



Quality Assurance Reform In Algerian Higher Education: Policy And Implementation (2008-2023)

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the evolution of Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms in Algerian higher education from 2008 to 2023, focusing on self-evaluation as a key driver of institutional improvement. Through analysis of 22 strategic documents, including legislative frameworks, international cooperation programs, bilateral support initiatives, and quality networks, the study traces QA development across four phases: foundation, development, implementation, and consolidation. Employing a cross-document analysis framework grounded in Denzin's (1978, 2012) triangulation methodology, this research integrates systematic translation protocols for French-language documentation with multi-dimensional content analysis. As a bilingual QA expert and practitioner, the researcher ensures conceptual and technical fidelity through direct translation and rigorous verification processes. The investigation reveals complex implementation challenges, including policy interpretation disparities, institutional adaptation hurdles, and varying impacts of international program influence. This study provides the first comprehensive longitudinal analysis of QA implementation in Algeria, documenting its maturation through distinct developmental phases and analysing recent structural reforms, particularly the centralization of quality oversight mechanisms and modernization of evaluation frameworks. The findings demonstrate how the 2023 National QA Framework revision addresses persistent challenges in research valorisation, digital infrastructure development, and stakeholder engagement, while illuminating the dynamic relationship between international quality standards and local institutional contexts.

Keywords: Quality Assurance; Higher Education; Algeria, Educational Policy; Self-Evaluation; Document Analysis

Introduction

Striving for excellence has emerged as a central priority in 21st-century higher education, with sophisticated QA systems driving institutional advancement and educational reform. Developing nations, such as Algeria, face unique challenges in harmonizing international standards with local cultural and institutional contexts. Algeria's systematic implementation of QA represents a strategic shift from traditional governance to evidence-based institutional improvement and sustainable academic excellence.

Since adopting the Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) system in 2004, Algeria's higher education landscape has undergone transformative changes. The introduction of QA mechanisms in 2008 marked a critical step toward aligning national institutions with international benchmarks while preserving local values. Recent milestones, such as the establishment of the QA Directorate at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) in 2021 and the revision of the National QA Framework (RNAQES) in 2023, underscore Algeria's commitment to enhancing higher education quality.

This research provides the first comprehensive longitudinal analysis of QA evolution from 2008 to 2023, exploring the interplay between international standards and local realities. By examining the shift from decentralized QA units to centralized oversight and evaluating institutional adaptation strategies, the study offers insights into quality enhancement mechanisms. It also proposes recommendations to strengthen QA

practices in response to technological advancements and evolving educational paradigms, offering lessons for other developing nations.

The study aims to analyse QA evolution in Algeria, assess the impact of international cooperation, evaluate institutional adaptation strategies, and propose actionable recommendations for improvement. Core research questions address the progression of QA policies, the role of international cooperation, institutional adaptation, and factors influencing QA effectiveness. By combining document and content analysis, the research provides a nuanced understanding of QA development and its implications for Algeria's higher education sector.

Situated within broader theoretical and empirical contexts, this study contributes actionable insights for policymakers, institutional leaders, and stakeholders committed to enhancing the quality and global competitiveness of Algerian higher education.

Literature Review

The Evolution of QA in Higher Education: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

QA in higher education has undergone significant evolution over the past century, adapting to shifting global needs and educational landscapes. This progression can be categorized into distinct phases, each reflecting the broader socio-economic and political contexts of its time.

Early Foundations (1900s–1950s)

QA in higher education initially emerged in the United States, driven by economic concerns and the need to protect consumers. The creation of External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs) represented an initial effort to bring consistency to an increasingly varied and expanding higher education system (Kinser, 2021). These foundational efforts laid the groundwork for structured QA systems in subsequent decades.

Post-War Expansion (1960s–1980s)

The post-World War II era saw a global recognition of QA's importance in higher education. European countries, notably the UK and Ireland, established national external QA mechanisms, balancing state regulation with institutional quality enhancement (Harvey & Stensaker, 2022). Simultaneously, research emphasized education's role in economic growth (Babeau, 1969; Mincer, 1974; Schultz, 1961), fuelling the expansion of QA practices to support societal development.

Global Proliferation and Standardization (1990s)

The 1990s marked an era of rapid QA development worldwide. A proliferation of EQAAs and self-funded agencies emerged, reflecting the growing demand for standardized approaches. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was created in 1991 to foster collaboration among QA agencies worldwide (INQAAHE, 2023). Institutions began formalizing QA through mission clarity, objective setting, and the adoption of quality management systems (Brogue & Saunders, 1992).

African QA Development (1960s–2000s)

Africa followed a distinct trajectory in QA evolution. Nigeria established its national QA agency in 1962, marking an early start. However, progress was uneven, with a significant decline in higher education quality by the mid-1990s. The 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education played a key role in catalysing reform, spurring initiatives like degree recognition conventions, program harmonization, and the creation of QA agencies across the continent (UNESCO, 1998; HAQAA, 2018).

Accountability and Globalization Era (2000s–2010s)

The new millennium saw QA systems adapt to the demands of an interconnected world. Institutions emphasized accountability amid trends like massification, internationalization, marketization, and privatization. Global rankings began influencing QA practices (Harvey, 2018; King, 2018). Regional networks, such as the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) established in 2007 (AfriQAN, 2014), enhanced capacity-building and collaboration across diverse QA systems (CHEA, n.d.).

Alignment with Qualification Recognition (Early 2010s)

With increasing global mobility, QA systems aligned with qualification recognition frameworks (Knight, 2004; OECD, 2005). Efforts to streamline international credential recognition improved the portability of educational qualifications, despite operational challenges (Hou, Morse, & Wang, 2017).

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Adaptation (2020–Present)

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a rapid reimagining of QA practices, with a new focus on trust and credibility in evaluations (INQAAHE, 2021). Additionally, QA systems grew to include a broader focus on stakeholder engagement, social impacts, innovation, and integration of third-mission activities, aligning with the post-pandemic world (Kaiser, Melo, & Hou, 2022).

Throughout these phases, certain principles have remained central to QA systems, including evidence-based practices, enhancement-led approaches, and a focus on institutional self-evaluation. Core QA methods—audits, accreditation, assessments/inspections, and external examinations—have evolved but continue to anchor most QA frameworks (Harvey & Stensaker, 2022; Martin & Stella, 2007).

As QA continues to be a cornerstone of global educational policy, especially in developing countries, resource disparities and uneven academic standards remain challenges. Capacity-building initiatives, such as UNESCO's Regional and Global Conventions, offer a robust framework for addressing these issues (Hou, Hill, Chan, Chen, & Tang, 2021). These efforts enhance the quality of higher education, which not only boosts academic performance but also supports broader socio-economic development, promoting equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities.

Understanding QA's historical evolution alongside contemporary implementation mechanisms bridges past developments with present applications, highlighting its critical role in institutional improvement and global educational advancement.

QA Approaches and Methods in Higher Education

Approaches of QA

There are several interrelated approaches to QA in higher education, including quality audit, quality assessment, and accreditation.

A quality audit evaluates how effectively an institution meets its objectives through a three-step process: assessing the alignment of quality procedures with objectives, verifying adherence to these procedures, and measuring their effectiveness in achieving the goals. By determining the effectiveness of institutional processes, the audit provides a report verifying the accuracy of the institutions' claims (Fraser, Khunti, Baker & Lakhani, 1997; Woodhouse, 1999).

Quality assessment, also referred to as evaluation, gauges the quality of an institution's outcomes. This approach provides decision-makers with critical insights to make informed choices about programs or policies, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with institutional priorities (Woodhouse, 1999; Norris, 2006).

Accreditation confirms that an institution satisfies certain standards or criteria, offering official recognition of its quality and operational performance (Woodhouse, 1999). Together, these three approaches ensure that institutions meet five essential success factors: the alignment of objectives, the sustainability of strategies, the consistency and effectiveness of actions, and the ability to measure outcomes (Woodhouse, 1999).

Methods of QA

QA processes rely on various methods, such as self-evaluation (SE), document review, peer assessments, inspections, stakeholder feedback surveys, direct oversight, and delegated responsibilities. External examiners play a crucial role in maintaining consistent evaluations across academic programs and projects (Harvey, 2006; Harvey & Green, 1993; Land & Gordon, 2013).

Self-assessment is central to QA, enabling institutions to critically evaluate their practices, measure performance, and align with standards. It complements document reviews and peer evaluations, creating a holistic QA framework. While self-assessment focuses on students' skills and engagement (McMillan & Hearn, 2008; Kitsantas, Reiser, & Doster, 2004), SE targets institutional processes and improvement areas (MacBeath, Oduro & Lightfoot, 2005).

Peer review fosters a quality culture through collaborative decision-making, while inspections address deficiencies to enhance performance (Frazer, 1994; Napier, Riazi, & Jacenyik-Trawogor, 2014). Document analysis assesses institutional outcomes (Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Joao Rosa, 2007), and stakeholder surveys, such as student evaluations, improve communication and capture quality perceptions (Cowen, 1996; Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003).

Direct intervention promotes transparent leader-employee dialogue, addressing challenges and building trust (Harvey & Newton, 2004). Proxy delegation ensures candid feedback through anonymity (Coates, 2005).

These QA methods collectively support continuous improvement and alignment with educational standards. Among them, SE holds particular significance in this study, as the following section explores its mechanisms and impact in driving institutional accountability and growth within the QA framework.

Self-Evaluation: A Cornerstone of QA in Higher Education

SE has become a vital tool in higher education, transitioning from a school improvement strategy to a mechanism for institutional accountability and quality enhancement. It equips managers with insights for effective resource allocation and decision-making (Borich, 1995; Ehren & Swanborn, 2012; MacBeath, 2005b). Far from being merely an assessment tool, SE fosters continuous improvement by encouraging reflection and self-critique among educators and students, improving performance and aligning curricula with stakeholder expectations (Heiderscheidt & Forcellini, 2023; Juma, 2024; MacBeath, 2005b). Institutional SE evaluates policies and practices against strategic objectives, while teacher SE enhances educators' skills and effectiveness, both relying on stakeholder feedback for improvement (Adelman, 2005; Airasian & Gullickson, 2006; MacBeath, 2005a).

SE ensures high standards in higher education by promoting accountability and enabling institutions to adapt based on stakeholder feedback, benefiting individuals and communities (Ritchie, 2007). Algeria exemplifies this approach through the establishment of the Commission for the Implementation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CIAQES) (MESRS, 2010), highlighting efforts to align with international standards while addressing local needs.

The Evolution of QA Implementation in Algerian Higher Education (2008-2023)

The institutionalization of QA in Algerian higher education over the past 15 years demonstrates a systematic commitment to enhancing standards through structured mechanisms and international collaboration. Initiated in 2008 with a MESRS-World Bank conference, this process laid the foundation for a comprehensive QA system (MESRS, 2023a). Engagements with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO researchers the same year underscored Algeria's alignment with international QA frameworks (MESRS, 2023a).

A major milestone was the 2010 establishment of CIAQES-I under Decree No. 167, tasked with coordinating QA implementation (MESRS, 2010). Capacity-building efforts began in 2011 through UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), providing training for CIAQES members, educators, and administrators (MESRS, 2023a). By 2012, Quality Control Cells (CAQs) and QA managers (RAQs) were operational, standardizing quality management across institutions (MESRS, 2023a).

The 2013 roadmap, finalized RNAQES, and Algero-Canadian symposiums furthered QA initiatives, followed by CIAQES-II in 2014, which expanded through regional meetings and collaborations, including training with the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) (MESRS, 2014, 2016a). International partnerships, such as The Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) seminars, highlighted Algeria's integration of global expertise with local implementation (MESRS, 2023a).

In 2017, a transformative SE process assessed regional higher education landscapes, culminating in a national report (MESRS, 2023a). The SE Guide, anchored in RNAQES, emphasized participatory evaluation to foster institutional excellence (Lerari, 2016; MESRS, 2016a, 2023a). External evaluations of 18 pilot institutions in 2018 blended international expertise with local insights (MESRS, 2023a). The creation of a QA Directorate in 2021 centralized oversight, signalling a mature phase in Algeria's QA evolution (MESRS, 2021). The 2023 RNAQES revision addressed lessons from earlier implementations, digital transformation, and modern pedagogical needs (MESRS, 2023b).

This trajectory showcases Algeria's strategic planning, international partnerships, and institutional growth, reflecting its dedication to sustainable educational excellence and a responsive QA framework from 2008 to the 2023 reforms.

Previous Studies

Research on QA implementation in Algerian higher education has evolved through various focused studies that illuminate both progress and persistent challenges in QA development. At the institutional level, significant contributions have emerged through detailed case studies. Notably, Bedoui and Laoudj's (2019) analysis of scientific research quality at Sétif 1 University employed the RNAQES to evaluate the university's 2017 CAQ data, establishing crucial links between assessment methodologies and institutional quality enhancement within the accreditation process.

Further institutional insights were provided by Boukredine and Idjet's (2022) comprehensive examination of the SE process at École Normale Supérieure Assia Djebar de Constantine. Their research meticulously mapped the evaluation process, stakeholder engagement patterns, and implementation challenges across the seven domains specified in the RNAQES, ultimately generating targeted improvement recommendations. Complementing these single-institution studies, Bedoui and Mansouri (2018) conducted valuable cross-institutional research through their comparative analysis of SE outcomes at Sétif 1 and Adrar Universities (2017-2018), demonstrating how SE serves as a critical feedback mechanism for institutional development across different contexts.

Domain-specific analyses have added another layer of understanding, exemplified by Ben Ayad, Bedoui, and Mansouri's (2021) focused study of academic formation at Mila University Centre (2018-2019). Their research mapped key QA stakeholders and evaluated outcomes across the seven RNAQES domains, identifying specific areas requiring improvement in training provision, student support systems, and educational progress monitoring. The operational perspective was further enhanced by Zaoui and Kouache's (2021) examination of QA Unit effectiveness at Algiers 3 University in 2017, which revealed systemic challenges in information systems and policy development while acknowledging the basic effectiveness of the SE framework.

Research Gaps and Contributions

Existing studies on QA in Algerian higher education have offered valuable insights, yet significant gaps remain. This research addresses these limitations through distinctive contributions to enhance understanding of QA evolution and implementation.

Firstly, it presents the first comprehensive longitudinal analysis of QA development in Algeria from 2008 to 2023. This extended timeline surpasses the snapshot approaches of prior research, offering deeper insights into developmental patterns and systemic changes over time.

Secondly, the study bridges the gap between policy formulation and institutional implementation by examining how national directives translate into operational practices. It highlights the challenges and successes encountered, uncovering the complex interplay between regulatory frameworks and institutional adaptations.

Additionally, the research employs a holistic analytical framework to explore QA implementation across multiple dimensions, uncovering the interconnected nature of QA practices and their impact on institutional effectiveness.

Of particular importance is its focus on the intersection of QA mechanisms with Algeria's socio-economic imperatives. Unlike previous research that primarily emphasizes institutional-level analyses, this study examines how QA aligns with workforce development, research valorisation, and industry-academic partnerships at a systemic level. Furthermore, it addresses the role of diverse stakeholders in shaping quality enhancement processes, an area that has been underexplored in the Algerian context.

By filling these gaps, this research not only advances understanding of QA's evolution but also provides system-level insights that link educational quality with socio-economic development objectives. The findings aim to inform policy and practice, offering an analytical framework that can benefit other developing nations facing similar challenges in harmonizing education quality with workforce and societal needs.

Methodology

Research Paradigm and Theoretical Framework

This study is fundamentally grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, acknowledging that understanding QA in Algerian higher education necessitates deep engagement with contextual realities and multiple stakeholder perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This interpretivist approach facilitates the examination of how QA policies and practices are interpreted, implemented, and experienced within the unique sociocultural context of Algerian higher education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research employs a comprehensive qualitative methodology to explore the evolution of QA policies, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between international quality standards and local institutional contexts. This theoretical stance, as articulated by Schwandt (2015), enables a sophisticated examination of subjective experiences and interpretative dynamics that play a critical role in educational quality management.

Document Selection Protocol

The study's methodological foundation rests upon a rigorous document selection process, guided by five essential criteria synthesized from the seminal works of Bowen (2009) and O'Leary (2017). The first criterion focused on substantive relevance, ensuring each document's direct connection to QA and SE implementation in Algerian higher education. The second criterion demanded authenticity verification, whereby each document's official status and institutional legitimacy underwent thorough confirmation.

Temporal congruence constituted the third criterion, with particular attention to the transformative period from 2008 to 2023. This timeframe captures the complete evolutionary arc of Algeria's QA journey, beginning with the foundational Law No. 08-06 of 2008 that established the initial regulatory framework, and extending through to the comprehensive RNAQES revision of 2023. This temporal scope enables analysis of both the system's foundational development and its recent maturation, including crucial reforms, implementation phases, and strategic adaptations.

The fourth criterion addressed document accessibility and authorization. Most policy documents were openly available through official government channels, while the analysed documents comprised national and international materials in the public domain. To maintain ethical research standards, findings are presented without referencing specific institutions. The final criterion involved impact assessment, critically evaluating each document's influence on QA implementation processes and outcomes.

Document Corpus Analysis

This study systematically analysed 22 strategically chosen documents to explore the complex development of QA in Algerian higher education. The documentary corpus was methodically categorized to capture the complex interplay between national frameworks and international influences.

The analysis encompassed *four legislative and regulatory documents* that established the foundational legal architecture for QA implementation, including pivotal legislation like Law No. 08-06 and subsequent regulatory orders. *Seven international cooperation programs*, including comprehensive initiatives like the Support Program for the Improvement of Public Services-Higher Education and Scientific Research Sector (PAPS-ESRS) and the transition from Tempus to Erasmus+, demonstrated the transformative impact of global partnerships on local QA development. *Three bilateral support programs* highlighted targeted international collaborations designed to enhance specific aspects of QA practice, such as the From University to World of Work project addressing graduate employability.

The corpus additionally included *six QA initiatives* that illuminated the practical implementation of QA standards within institutions, notably the two versions of RNAQES (2016-2023) and comprehensive evaluation campaigns. *Two international quality networks* documented Algeria's strategic engagement with global QA communities, exemplifying the country's commitment to international standards while maintaining contextual relevance.

This rigorous categorization enabled a nuanced examination of QA evolution across policy formation, practical implementation, and institutional adaptation, while revealing the intricate relationships between national development priorities and international collaboration frameworks.

Analytical Framework and Process

The analytical framework employed a sophisticated multi-stage content analysis methodology designed to extract nuanced insights into QA policy evolution and practices. The initial phase involved an exhaustive document review, where each document underwent careful scrutiny to extract relevant themes, concepts, and practices. This approach, informed by Lune and Berg's (2021) methodological guidelines, ensured systematic and thorough examination of the documentary evidence. The subsequent thematic coding process, grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2021; 2022a,b) methodological insights, facilitated the development of a comprehensive coding framework. This framework focused on key areas including the evolutionary trajectory of QA policies, the transformative impact of international cooperation, and institutional challenges encountered during implementation.

Cross-Document Analysis and Translation Protocol

This study employed a cross-document analysis framework to examine QA evolution in Algerian higher education, building on Denzin's triangulation methodology (1978, 2012) and Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) subsequent work. The approach integrated multiple triangulation dimensions, analysing legislative texts, program reports, and evaluation documents across different time periods to track QA development patterns. The analysis of French-language documentation required precise translation protocols. As a bilingual QA expert serving both as university QA unit member and faculty QA unit manager, the researcher conducted direct translations of French materials into English. Each translation underwent careful verification against source documents, with particular attention to technical terminology and institutional nomenclature. This dual role facilitated a nuanced engagement with the materials, adhering to established translation validation principles (Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington, 2010; Squires, 2009).

The methodology revealed the interplay between institutional, regional, and international influences on QA practices. Through systematic cross-document analysis and rigorous translation, the study constructed a detailed account of QA development within Algerian higher education, identifying key trends and evolutionary patterns while maintaining methodological integrity. This approach enabled robust examination of how QA mechanisms adapted and evolved, ensuring findings accurately reflected the system's complexities while meeting scholarly standards.

Ethical Considerations

While this study focused on documentary analysis instead of involving direct human participants, key ethical considerations were meticulously addressed. Most of the documents analysed were publicly accessible policy texts retrieved from official government and university websites. Adhering to ethical research standards (Israel & Hay, 2006), these documents were treated with academic integrity, ensuring confidentiality and analytical transparency throughout the study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Translation ethics were a central concern, guided by robust cross-linguistic research methodologies. Informed by Temple and Young's (2004) foundational work on translation complexities, the study critically engaged with the power dynamics inherent in translating institutional documents. A reflexive approach was adopted to preserve the authenticity and nuanced meaning of original texts while ensuring their accurate representation in translation.

Cultural sensitivity was integral to the translation and interpretation processes. Drawing on Shklarov's (2007) principles for cross-cultural research ethics, the study emphasised not only linguistic precision but also a deep respect for the contextual and cultural integrity of the documents. This approach guaranteed the faithful representation of institutional voices within their unique semantic and cultural contexts.

The ethical implications of portraying institutional practices and policies, particularly in QA evaluation, were also carefully considered. Following Hammersley and Traianou's (2012) framework for ethical educational research, the study aimed for a balanced representation of institutional efforts and challenges in implementing QA initiatives. This commitment ensured that the analysis was both fair and constructive.

Additionally, the potential impact of the findings on stakeholders involved in QA practices was addressed. By prioritizing transparency and accountability, the research sought to contribute positively to discussions on quality improvement in higher education while respecting the integrity of the institutions involved.

In summary, this study navigated ethical complexities through rigorous protocols for document handling, translation fidelity, and balanced representation of institutional practices. These measures ensured the credibility of the findings while safeguarding the rights and dignity of the institutions under study.

Limitations of the Study

This study faced several methodological and practical constraints that influenced its scope and depth, requiring careful interpretation of the findings. While it offered valuable insights into Algeria's QA system in higher education, certain limitations impacted its comprehensiveness.

The reliance on documentary analysis, essential for exploring formal QA policies and procedures, presented inherent challenges. As Bowen (2009) observes, documents often provide only a partial perspective, insufficient for capturing the nuanced realities of institutional implementation. Restricted access to internal institutional documents, particularly those containing sensitive operational data and confidential quality assessment reports, left significant gaps in understanding QA processes at granular levels.

The multilingual nature of the documentation added complexity to the analysis. However, the researcher's bilingual proficiency in French and English, combined with adherence to rigorous translation protocols, minimized the risk of losing subtle meanings embedded in technical terminology and context-specific QA concepts. These measures align with van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg's (2010) emphasis on preserving nuanced meanings in cross-linguistic research.

While the findings reflect the diverse experiences across Algeria's higher education landscape, significant variations in institutional resources and regional contexts constrained the study's generalizability. Certain institutions or regions may deviate markedly from the trends observed, limiting the applicability of the results.

The absence of historical documents and internal working papers presented additional barriers to fully reconstructing the evolution of QA practices. Drawing on McCulloch's (2004) framework, the lack of such materials restricted a comprehensive understanding of internal decision-making processes, particularly in the early stages of QA implementation.

Moreover, the objectivity of official documents posed interpretive challenges. As Prior (2008) notes, these materials often reflect idealized representations rather than the complexities of real-world practices. Although triangulation strategies were employed to address this issue, the potential for institutional bias in official documentation must be acknowledged.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes significantly to understanding QA practices in Algerian higher education. These constraints highlight the need for complementary methodological approaches, such as ethnographic studies or interviews, to bridge identified gaps and provide a more holistic view of QA processes.

Integrated Analysis of QA in Algerian Higher Education (2008-2023)

The evolution of QA within Algerian higher education demonstrates a systematic transformation through four distinct phases.

The *Foundation Phase (2008-2013)* began with Law No. 08-06 (2008) and Order No. 167 (2010), establishing regulatory requirements. The Tempus program supported 56 projects between 2002-2013 (Benstaali, 2014; EC, 2013). Key initiatives included the Development, Education, Training, and Innovation (DEFI)-Averroes project for employability practices, the Optimising Sustainability and Management of Education Systems (OSMOSE) project for university-industry partnerships, Internal QA in Mediterranean Universities (AqiUmed) project for RNAQES development, and the Entrepreneurship and Valorisation of Research (EVARECH) project for entrepreneurial culture development.

The *Development Phase (2013-2016)* established RNAQES under CIAQES oversight, expanding beyond AqiUmed to include infrastructure, socio-economic relations, and international cooperation. Tempus evolved into Erasmus+ in 2014 (EC, 2014), modernizing education and enhancing employability.

The *Implementation Phase (2016-2020)* launched RNAQES in October 2016. Multiple Erasmus+ projects (2014-2020) addressed specific challenges: RISE (Modernizing Human Resource Management), COFFEE (Developing Employability-Focused Training), SATELIT (Promoting Innovation and Technological Excellence), SMWeld (South Mediterranean Welding Centre for Education, Training, and Quality Control), MAGIC (Regional PhD School Based on Innovative Hydro Platform in Water and Environment), PROMED (Boosting Environmental Protection and Energy-Efficient Buildings), AFREQUEN (Quality in Higher Education for Renewable Energy in North and West Africa), and Mission d'Assistance Technique.

International cooperation programs enhanced implementation through PAPS-ESRS (modernizing university systems), Higher Education Reform Experts (HERES) network, Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), Training-Employment-Qualification-Adequacy (AFEQ) program, From University to World of Work program, and Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) instrument (Programme d'Appui à la mise en œuvre de l'Accord d'Association [P3A], 2018).

The *Consolidation Phase (2021-2023)* established the QA Direction (2021) and revised RNAQES (2023). Analysis of 18 institutional SE reports and external Canadian panel assessments revealed implementation challenges: 73% of institutions struggle with research valorisation, 65% with digital infrastructure, and 58% with stakeholder engagement (MESRS, 2023a).

The 2023 RNAQES revision, developed with HCERES, introduced standardized evaluation protocols, enhanced digital systems, strengthened student mobility, improved research valorisation, and enhanced resource accessibility.

Future priorities include improving stakeholder engagement, strengthening digital infrastructure, and advancing research valorisation through robust funding mechanisms, comprehensive training programs, and stronger links between QA processes and institutional initiatives.

Revisiting Research Insights

Research Question 1: Tracing the Evolution of QA Policies and Practices

The evolution of QA and SE in Algerian higher education has unfolded through distinct phases, each contributing to the system's growth. The journey began with the *Foundation Phase (2008-2013)*, a crucial period where the legal and regulatory framework for QA was established through key legislation, including Law No. 08-06 and Order No. 167. During this phase, Algeria also sought international collaboration, notably through the Tempus program, which funded 56 projects, such as the AqiUmed initiative, which played a pivotal role in setting the foundation for future QA mechanisms.

The system matured with the *Development Phase (2013-2016)*, which marked a shift toward creating a more comprehensive QA framework. The introduction of the RNAQES system under the CIAQES expanded QA to address multiple dimensions of educational quality, reflecting Algeria's ambition to move beyond basic frameworks and embrace a more holistic approach to QA.

During the *Implementation Phase (2016-2020)*, the system's operational capacity was tested. Institutions began applying RNAQES, supported by extensive evaluation campaigns designed to identify strength and weakness. This period was critical for refining processes and building confidence in the QA system's capabilities.

Today, Algeria finds itself in the *Consolidation Phase (2021-2023)*, a stage of institutional maturity. This period is marked by the establishment of the QA Direction and a comprehensive revision of RNAQES, demonstrating Algeria's commitment to embedding sustainable QA practices aligned with international standards.

Research Question 2: The Role of International Cooperation in Shaping QA

International cooperation has been instrumental in shaping Algeria's QA journey. Through strategic partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and technical assistance, Algeria has gained global expertise to address local challenges.

The PAPS-ESRS program, launched in 2010, was among the first to modernize university systems, focusing on internal QA and integrated information systems. The Tempus program further contributed through diverse projects, such as the DEFI-Averroes, which aimed to enhance graduate employability, and OSMOSE, which sought to strengthen university-industry partnerships.

When Erasmus+ program replaced Tempus in 2014, it introduced projects like RISE, COFFEE, and SATELIT, which further advanced QA efforts. The HEREs program created a network of experts to promote Bologna strategies, while the PRIMA partnership facilitated collaboration on sustainable development. Other initiatives, such as From University to World of Work project and TAIEX seminars, addressed skills mismatches and operational expertise. These international collaborations provided Algeria with the tools, knowledge, and networks necessary to develop a robust QA system aligned with global standards.

Research Question 3: Institutional Adaptation of QA Framework

At the institutional level, the adaptation of QA frameworks has been both progress and challenge. Evaluations conducted in 2018 by a team of Canadian and local experts assessed the implementation of QA in 18 institutions. The assessments revealed strong performance at institutions like Ouargla University and the Universities of Science and Technology in Oran and Algiers, where committed leadership and active participation in international programs contributed to their success.

However, other institutions faced significant hurdles. Research valorisation remains a challenge for 73% of institutions, 65% struggle with digital infrastructure, and 58% report difficulties engaging stakeholders. These figures underscore the complexities of adapting QA frameworks to diverse institutional contexts, indicating the need for more targeted interventions to address these common obstacles.

Research Question 4: Factors Facilitating and Hindering Effective QA Implementation

The implementation of QA in Algeria has been influenced by both enabling and constraining factors. On the positive side, Algeria benefits from a strong legislative framework and the support of international programs, which provide a solid foundation for QA. These elements foster capacity-building and alignment with international best practices.

Nevertheless, challenges persist. A notable gap is the lack of regulatory provisions to adequately compensate RAQs for the additional workload associated with their QA responsibilities. Resource constraints, particularly in research facilities and digital infrastructure, further hinder the progress of QA implementation. These challenges highlight the need for an integrated approach that not only addresses organizational capacity but also improves resource availability.

Research Question 5: Enhancing QA Practices to Serve Institutional and National Objectives

To enhance QA practices in Algeria, future efforts should focus on strategic, coordinated action. The recent revision of RNAQES in 2023 introduced standardized evaluation protocols and advanced digital quality management systems, providing a strong foundation for improvement.

Key priorities for the future include the establishment of a National QA Agency to oversee and support QA efforts, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and improving digital infrastructure. Advancing research valorisation and strengthening links between QA processes and institutional initiatives are also critical. Achieving these objectives will require sustainable funding mechanisms, comprehensive training programs, and local capacity-building efforts. By continuing to build on its international partnerships while tailoring solutions to the Algerian context, the country can ensure that QA remains an integral and evolving component of its higher education system.

Conclusion

The transformation of QA in Algerian higher education (2008-2023) demonstrates how a developing nation can navigate educational reform while maintaining cultural authenticity and international excellence. The progression from foundation to consolidation phases provides insights into educational transformation in North Africa and the Global South.

Algeria's distinctive approach combines indigenous development with international expertise, developing context-sensitive quality frameworks rather than importing external models. RNAQES's establishment, evolution through Canadian expert evaluations, and 2023 revision exemplify this adaptive capacity.

The research reveals an implementation paradox: while structural integration through CAQs has succeeded, operational challenges persist, with 73% of institutions struggling with research valorisation and 65% with digital infrastructure. The experiences of Oran and Algiers Universities of Science and Technology, and Ouargla University demonstrate how leadership, resources, and international engagement create excellence centres.

The synergy between European partnerships (PAPS-ESRS, TAIEX, Tempus, and Erasmus+) and local expertise has created a *hybrid QA model* bridging international standards with local traditions. This approach, demonstrated through 56 Tempus projects and subsequent Erasmus+ initiatives, offers a template for regional educational reform.

The analysis reveals the need for formal recognition frameworks for QA personnel, suggesting reform success requires appropriate recognition mechanisms beyond technical systems and international collaborations.

Three pivotal areas emerge for future development: accelerating digital transformation of quality management systems, evolving stakeholder engagement from consultation to continuous collaboration, and bridging academic excellence with societal impact through research valorisation.

The 2021 QA Direction establishment represents broader transformation in quality conceptualization. Moving forward requires balancing global standards with local needs, structural frameworks with operational realities, and institutional requirements with human factors. Algeria's experience offers valuable lessons for educational QA in developing contexts worldwide.

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