

# Efficacy of Quality Assurance Practices in Promoting Diversity and Inclusion In Higher Education Institutions

Moses Paafio Kwao, Lineo L. Toolo

Family Health University, Ghana

[Orchid ID Number: 0009-0007-9318-6527](#)

Department of Educational Leadership and Management, College of Education

University of South Africa

[Orchid ID Number: 0000-0001-6954-2893](#)

**Corresponding author:** Moses P. Kwao

Family Health University

## Abstract

The growing concern for QA in Ghana is driven by the rapid increase in the number of HEIs and the surge in enrolment figures, which have not been matched by a corresponding rise in resources and infrastructure. An increasingly diverse student population further complicates the quality debate in HEIs. The study aimed at exploring efficacy of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in HEIs. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. Purposive and convenience sampling technique was used in sampling 338 students from the various universities. A google form of questionnaire was designed to gather information from students of the sampled universities in Ghana. SPSS version 26 was used to perform descriptive characteristics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation), and inferential statistics (Correlation analysis). The study showed moderately effectiveness of QA practices at HEIs in promoting diversity and inclusion ( $M=3.23$ ,  $SD=1.179$ ). The study found a disparity between public and private universities, suggesting that QA practices are more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion at public institutions. Additionally, it was found that male students, older students, and those in higher academic levels perceived QA practices as more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion within the university environment. The study recommends policy-level changes aimed at updating legislative instruments governing QA practices in HEIs. These amendments should explicitly incorporate diversity considerations to ensure QA practices are optimally effective in promoting diversity and inclusion across the higher education sector. Such proactive measures are essential for fostering environments where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed.

**Keywords:** Quality assurance, diversity, Inclusion, educational institutions

## 1.0 Introduction

Quality in higher education is a multifaceted concept, encompassing various functions and activities integral to the academic ecosystem. This includes teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, student engagement, infrastructure, and community services, as well as the broader academic environment (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020:18). Higher education should be marked by an international dimension, fostering the exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, teacher and student mobility, and international research projects. These endeavors must be balanced with respect for national cultural values and specific circumstances. This holistic view of quality in higher education is articulated in UNESCO's Right to higher education (2020), emphasizing the importance of a global yet contextually sensitive approach to academic excellence.

A report by Hillman and Baydoun (2019) revealed that the application of quality assurance (QA) principles is a promising direction for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to maximize their potential and drive improvement. QA in higher education involves the implementation of mechanisms and procedures meticulously designed to demonstrate to relevant stakeholders that institutions are committed to adhering to sound policies that enhance institutional effectiveness (Mensah, 2022). Essentially, it enables institutions to assert with confidence that the quality and standards of their educational provision are not only upheld but continually improved (Mensah, 2022). QA has thus become the fundamental strategy adopted by HEIs to ensure quality and achieve their objectives in teaching, research, and innovation. As noted by Wangai (2022), HEIs have adopted QA as the sure way for quality improvement. QA provides direction to ensure and improve the quality of knowledge creation, processing, storage, and sharing at HEIs. Furthermore, QA ensures that the entirety of the services rendered by HEIs meets the recommended international standards and satisfies the explicitly outlined or implied needs of their stakeholders (Rzqoo, 2020).

The growing concern for QA in Ghana is driven by the rapid increase in the number of HEIs and the surge in enrolment figures, which have not been matched by a corresponding rise in resources and infrastructure (Alomenu, 2023). An increasingly diverse student population further complicates the quality debate in HEIs (Gyamera, 2024). These factors have serious implications for maintaining quality within these institutions. For many academic and non-academic staff, as well as other stakeholders, the swift rise in student numbers has posed significant challenges, placing a heavy burden on HEIs rather than presenting opportunities. Consequently, QA practices and systems have become crucial topics of discussion and are seen as the most reliable means of promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions. By setting standards, ensuring accountability, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, effective QA practices can lead to more inclusive policies, curricula, support services, and campus environments. This, in turn, enhances the educational experience for all students and staff.

### **1.1 Research questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study

- How do students perceive the effectiveness of QA practice in promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education institutions?
- How does the demographic composition of the student associate with perceptions of the effectiveness of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education?

### **1.2 Significance of the Study**

The outcome of the study would provide evidence-based insights that can inform the creation of policies aimed at enhancing diversity and inclusion through effective QA practices. Also, the findings from the study would help establish benchmarks for diversity and inclusion that institutions can be held accountable to, promoting greater transparency and responsibility in higher education in Ghana. The study will further offer a framework for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies designed to foster inclusive environments in higher education institutions. The outcome of the study would provide QA boards with empirical evidence to refine and enhance the standards and criteria used to assess diversity and inclusion efforts in higher education. It will support the development of comprehensive QA frameworks that integrate diversity and inclusion as key components of institutional quality.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Concept of QA in HEIs**

QA in higher education can be traced back to the early 19th century when the first universities were established in Europe (Rashdan, and Ashour, 2017). These institutions recognized the need for QA in order to ensure that their graduates were competent and could contribute effectively to society. In the United

States, quality assurance in higher education gained momentum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the establishment of accreditation agencies such as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) (Banta, Ewell, & Cogswell 2016). These agencies were responsible for evaluating the quality of higher education institutions and ensuring that they met certain standards. The 1960s and 1970s saw a significant shift in the focus of QA in higher education, from inputs to outputs (Ewell, 2010). This shift was a response to the growing demand for accountability and evidence-based practice in higher education. As institutions face new challenges and opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, QA continue to play a critical role in ensuring that higher education meets the needs of students, society, and the global community (Anyidoho, & Ogina, 2024). The Bologna Process, which is a series of reforms aimed at creating a European Higher Education Area, led to the development of a European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) framework for QA in higher education. In addition to the ESG, many countries have developed their own QA frameworks and accreditation systems.

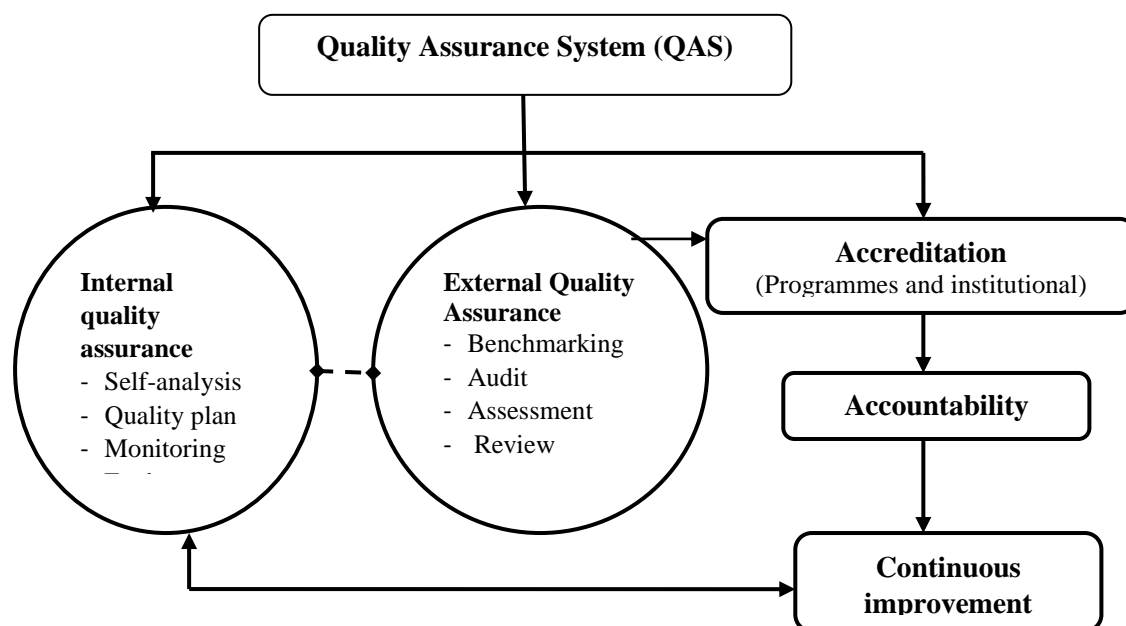
QA in HEIs is a systematic and continuous process of monitoring and evaluating academic programs, teaching, research, and support services to ensure that they meet or exceed set standards and expectations (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2021). According to the UNESCO (2021), QA is a set of policies, procedures, and practices that are used to ensure the quality and standards of higher education institutions and programs. One of the key components of QA in tertiary education is the establishment of clear and measurable learning outcomes. These outcomes should be aligned with the goals of the institution and should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they remain relevant and effective in preparing students for their future careers (Harden & Crosby, 2000). Harvey and Green (1993) buttress the above assertion by saying that there must be monitoring of teaching methods and materials, the evaluation of student performance, and the implementation of feedback mechanisms to improve teaching and learning processes. From the above, it could be deducing that QA in HEIs ensures provision of high-quality education, promotes transparency and accountability, and contributes to the development of a knowledge-based society.

## **2.2 QA systems in HEIs**

QA scholars identified two types of QA systems: the internal and external system. The internal quality assurance (IQA) a crucial aspect of HEIs, as it ensures that the institution's academic programs and services meet the required standards of quality. IQA encompasses a range of activities, including monitoring, evaluating, and improving the quality of teaching, research, and administrative services. In this article, we will explore the concept of IQA in HEIs and its importance in ensuring the quality of education. According to Altbach and Philip (2015), IQA is essential for ensuring that HEIs are responsive to the needs of students and stakeholders, and that they maintain high standards of quality. They also point out that IQA should be an integral part of an institution's culture, with all stakeholders committed to quality improvement. Mensah (2021) mentioned that IQA is the involvement of all stakeholders in the quality improvement process. As noted by Saugadi, R, Ali I, Maisyaroh & Burhanuddin (2024), IQA should involve not only academic staff and administrators but also students and external stakeholders. Saugadi et argued that involving students in the quality improvement process can help to ensure that their needs and expectations are met.

External quality Assurance (EQA) is an essential process for ensuring the quality and standards of HEIs worldwide. It involves external stakeholders, including quality assurance agencies, professional associations, and employers, in evaluating and monitoring the quality of education offered by HEIs (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015). EQA is a necessary aspect of ensuring the accountability of HEIs to their stakeholders and the public, and it helps to promote confidence in the education system. External Quality Assurance is an essential process for ensuring the quality of higher education institutions. It involves independent quality assurance agencies that evaluate and monitor HEIs against established standards and criteria, providing feedback and recommendations for improvement. EQA

helps to ensure that HEIs provide students with quality education that prepares them for the demands of the workforce, and it promotes confidence in the education system. As such, EQA is critical to the accountability of HEIs to their stakeholders and the public. Figure.1 shows the link between IQA and EQA Systems.



**Figure 2.1: Link between IQA and EQA Systems**

### **QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion (D&I)**

D&I in this context means providing education that is equally available and accessible to every potential and current student, while respecting individual differences in physical and cognitive abilities, as well as various social, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Schuelka et al., 2019; Ceresnova & Rollova, 2018). D&I in higher education, often described as “universal accessibility to knowledge,” not only addresses the needs of people with special educational requirements but also caters to all learners, considering their differing needs to achieve effective education for everyone (Porfírio et al., 2016). This concept extends to institutional structure inclusivity in QA, which involves incorporating students' feedback to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Gebrehiwot (2015) underscores the importance of inclusivity by ensuring that university buildings reflect the institution's beliefs about learning and teaching and demonstrate concerns about inclusion, participation, and community. QA agencies therefore urge higher education institutions to create structures and procedures that allow students to participate as partners in QA and enhancement processes (Scott, 2018). By doing so, institutions can better address the diverse needs of their student populations and foster an environment that promotes both diversity and inclusion.

Groen and Borin (2021) affirmed that QA promotes diversity and inclusion by ensuring that counseling and support services are accessible to all students, regardless of their background. This encompasses academic support, mental health services, and other resources that help students succeed and feel supported. According to Kayyali (2023), institutional structure inclusivity in QA promotes a learning environment that respects and values diversity. QA practices help create curricula and classroom dynamics that include diverse perspectives and foster an atmosphere of respect and inclusion. Nkala and Ncube (2020) suggested that higher education institutions (HEIs) should clearly and consistently communicate their commitment to diversity and inclusion. QA practices ensure that this commitment is evident in the institution's mission statements, policies, and everyday interactions. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) emphasizes the importance of structures for student involvement. Ala-Vähälä (2020) points out that QA practices involve

taking student feedback on diversity and inclusion seriously, creating channels for students to voice their concerns and suggestions, and ensuring that this feedback leads to tangible actions and improvements.

Carter and Abawi (2018) highlighted the need to establish QA structures that foster student involvement and examine their inclusivity as stakeholders. Tapera and Kuipa (2016) underscored the role of QA practices in ensuring that student bodies are inclusive and represent diverse interests and identities, fostering a sense of community and belonging among students from various backgrounds. QA practices also ensure that HEIs remain relevant to industry while maintaining regional and global competitiveness in higher education. Kayyali (2023) emphasized that the effectiveness of QA practices is reflected in the sense of belonging felt by students from diverse backgrounds. Effective QA practices contribute to creating an environment where all students feel valued and included, thus enhancing the overall educational experience for every student.

### **3.0 Materials And Methods**

#### **3.1 Research approach**

Quantitative research approach was adopted for this study. The quantitative research method adopts a deductive and objective view, which is characterized by tangible data such as counts, weight, mass, and other physical measures (Mohajan, 2020). Groen (2017) emphasizes that the quantitative method is used to determine the extent of a problem or the existence of a relationship between aspects of a phenomenon by quantifying the variation. It usually includes the investigation of frequencies and different measurable variables with the aim of explaining a certain phenomenon. The quantitative method deals with numerical measurements which mainly consist of several kinds of data collection tools including questionnaires and checklists.

#### **3.1 Research design**

The research method used in this study was a survey with a descriptive focus. The descriptive survey design was chosen because it allows for the collection of data from a large sample of respondents in a short amount of time, which is acceptable given the focus of the research. In addition, the descriptive survey approach was utilised to generalize the study's findings to universities in Ghana.

#### **3.2 Population**

In this study, the population was made up of students of public and private universities in Ghana who have a stake in ensuring quality assurance in their respective institutions. In Ghana, there are 27 public universities and 10 accredited private universities. The universities in Ghana comprises with different characteristics, size, complexity and academic specialization.

#### **3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

Purposive and convenience sampling procedures were used for the study. As universities in Ghana comprises different characteristics, purposive sampling was used in selecting 6 universities with enough characteristics to fit the requirements of the research design. In the selection of the students of the sampled universities, convenience sampled was employed to select 60 students from each public and private universities selected. In all, 360 students were selected for the study.

#### **3.4 Instruments for Data Collection**

A well-structured close-ended questionnaire was designed to gather information from students of the sampled universities in Ghana. Close-ended questionnaires were used because of the fact that they are easy for respondents to answer and they are also easy for researchers to analyse data (Mohajan, 2020). The questions focused on these forms of dichotomous response and rating scale questions. The researcher gave



out the questionnaires to the students in a google form. It is to be emphasized that the questionnaire allowed respondents time to think through the questions to provide accurate answers.

### 3.5 Data analysis plan

The quantitative data collected were processed and analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. SPSS version 26 was used to perform descriptive characteristics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation), and inferential statistics (Correlation analysis). Correlation matrix was used to measure the associations between various background factors (such as type of institution, age group, gender, and academic level) and the perceived efficacy of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in HEIs.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Background Information of Respondents

Background information was collected from the participants to provide insights into their characteristics relevant to the study. This included data on the type of institution attended by the participants, age group, age, and level of the students. The collected demographic data were organized and presented in Table 1 to facilitate a clear understanding of the participants' profiles. Out 360 questionnaires administered to the students, 338 were retrieved representing 93.9% response rate. Present in Table 1 shows the background information of the students.

**Table 1: Background information of respondents**

Characteristics	Responses	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Type of institution	Private	146	43.2
	Public	192	56.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age group	Below 20years	48	14.2
	20-29years	138	40.8
	30-39years	122	36.1
	40years and above	30	8.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Gender	Male	150	44.4
	Female	188	55.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Level of Students	Level 100	64	18.9
	Level 200	92	27.2
	Level 300	72	21.3
	Level 400	110	32.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As presented in Table 1, 43.2% of the students were from private universities, while the remaining 56.8% were from public universities. This implies that a larger proportion of public university students were included in the study compared to private university students. The age distribution of the students varied significantly. The smallest proportion, 8.9%, were students aged 40 years and above, while the largest proportion, 40.8%, consisted of students aged 20-29 years. Additionally, 14.2% of the students were below 20 years, and 36.1% were between the ages of 30-39 years. This indicates that the majority of students included in the study were relatively young, with most being below 40 years old. Regarding gender, the

majority of students included in the study (55.6%) were female, while the smaller proportion (44.4%) were male. This indicates that there were more female students included in the study than their male counterparts. In terms of the students' academic levels at the various universities, the data revealed that 18.9% of the students were in Level 100, while 27.2% were in Level 200. Additionally, 21.3% of the students reported being in Level 300, and the remaining majority (32.5%) were in their final year, Level 400. This shows that the majority of the university students included in the study are in their final year, making them well-positioned to provide informed perspectives on the efficacy of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions.

#### 4.2 QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in HEI

Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the effectiveness of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion. The efficacy of QA practices in this context was measured using mean scores and standard deviations, with a significant mean level fixed at 3.0. Statements with mean scores above this threshold were considered significant, while those below were rejected. Table 2 depicts the mean scores and the associations between various background factors (such as type of institution, age group, gender, and academic level) and the perceived efficacy of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in HEIs.

**Table 2: QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in HEIs as against demographic information of students**

S/NConstruct	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Type of Institution			1	.46 6*	.27 0*	- .05	- .057	.016	.01 6	.04 6	.02 4	.068	.038
2 Gender				1	.13 8*	.37 9*	- .084	.035	- .00 8	- .01 0	- .09 5	- .087	- .108 *
3 Age group					1	.73 2*	.132 *	.190 **	.01 3	.18 5*	.11 1*	.096	.075
4 Students academic level						1	.262 **	.265 **	.10 8*	.24 3*	.13 8*	.108 *	.142 **
5 Counseling and support services are accessible to all students regardless of their background <sup>d</sup>	3.1 5	1.29 7					1	.816 **	.74 3*	.65 0*	.63 8*	.549 **	.462 **
6 The university's diversity and inclusion policies are effectively implemented <sup>d</sup>	3.3 9	1.11 2						1	.75 4*	.73 2*	.74 0*	.579 **	.588 **
7 The university promotes a learning environment that respects and values diversity <sup>d</sup>	3.3 0	1.18 6							1	.75 5*	.71 2*	.705 **	.657 **
8 The university effectively communicates its commitment to diversity and inclusion <sup>d</sup>	3.2 1	1.17 4								1	.80 9*	.736 **	.700 **
9 Student organizations and clubs are inclusive and represent diverse interests and identities <sup>d</sup>	3.1 4	1.18 0									1	.771 **	.704 **
10 Students from diverse backgrounds feel a sense of belonging at the university <sup>d</sup>	3.1 9	1.20 3										1	.741 **
11 The university takes student feedback on diversity and inclusion seriously and acts upon it <sup>d</sup>	3.2 1	1.10 7											1
Average	3.2 3	1.17 9											

\*\*P<0.01, \*< 0.05 Mean< 3.0 (Disagreed); Mean=3.0 – 3.5 (Moderately agree); Mean= 3.6 – 4.0 (Highly agree)

**Type of Institution:** Private University=1 (Negative coefficient), Public University=2(Positive coefficient)

**Gender:** male = 1(Negative coefficient), female = 2(Positive coefficient)

**Age group:** Young students=1(Negative coefficient), Older students=2(Positive coefficient)

**Students academic level:** Lower level =1(Negative coefficient), Higher level=2(Positive coefficient)

d: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

As shown in Table 2, the average score of 3.23 indicates that QA practices in higher education institutions are moderately effective in promoting diversity and inclusion. Students noted that counseling and support services at the universities are accessible to all students, regardless of their background, with this statement achieving a mean score of 3.15 and a standard deviation of 1.297. Students also agreed that the university's diversity and inclusion policies are effectively implemented, reflected by a mean score of 3.39 and a standard deviation of 1.112. Additionally, they believed that the university promotes a learning environment that respects and values diversity, with this statement attaining a mean score of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 1.186. Furthermore, students indicated that the university effectively communicates its commitment to diversity and inclusion, with a mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 1.174. They also agreed that student organizations and clubs are inclusive and represent diverse interests and identities, with this statement having a mean score of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 1.180. Additionally, students mentioned that those from diverse backgrounds feel a sense of belonging at the university, with a mean score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 1.203. Lastly, students indicated that the university takes student feedback on diversity and inclusion seriously and acts upon it, with a mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 1.107. These findings underscore the effectiveness of QA practices in fostering an inclusive and diverse educational environment in HEIs, as perceived by the students.

The table further shows a comparison of the effectiveness of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion between private and public universities. The findings indicate that QA practices at public universities are more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion compared to private universities. This is evident as the type of institution is positively associated with all the variables except for one: "Counseling and support services are accessible to all students regardless of their background" ( $r=-.057$ ). This exception suggests that while public universities excel in various aspects of QA practices to foster diversity and inclusion, they may need to improve the accessibility of their counseling and support services to ensure they are equally available to all students.

However, when comparing the efficacy of QA practices in promoting diversity and inclusion against the background information of students, such as gender, age group, and level of students, distinct patterns emerge. The findings show that male students perceive QA practices as more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion in the university compared to their female counterparts. This perception is evident as gender is negatively associated with all variables except for the statement: "the university's diversity and inclusion policies are effectively implemented" ( $r=.035$ ). Additionally, older students perceive QA practices as more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion compared to younger students. This is reflected in the positive association between the age categories of students and the variables. On the other hand, students at higher academic levels view QA practices as more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion at the university compared to students at lower levels. The academic level of students is positively associated with most of the variables presented in Table 2.

## **5.0 Discussion of Results**

The study showed moderately effectiveness of QA practices at HEIs in promoting diversity and inclusion. It was found that these practices play a crucial role in ensuring that counseling and support services are accessible to all students, thereby fostering a learning environment that respects and values diversity. Moreover, HEIs take student feedback on diversity and inclusion seriously and act upon it, demonstrating a clear commitment to these principles. The implementation of diversity and inclusion policies was not only observed but also deemed effective in practice. Furthermore, QA practices at HEIs were noted to contribute significantly to the inclusivity of student association, which now represent a broad spectrum of interests and identities. This inclusivity has resulted in students from diverse backgrounds feeling a strong sense of



belonging within their university community. The study highlighted a disparity between public and private universities, suggesting that QA practices are more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion at public institutions. Additionally, it was found that male students, older students, and those in higher academic levels perceived QA practices as more effective in promoting diversity and inclusion within the university environment. These findings support the recommendation by QA agencies for HEIs to establish structures and procedures that enable student participation as partners in QA and enhancement processes. This approach ensures that institutions can better cater to the diverse needs of their student populations and cultivate an environment that champions both diversity and inclusion. The results align with previous research indicating that QA initiatives, such as ensuring accessible support services and inclusive curricula, are pivotal in creating an educational setting where students from all backgrounds feel valued and respected (Scott, 2018). This perspective is echoed by Groen and Borin (2021), who emphasize the role of QA in ensuring equitable access to support services. Additionally, Kayyali (2023) underscores how QA practices contribute to inclusive educational practices by integrating diverse perspectives into teaching and learning environments. Ala-Vähälä (2020) further emphasizes the importance of listening to student feedback on inclusion, translating suggestions into meaningful actions that enhance the university experience for all.

## 6.0 Conclusion And Recommendations

The study discovered moderate effectiveness of QA practices at HEIs in cultivating an environment that celebrates diversity, prioritizes inclusion, and supports the academic and social thriving of every student. Key findings reveal that QA practices moderately ensure equitable access to counseling and support services for all students, demonstrate responsiveness to student feedback on diversity and inclusion issues, and effectively communicate institutional commitment to these core values. Moreover, QA initiatives moderately contribute significantly to fostering inclusive student associations that reflect a wide array of interests and identities. Significantly, the study highlights a notable difference in the effectiveness of QA practices between public and private universities, suggesting that public institutions excel in promoting diversity and inclusion through their QA frameworks. Additionally, the study identifies that male students, older students, and those in higher academic levels perceive QA practices as more effective in enhancing diversity and inclusion within the university environment. In conclusion, the study affirms that robust QA practices at HEIs not only uphold standards of excellence in education but also play a crucial role in creating an inclusive and supportive campus climate where all students feel valued and empowered to succeed. To enhance these efforts, the study recommends policy-level changes aimed at updating legislative instruments governing QA practices in HEIs. These amendments should explicitly incorporate diversity considerations to ensure QA practices are optimally effective in promoting diversity and inclusion across the higher education sector. Such proactive measures are essential for fostering environments where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed.

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