

## Internal Quality Assurance Practices in Achieving World-Class University Standards: Perspectives from Administrators, Faculty, and Students

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**Abstract:** This study explored the stakeholders' interpretation of a world-class university and assessed the sustainability of internal quality assurance practices towards achieving the world-class university standards. It was guided by qualitative case study design and used interview and documentary review methods to generate data from 21 participants. The data were analysed using thematic and content analysis. The results revealed participants' interpretation of world-class university being linked with the realities of the world-class university as defined in the literature. Regarding sustainability, participants' perspectives focused on the aspects of strengths, weakness, opportunity and threats and noted the need for university quality assurance practices to exceed the standards set by accreditation authorities. The study concluded that the idea of world-class university was inescapable, and recommended strategies to strengthen universities towards features of third-generation universities.

**Keywords:** Internal Quality Assurance, World-class University Standards, University Core Functions, Sustainability, Socio-economic Development

### 1. Introduction

The aspect of quality constitutes one of the critical issues in higher learning institutions. It occurs amidst efforts to raise and uphold quality of higher education. Arguably, universities and other higher education institutions' worldwide have been formulating quality assurance policies to guide their core functions of teaching, research and community service (Inter-University Council for East Africa [IUCEA], 2010; Sokoine University of Agriculture [SUA], 2018; Tanzania Commission for Universities [TCU], 2024a, TCU, 2019). The desire to promote socio-economic development through excellence in university education has led to the establishment of various international bodies to monitor educational standards. In Western Europe, the examples included European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in which quality assurance became a priority after the signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999 (Bennett et al., 2010). In Africa, organs such as Harmonization of African Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) were established in attempt to enhance the quality of university education (Ayoo et al., 2020) while in East Africa, the IUCEA formed a good example (IUCEA, 2010).

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Besides inter-governmental organs, each country had formulated its own regulatory authority for ensuring that the university education was well monitored in order to guarantee the leading role in socio-economic development efforts. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) was established under Universities Act of 2005 (Cap. 346) (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2005). It was mandated to recognise, approve, register and accredit universities operating in Tanzania and coordinate the proper functioning of all university institutions in Tanzania to foster a harmonized university system in the country. In performing its roles, TCU published several quality assurance-focused guidelines. Such guidelines included the handbook for standard university education in Tanzania (TCU, 2019); University Qualification Framework [UQF] (TCU, 2012); framework for development and delivery of curricula for teacher education programmes in Tanzania (TCU, 2024a). The UQF, for example, specified higher learning into levels with performance criteria. For instance, Level 7, 8, and 9 represented qualification framework for Advanced Diploma, Bachelor Degree, and Postgraduate levels respectively. Graduates from Level 7 were expected to have broad and coherent knowledge, skills and competencies in analysis and interpretation of information, problem solving, and ability to learn or work independently. The UQF defined Level 8 as qualifying an individual to hold advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies in a discipline, field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles and ability to work independently. Level 9 was set to enable students to acquire specialized knowledge, skills and competencies in a specific discipline for professional practice (TCU, 2012). Nevertheless, it appears that there is limited understanding on the internal quality assurance practices among the university-based actors in relation to achieving world-class university standards. As such, the success or failure in achieving world-class university standards largely depends on both the interpretation and commitment of the university-based actors. Hence, the objectives of the study were twofold: first, to explore those actors' interpretation of a world-class university and secondly, to assess the sustainability of the internal quality assurance practices in achieving the world-class university standards.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Quality assurance in lower economy universities**

Following the TCU guidelines, the universities and other higher education institutions in Tanzania developed their internal Quality Assurance (QA) organs famously known as Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) units. As such, the quality of university graduates is largely determined by the extent to which the universities' IQA systems are organized and enforced in order to comply with the established quality assurance standards. There is an ample literature on the IQA units in relation to the espoused Quality Assurance (QA) goals (Ayano, 2020; Mondywa, 2022; Mrema et al., 2023; Mucherwa, 2017; Mudaheranwa, 2022; Njihia & Chilumika, 2021; Shabani et al., 2014; Wangai, 2022). Nonetheless, the existence of IQAs in Tanzanian universities and higher learning institutions has not yet addressed the scholars' criticism of the university graduates' lack of creativity, job market and self-reliance skills and attitudes, and inability to solve own and societal problems (Massaro, 2010; Mgaiwa, 2018; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Sumra & Katabaro, 2016). Since these attributes contribute to achieving world-class university standards, the study on university-based actors' interpretation of a world-class university and sustainability of those IQA practices was thought imperative.

The universities in the world have experienced various levels of development depending on the technological advancements in their respective regions. While those from the Western world had evolved for centuries, those in Africa and Tanzania in particular emerged in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This largely explains the varying levels of development and experience of the university education. In the era of the globalized world, which is characterized by competitive operations in all spheres of life, the universities from both the developed and developing regions play varying roles in the socioeconomic development of the nations. This has brought with it the notion of first, second, third and fourth generation universities (Lukovics & Zuti, 2015; Mizraie et al., 2018; Oztel, 2020; Pawlowski, 2009; Wisenna, 2009; Zuti & Lukovics, 2017). As such, the universities in different regions of the world are classified differently based on their levels of advancement. In the context of this study, the universities with highly advanced programmes and operations are referred to as the world-class universities. It is imperative that universities IQAs in the world focus on achieving world-class university standards.

## 2.2 Characteristics of World class Universities

The characteristics of the first to fourth generation universities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of different generations of universities

Aspect	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation	Fourth Generation
Goal	Education	Education and Research	Education, research and utilization of knowledge	Education, research, utilization of knowledge and proactive economic development
Role	Protection of truth	The cognition of nature	Creation of added value	Creation of strategic aims and the role of the engine in the local economy
Output	Professionals	Professionals and Scientists	Professional, scientists and entrepreneurs	Professionals, scientists, entrepreneurs and competitive local economy
Language	Latin	National	English	Multilingual (National and English)
Management	Chancellor	Part-time scientists	Professional management	Professional management and local experts

Source: Asgari et al., (2021)

Saad and Zawdie (2011) argue that the main features that distinguish the generations of universities are linked with the government, university and industry. According to Saad and Zawdie (2011), this distinction is referred to as triple helix model of innovation and technological processes. While the fourth generation of the universities has clear dynamics of interactive relationships between the government, industry and universities, the relationships in the developing regions are not very clear. The

fourth generation of the universities is claimed to originate from the knowledge creation regions whose universities are also known as knowledge economy universities (Lukovics & Zuti, 2013). These are claimed to augment their traditional activities (education and research) based on the local economy which relates with the local actors on the day-to-day basis. The universities in this category produce highly qualified graduates. Moreover, their research involves constant innovations and their outputs obtain practical value in solving real problems. This implies that the universities contribute, among other things, to the development and support of the enterprises in terms of the knowledge economy in the surrounding region. Hence, the world-class university's attributes include teaching, research and service functions which meet the demand of the developed economies. Such universities work closely with the other sectors of the economy such as industry, enterprises and the government.

### **2.3 Critical Evaluation**

The universities in the lower economies have not yet reached the fourth-generation level but their stakeholders might be aware of what transpires out there and wish to attain high level. They are claimed to strive towards the third-generation level which is characterized by education, research and utilization of knowledge and link the roles of professionals, scientists and entrepreneurs for the socio-economic development of their nations (Lukovics & Zuti, 2013; Wisenna, 2009; Wright et al., 2008). However, there is limited literature exploring the university-based stakeholders' interpretation of the world-class universities and assessing their perspectives regarding the sustainability of the IQA practices for attaining the world-class university standards. While there are several factors that affect the attainment of the world-class university education within the context of lower economies such as Tanzania, it is not well known how the university-based stakeholders perceive the world-class university. It is also not clear how they view the sustainability of the practices of the internal quality assurance units towards achieving the world-class university level. While it may be assumed that they desire their university IQA units to lead the university core functions of teaching, research and community service, it is deemed imperative to find out how those core functions are related to the features of the existing world-class universities.

The context of this study was the private universities in Tanzania. Since the 1990s, most of the sub-Saharan governments invited the private sector to establish universities as there was a high demand for university places that could not sufficiently be handled by the government-owned universities. This was the time when the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) had pressured on privatization (Odjidja, 2023; Mondywa, 2022; Mucherwa, 2017; Tamrat, 2018). The rapidity of the growth and expansion of the private universities in sub-Saharan Africa has been so abrupt thus inviting concern on quality issues (Tamrat, 2020; Mgaiwa, 2018). Shortly after the deregulation of the private sector in many African countries, the private universities outnumbered public ones. In Tanzania, for example, the full-fledged private universities were 22 and 8 colleges against 12 public universities and 7 colleges at the time of this study (TCU, 2024b). It is, therefore, apparent that the private universities are a force to reckon with in targeting the world-class university level. This implies that researching into their internal quality assurance practices for attaining a world-class level is domineering.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Approach and Design**

The study adopted qualitative approach as it focused on the interpretation of the participants' understanding of the world-class university and their assessment of sustainability of internal quality assurance practices for achieving world-class university standards. The interpretivist theoretical grounding was used to seek informants' meanings of a world-class university and to assess their views on practices for achieving such university standards. This theoretical grounding requires researchers to immerse in the contexts of the insiders and make an interpretation of their subjective construction of their social world (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Soklaridis, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2014). A multi-case case design was employed, involving three private universities as cases (Yin, 2011). Multi-case study design provides a robust approach to studying the complex phenomena, thus allowing for the comprehensive understanding of meaningful insights (Yin, 2011; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The adoption of the multi-case study design allowed for a broader exploration of the research topic and enhanced the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the design enabled the researchers to address the potential limitations and biases which are associated with single-case studies.

#### **3.2 Sources of Data**

The primary sources of data were utilized, thus providing the first-hand information on the stakeholders' perceptive of the world-class university and how the internal quality assurance practices earmarked the features of world-class university. The data were generated through the participants' own experiences (Mutch, 2013) as they were part of the university's quality assurance processes. The university-generated documents were also used to provide insights on the understanding and sustainability of internal quality in the research sites.

#### **3.3 Research Site, Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedures**

The study was undertaken in the Dar es Salaam, Arusha and coast regions, Tanzania. Its target population consisted of university quality assurance officers, academic staff and student leaders. The study involved a total of 21 participants in the form of three (3) quality assurance officers, nine (9) academic staff and nine (9) students' leaders. The quality assurance officers and students' leaders were selected through purposive sampling following the criteria of their positions, whereas academic staff were selected through convenient sampling based on their availability during the research process. While the quality assurers and academic staff served the administrative and curriculum implementing roles respectively, the students' leaders represented the receiving end of the curriculum processes. While qualitative studies face the limitation of using smaller samples, this shortcoming was offset by providing rich and in-depth insights that enhanced research rigor. Hence, although the sample was small, it enabled the study to obtain detailed information regarding university actors' interpretation of the world-class university standards and their experience of the sustainability of the internal quality assurance practices.

### **3.4 Tools for Data Collection**

The data were mainly collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews complemented by review of documents. The research questions in relation to the objective on participants' interpretation of a world-class university included: how do university actors view a world-class university, and was associated with interview questions like: What are the main features of a world-class university? How can it be made a reality? How does it differ from those that are not world-class? For the objective on the internal quality assurance practices, the research question was: How are internal quality assurance practices executed for achieving a world-class university, and its interview questions included, for example: How do university actors' roles target the realization of a world-class university aspiration? What should be done to ensure realization of the goals towards world-class university? How can a university IQA unit be run in order to achieve the status of the world-class university. The researchers visited the field before collecting the data for purpose of familiarizing with the research contexts and building professional relationships with the research informants. During the field visits, the interview questions were revised by the researchers in order to obtain accurate and in-depth information from the study participants. The questions aimed to explore how the internal quality assurance units worked towards the goal of achieving status of world-class university, how various university actors contributed towards world-class university, how the core university functions were undertaken to achieve the world-class level, etc.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed following the stages outlined by Saldaña (2014). The analysis involved the identification of the codes in the data, review of the categories in order to develop themes and application of the emerged themes from the research questions. Critical reading of words, phrases and paragraphs that repeatedly emerged in the data set was conducted for coding purposes (Varpio & Kiger, 2020). Examples of themes arising from codes included 'well-coordinated programmes, quality of research and innovations, international collaboration and networking, accreditation of international programmes, survival strategies from sanctions, strengths and weakness, etc. The researchers continuously checked and reviewed the transcribed data as they received them and engaged the participants in order to validate their responses through member-checking (Candela, 2019; McKim, 2023). This enabled the participants to re-define their earlier conceptions and views and to modify their preconceived ideas regarding the internal quality practices focusing world-class university standards. The small sample size allowed for thorough reading and re-reading of the data set (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al. 2011). Inductive coding was used and it relied on the transcribed data in order to note down the key emerging issues. As for documentary review, the content analysis was used to corroborate the information with the data which was obtained through interviews. The review of documents complemented with the thematic analysis as interview themes were linked with the reviewed TCU guidelines and other reviewed documents forming the discussion of the research findings.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The research findings emanated from the two research questions which focused on participants' understanding of the world-class university and sustainability of the internal quality assurance processes

towards the world-class university. Overall, the study findings indicated that the administrative, curriculum implementation and curriculum attainment levels had a clear understanding of a world-class universities and how it looked like, citing examples from the developed economies of the world. This understanding emanated from the experience of the university education that the study participants formed part. As would be presented shortly, the views on internal quality assurance practices for achieving world-class university standards varied with the different categories of participants. This variation was attributed by the participants' administrative position, teaching and learning roles. Generally, results established participants understanding of a world-class university, claiming that it was unattainable not only due to the economy-related issues but largely due to a focus on survival from the accreditation authority to avoid sanctions. That is, the focus was on meeting the requirements of the accreditation institution rather than excelling towards the standards characterising a world-class university.

#### **4.1 Perceptions on world-class university**

The first research question on participants' interpretation of the world-class university obtained responses that were somewhat similar irrespective of the category of the informants. The participants identified various features of a world-class university based on their own understanding, which presumably derived from their acquaintance with the ideal university standards. The themes defining the world-class universities involved aspects such as well coordinated programmes, superior research and innovations, international collaboration and networking, and exchange programmes with the other universities. In defining the world-class university, participants also made reference to the advancements in science and technology through Information, Communication and Technology (ICT). They stated that ICT had contributed much to the free-flowing information on what transpired in universities elsewhere, providing best practices from the famous universities in the world.

The study participants claimed that one of the distinguishing features of the world-class university included well-formulated programmes which responded to the needs of the labour market and society. For instance, the interviewed student teachers noted the aspect of close connection between the university programmes and the industry in a manner that the university programmes enabled graduates to enter the labour market with a relative ease. The academic staff associated world-class university with adequate funding that enabled the programmes to engage in Research and Development (RD) related to each programme. They viewed the stability of financial resources as key in enabling the university programmes to run efficiently. However, considering the aforementioned features of a world-class university, one quality assurance officer noted that those features are hard to achieve in the lower economies, saying:

...Our universities in Africa face technological and innovative backwardness. They cannot compare themselves with those from the developed economies. What we need to do is to keep on learning from them, adopt and strengthen our programmes with the aim of advancing as fast as we can. We need to learn a lot in order to establish the universities with international qualities (Interview with the quality assurance officer from university 'Y', 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2023).

The study participants' interpretation of a world-class university further involved the aspect of research, international collaboration and networking, and exchange programmes. They stated that research and development in the universities in the developed economies had brought notable progress compared to their situation where research activities were little resourced. Scholars who attributed high standards of university to research and development, collaboration and exchange programmes include Asgari et al., 2021; Saad & Zawdie, 2011, Wisenna, 2009; Wright et al., 2008; Zuti & Lukovics, 2017). As such, findings indicated a sharp contrast of the developed economy universities from the lower economies.

#### **4.2 Overview**

Generally, the study findings revealed that the participants had precise ideas regarding the world-class university level and they clearly stated that the universities in the developing countries were far from reaching the world-class university level. Their perspectives generally suggested that their universities were somewhere at the second-generation university level towards the third-generation university level as described by Lucovics and Zuti (2013); Wisenna (2009); Wright et al. (2008). This university level is featured by delayed utilization of innovation, delayed transfer of knowledge, little connections between the university and the enterprises and its training programmes being not as efficient as the third and fourth generation universities (Zuti & Lukovics, 2017). On the contrary, the third and fourth generation universities which are referred to as world-class universities in the context of this paper have their programmes involving high-quality research, high levels of innovations and outputs which are professionals, scientists, entrepreneurs and local competitive economy (Asgari et al., 2021). Moreover, they have close connections with the government and industry (Lapteva & Efimov, 2016; Oztel, 2020; Sepehri et al., 2021). This is contrary to the universities in the low economies whose programmes are featured by poor resource allocation, imbalanced ratio of faculty-student population and inadequate funding (Odjidja, 2023; Tamrat, 2020; Wisenna, 2009). This explains why the university graduates fail to fit into the labour market in the lower economies as their programmes lacked clear connections (Mgaiwa, 2018; Mohammedbhai, 2014; Sumra & Katabaro, 2016). It is apparent that the understanding of the world-class university as obtained from the participants did not translate into efforts for achieving those standards.

#### **4.3 Sustainability of internal quality assurance units towards world-class university**

The second research question centred on how the internal quality assurance practices were executed in an attempt to achieving a world-class university. The participants acknowledged the crucial role that the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) units played in ensuring the compliance with quality standards and regulations set out by the accrediting authority. However, their views on IQA practices towards achieving the world-class university standards contrasted. The faculty and student leaders' pinpointed inadequacy of the IQA practices while the quality assurance officers claimed there were success areas to reckon with. Hence, the findings were classified into themes that revealed the internal quality assurance strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats regarding practices for improving quality assurance for achieving world-class university standards.



#### 4.4 Strengths

Results revealed that the study participants had positive opinions on the role of the IQA units in spearheading the quality of university education. The students' perspective indicated that there were some positive aspects such as their involvement by the IQA units in suggesting the best practices for improving the university activities. They claimed that the university administration addressed their views for improving learning. Equally, the QA officers claimed that they engaged student leadership in capacity-building sessions to ensure smooth operations for achieving high quality. One QA officer noted:

... Apart from developing the quality assurance guidelines, our unit also provides internal capacity building workshops to staff and student leaders in order to build quality culture in our institution because the issues of quality are not only the role of IQA office; they involve everyone at the university. If you compare the current situation with the past three to four years, things have drastically changed, which shows that we are advancing towards the world-class university level. (Interview with the head of the IQA unit from university 'Z' on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2023).

The positive aspect of the sustainability of IQA practices has always been the case as the modern university operations are geared towards producing competent graduates who are suitable for the life realities awaiting them upon graduation. Hence, the internal quality assurance was viewed as a tool for embracing technological innovations, a means for creating employment opportunities and a way towards world-class standards. Scholars (Gupta, 2021; Kazeroony, 2012; Ryan, 2015) maintain that the global environment, technological innovations, and economic factors such as need for self-employment have necessitated modern higher education institutions to re-think their teaching and evaluation processes. The results therefore concur with the widely shared view that quality assurance processes serve as the critical aspects for ensuring the effective functioning of the universities (Wong, 2012; Manatos et al., 2015; Telli, 2013).

#### 4.5 Weaknesses

In spite of the strengths, the results of the study indicated that some participants were dissatisfied by the internal quality assurance practices, providing various concerns. Those dissatisfactions were from faculty and student perspectives, ranging from inadequate involvement among the faculty to fear of ill-treatment among students who rated poorly the incompetent course instructors. The observation from the faculty was that the quality assurance practices tended to serve as a means to disclose errors among the course instructors rather than being participatory. They also wondered whether the course evaluation forms were by themselves adequate tools in determining attainment of the learning goals. One of the faculty remarked that:

... IQA units are doing things on their own. We are not involved in the issues such as development of QA tools in which we would have some suggestions. If you closely look at the tools given to students for evaluating the courses taught, you may find a lot of mistakes and its inability to collect the required information. However, since we are not involved, we just look at it and keep quiet (Interview with academic staff from university 'Y', 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2023).

The faculty perspective on limited involvement in designing and implementation of course evaluation forms finds support of scholars who viewed cooperation with stakeholders as a necessary precondition

for effectiveness of the quality assurance processes (Seyfried & Poulenz, 2018). Kis (2005) further cautioned that there is a risk of goal distortion that may happen when the decisions are merely imposed without engaging implementers in various stages of policy formulation and implementation. In the absence of stakeholder engagement, it might be difficult to have in place the quality assurance that focuses on achieving world-class university standards.

The student perspective indicated dissatisfaction of the IQA practices in several aspects including, for example, inconsistencies in the assessment of learning. They opined that the questionnaire forms given to them at the end of the course could not adequately measure the learning processes, as they mainly tended to determine instructors' attendance, fairness, coverage and assessment procedures rather than students' development of competences and satisfaction. Their position was that the filling of the course evaluation forms consisted of subjective rather than objective measure of the reality of the course because students had various subjective judgments caused by fear of mistreatment, interest and preference towards the course instructors. They also considered those forms as not providing a clear portray of what they had learnt. Students' dissatisfaction of the course evaluation tools finds support from literature (Borch et al., 2020), questioning what it means by students' satisfaction of the courses they take. As such, there are varied perceptives associated with students' course evaluation (Çapa-Aldin & Gülmez, 2017; Cardoso et al., 2013; Zhao & Gallant, 2012) due to varied positions (Cardoso et al., 2013), which affect the quality of higher education (Cardoso et al., 2015). It is on the basis of the discontent of the course evaluation that Zheng (2022) suggests adoption of the deep learning model that requires a shift from teaching for its own sake to integration of knowledge, skills and attitudinal dispositions.

#### **4.6 Opportunities**

The study participants' views provided that quality assurance is a process; not an outcome. Hence, they perceived quality assurance processes as an endless process. The faculty, for example, argued that the guidelines provided by the accreditation authorities require innovative practices. One of the faculty members noted that the guidelines from the university qualification framework cannot all be fulfilled overnight, but provide the QA units an opportunity to devise methods for excelling towards higher standards of quality. All three interviewed QA officers stated that their offices were open to thoughts that were meant to improve the university standards. Besides the TCU's qualification framework and other guidelines (TCU, 2012; TCU, 2019), scholars view quality assurance as an opportunity for improving the quality of university education (Kis, 2005; Mgaiwa, 2018; Oliver, 2022; Zheng, 2022). However, there is limited evidence how the quality assurance efforts among the private universities capitalize on the scholarly views for improvement besides sticking on the minimum requirements espoused by the accrediting organs.

#### **4.7 Threats**

The study results identified some threats facing the internal quality assurance practices of the private universities studied. Those included, focus on fulfilment of the requirements of the accrediting authority rather than targeting the world-class university standards. Regarding status quo, the participants, particularly the faculty, posited that since the IQA officers were hired by the owners of the private universities, they worked towards the interests of their employers. Hence, their role was that of reporting the weaknesses and to ensure that the requirements of the accrediting authorities were fulfilled to ensure the survival of their institutions, rather than to strengthen the IQA practices towards world-class university standards. This view might hold considering that the TCU's (2012) University Qualification

Framework (UQF) sets out the levels to be attained by the universities and higher learning institutions. Its regulation (TCU, 2012) state that failure to comply with the guidelines would be met by penalty, including deregistration. However, while the TCU requires universities to view its condition as a minimum requirement so that they excel beyond those minimum conditions, there is evidence of universities facing the TCU penalty. For instance, in 2020, TCU deregistered six universities and three campuses that had failed to comply with the postulated standards and guidelines for university education in Tanzania, including ineffective administration and non-compliance to standards and guidelines (Peter, 2020). This suggests that the idea of world-class university standards remains largely calling. One of the QAOs admitted that:

... You need to note that we are not claiming to be there or nearer to the world-class university level. We insist that we are striving to be on track by trying to excel beyond the expectations of the accreditation authorities. Even those world-class universities that we learn from did not abruptly reach where they are today. I am of the opinion that reaching the world-class university level is a process (Quality Assurance Officer from University 'Z', 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2023).

A review of documents indicated that after the introduction of the private universities in sub-Saharan countries, the quality of the university standards was jeopardized by the rapidity of the 'massification phenomenon' (Akalu, 2017; Tamrat, 2020; TCU, 2019). This necessitated formulating stringier quality assurance measures in order to avoid tempering with the quality of education offered (TCU, 2019, TCU, 2024a). The literature shows that the quality assurance units were required by the accreditation institutions to ensure that the mission of keeping the quality high was forged so as to attain the world-class university status in spite of the resource constrains. Based on maintaining quality, several guidelines were set for harmonizing quality assurance in Africa (see, for example, African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance [SG-QA] (IUCEA, 2010; TCU, 2012, 2019; 2024a). Nonetheless, some factors hindered the attainment of the ideal world-class university level in the private universities. One of the critical factors has been a lack of will to implement adequately the internal quality audits and tracer studies (Mgaiwa, 2018; Mrema et al., 2023). Hence, the emphasis on the world-class university level has seemed to be more on paper rather than in actual practice.

Overall, the study established that the university actors had an awareness of the world-class university and were agreed that besides requirements by the accreditation authorities, the ideals of world-class university are worth pursuing. However, findings revealed that the practices for achieving those standards require concerted and collaborative efforts of the executives of the private universities and those university actors.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper concludes that the world-class university standards cannot be simply attained through meeting the requirements of the accreditation institution. Rather, they have an uphill task to learn how to broaden the university activities by engaging stakeholders beyond the university education such as the industry, the enterprises and the government. Arguably, the university programmes in place do not help their products to enter the labour market with competences enabling them to be self-reliant. It is therefore recommended that more studies on the best practices for achieving world-class university

standards using different methodologies be undertaken so as to ensure the universities in lower economies are on track.

## 6. Conflict of interest

The content of this study does not reflect or bear any stance of the financial sponsor the university of Dodoma. The ideas presented are solely author's ideas that have no competing interest with the funder or whoever was involved in this study.

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