



Quality Assurance and Student Experience in A Sahelian Context: Qualitative Analysis of the Evaluation of Teaching by the Student Teachers of the Higher Teacher Training College of the University of Maroua

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This article investigates quality assurance in pre-service teacher education at the Higher Teacher Training College of the University of Maroua, Cameroon, drawing on a qualitative corpus of interview sheets compiled in 2015 and covering twenty student teachers coded from A to T. The empirical material rests on a semi-structured guide adapted from the quality framework of the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education, built around seven dimensions: environment, pedagogical strategies, assessment, pedagogical relationship, supervision, content and organization. Regrouped into six analytic axes during coding, these dimensions serve to understand how student teachers perceive the quality of their training in an institutional context shaped by material, climatic and organizational constraints specific to the Sahelian area of Far North Cameroon.

The thematic analysis yields four main findings. Students first link quality to tangible learning conditions: physical accessibility of the campus, electricity, documentary resources, digital connectivity and laboratory equipment. They then describe a recurring gap between the professional ambitions of the curriculum and the weakness of practical mediation, especially in science and language tracks. Assessment practices and the late publication of results further emerge as a central source of dissatisfaction, because of stress, perceived opacity and negative effects on academic preparation. Pedagogical relationships finally appear ambivalent, some lecturers being perceived as available and supportive while others are described as inattentive to students' difficulties.

The article argues that, in a teacher-training institution located in a Sahelian environment, quality assurance cannot be reduced to procedural compliance: it must be approached as an institution's ability to adjust to context, combining regional standards, local resources, territorial equity and effective professionalization. Two caveats bound these findings: the study is a secondary analysis of interview sheets compiled in 2015, with no possibility of follow-up or triangulation with lecturers and administrative staff, and the recurrences identified were not quantified. The paper concludes by advocating a more situated form of quality assurance grounded in student voice, stronger pedagogical infrastructure and more stable administrative routines.

Keywords: Quality assurance, Higher education, Student evaluation of teaching, ENS Maroua, CAMES, Sahelian context, Teacher education.

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1. Introduction

Quality assurance has established itself as one of the major instruments for regulating, legitimizing and improving higher education. In Africa, this dynamic is part of a twofold movement: states and institutions face massification, the diversification of provision and increased social demand, while having to consolidate mechanisms that guarantee the relevance of programmes, the reliability of assessment and the credibility of degrees (Hayward, 2006; Ayoo et al., 2020). In francophone Africa, CAMES occupies a central position in harmonizing standards, assessment practices and quality frameworks, while UNESCO recalls that quality assurance must articulate the institutional, national and sub-regional levels with sustained attention to local capacities (UNESCO-IPE, 2014).

These issues take on particular intensity when they concern institutions responsible for training future teachers. The quality of a higher teacher training college is measured not only by the coherence of its texts or the conformity of its provision, but by its capacity to produce professionals able to teach in real contexts, often marked by scarce resources, territorial inequalities and constrained teaching environments. From this point of view, the student voice constitutes a strategic observatory: it captures, as close as possible to practices, the way in which training arrangements, learning conditions and administrative regulations are actually experienced.

The corpus focuses on the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) of the University of Maroua, in the Far North of Cameroon. Created by presidential decree No. 2008/282 of 9 August 2008, the ENS is the university's first institution; it provides initial and continuing training of teachers, research in education and the development of academic bilingualism (Présidence de la République du Cameroun, 2008). The material shifts the analysis towards a teacher-training institution in a Sahelian environment, and makes it possible to read student evaluation of teaching as a revealing indicator of the tensions between institutional

prescriptions and actual learning, in line with earlier Cameroonian studies (Ebale, 2017).

The guiding question is the following: how do the student teachers of the ENS of Maroua perceive the quality of their training in light of the CAMES framework, and what do these perceptions reveal about the actual conditions of professionalization in a Sahelian context? The hypothesis defended is that perceived quality depends less on the formal existence of standards than on their material, pedagogical and organizational translation into university daily life.

2. Conceptual Framework

In the African literature, quality assurance first appears as a project for structuring higher education systems. Shabani et al. (2014) show that it contributes to building a continental space for higher education and research, while revealing significant disparities in institutional capacities between countries and institutions. Materu (2007) stresses that quality mechanisms cannot be effective without credible self-assessment, supervision and continuous improvement mechanisms, while Hayward (2006) documents the difficulty African accreditation agencies face in equipping themselves with the means to fulfil their missions. More recent debates on harmonization insist on the need to combine common standards with local appropriation, so as to avoid quality assurance being reduced to formal conformity detached from teaching experiences (Ayoo et al., 2020).

In the CAMES area, quality assurance relies on harmonized frameworks for governance, training and continuous improvement. The recent publication of institutional evaluation reports under the JointQA project recalls this ambition of consolidation through joint approaches between national, regional and continental levels (CAMES, 2026).

The quality approach cannot be dissociated from the contexts in which it takes root. UNESCO-IPE (2014) insists, for francophone Africa, on the scarcity of technical skills, on cost-

effectiveness constraints and on the articulation between national and institutional levels. This perspective is decisive at the ENS of Maroua, where the geographical, climatic and infrastructural environment directly affects the university experience.

Student evaluation of teaching cannot be reduced to a mechanism of immediate satisfaction. It constitutes an instrument of pedagogical regulation, an indicator of the academic climate and a revealer of the coherence between the prescribed curriculum and the lived curriculum, provided it is interpreted with caution, triangulated with other data and inscribed in a logic of improvement rather than sanction.

The framework of the article rests on three propositions: quality assurance is conceived as a dynamic of continuous adjustment between standards, resources and professional purposes; student perception is regarded as a legitimate datum of lived quality; and the Sahelian context is treated not as a backdrop but as a structuring variable of the effectiveness of the arrangements.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus and Participants

The study is based on a secondary qualitative analysis of a corpus of interview sheets compiled in 2015 and relating to twenty student teachers at the ENS of the University of Maroua, identified by the letters A to T. Each sheet includes a contextualization of the CAMES framework, socio-demographic information and a set of answers to open questions organized according to a semi-structured guide adapted to the local context. The demographic variables available cover year of study, discipline, sex, age, regional origin and status.

3.2. Instrument

The guide is organized into four sequences. The first introduces the interview, recalls the objective of improving quality and guarantees anonymity. The second examines overall perceptions of the training. The third proceeds to the systematic evaluation of seven dimensions:

environment, strategies, assessment, relationship, supervision, content and organization. The fourth collects the improvement proposals formulated by the students.

3.3. Data Processing

After a full reading of the corpus, units of meaning were identified, grouped and reclassified into analytical nuclei. A first coding level took up the seven dimensions of the guide; the relationship and supervision dimensions proved inseparable in students' discourse and were merged, bringing the analysis down to six axes, the structure retained in Section 4. A second level brought out transversal themes: territorial constraint, theory-practice gap, administrative vulnerability, demand for pedagogical recognition and the search for more concrete professionalization.

Occurrences were not counted. The analysis identifies the logic of recurrences, the dominant tensions and the articulations between dimensions, but does not allow any claim about the relative frequency of perceptions within the corpus. The quantifiers used in Section 4 must be read in this framework. When the sheets contained sufficiently stabilized formulations, they are quoted directly, with the student's code and, when available, his or her level or discipline. Respondents spoke in French. The excerpts cited in this article are English translations prepared for the present version.

3.4. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Students are anonymized by letters, in accordance with the original corpus, and quotations are used from an analytical rather than an identifying perspective. No element allowing the direct or indirect identification of a student, a lecturer or a department appears in the article.

The study relies on interview sheets compiled in 2015 and not on primary data collection contemporary with the writing of the article. It therefore makes it possible neither to follow up with respondents, nor to triangulate with lecturers, the administration or field

observations. The time lag between collection and analysis further requires the results to be read as a dated snapshot, not as a present-day account of the ENS. This limitation does not invalidate the heuristic value of the corpus, but it rules out treating the findings as a measure of current actual quality.

4. Results

4.1. The Environment, Material Foundation of Quality

The first lesson of the corpus concerns the centrality of the environment in defining quality. Students do not oppose pedagogy to infrastructure: they show that the former depends closely on the latter. Accessibility constraints, unstable electricity, weak connectivity, limited documentary resources and the lack of equipment in specialized rooms appear as immediate determinants of lived quality. The outlying location of the campus and the difficulties of travelling during the rainy season are described as direct obstacles to the continuity of learning, as formulated by student A: "The university is located outside the city, where we suffer a lot in the rainy season because the roads are muddy and difficult."

Applied to a Sahelian institution, quality assurance frameworks must integrate campus access and climatic vulnerabilities as academic parameters. Students in the science tracks emphasize the insufficiency of laboratories, the lack of reagents and the absence of measuring equipment; in the language tracks, what is missing are language laboratories, audiovisual materials and environments for oral practice. The environment is where the real equality of access to learning is at stake.

4.2. Teaching Strategies and the Gap Between the Prescribed Curriculum and Actual Practice

Students acknowledge the general relevance of the content and the professionalizing ambition of the programmes, but denounce a persistent gap between the theoretical architecture of the training and its practical translation. The

criticism intensifies in the scientific disciplines, where the absence of experimental hands-on work weakens the coherence of learning: when practical work is nonexistent or very limited, the training is reduced to knowledge that can hardly be transferred to the exercise of the profession.

Several sheets express the feeling that some lecturers assume prerequisites that are not acquired. Student E gives the most abrupt formulation: "Teachers arrive only with their assessments, which often have nothing to do with the courses." This should not be read as a mere criticism of examinations, but as a rupture between pedagogical progression, support for difficulties and professionalization goals; student A mentions in the same vein the insufficiency of secondary-school knowledge to follow certain specialized courses. In the English tracks, the criticism focuses more on the weakness of oral practice and the lack of exposure to authentic resources.

4.3. Assessment, Perceived Opacity and Academic Stress

The assessment dimension is approached from three angles: relevance of the modalities, clarity of the criteria, administrative temporality of the results. Some students consider that examinations do not always reflect the content actually taught; others mention the insufficient explication of the criteria, particularly in tests mobilizing oral skills, participation or practical competences.

The most recurrent complaint, however, concerns the late publication of results, of which student A says that the administration "stresses us a lot with the late publication of our results". The theme runs through the corpus and suggests that administrative temporality acts as a fully fledged pedagogical variable: when results are delayed, remediation is postponed, orientation decisions are disrupted and the trust relationship with the institution erodes. Assessment is therefore not only an act of measurement: its legitimacy depends on the readability of expectations, the coherence between courses and examinations, and the speed of feedback.

4.4. Pedagogical Relationship and Supervision

The pedagogical relationship is neither absent nor stabilized: it varies according to lecturers and departments. Student F, in Master 2, formulates this heterogeneity: "Some teachers are very available. When we don't understand, they take the time to explain again. But others, it's the lesson, and then they leave. We can't ask questions." The contrast identifies two regimes of presence, one that extends the lesson through explanation, the other that closes it at the exit of the classroom.

The demand is not merely affective. Student L, in Licence 3 (third-year undergraduate), links supervision to preparation for the profession: "The didactics professor helped us a lot to prepare model lessons. That gave us confidence for the internship." Availability then becomes a mediation towards the field; its absence accentuates academic isolation. In a teacher training college, this dimension has an exemplary value, since it indirectly models the future practices of student teachers.

4.5. Content and Unfinished Professionalization

The content of the programmes is not rejected in principle: several students acknowledge its intellectual interest and disciplinary relevance. However, they measure its value by its capacity to prepare for the realities of teaching, including in institutions that are themselves constrained. Student C, in sciences, opposes the prescribed curriculum to the field: "The programme is well designed on paper, but when you arrive in the field, you realize that we have never handled the equipment we are going to find in the classrooms." The same gap is found in English, where student R links the reading/oral imbalance

to a concrete internship difficulty: "In English, we read a lot of texts, but we don't speak enough. During the internship, I had trouble leading an oral expression lesson."

These two excerpts specify what the corpus designates as unfinished professionalization. Students do not contest the need for demanding theoretical learning; they ask that appropriated content, and not only the prescribed content, prepare for the gestures of the profession. Quality assurance is then called upon to examine transfer, and not only programme coverage.

4.6. Institutional Organization and the Governance of Everyday Life

The organizational dimension runs through the corpus: calendar, circulation of information, resource management, the administration's capacity to respond. Students acknowledge the purposes of the institution, but describe an everyday life hampered by delays and communication breakdowns. Student P, in Master 1, links the delay of results to a loss of orientation and, for some classmates, to dropping out: "The results are always published late. We don't know where we stand. Some of my classmates dropped out because of that." Student M, in Licence 2 (second-year undergraduate), for his part describes an informal circuit that takes the place of the administration: "The administration doesn't communicate. We learn about changes to the calendar through messages between students."

These two excerpts show that quality assurance cannot be reduced to the act of teaching. A late result and a calendar learned by hearsay weigh on trust as much as an unstocked laboratory. The mention of dropouts nonetheless remains a student statement: the corpus establishes neither its extent nor its causal link.

Table 1. Synthesis of the six analytical axes identified from the corpus (N = 20 interview sheets, coded A to T).

Axes	Dominant findings	Effects on perceived quality
Environment	Difficult accessibility, unstable electricity, limited documentary resources, weak connectivity, insufficient laboratories	Hindrance to the continuity of learning and to study conditions
Teaching strategies	Courses often highly theoretical, weak practical mediation, variable consideration of prerequisites	Gap between training objectives and actual learning
Assessment	Criteria sometimes unclear, examinations perceived as disconnected, late publication of results	Academic stress, feeling of opacity, weak formative function
Relationship and supervision	Heterogeneous availability; didactic supervision useful for internship preparation	Ambivalent experience; uneven professional confidence
Content	Programmes judged relevant but poorly instrumented; paper/field gap	Partial professional preparation
Organization	Late results, irregular communication, calendar learned through informal circuits	Weakened institutional trust; dropouts mentioned by students

5. Discussion

The results allow a central proposition: in a teacher-training institution located in a Sahelian context, quality is not an abstract attribute of the curriculum, but a situated experience of the institution, grasped from concrete indices (infrastructure, pedagogical relationship, readability of assessments, administrative efficiency). This reading corroborates the multilevel conception of UNESCO-IPE (2014).

It is not, however, a local variant of a generic African problem. Shabani et al. (2014), Materu (2007) and Ayoo et al. (2020) document disparities in capacities between countries and institutions, but the corpus does not allow a systematic comparison with other regions. It shows, nonetheless, that in Maroua, climate, landlockedness and energy fragility become academic variables. Quality assurance there is played out less in formal alignment with frameworks than in the capacity to make them practicable under territorial constraint.

The first contribution of the study is therefore to contextualize the CAMES framework. Far from contesting its relevance, the data invite it to be interpreted as a flexible matrix calling for territorial translation. The seven dimensions of the guide are operational, but their effectiveness depends on very concrete variables: campus accessibility, equipment maintenance, connectivity, libraries, administrative deadlines. Quality assurance cannot be dissociated from equity of equipment between institutions of the same system.

The second contribution concerns teacher training. In a higher teacher training college, the weakness of practice is not a technical gap among others: it affects the construction of professional identity. A student teacher who has never handled classroom equipment, or who has not spoken enough the language he or she will have to teach, enters the profession with incomplete professionalism. It is not enough for the programmes to be coherent on paper; they

must be sufficiently instrumented. This finding extends the requirement of continuous improvement formulated by Materu (2007), moving it from procedures to means.

The third contribution lies in the administrative dimension. The excerpts relating to the delay of results and informal communication show that elements often marginalized in quality policies affect the academic climate, to the point of being associated, in student discourse, with dropouts. Credible quality assurance should include indicators of responsiveness, transparency and quality of administrative service.

The study finally corroborates the value of student evaluation of teaching as an instrument of knowledge, and not only as a feedback procedure. Student perception cannot serve as sole proof, and the present corpus, secondary and not triangulated with lecturers or the administration, is a reminder of its limits. It nevertheless reveals dimensions of quality that formal indicators leave in the shadows.

6. Operational Recommendations

Five orientations emerge from the results.

1. Contextualize quality management at the scale of the ENS of Maroua, by explicitly integrating mobility constraints, climatic seasonality and connectivity into improvement plans.
2. Prioritize the strengthening of professionalization environments: science laboratories, language laboratories, pedagogical resource centres, effective access to digital technologies.
3. Formalize more transparent assessment arrangements, with explicit criteria, faster feedback and better coherence between taught content and examinations.
4. Consolidate pedagogical supervision through tutoring mechanisms, internship monitoring and regular feedback.
5. Institutionalize student listening as a permanent component of quality governance, in a logic of continuous improvement rather than one-off control.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the interview sheets A to T shows that the student teachers of the ENS of Maroua develop a demanding and concrete conception of quality assurance. For them, quality is measured by the relevance of the content, the availability of lecturers, the coherence of assessments, the solidity of infrastructure and the reliability of institutional organization. The tensions identified (the gap between theory and practice, insufficient equipment, weak connectivity, slowness in publishing results) indicate that the professionalization of future teachers remains partially hindered by systemic constraints.

The study thus invites us to go beyond a procedural conception of quality assurance in favour of a situated, relational and material approach. In a Sahelian context, quality assurance is not only a matter of standards: it concerns an institutional capacity to make standards practicable, fair and pedagogically fruitful. These conclusions hold for a corpus of twenty sheets compiled in 2015 and analysed secondarily, and would need to be tested by primary data collection triangulating the student voice with that of lecturers and the administration.

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