

Higher education assessment and accreditation system in Mozambique: an analysis from the perspective of stakeholders¹

*Sistema de avaliação e acreditação do ensino superior em Moçambique:
uma análise sob a percepção das partes interessadas*

*Sistema de evaluación y acreditación de la enseñanza superior en Mozambique:
un análisis desde la perspectiva de las partes interesadas*

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to analyze stakeholders' perceptions about the implementation of the system for evaluating courses and programs at Mozambican Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) - SINAQES. To this end, a qualitative study was carried out involving semi-structured interviews with perceptions of 31 agents, including managers of public and private HEIs, as well as members of self-evaluation committees. The collected perceptions were analyzed using the IRaMuTeQ software, which facilitated textual analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes in the responses. In the perceptions accessed, certain aspects were central: the academic community's reaction to the implementation of SINAQES; the importance of the proposed evaluation system; the changes perceived in the HEIs; and the challenges during implementation. In this sense, the relationship between the implementation of an evaluation system and the context of education in Mozambique highlighted the focus given to, and contradictions in, improving educational infrastructure, adjusting curricula, adequately training teaching staff, and the internationalization of higher education.

Keywords: Quality assessment; Higher education; Stakeholder; Mozambique.

Resumo: A presente pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar a percepção das partes interessadas acerca da implementação do sistema de avaliação de cursos e programas das Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES) moçambicanas – o SINAQES. Para tal, foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa que envolveu entrevistas semiestruturadas com 31 participantes, incluindo dirigentes de instituições de ensino superior (IES) públicas e privadas, além de membros das

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comissões de autoavaliação. As percepções coletadas foram analisadas utilizando o *software* IRaMuTeQ, que facilitou a análise textual, permitindo identificar padrões e temas recorrentes nas respostas. Nas percepções acessadas, determinados aspectos mostraram-se centrais: a reação da comunidade acadêmica à implementação do SINAQES; a importância do sistema de avaliação proposto; as mudanças percebidas nas IES; e os desafios durante a implementação. Nessa direção, a implementação de um sistema de avaliação no contexto da educação em Moçambique evidenciou o enfoque dado na busca pela melhoria da infraestrutura de ensino, no ajuste dos currículos, na formação adequada do corpo docente e na promoção da internacionalização do ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação da qualidade; Ensino Superior; Partes interessadas; Moçambique.

Resumen: Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar las percepciones de las partes interesadas sobre la implementación del sistema SINAQES de evaluación de cursos y programas en las instituciones de enseñanza superior (IES) de Mozambique. Para ello, se llevó a cabo una investigación cualitativa que incluyó entrevistas semiestructuradas con 31 participantes, entre los que se encontraban dirigentes de instituciones de enseñanza superior (IES) públicas y privadas, así como miembros de comités de autoevaluación. Las percepciones recogidas fueron analizadas utilizando el software IRaMuTeQ, el cual facilitó el análisis textual, permitiendo identificar patrones y temas recurrentes en las respuestas. En las percepciones a las que se tuvo acceso, ciertos aspectos resultaron centrales: la reacción de la comunidad académica ante la implementación del SINAQES; la importancia del sistema de evaluación propuesto; los cambios percibidos en las IES; y los retos durante la implementación. En este sentido, la implantación de un sistema de evaluación en el contexto de la educación en Mozambique ha puesto de relieve la importancia de mejorar la infraestructura docente, ajustar los planes de estudio, proporcionar una formación adecuada al personal docente y promover la internacionalización de la enseñanza superior.

Palabras clave: Evaluación de la calidad; Educación superior; Partes interesadas; Mozambique.

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Introduction

The Republic of Mozambique is located in the southeast of the African continent, which was a Portuguese colony and became independent in 1975. In this context, educational policies were related to organizing a society marked by colonial domination and the reproduction of exploitation (SAMUSSONE; SILVEIRA; LAURIANO, 2022). The country has a GDP per capita of US\$499 and a poverty rate of 87.5%, with the majority of the rural population still living on less than US\$1.25 a day and lacking essential services such as access to drinking water, health facilities, and schools.

Over the years, especially since its independence, the country has undertaken efforts and reforms to adapt the educational field with the country's reality, aiming to

overcome challenges, and support its economic and social development process. Regarding Higher Education (HE), there has been a focus on establishing higher education institutions (HEIs). Between 1992 and 2021, the higher education system in Mozambique will have evolved from just 3 to 56 educational institutions, both public and private (MOZAMBIQUE, 2018).

The complexity of the efforts to make education the key to the country's development required the government to create public policies that would regulate the growing expansion of higher education and adhere to quality standards that would stimulate and support the development of a culture of quality; the evaluation of the elements, processes and players in higher education; the establishment of transparent and credible evaluation processes; the adaptation of education to the needs of the national and international context; and guidance by technical procedures and standards, among other principles (SAMUSSONE, 2022).

In this context, the government approved Decree No. 63/2007, which created the National System for the Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (SINAQES). SINAQES is a system that integrates standards, mechanisms, and articulated procedures to evaluate higher education in Mozambique.

The implementation structure of SINAQES is complex, involving actors such as the National Council for Higher Education (composed of rectors and leaders of higher education institutions, representatives of the National Council for Evaluation and Quality Assurance), public and private higher education institutions, with the participation of all their "sub-actors" (namely, managers, students, teachers, researchers, and technical-administrative staff), employers; civil society; and professional associations.

It is hoped that involving stakeholders in the process to collect their perceptions will make the evaluation more accurate for identifying and implementing improvements (BRYSON; PATTON; BOWMAN, 2011). Furthermore, the involvement of these different agents is seen as contributing to improving the design and implementation of evaluations and the use of evaluation results in decision-making.

The study field of SINAQES is still in its early stages and requires more comprehensive research (Angst; Alves, 2018; Mandlate, 2020; Mussoho; Mulhanga, 2022; Parruque; Sapane, 2023; Samussone; Silveira; Lauriano, 2022; Zavale; Santos; Dias, 2016). Particularly, there is a need to understand the perspectives of the stakeholders who play a significant role in the operationalization of the evaluation system. This research gap, as identified by Sandberg and Alvesson (2011), is a crucial area that requires empirical support.

In this direction, the guiding question of this research is: what are the characteristic aspects of the implementation of SINAQES from the point of view of its stakeholders? Therefore, the research was conducted to analyze the perception of the involved actors, namely managers and members of the self-evaluation committees, about implementing of the course and program evaluation system in Mozambican HEIs.

In order to understand the perceptions of the actors involved in the implementation of SINAQES, it was decided to work with the managers and members of the self-evaluation committees, who play a pivotal and active role from the conception to the implementation of the policy.

It is expected that the study will significantly contribute to a better understanding of the conditions for implementing quality assessment in the higher education context. Furthermore, the study may contribute to reorienting the formulation and implementation of the analyzed program, offering a brighter future for quality assessment in higher education.

In addition to this introduction, the article is organized as follows: a presentation of the constitutive aspects of SINAQES as a public policy, followed by the methodological aspects that underpinned the study's operationalization, and the results and discussion. Finally, the final considerations are pointed out, along with the limitations of the research and the opportunities for future research.

SINAQES as a public educational policy

The historical context of education and higher education policies in Mozambique is characterized by two major moments - the colonial period and the post-independence period in 1975. Colonial education took place from the first half of the 19th century until the end of the 20th century (1845 to 1974), and was characterized by domination, alienation and Christianization (FARIA; PACALA, 2020). Therefore, it arose from the need to create an elite in an environment of antagonism between manual and intellectual labor, where education for natives aimed to guarantee the learning the Portuguese language, the fundamentals of the Catholic religion and the acquisition of skills for rural and manual work (QUIMUENHE, 2018). The only existing university was intended only for the children of the Portuguese, considering that access was strongly based on social and economic capital, which did not facilitate the participation of Africans (BEVERWIJK, 2005).

After independence in 1975, education was seen as a central instrument for national development and guaranteeing popular democracy. This situation is represented by the 1975 Constitution, which enshrined access to education as a right and duty of every citizen (Afrimap, 2012). The State thus assumed the role of promoting the necessary conditions so that all Mozambicans to have access to this right.

Over time, a series of reforms led to a significant increase in the number of HEIs between 1985 and 1986. This included the establishment of the Pedagogical Higher Institute (ISP) in 1985, which was later upgraded to university status and renamed the Pedagogical University (UP); and, in 1986, the creation of a higher education school to train diplomats, the Higher Institute of International Relations (ISRI) (Langa et al., 2014). The establishment of these new public HEIs played a crucial role in the training of national staff in specialized areas, thereby addressing the country's specific development needs (COSSA; BUQUE; PREMUGY, 2019).

Between 1977 and 1985, the Mozambican government adopted socialism as a political and economic model for development and social construction. However, after its repeal as Mozambique's political system, government efforts emphasized the notion of modernization and reform of public areas and, subsequently, changes in education. In the context of higher education, the most significant change was the enactment of the first specific law for the sector (Law No. 1 of June 24, 1993). This legislation paved the way for the creation of several higher education institutions, including the participation of private institutions, which resulted in a substantial increase in the number of HEIs in the country. This growth also raised concerns about guaranteeing the quality of the education offered (LANGA et al., 2014; SAMUSSONE, 2022).

As a result of the expansion of HEIs, quality assurance has emerged as a complex and pressing problem that requires the formulation of public policies. This issue is not one-dimensional, but rather a web of diverse elements such as rapidly changing academic work environments, student groups with ever-changing expectations and needs, and issues that make up cross-cutting agendas for government action (CHAIYA; AHMAD, 2021). The urgency of addressing these challenges cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts the quality of education in the country.

In particular, HEIs, in seeking to integrate new technologies and more innovative pedagogical methods, also tend to change how teachers, researchers, and other professionals work and collaborate. Labor market demands and new preferences in learning styles guide the conditions under which HEIs operate. In addition, government

priorities tend to play a role in formulating guidelines and practices in HEIs (SAMUSSONE, 2022).

The Mozambican government approved Decree No. 63/2007, which created the National System for the Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (SINAQES). In the same year, it also approved the creation of the National Council for the Evaluation of Higher Education Quality (CNAQ), with the mission is to promote the evaluation and accreditation of courses, programs, and HEIs (MOZAMBIQUE, 2018).

The aim is to control the growing expansion of HEIs, coupled with the need to harmonize this type of education at national, regional, and international levels. In this sense, it is worth noting that, in the case of Mozambique, its guidelines point to the internationalization of its higher education as a quality parameter. This strategic move not only enhances the quality of education but also opens up new horizons for students, fostering a global perspective. In this direction, emphasis is placed on sending students from the country to gain experience and training at international HEIs, creating partnerships with foreign institutions, adopting global curricula, and participating in international academic networks (MOZAMBIQUE, 2018; SAMUSSONE, 2022).

Given this, SINAQES is characterized by a system that integrates standards, mechanisms, and procedures to achieve quality objectives in higher education and is implemented from three subsystems. These are (i) self-evaluation, (ii) external evaluation, and (iii) accreditation.

The self-assessment system is initiated by the pivotal establishment of the Self-Assessment Commission. This Commission serves as the catalyst, propelling institutions towards a culture of quality. It fosters an interactive and participatory process that encourages commitment and involvement from the academic community at all levels. The Commission is instrumental in recognizing the need for a quality and less bureaucratic system, promoting willingness to carry out self-assessment, and fostering commitment to identifying and disseminating good practices (ANGST, 2017). At this stage, the Commission will be formally appointed to coordinate, carry out, and oversee the internal evaluation process at the respective HEIs. This process includes training, developing an activity plan, budgeting, and raising awareness among the academic community. Questionnaires and interview guides will be designed, collected, organized, and analyzed. A preliminary report will be compiled.

The next step is an external assessment conducted by independent experts appointed by the CNAQ, who have had no connection to the educational institution in

the last five years. Visits are made to the educational institution, and meetings are held with representatives of its teaching, student, and administrative staff, as well as external entities such as alumni and employers. At this stage, the aim is to validate the self-evaluation report and use it as an accountability tool.

The third and final subsystem of SINAQES consists of accreditation, which is the procedure by which the CNAQ formally verifies and recognizes that a particular course, study program, or HEI meets the organizational conditions and presents its performance in diversified dimensions. Thus, Decree 63/2007 defines the following as indicators for assessing the quality of HE in Mozambique: (1) the HEI's mission; (2) the management and democratization of the HEI; (3) its curriculum design process and student assessment processes; (4) the process of training, performance, and qualification of teaching staff; (5) the process of admission, equity, and access to resources by students; (6) the establishment of qualifications and specializations of the administrative staff; (7) the social and socio-economic impact of the HEI's research; (8) the adequacy of the infrastructure for its teaching process; and (9) its level of internationalization (MOZAMBIQUE, 2018; SAMUSSONE, 2022).

These indicators are assessed on a scale of 1 to 4. Table 1 summarizes the accreditation process for Mozambique's higher education courses and programs.

Table 1 - Scale for evaluating HEI courses and programs in Mozambique

Scale	Performance	Score	Certification
1	Not satisfactory	0 to 59%	Not accredited
2	Satisfactory with many reservations	60 to 79%	Accredited (level C), with a certificate valid for up to 2 years
3	Good	80 to 89%	Accredited (level B), with a certificate valid for up to 3 years
4	Excellent	90 to 100%	Fully accredited (level A), with a certificate valid for five years

Source: CNAQ External Assessment Manual (Mozambique, 2018).

Courses or programs at HEIs in Mozambique, even if they have a rating between 60 and 79%, have the potential to improve. The accreditation level, in this case, is valid for two years, during which the course or program can address the anomalies detected by the external evaluation and submit its self-evaluation report. When the maximum rating is achieved (between 90% and 100%), a 5-year accreditation is offered, showcasing the potential for growth and improvement.

Methodological aspects

This research is characterized as being based on a qualitative approach to access the experiences of social subjects with the attributes we want to know and to generate in-depth, illustrative, and non-metric information (Silveira; Córdova, 2009). In this context, field research was carried out, from which, at first, it was prioritized to consider the research participants through whom the experience with the research object - the implementation of SINAQES in Mozambique - would be accessed.

The subjects for the research were defined as the leaders and members of the Self-Assessment Commissions (CAA) of HEIs that had at least one course assessed in the last assessment carried out (2019) up to the time the research was carried out. The leaders and members of the CAAs, unlike other stakeholders, are agents who have been active from the conception to the implementation of SINAQES. The study specifically included leaders and members of the committees associated with HEIs located in the central region of Mozambique, covering the provinces of Manica, Tete, Sofala, and Zambézia. This region has the most significant number of institutions with the most higher education courses evaluated (2015 to 2019). It is in the development process, reflecting the context experienced in the country.

Thus, authorization letters were sent to six HEIs, which resulted in access to five of these institutions as the locus for data collection: Universidade do Zambeze (UniZambeze, public); Instituto Superior Politécnico de Manica (ISPM, public); Instituto Superior Politécnico de Tete (ISPT, public); Universidade Católica de Moçambique (UCM, private) and Universidade Politécnica (Politécnica, private).

As for sampling, we chose to apply the snowball sampling technique. According to Vinuto (2014), this technique consists of non-probabilistic sampling that uses reference chains to identify and access research participants. In this sense, data begins to be collected from a small group of participants known as “initial informants.” These individuals were chosen based on accessibility and relevance criteria, and contacts were made with HEIs to identify managers and members of self-evaluation committees who could participate in the study. Once collection had begun, the initial informants were asked to indicate other members of the target population to be interviewed. Each new participant recruited was then asked to refer more people, forming a “snowball” (VINUTO, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were used as a collection tool to obtain more in-depth information on implementing the policy in question while allowing other themes and considerations to emerge from the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Marconi; Lakatos, 2003). In total, 31 interviews were carried out, 16 of which were with managers and 15 with members of the self-evaluation committees. The interviewees were identified as E1, E2, E3,..., and E31 in order to guarantee their anonymity and confidentiality, as agreed with the participants in the research and ensured through the opinion of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the institution proposing this study (protocol no. 28155620.3.00005153).

The interviews were subjected to lexicographic textual analysis using the free software Interface de R pour Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires (IRaMuTeQ), which allows textual information to be analyzed using statistical techniques aimed at categorizing textual data by the similarity of the vocabularies present, allowing the main themes expressed in the content gathered by the transcribed interviews to be identified (Lins, 2017). From this, four central themes emerged: (i) the reaction of the academic community to the implementation of SINAQES, (ii) the importance of the proposed evaluation system, (iii) the changes perceived in the HEIs, and (iv) the challenges perceived during implementation. Each of these will be presented and discussed in the following section.

Results and Discussion

Regarding the reaction of the academic community to the introduction of SINAQES, it was noted that most of the participants in the survey did not show any resistance. However, some pointed out that there was a “fear of the new” since, when the evaluation system was implemented, it was unclear how the results obtained would be used. As one of the survey participants put it, “there was not exactly resistance, but there were perception problems” (E2, head of a public HEI).

In the case of the heads and members of the HEI self-evaluation committees, there was a concern to know how SINAQES would work and how they should position themselves in the face of its implementation. This concern was related to the very role these directors and committee members would play in disseminating the initiative to the academic community. “[...] the process was smooth, and I think the initial resistance was that we did not know the process, but once we all knew what the process was, people accepted it commonly”(E17, head of a public HEI, own translation).

On the other hand, there were those in the academic community believed that the assessment of courses should not be the responsibility of administrative staff members, for example. In this regard, one of the managers interviewed acknowledged that there had been “[...] a huge improvement with the staff of the technical administration, a huge improvement (E11, manager of a public HEI, own translation)”. In this sense, the participant recalls the importance of everyone's engagement in the academic community so that the evaluation system could be implemented within the expectations of contributing to the quality of higher education.

Official data indicates that between 2010 and 2019, around 54 events were held, involving 1,667 people, to disseminate and train the academic community on SINAQES (MOZAMBIQUE, 2018). It has already been identified that, in the context of higher education in Mozambique, potential resistance to the program has been associated, mainly due to gaps linked to the training of many those responsible for managing the evaluation, which, in a way, affects the process of replicating the evaluations (LOIOLA; NATHA, 2017). As a result, attention has been drawn to the importance of training and capacity building to enable the culture of quality assessment to be assimilated by the stakeholders, including students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff.

The leaders and members of the CAAs showed that they understood the importance of carrying out course evaluations through SINAQES. Above all, they emphasized the importance of offering a quality assessment standard at the national level based on parameters and indicators. “[...] it's important, because we're offering services to society and society in general needs to know through evaluators if what is being offered is a quality service (E2, head of a public HEI, own translation)”.

The interviewees then described the evaluation process before the implementation of SINAQES. It was noted that previously there was no structured mechanism for evaluating courses and programs at HEIs, and it was limited to applying questionnaires to teachers and students to evaluate subjects. One of the participants highlighted that “[...] in the past, everyone decided how to operate, but now, at least, there are indicators that show that if I just follow this line, I am on the right track” (E2, head of a public HEI, own translation).

This aspect highlights the importance of the evaluation process for organizing administrative processes, training staff, identifying improvements, and dialogue with the HEI's governing bodies (ANGST; ALVES, 2018). One of the CAA members also pointed out that

[...] the first importance is knowing if the HEIs are organized internally to fulfill their mission, which has to do with teaching, research, and extension,

and then the external evaluation, which already helps through its report issued at the end, organized to answer the objectives (E7, member of a CAA of a public HEI, own translation).

The survey participants also described the changes in their HEIs due to the introduction of SINAQES in Mozambique. They highlighted improvements (i) in teaching infrastructure, (ii) in the training of teaching staff, (iii) in the mobility of teachers and students between national and international HEIs, (iv) in the participation of the academic community in the life of the institution; and (v) in the decision-making process at HEIs.

Below are some excerpts from the interviews to represent the interviewees' statements:

[...] the changes brought about by SINAQES include the improvement of some infrastructures, greater attention to the process of training teaching staff, improvement of the teacher/student ratio considering the standards that have been set, training and recruitment of teaching staff (E11, member of a CAA at a public HEI, own translation).

[...] many teachers are starting PhD programs due to this evaluation process. In addition to teacher training, the main changes brought about by SINAQES include improved curricula and teaching infrastructure (E20, member of a CAA at a public HEI, own translation).

[...] revision of the curriculum, although in polytechnics the curriculum is revised every five years, improvement of laboratories, improvement of infrastructure in general and an increase in full-time teaching staff [...] about the positive aspects of SINAQES, we can list the improvement of curricula, improvement of the quality and training of teaching staff, facilitation of the process of academic mobility between teachers from national and foreign HEIs, as well as improvement of teaching infrastructure (E5, head of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] improved participation in psycho-pedagogical training courses, decentralization of decisions, greater participation by teachers and students in the academic life of the institution, greater transparency in administrative processes, improvements in classrooms, garbage cans, stairs for the disabled, greater coordination between sectors, among others (E12, member of the CCA of a private HEI, own translation).

These changes were related to demands to improve Mozambican higher education. For example, regarding teaching infrastructure, the evaluation process focused on improvements in classrooms, laboratories, equipment, libraries, communication and information technologies, means of transportation, leisure and sports, canteens, work offices, amphitheaters, maintenance of facilities and equipment (Mozambique, 2018; Samussone, 2022).

In addition, the survey participants highlighted the curricular reforms resulting from the evaluation process. The curricular adjustments were pointed out by the interviewees as a way to promote knowledge and skills in scientific research and professional practices that contribute to the country's economic and social development. Considering aspects related to improving the curriculum, according to Dattey, Westerheijden, and Hofman (2017), is fundamental to determining the quality of the academic programs offered at any educational institution. In addition, it can be considered one of the main determinants in defining the quality of teaching and the intended learning outcomes. However, one of the interviewees drew attention to the materials used by teachers, about the use of materials produced in other countries, focusing on other contexts with different realities from Mozambique.

[...] most of the materials we use are what others produce and we transfer them to our students. When we look for publications made in Mozambique in recent times, they are almost non-existent (E4, head of a private HEI, own translation).

Improvements in higher education curricula have been linked to the training of teachers themselves. In Mozambique, there has been an increase in the level of training of higher education teachers, attributed to increased concern about the issue of quality assessment in HEIs, courses, and teaching staff (TERENCIANO; NATHA, 2016). In this regard, efforts have emphasized the increase in the level of qualification of teachers, in particular, the number of teachers with master's degrees and doctorates (COSSA; BUQUE; PREMUGY, 2019).

In addition, CAA leaders and members highlighted the challenges and constraints experienced while implementing the assessments. They highlighted the need for more human and financial resources for the assessment processes and the fees required by the CNAQ. It should be noted that the fees were related to the HEIs' co-payment of SINAQES implementation costs, participation in seminars organized by the CNAQ, monitoring of the self-evaluation process, as well as co-payment of external evaluation costs, including the daily rates of CNAQ evaluators and technicians, accommodation costs and fees for external evaluators and accreditation processes.

Respondents mentioned aspects linked to the centralization of activities related to budget execution, stating that the course being evaluated has neither the autonomy nor the resources to comply with the recommendations of the external evaluations. As a result, for the interviewees, the courses are penalized for the university's problems in general. Below are some excerpts that highlight this situation:

[...] unfortunately, some things are still unclear; for example, when we look at quality, we look more at the course and forget to look at financial administrative procedures, but there is also the fact that courses and programs have little autonomy when it comes to managing administrative and financial resources (E2, head of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] sometimes, in some institutions, they do not know what to do because there is this report that has excellent recommendations, but they have the limitation that they do not have enough resources to cover all the recommendations that have been made (E3, head of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] so it has been challenging for a teacher to be part of a subcommittee and simultaneously teach classes, manage projects and then do their research. So this also creates conditions where deadlines are not met or the work needs to be done to perfection (E29, head of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] now, nothing happens once we have these improvement plans, because the improvement plans are given on budget. For example, we are penalized more for some indicators, and we have to try to change that (E23, head of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] and then even if they have enough resources, there are institutions where decision-making is so centralized that they cannot decide how much money they are going to invest in the course because it is the rector or the director general or the deputy director general who decides (E6, CAA member from a public HEI, own translation).

[...] because the improvement plan only depends partially, for example, on the faculty or the university. It goes beyond that because some elements within it need a budget (E10, head of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] in structural terms, on paper, there is a Technical Quality Council at Intuition. However, day-to-day implementation is complicated because the people who are part of the Technical Quality Council are employees with other jobs and are multifaceted people who deal with many things. As the quality assessment process is still in its infancy, it would be necessary for these people to be available to follow the processes, as they should be, and to have the time (E2, head of a public HEI, own translation).

The statements made by the respondents in these excerpts regarding the scarcity of resources, both human and financial, to carry out the evaluation process are in line with the research by Zavale and Guissemo (2019), who clarified that the implementation of ES accreditation systems in Mozambique brings with it challenges related to the high costs of the process. This involves paying for field visit expenses, fees for peer reviewers, and costs involved in preparing the self-assessment, follow-up, administrative costs, and the costs of implementing improvement plans.

The insufficiency of financial resources in both public and private HEIs, was verified by Mussagy (2016), who pointed out that the functioning of HEIs, especially public ones, has been characterized by a shortage of resources since they depend on the state budget, which in turn depends on partnerships that tend to reduce gradually. It should be noted that, in the Mozambican context, all public institutions created and maintained by the state are financed by the General State Budget (OGE) and other mechanisms at their disposal, such as external partnerships, like international entities, and fees paid by students (Tiano, 2012). Private HEIs, on the other hand, are faced with insufficient funds, where the primary funding sources are fees paid by students, with an estimated dropout rate of 10% of enrolled candidates and defaults.

Another challenge presented by the respondents refers to the appointment of external evaluators. In the perception of the survey participants, the choice of some evaluators represents a conflict of interest. It was reported that sometimes evaluators are selected from some HEIs with courses similar to those evaluated. Given this, it is recommended, for example, that the participation of foreign experts be considered. The following excerpts give some accounts of this perception:

[...] so they come with a bad intention of showing that this is not the reality here; I believe that because they are competitors, they do not even want to show that their institution is probably worse placed than ours. Now, we need to think more about how the experts are chosen. (E1, CAA member from a public HEI, own translation).

[...] I will give you an example: I am from institution X, and I have a degree in agricultural engineering, so I'm going to be part of a team that's going to assess the agronomy faculty at university Y. Often we are competitors, and we cannot manage to separate the issues to a certain extent. (E11, CAA member from a public HEI, own translation).

[...] we, for example, in the external evaluation process, had a specialist from Angola, so that means we can bring in staff from abroad with the same courses there, but not hire our competitor to come and evaluate (E8, CAA member from a public HEI, own translation).

Still, Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011) point out that evaluations must identify and deal openly and honestly with real or perceived conflicts of interest that could compromise the evaluation. In this case, it is understood that the entire assessment is carried out by trained people, following the CNAQ's codes of ethics for external assessors. Furthermore, the interviewees' reports coincide with the results of the research by Zavale and Guissemo (2019), from which the authors reveal that some

external evaluation committees included members who were senior managers of universities, schools, or faculties at other HEIs, a situation defined by the external evaluation manual as being conflicting.

The interviewees also reported challenges related to the adequacy of the evaluation to the context under analysis, claiming that some indicators are not suited to the country's reality. Some evaluators demand evidence that is outside the context under evaluation.

[...] regardless of what was supposed to happen, the evaluation given to my course was not fair because at some point the evaluator brought up issues that did not fit in with our reality (E14, CAA member from a public HEI, own translation).

[...] look more at our reality. We want to improve the quality of higher education, but we cannot forget the context we are in either (E6, CAA member from a public HEI, own translation).

In this regard, emphasis was placed on the indicator related to teaching staff due to many institutions' low scores for this indicator. One of SINAQES' quality parameters is the adequacy of teachers' qualifications. In this regard, it was revealed that there is a lack of teachers with a doctorate as a characteristic of higher education in Mozambique. Given this, it should be noted that the evaluation system stipulates the ratio of one teacher with a doctorate to 150 students as a parameter.

According to one of the research participants: “[...] this proportion is now quite difficult because there are few institutions that offer doctoral courses” in the country (E25, head of a public HEI, own translation). It should be noted that, until 1998, HEIs in Mozambique only offered undergraduate courses; it was only in 1999 that they began to offer postgraduate programs (masters and doctorates) (COSSA; BUQUE; PREMUGY, 2019).

Furthermore, access to study and research grants proves challenging for teacher training. Unlike other countries, Mozambique still has no loan or financing programs for higher education. One of the participants in the research points out that “[...] saying that teachers have to train at the doctoral level, it is fine that teachers have to train, but you need to have funds to give scholarships to train” (E2, head of a public HEI, own translation).

Also, in this regard, the inconsistency between training people for the teaching staff and the SINAQES accreditation deadlines was emphasized. The interviewees

pointed out the evaluation of teaching staff as being unrealistic for 2 to 3 years of accreditation, as it is impossible to train teachers to doctorate level in this period.

[...] regarding the faculty component, it was the question of the number of Ph.D.s because, in two years, generally, if you do not meet this criterion, you are automatically classified as level c; you did not have to, and level c is two years and in two years you cannot meet this criterion (E3, manager of a public HEI, own translation).

[...] for example, if you are given a two-year accreditation, it is not possible to train teachers to doctorate level in that time, even if the master's course lasts at least two years; so, we should rethink the accreditation deadlines (E23, head of a public HEI, own translation).

It is worth noting that context is one of the fundamental components for structuring a program or intervention, as its effects can either favor or compromise the program's results. Context is how the program functions within its community's economic, social, and political environment and addresses issues that explore relationship problems and program capacity (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). In this direction, the importance of knowing the program's budget, time, data, and political constraints is highlighted, and decisions should be guided by the various stakeholders' vision (Freitas; Silveira, 2015).

Conclusions

To begin with, it is worth pointing out that seeking to understand the implementation of SINAQES allowed us to enter a context in which the conditions under which an evaluation system is implemented are made up of historical and structural adversities. Furthermore, the perspective of one of the groups of actors involved in the implementation of the evaluation system under analysis was considered. In this way, it proved to be an opportunity to reach characteristic aspects, as well as perceived contradictions, which would remain obscured from the analysis of SINAQES through political actors or documentary sources, for example.

According to the research participants, this study found that one of the aspects that characterized the implementation of SINAQES, the evaluation and accreditation system for Mozambican HE, was the low level of resistance from the academic community, which recognized the importance of having benchmarks and indicators to guide the improvements demanded by HEIs, their courses and teaching programs. On the other hand, according to Angst (2017), forming a quality culture is essential to overcome potential objections arising from a lack of knowledge about the implications

of the results of these evaluations. In this sense, the heads of the HEIs and the members of the self-assessment committees played an essential role since they were involved in disseminating information about SINAQES to the community.

The involvement of these agents was also characterized by challenges, especially those linked to insufficient human and financial resources. About the former, the perception of conflicts of interest in the evaluation process, in terms of the choice of evaluators, also stands out. Regarding financial resources, it should be noted that other researchers have shown that the process of evaluating SE has high costs. For example, the evaluation process involves visits to HEIs and meetings for interviews with representatives of many other stakeholders - teachers, students, administrative staff, external bodies, alums, and employers. To this end, there is a need for integrated implementation between the higher education funding policy and SINAQES. Otherwise, HEIs will channel the few existing resources to pay for evaluation costs.

Also highlighted as aspects that characterize the implementation of SINAQES are the conditions and contradictions regarding the training of teaching staff. Through the perceptions collected, it was pointed out that it is a relevant parameter for the quality of higher education in Mozambique to increase the level of qualification of the teaching staff at its institutions. This qualification refers to the master's and doctorate levels of its teachers. However, this approach reveals contradictions in the capacity to offer doctoral courses by the country itself, drawing attention to the internationalization of how these teachers are qualified. The greater ease with which teachers (and students) can move abroad is recognized as an improvement; however, one of the challenges in implementing SINAQES was to adapt specific quality requirements to the country's reality, in particular, the training of its teachers and insufficient financial resources to implement the improvements identified in the evaluation.

Finally, a limitation of this research is that it did not involve the specialists involved in external evaluations, who are considered to be one of the central players in the implementation of the Mozambican evaluation and accreditation system. However, their perspective, if integrated in future research, could provide valuable insights and enhance the effectiveness of the system. Therefore, their inclusion is recommended.

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