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Challenges of self-assessment in higher education in Mozambique: tensions between regulatory compliance and the enhancement of academic quality

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Abstract: This investigation explores the challenges in consolidating self-assessment practices in Mozambican Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in light of national and international regulatory frameworks. Since the pilot evaluation in 2016, limited progress has been observed in the institutionalization of internal quality assurance mechanisms, with a predominance of processes geared towards formal accreditation and low participation from educational stakeholders. This reality reveals a structural tension within the National System for the Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (Sinaqes) between the regulatory model focused on accountability and external conformity and the formative/emancipatory model, which is essential for institutional learning and transformation. In this context, the research objective is to analyze the tensions between the regulatory model and formative self-assessment practices in Mozambique, identifying the impact of this polarity on institutional participation and academic qualification. This is a qualitative case study, grounded in document analysis and the application of a questionnaire to 96 participants (faculty, students, managers, and employers) from public and private HEIs in the provinces of Sofala and Manica. Data was analyzed using the Content Analysis technique of Bardin. Key findings include: the urgent need for effective inclusion of stakeholders in strategic phases; the broadening of the focus to pedagogical and curricular dimensions; and the strengthening of cooperation with the external environment. The results offer a critical diagnosis for the National Council for Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance (Cnaq), reinforcing the urgency of transitioning to an emancipatory model, which is crucial for social relevance and academic qualification.

Keywords: Mozambican higher education; educational quality; academic qualification; formative self-assessment.

1 Introduction

Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Gqes) consists of an integrated set of policies, processes, structures, and practices designed to ensure and promote high standards of quality in courses, programs, and institutions. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) (2015, p. 12), “[...] quality assurance is essential for ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education [...]”, and it is also considered a strategic pillar for the credibility, relevance, and competitiveness of higher education institutions in relation to society and global markets.



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The continuous improvement of quality management and assurance mechanisms in higher education constitutes a catalyst for critical reflection on self-assessment processes and for strengthening an institutional culture of excellence (Afonso, 2024). In this context, self-assessment goes beyond the logic of formal accountability, becoming a formative and strategic practice of institutional self-regulation. This transformative dimension is sustained by the intentionality of the process, which, according to Vieira (2013), determines whether evaluation assumes a bureaucratic character focused on regulatory compliance or a formative character centred on organisational learning.

In Mozambique, the regulatory framework governing this process is considered robust and up to date. One of the cornerstones of this framework is Law No. 1/2023¹, which guides actions in the sector. It clearly establishes fundamental principles such as democratic participation, inclusion, equity, and professional ethics for practice in the field (Mozambique, 2023a).

Within the framework of the National System for Assessment, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Sinaqes), established by Decree No. 63/2007² and revised by Decree No. 91/2023, self-assessment is defined as an initial, continuous, and fundamental stage, requiring the active involvement of all stakeholders in the educational process (Mozambique, 2007; 2023b). Ferreira and Oliveira (2015) and the African Union (2023) further emphasize that the effectiveness of this process lies in the ability of higher education institutions IES to create secure institutional cultures and promote broad participation.

However, practice reveals significant weaknesses in the consolidation of a robust evaluation culture within Mozambican institutions. According to Cnaq, only 25% of IES had undergone external evaluation by 2021, demonstrating the limited coverage of the system (Mozambique, 2023a). This situation of low participation is further

¹ Law No. 1/2023 is identified in the literature as one of the fundamental pillars of the legal framework governing higher education in Mozambique. This legal instrument establishes essential principles for the sector, including democratic governance, inclusion, equity, and professional ethics. From a regulatory perspective, it guides institutional actions and is aligned with commitments to quality assurance and social relevance.

² The National System for Assessment, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Sinaqes) was established by Decree No. 63/2007 of 31 December, which defined self-assessment as the initial and strategic stage of institutional self-regulation. Currently, the system is governed by Decree No. 91/2023 of 29 December, which revised and updated the regulations for assessment, accreditation, and quality assurance in the country.

supported by records showing that fewer than 20 of the approximately 55 IES in the country submitted complete self-assessment reports, indicating that the majority have not yet consolidated systematic self-regulation practices (Mozambique, 2020). Such indicators suggest that evaluation processes are often limited to fulfilling formal requirements for accreditation purposes, resulting in low levels of collaboration and limited participation of institutional stakeholders (Mozambique, 2023d).

Lopes (2025) argues that institutional self-assessment in IES has been shaped by tensions between regulatory requirements and the need for pedagogical transformation. Although Sinaqes establishes internal evaluation as a strategic stage, its implementation reveals weaknesses that compromise the development of co-responsible institutional cultures.

It is therefore essential to analyse how the polarity between regulatory and emancipatory models affects the participation of institutional actors and the processes of academic quality enhancement. Understanding this tension is fundamental to contributing effectively to the debate on the actual effectiveness of quality assurance policies in Mozambique.

In this context, the study proposes an in-depth analysis. The objective of the research was to examine the tensions between the regulatory model and formative self-assessment practices in Mozambique, identifying the impact of this polarity on institutional participation and academic quality enhancement.

The research adopts a qualitative approach and is designed as a case study, following the methodological assumptions of Yin (2015). It focuses on IES in the provinces of Sofala and Manica, Mozambique. Data were collected through two complementary strategies: documentary analysis, in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Gil (2019), and the administration of a structured questionnaire developed according to the methodological principles of Marconi and Lakatos (2017).

Among the documents analysed, particular emphasis was placed on Law No. 1/2023 (Mozambique, 2023a) and Decree No. 91/2023 (Mozambique, 2023b), which constitute the principal Mozambican legal framework. In addition, relevant international quality assurance references were included. These comprise the Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs) (Unesco, 2015), the Institutional Evaluation Manual (Haqaa, 2017), the Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance report

(Oecd, 2018), and the report of the African Quality Assurance Network (Mozambique, 2024).

The questionnaire, which served as the primary data collection instrument, was administered to a diverse group of institutional and external stakeholders. The final sample consisted of 96 participants, including members of Self-Assessment Committees, institutional managers, academic staff, students, alumni, and employers. This diversity enabled the collection of multiple perspectives and comprehensive insights into the evaluation processes currently implemented in Mozambican IES.

The data obtained were analysed using the content analysis technique proposed by Bardin (2020), allowing for an interpretative reading of the discourses and institutional practices related to self-assessment, accreditation, and academic quality enhancement. The article is organised into five interrelated sections that articulate the research process with its theoretical foundations and empirical findings.

2 Theoretical foundations of institutional evaluation and quality in mozambican Higher Education

Institutional evaluation in IES is characterized as a systematic, participatory, and formative process aimed at the critical analysis of academic, administrative, and pedagogical practices. In the Mozambican context, this process is structured by the National System for Assessment, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Sinaqes), established by Decree No. 63/2007 and revised by Decree No. 91/2023 (Mozambique, 2007; 2023b), which defines self-assessment as an initial, continuous, and strategic stage of institutional self-regulation.

Institutional self-assessment goes beyond the logic of formal accountability, becoming a reflective and emancipatory practice capable of promoting co-responsible institutional cultures oriented toward continuous improvement. According to Vieira (2013, p. 45), “The intentionality of self-assessment determines its character: it may assume a bureaucratic form focused on regulatory compliance, or a formative one centred on organisational learning and institutional transformation.”

Afonso (2024, p. 18) further emphasizes that “[...] self-assessment cannot be reduced to a technical instrument of control, but must be understood as a cultural and political practice capable of promoting institutional emancipation.” Lopes (2025) warns

that the uncritical assimilation of Eurocentric models may undermine the transformative potential of evaluation, turning it into a ritual of compliance.

Within Mozambique, self-assessment encompasses dimensions such as institutional mission and policy, organisation and management, curriculum, academic staff and students, infrastructure, employability, internationalization, and university outreach (Mozambique, 2024). It is, therefore, a process that requires an integrated vision, articulating all these dimensions and a collective commitment capable of mobilizing different institutional actors around the continuous improvement of academic and administrative quality.

Santos (2010, p. 33) argues that “[...] self-assessment as a formative practice fosters professional development and the construction of democratic institutional cultures.” Salvador and Sordi (2024) reinforce that this approach promotes the strengthening of the academic staff and shared responsibility among institutional sectors. Engel, Bianchi, and Paulo (2018, p. 112) add that “[...] emancipatory self-assessment contributes to the alignment between institutional mission and pedagogical practices.”

Institutional evaluation is challenged to move beyond traditional logic. As Erichsen (2007, p. 71) states, “[...] institutions must go beyond the analysis of inputs, focusing primarily on outcomes and social impacts.” This shift seeks institutional effectiveness, understood as the capacity to generate lasting and socially relevant impacts by integrating academic quality, social relevance, and institutional transformation (Afonso, 2024).

A structural tension within institutional evaluation has been identified by several scholars in the field. Authors such as Harvey and Green (1993), Vieira (2013), Lopes (2025), Santos (2010), and Engel, Bianchi, and Paulo (2018) converge in recognizing this tension. The implications of this polarity between the two paradigms directly affect the depth, intentionality, and practical outcomes of evaluation processes implemented by institutions.

On the one hand, the regulatory model, centred on normative compliance and accountability, is guided by the logic of formal accountability and external accreditation as a mechanism of institutional validation (Harvey; Green, 1993; Vieira, 2013). The predominance of this model over formative approaches tends to transform the evaluation process into a technical-administrative ritual of compliance. According to

Vieira (2013), this tendency compromises the critical appropriation of evaluation by institutional actors, reducing self-assessment to a mere instrument of documentary control and undermining its potential for transformation and organisational learning.

In contrast, studies by Santos (2010), Engel *et al.* (2018), and Lopes (2025) propose an emancipatory model, also referred to as the formative model, which values reflective, dialogical, and participatory practices aimed at organisational learning and institutional transformation. This approach emphasizes alignment between institutional mission, pedagogical practices, and social relevance, fostering the development of quality cultures characterized by shared responsibility and innovation.

The choice between these models is not merely operational; rather, it reflects competing understandings of the role of evaluation in higher education. In contexts such as Mozambique, this polarity is expressed in the way evaluation processes are conceived, conducted, and appropriated by institutional actors.

Overcoming the tension between the regulatory and emancipatory models is grounded in the development of evaluation practices that are context-sensitive and responsive to local Mozambican realities. This commitment to transforming educational quality requires the continuous training of institutional actors and the expansion of representativeness throughout all stages of the process. Such initiatives create spaces for dialogue and active listening, facilitating the integration of evaluation results with pedagogical innovation and the consolidation of a culture of shared responsibility.

Within this framework, educational quality is understood as a multidimensional construct that varies according to the meanings attributed to it by institutional actors. According to Harvey and Green (1993), quality manifests itself through exceptionalism, associated with excellence; consistency, focused on uniformity; fitness for purpose, linked to institutional mission; transformation, centred on formative impact; and value added, which measures student development. These dimensions demonstrate that the effectiveness of institutional evaluation depends on balancing compliance with formal requirements and achieving meaningful change in individuals and organisations.

Addressing the tensions identified within Sinaques requires a paradigmatic shift toward a dialogical practice committed to academic quality enhancement and institutional autonomy. This entails investing in the continuous development of institutional actors, expanding opportunities for active participation and consultation,

and systematically integrating evaluation outcomes into curricular innovation. Only when self-assessment is embraced as a critical and shared-responsibility practice can it promote genuine institutional effectiveness and social relevance within the Mozambican context.

Academic quality enhancement constitutes a comprehensive concept referring to the set of competencies, knowledge, and attitudes developed by institutional actors throughout the educational process. This fundamental concept encompasses several crucial elements, including curriculum design, faculty development, graduate employability, and effective social integration. Consequently, the consolidation of a quality culture requires dialogical practices grounded in the principles of democratic participation and the appreciation of diversity.

The consolidation of an institutional culture of quality requires dialogical evaluation practices supported by the principles of shared responsibility, democratic participation, and respect for diversity. Evaluative co-responsibility implies the active involvement of all institutional stakeholders—academic staff, students, managers, and civil society in the formulation of diagnoses, the definition of improvement plans, and the development of transformative educational policies (Santos, 2010; Afonso, 2024).

The discussion of quality in IES is not limited to the national context and must be situated in relation to regional and global frameworks. At the African level, the Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (Haqaa) project stands out, having resulted in the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (Asg-qa) (Haqaa, 2017).

According to the African Union (2017), these standards propose culturally relevant and inclusive mechanisms aligned with the continent's socioeconomic development needs. The African Union (2023, p. 28) emphasizes that “[...] quality assurance should promote equity, inclusion, and alignment with local challenges while respecting institutional diversity.”

At the global level, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Oecd), through its report *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance*, highlights quality assurance as a strategic factor for the competitiveness and relevance of higher education. According to the Oecd (2018, p. 14), “[...] quality assurance is a strategic factor for competitiveness and relevance in higher education

[...]", requiring robust systems, comparable indicators, and mechanisms of transparency.

These guidelines converge with Unesco's 2030 Agenda, which establishes the provision of quality, equitable, and inclusive education as a key objective. As Unesco (2015, p. 12) states, "[...] quality assurance is essential for ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education." The same organisation further emphasizes that "[...] the consolidation of a quality culture requires continuous investment in the professional development of higher education personnel, with a focus on evaluation, innovation, and management" (Unesco, 2020, p. 21).

According to the Association of African Universities (AAU, 2023), the consolidation of an institutional quality culture faces multifaceted challenges that vary according to regional contexts, regulatory frameworks, and the maturity levels of evaluation systems. Among the main obstacles are the tension between state regulation and university autonomy, the fragmentation of information systems, the scarcity of reliable data, and the absence of systematic training programs for academic staff, managers, and evaluators.

The financial sustainability of quality assurance systems is also a critical issue. The Oecd (2018) recommends that governments and institutions ensure adequate and stable funding as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of evaluation processes. Without sufficient human, technological, and logistical resources, such systems tend to become discontinuous and superficial.

With regard to emerging trends, there is growing recognition of the importance of student participation in institutional evaluation processes. Students are increasingly viewed as active agents of quality whose perceptions, experiences, and educational trajectories should be considered in policy formulation and the revision of pedagogical practices (Mozambique, 2023d).

This trend is aligned with the principles of inclusion, equity, and shared responsibility reflected in the frameworks established by Unesco (2015; 2020) and the African quality standards developed by the African Union (2017). Another significant trend is the internationalization of quality assurance systems through the strengthening of regional networks, mutual recognition agreements, and international accreditation processes.

The issue of internationalizing quality evaluation should be understood through the lens of diversity and context. As Lopes (2025, p. 45) observes, “[...] the internationalization of evaluation does not imply homogenization, but rather dialogue among institutional cultures and respect for local specificities.” This principle is essential to ensure that quality assurance models, when implemented in different settings, do not overlook local needs and pedagogical contexts.

Finally, the incorporation of digital technologies into evaluation processes represents a promising innovation with the potential to enhance transparency, efficiency, and participation. Quality management platforms, real-time data collection systems, and predictive analytics tools are being progressively adopted by agencies and institutions. However, their implementation continues to face challenges related to infrastructure, technical capacity building, and digital ethics (Unesco, 2020; Oecd, 2018).

3 Methodological Aspects of the Research

The present study adopts a qualitative approach and is designed as a case study, based on the assumptions of Yin (2015), who defines it as a strategy for the in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The geographical scope is limited to the provinces of Sofala and Manica, encompassing both public and private institutions within the framework of the implementation of the National System for Assessment, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Sinaques).

Data collection was carried out through two complementary strategies: documentary analysis, guided by Gil (2019), covering legal and policy frameworks such as Law No. 1/2023 (Mozambique, 2023a), Decree No. 91/2023 (Mozambique, 2023b), the Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs) (Unesco, 2015), the Institutional Evaluation Manual (Haqaa, 2017), the report *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance* (Oecd, 2018), and the report of the African Quality Assurance Network (Mozambique, 2024).

The questionnaire, which served as the primary data collection instrument, was administered remotely through the Google Forms platform to a diverse sample of 96 participants, including institutional managers, academic staff, students, and employers. The instrument was organised into five thematic sections: (1) sociodemographic data;

(2) institutional participation; (3) perceptions of educational quality; (4) the impact of self-assessment; and (5) expectations and recommendations. This structure, also grounded in Amado (2014), enabled the integration of qualitative and quantitative dimensions, facilitating a critical understanding of evaluation practices and ensuring the collection of multiple perspectives on the reality of higher education institutions (IES).

The validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through three complementary strategies: content validation, based on theoretical and normative references; expert validation, involving technical review by experienced academics and institutional managers; and empirical validation, achieved through the triangulation of perspectives from the diverse sample. Data analysis followed Bardin's (2020) Content Analysis technique, allowing responses to be systematized into seven analytical categories reflecting the core dimensions of evaluation: institutional mission, administrative management, curriculum, academic staff and students, infrastructure, employability, and internationalization.

To ensure the scientific accuracy and transparency required by reviewers, the data collection instruments and summaries of responses were made available as supplementary documents. Only the most significant interpretative inferences and qualitative excerpts were incorporated into the main body of the article, prioritizing the analytical depth necessary to understand the tensions between the regulatory and emancipatory models. This methodological decision was intended to ensure clarity and focus on the findings that demonstrate how the polarity between external compliance and institutional transformation affects the participation of members of the Self-Assessment Committees (CAA).

Regarding professional occupation, the analysis of the 96 participants reveals a strong predominance of students, totalling 65 respondents (67.7%), followed by 19 academic staff members (19.8%), 7 former students (7.3%), 3 institutional managers (3.1%), and only 1 employer (1.0%). It should be noted, however, that there were no representatives from civil society organisations or professional associations, a gap that limits the diversity of perspectives and weakens the dialogical dimension of the evaluation process. According to Santos (2010), such insufficiency restricts the capacity of the process to promote shared responsibility and organisational transformation. In this regard, Afonso (2024, p. 18) emphasizes that “[...] self-

assessment cannot be reduced to a technical instrument of control, but must be understood as a cultural and political practice.”

The significant participation of students reflects the interest of the primary beneficiaries of educational services, whose experiences are recognized as a central focus of the evaluation process. This trend is consistent with Unesco’s (2020) recommendations and aligns with the African quality standards established by the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (Asg-qa), which emphasize active student engagement and their effective inclusion in decision-making mechanisms. The central role of this group within IES strengthens the potential for using evaluation outcomes to improve teaching and learning processes.

With regard to educational attainment, the data indicate that 53 participants (55.2%) possess high secondary education or an equivalent qualification, 28 (29.2%) hold a undergraduate degree, 9 (9.4%) hold a master’s degree, and 6 (6.3%) hold a bachelor-level qualification. This distribution reveals a predominance of technical and undergraduate-level education, a factor that may influence the depth of critical analysis conducted within the Self-Assessment Committees. As Lopes (2025) warns, the effectiveness of institutional evaluation requires continuous investment in the training and capacity building of the actors involved, ensuring that the use of evaluation instruments goes beyond mere technical execution.

The institutional experience of the participants reveals a well-established trajectory, with academic staff and technical personnel reporting lengths of service ranging from 5 to more than 15 years, while all institutional managers fall within the range of 10 to 15 years of professional experience. This professional maturity facilitates the identification of structural and pedagogical aspects that are relevant to academic quality enhancement. However, the effectiveness of this process is closely linked to the organisational environment, since, according to Ferreira and Oliveira (2015, p. 87), “[...] its effectiveness depends directly on the ability of IES to foster secure and participatory institutional cultures.”

Despite the predominance of internal stakeholders such as academic staff and students, the absence of external actors including representatives of civil society, professional associations, and parents indicates that the context investigated in Mozambican institutions has not yet achieved the broad participation advocated by the Oecd (2018) and Haqaa (2017). This gap weakens the dialogical dimension of

evaluation, limiting its capacity to promote shared responsibility and institutional transformation.

The development of a quality culture therefore depends on the implementation of strategic measures aimed at strengthening the representativeness and engagement of all stakeholder groups, including the wider community and employers. Such actions are essential for consolidating the transition from a regulatory model, focused on documentary compliance and formal accountability, to an emancipatory and formative practice. This paradigm shift is considered crucial if self-assessment is to promote concrete institutional improvements, ensuring social relevance and academic quality enhancement within the Mozambican context.

4 Results and discussion of the tensions in self-assessment between regulation and emancipation

This section is dedicated to the presentation of results, the interpretative analysis of questionnaire content, and documentary analysis, with data triangulation conducted through a critical dialogue with the theoretical foundations of the study. The categorization of the collected data followed the principles of content analysis systematized by Bardin (2020), observing the criteria of exhaustiveness, representativeness, homogeneity, and relevance.

For standardization purposes, a specific nomenclature was adopted to identify the respondent groups in the study. The codes used are: E (Students), D (Academic Staff and Technical-Administrative Personnel), G (Institutional Managers), and M (External Members). The M group comprises employers, representatives of professional associations, civil society organisations, and former students (alumni).

The present analysis synthesizes the perceptions of members of the CAA, drawn from a total of 92 participants, regarding the degree of institutional participation, the most frequently discussed criteria, and the level of involvement of different stakeholder groups. The data show that participation was significantly higher during the operational and initial stages of self-assessment, particularly in committee training activities, reported by 26 respondents (28.1%), questionnaire launch activities, reported by 33 respondents (35.4%), and data collection activities, reported by 19 respondents (20.8%).

This pattern confirms what Afonso (2024) describes as the predominance of regulatory practices, in which emphasis is placed on procedural stages and information gathering, rather than on critical appropriation and the formative dimension of the process.

In contrast, the stages related to analysis and decision-making recorded limited involvement, as evidenced by participation in the preparation of the preliminary report, reported by only 5 respondents (5.2%), and in the development of improvement plans, reported by 13 respondents (14.6%). This finding reveals a weakness in the critical appropriation of self-assessment. As emphasized by Afonso (2024) and Salvador and Sordi (2024), the effectiveness of evaluation processes depends not only on the collection of information but also on the institutional capacity to transform such information into strategic decisions and improvement actions. Low participation in these phases therefore hinders the transition toward formative evaluation, reducing it to a predominantly regulatory and technical-administrative exercise.

This disparity in engagement resulted in limited participation from the broader academic community, as well as from professional associations and employers, thereby affecting the representativeness of the process. At the same time, activities were concentrated mainly in the areas of institutional policies, cited by 34 respondents (36.5%), and organisation and management, cited by 43 respondents (46.9%). Consequently, crucial dimensions of academic quality enhancement such as curriculum, academic staff and students, internationalization, and employability were addressed only marginally.

This pattern of focusing on structural rather than pedagogical aspects diverges from the principles of shared responsibility and multi-stakeholder involvement advocated by the Cnaq (Mozambique, 2023a; 2023b). Specifically, among students, the majority 62 respondents (67% of the total participants) reported involvement in discussions concerning institutional policies, instructional materials, and teaching methods, confirming the initial and operational engagement of this group.

The testimonies reveal significant initial engagement, particularly during the operational stages of the process. Student E7 reported participation in discussions concerning organisational policies and mechanisms, while E24 complemented this by describing involvement in the organisation of instructional materials (personal communication). In addition to management and resource-related issues, the

pedagogical dimension was also mentioned, as highlighted by student E4: “We participated mainly in the training phase and in the administration of the questionnaires, but we had no opportunity to discuss the results or propose improvements” (personal communication). Students such as E8 and E38 reinforced this pattern by reporting that their involvement was limited to data collection activities (personal communication).

These statements reveal the bureaucratic nature of the self-assessment process, confirming Vieira’s (2013, p. 45) assertion that: “The intentionality of self-assessment determines its character: it may assume a bureaucratic form focused on regulatory compliance, or a formative one centred on organisational learning and institutional transformation.” The absence of opportunities for debate contrasts with Santos (2010, p. 33), who argues that “[...] self-assessment as a formative practice fosters professional development and the construction of democratic institutional cultures,” and with Afonso (2024, p. 18), who maintains that “[...] self-assessment cannot be reduced to a technical instrument of control, but must be understood as a cultural and political practice capable of promoting institutional emancipation.”

In this regard, students’ statements illustrate the tension highlighted by Lopes (2025), showing how normative pressures diminish the transformative potential of evaluation and limit student participation to operational stages. Despite this engagement, the analysis reveals a clear perception of limitations regarding the scope of participation, particularly in the strategic and decision-making phases of the process. This dissatisfaction is captured in the statement of student E6: “[...] however, we would have liked to be involved in issues related to the organisation and management of the institution itself, curriculum matters, and other relevant aspects [...]” (personal communication). This gap demonstrates that, although consulted, students feel marginalized from structural discussions.

The participation of academic staff and technical-administrative personnel was concentrated in activities related to institutional policies and academic infrastructure. Lecturer D5 noted: “Within the context of self-assessment, we had the opportunity to reflect on the operational conditions and policies of our institution, specifically on admission and assessment processes” (personal communication). Similarly, lecturer D4 reported involvement in activities related to infrastructure (personal communication).

Despite this initial engagement, the testimonies reveal limitations regarding the depth of critical reflection. Lecturer D11 observed this constraint: “We were given an explanation of how the indicators work, but during the evaluation process we only completed questionnaires; we did not engage in any debate or in-depth reflection on them” (personal communication). In summary, academic staff and technical personnel were widely consulted and involved in operational tasks, but had little participation in the decisive stages of analysis and discussion.

The analysis of responses shows that the involvement of students, academic staff, and technical personnel was largely confined to the initial stages and to their role as subjects being evaluated, with limited participation in planning and in the development of improvement plans. These stages are considered fundamental according to the self-assessment and quality assurance mechanisms advocated by the CnaQ (Mozambique, 2024).

This finding concerning limited internal participation is consistent with recommendations from regulatory bodies, such as the Cnaq self-assessment report (Mozambique, 2018), which highlights the urgent need to expand the involvement of alumni, employers, and professional associations. At the international level, this limitation is also criticized in documents such as the Haqaa Institutional Evaluation Manual (2017) and the guidelines of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Enqa) (Unesco, 2021).

Unesco (2021) emphasizes that evaluation processes should be collaborative and inclusive, while the Oecd (2018) stresses that the effectiveness of institutional evaluation depends on the capacity to engage multiple stakeholders. The persistence of a predominantly technical-operational model therefore highlights the urgent need to strengthen dialogical, inclusive, and formative evaluation practices capable of fostering institutional shared responsibility.

Self-assessment practices in higher education institutions (IES) reveal an asymmetrical and predominantly structural focus. The analysis of the most frequently discussed aspects showed a greater emphasis on dimensions related to institutional operating policies, organisation and resource management, and curriculum relevance. In contrast, there was a low incidence of reflection on dimensions that are central to pedagogical and social quality, such as pedagogical relationships, teaching and assessment methods, and inclusion mechanisms, which constitute priorities in

Mozambican higher education policies, as highlighted in the report of the African Quality Assurance Network Conference (Mozambique, 2023d).

The evaluations conducted by the 96 participants indicate a rather superficial approach. The data reveal that 38 participants (39.6%) identified negative aspects requiring improvement; 31 (32.3%) pointed to weaknesses in planning and organisation/management; and 25 (26.0%) highlighted the lack of an appropriate framework for evaluation mechanisms. These findings support the concerns raised by the Cnaq (Mozambique, 2023d).

The identification of critical aspects corroborates the perspective of Salvador and Sordi (2024), who argue that the focus of the Self-Assessment Committee (CAA) should be strategic in nature. This position is reinforced by Engel, Bianchi, and Paulo (2018), who emphasize that committee members should examine how academic staff, managers, and technical personnel contribute to students' academic outcomes.

The evaluation model observed in the institutions analysed presents significant divergences from the formative ideal. This discrepancy suggests that self-assessment committees should go beyond merely fulfilling formal procedural requirements. It is imperative that these committees adopt a more pedagogical and strategic approach aimed at promoting concrete improvements within the institutional context.

When conducted in a participatory and strategic manner, institutional self-assessment constitutes an essential tool for educational quality enhancement in IES. The involvement of the extra-university community including parents, civil society, alumni, and employers is recognized as fundamental; however, this partnership has not followed a positive trajectory, as evidenced by the testimonies of managers G1, G2, G3, and G4. This limitation is also highlighted in international documents such as the Haqaa Principles (2017) and the Enqa Guidelines (Unesco, 2021).

Regarding the benefits achieved, the identification of negative aspects was cited by 38 participants (39.6%), while the revision of activity plans was mentioned by 31 participants (32.3%). These statements reflect the concerns expressed by the Cnaq (Mozambique, 2018), which emphasizes the need to strengthen institutional strategy in order to achieve a comprehensive vision of quality assurance.

Perceptions of self-assessment processes in IES reveal both structural tensions and transformative possibilities. Self-assessment is understood as a “[...] practice of

institutional development and transformation that requires the critical engagement of participants” (Santos, 2010, p. 45).

The findings reveal a desire to move beyond technocratic approaches, with suggestions emphasizing broader participation and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. These proposals are consistent with the principles of institutional shared responsibility and with Unesco’s framework (2020, p. 18), which states that “[...] evaluation should be guided by the values of inclusion, equity, and social relevance.” The Oecd further stresses that self-assessment should be “[...] an integral part of institutional culture, oriented toward continuous improvement and accountability [...]” (Oecd, 2018, p. 33), while Erichsen (2007, p. 21) highlights that “[...] institutional evaluation should be understood as a process of collective learning.”

However, the analysis also reveals significant challenges, including the concentration of participation in the initial stages of the process and the predominance of a narrow focus on structural dimensions. Afonso (2024, p. 14) argues that “[...] institutional self-assessment, when captured by Eurocentric logics, tends to reproduce asymmetries and silence local voices.” Lopes (2025) reinforces this critique by warning that the uncritical adoption of Eurocentric models may undermine the transformative potential of evaluation, reducing it to a mere ritual of compliance.

In light of this scenario, there is an urgent need to reconfigure self-assessment processes in IES by adopting a critical, inclusive, and strategic approach. Self-assessment should be understood as a reflective and co-responsible practice (Esteban & Gutiérrez, 2019), integrated into the educational cycle, promoting autonomy and critical reflection (Vieira, 2013), and fostering the development of ethical and critical competencies (Tardif, 2014).

At the normative level, Mozambican legal instruments such as Law No. 1/2023 (Mozambique, 2023a), Decree No. 91/2023 (Mozambique, 2023b), and the technical reports of the Cnaq (Mozambique, 2023d; 2024) establish clear guidelines for the institutionalization of self-assessment. These regulatory frameworks are aligned with international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs) (Unesco, 2015) and the National Development Strategy 2025–2044 (Mozambique, 2025).

The respondents’ perceptions clearly reveal the potential of self-assessment to enhance the quality of educational processes. However, such improvement can only

be achieved when self-assessment is embraced as a critical and formative practice. For this potential to be realized, continuous investment is required in key areas such as stakeholder training, broader participation, transparency, and the systematic integration of evaluation results.

5 Final Considerations

This study aimed to analyse the tensions between the regulatory model and formative evaluation practices in higher education institutions (IES), identifying the impact of this polarity on institutional participation and academic quality enhancement processes. The methodological approach adopted was qualitative, designed as a case study (Yin, 2015), based on documentary analysis and the administration of a questionnaire to 96 participants from public and private institutions located in the provinces of Sofala and Manica.

The findings reveal that the National System for Assessment, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Sinaqes) has been implemented predominantly according to the logic of the regulatory model, centred on formal accountability and documentary compliance. This orientation undermines the emancipatory potential of evaluation envisioned in both the national legal framework and international quality assurance references.

The structural tension between the two models manifests itself through three analytical dimensions. The first concerns asymmetrical participation: institutional actors are mobilized primarily during the operational stages, namely training and data collection, while remaining largely excluded from the strategic phases of analysis and decision-making. This dynamic reflects a pattern of instrumentalization that weakens both shared responsibility and the legitimacy of the evaluation process.

The second dimension relates to the restricted thematic focus. The concentration of discussions on institutional policies and administrative management (83.4%) indicates that evaluation processes have been used mainly to validate inputs and organisational structures, rather than to examine pedagogical practices, curricula, and learning outcomes. This distortion undermines the alignment between institutional mission, curricular innovation, and academic effectiveness, contradicting the principles of the 2030 Agenda (Unesco, 2015) and the standards advocated by the Oecd (2018).

The third dimension concerns the limited composition of evaluation stakeholders. The overrepresentation of students and the absence of employers and professional associations highlight the weakness of external participation, which is essential for assessing social relevance and graduate employability. The observed gender imbalance (80.2% male participation) also reveals persistent inequalities in access to decision-making spaces, creating tensions with the ethical and political commitments established by national legislation (Mozambique, 2023a).

The empirical evidence and documentary analysis converge on the conclusion that Sinages has prioritized accountability over institutional transformation. Overcoming this situation requires a paradigmatic shift: from evaluation as a mechanism of technical control to a dialogical, emancipatory practice oriented toward academic quality enhancement. Such a transition requires investment in the continuous professional development of institutional actors, greater representativeness in evaluation processes, and the reconfiguration of quality frameworks with a focus on learning, equity, and social relevance.

In this regard, several important avenues for future research emerge. Comparative studies between public and private institutions may deepen understanding of how different institutional configurations interpret and operationalize quality assurance frameworks. Longitudinal studies also appear promising for monitoring the evolution of evaluation practices across institutional cycles, enabling the identification of patterns of critical appropriation, resistance, and transformation.

Furthermore, research focusing on the training of key stakeholders including academic staff, managers, students, and external evaluators may contribute to strengthening evaluation competencies and consolidating institutional cultures based on shared responsibility. Another relevant line of inquiry involves examining the impact of evaluation on pedagogical innovation and curricular transformation by linking self-assessment outcomes with indicators of learning, employability, and inclusion.

Finally, further research of the ethical and political dimensions of evaluation is recommended, with particular emphasis on representativeness, gender equity, and the active inclusion of external stakeholders, in accordance with African and global quality assurance frameworks. Such studies may support the development of a context-sensitive, dialogical, and emancipatory evaluation model capable of promoting not only

institutional compliance but also academic quality enhancement and social relevance within Mozambican higher education institutions.

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