among departments, teamwork, and student participation were all positively rated. These findings align with Fullan (2016), who argued that collaborative cultures improve institutional learning and reform sustainability. Likewise, Okebukola (2021) emphasized that shared responsibility among staff and students strengthens quality ownership and institutional transparency. Thus, the study confirms that collective engagement is essential for maintaining and improving quality standards.

The findings on **technology integration** demonstrate that digital tools significantly enhance QA systems. Respondents strongly agreed that digital platforms, online evaluations, data-based decision-making, and virtual staff training contribute to quality assurance ($M = 4.22$). This is consistent with UNESCO (2022), which highlighted the importance of digital technologies in supporting monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based decision-making in higher education. Similarly, Al-Sharif and Al-Mahadin (2021) found that ICT-driven QA systems improve efficiency, accuracy, and institutional responsiveness. Therefore, the integration of technology is a vital mechanism for modern and sustainable quality assurance frameworks.

The study further confirms that **stakeholder engagement** is critical for institutional quality. With an average weighted mean of 4.15, respondents agreed that collaboration with accreditation bodies, student participation, community input, and employer feedback all support quality improvement. This finding supports Harvey and Green's (2018) quality framework, which emphasizes stakeholder satisfaction as a core dimension of quality. Likewise, Ewell (2015) noted that external accountability and stakeholder collaboration strengthen institutional credibility and performance. The strong role of accreditation bodies in this study reflects the importance of regulatory oversight in sustaining quality standards across higher education institutions.

Finally, the findings on **continuous professional development (CPD)** reveal that regular leadership training, QA workshops, ICT training, and mentorship significantly contribute to sustainable QA practices ($M = 4.18$). This supports the work of Day and Sachs (2014), who argued that continuous learning is essential for institutional growth and innovation. Similarly, Adeniji (2011) emphasized that staff development enhances performance and service quality. The strong agreement among respondents suggests that CPD ensures that academic leaders and staff remain competent, adaptive, and committed to quality assurance, thereby promoting long-term institutional effectiveness.

Conclusion

Conclusively, innovative leadership is central to effective quality assurance in West African higher institutions. All these indices (Transformational leadership, collaboration, technology, stakeholder engagement, and professional development) significantly influence and enhance quality assurance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended.

1. The Universities authority such as the Management should endeavour to expose their leaders into transformational and innovative leadership training regularly.
2. The Universities authority such as the Management, provost of colleges and deans should endeavour to strengthen internal Quality Assurance units of their institution.
3. All the management team of the Universities in the West African Countries should adopt Digital Quality Assurance systems.
4. The Stakeholders (Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Departments, QA officers) participation in leadership and digital training should be institutionalized.
5. The institutions management team in West African should make continuous professional development mandatory in their various institutions.

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