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Stakeholder Perceptions of Government-Led Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Nangarhar, Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study investigated stakeholder perspectives on government-led quality assurance in higher education institutions in Nangarhar Province, including perceptions of government support, implementation challenges, and quality improvement needs. The study employed an applied, quantitative descriptive survey design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 questions, which was developed from the research objectives, questions, and relevant literature, reviewed by 10 university professors, and pilot-tested with 25 individuals. The questionnaire demonstrated internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .82). The questionnaire was distributed in English through Google Forms. A total of 153 quality assurance and academic administrators participated, representing 83.6% of the 183 eligible personnel. Data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, and appropriate inferential statistical tests were also used to compare the relevant groups. The findings indicate that the value of quality assurance is widely understood by relevant stakeholders, but challenges remain in the areas of practical implementation of policies and standards, resource adequacy, systematic use of quality indicators, information systems, and capacity building. Respondents expressed mixed views on government support, coordination, and practical implementation of quality assurance. Overall, the findings indicate that effective coordination, sustained support, capacity building, systematic use of information, and evidence-based decision-making are essential requirements for strengthening quality assurance. As the study is based on the perceptions of stakeholders, its results should not be taken as a direct assessment of the actual quality or performance of institutions.

Keywords: Accreditation; Afghanistan; Capacity; Government; Institutions; Perceptions; Quality; Universities

Persepsi Pemangku Kepentingan terhadap Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan Tinggi oleh Pemerintah di Nangarhar, Afghanistan

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi pemangku kepentingan mengenai penjaminan mutu pendidikan tinggi yang dipimpin pemerintah di Provinsi Nangarhar, Afghanistan, termasuk dukungan pemerintah, tantangan pelaksanaan, dan kebutuhan peningkatan mutu. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain survei deskriptif terapan. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur berisi 20 pertanyaan yang dikembangkan berdasarkan tujuan penelitian, pertanyaan penelitian, dan literatur terkait. Instrumen ditelaah oleh 10 dosen dan diuji coba pada 25 orang, dengan konsistensi internal Cronbach's alpha sebesar 0,82. Kuesioner berbahasa Inggris disebarkan melalui Google Forms dan diisi oleh 153 pengelola penjaminan mutu serta kegiatan akademik terkait, atau 83,6% dari 183 personel yang memenuhi kriteria. Data dianalisis menggunakan frekuensi, persentase, dan uji statistik inferensial yang sesuai untuk membandingkan kelompok terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemangku kepentingan secara umum memahami pentingnya penjaminan mutu, tetapi masih menghadapi kendala dalam penerapan kebijakan dan standar, kecukupan sumber daya, pemanfaatan indikator mutu secara sistematis, sistem informasi, serta pengembangan kapasitas. Persepsi responden terhadap dukungan, koordinasi, dan pelaksanaan penjaminan mutu oleh pemerintah beragam. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya koordinasi yang efektif, dukungan berkelanjutan, pengembangan kapasitas, pemanfaatan informasi secara sistematis, dan pengambilan keputusan berbasis bukti. Karena penelitian didasarkan pada persepsi pemangku kepentingan, hasilnya tidak dapat dianggap sebagai penilaian langsung atas mutu atau kinerja lembaga pendidikan tinggi.

Kata kunci: Afghanistan; Akreditasi; Institusi; Kapasitas; Mutu; Pemerintah; Persepsi; Universitas

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of higher education is fundamentally important for the academic, economic, and social development of any country, and its quality assurance is often linked to government policy-making, regulation, financial support, and oversight(Rahimi & Ayubi, 2022). In Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar province, the higher education system has developed; however, its quality assurance systems face significant challenges(Akhtar, 2026). Therefore, this study analyzes the government's role in higher education in Nangarhar, assesses the effectiveness of government policies and institutions, and examines how this role impacts quality improvement. This study offers practical guidance for university reform, supports policymakers' decision-making, and aids quality assurance institutions. The main research question is, "What is the role of the government in quality assurance of higher education in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, and how effective has this role been in improving educational quality?" The objectives of this study include analyzing the role of the government, evaluating existing policies and mechanisms, identifying quality assurance efforts and challenges, gathering stakeholder opinions, and providing recommendations for strengthening quality.

Higher education is considered one of the fundamental pillars of social and economic development (Nabegu, 2023). The important role of higher education is that it not only equips individuals with the necessary skills but also contributes to the development of society (Rahimi & Ayubi, 2022). However, this view further links higher education to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If higher education does not provide people with the basic knowledge and skills, then goals such as quality education (SDG 4), poverty reduction (SDG 1), and economic growth (SDG 8) will face serious obstacles to achieving these goals; quality assurance in education is a vital requirement (Fahimi, 2023). Quality assurance mechanisms ensure that educational institutions provide teaching, assessment, and learning according to standards (Faizi et al., 2026). Quality assurance not only enhances the competence of students, but also increases social trust, and educational outcomes are aligned with labor market and international needs (Auzarmi, 2023). Therefore, quality assurance should be a central part of higher education policies and strategies, so as to pave the way not only for the personal development of individuals, but also to serve the broader development of society.

Literature Review

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations of Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Harvey and Green have analyzed the concept of quality in higher education and its various interpretations. Their findings indicate that quality is not a monolithic concept; rather, it is linked to the needs and expectations of universities, faculty members, students, and other stakeholders. The significance of this study for the current research lies in the premise that government-led quality assurance assessments should not rely solely on formal standards but should also incorporate stakeholder perceptions (Harvey & Green, 1993). Ryan reviewed existing literature on higher education quality assurance (QA), analyzing various concepts, models, and implementation strategies. The findings show that quality assurance systems vary according to national contexts and that the participation of faculty, students, and other stakeholders is crucial for quality improvement. This study provides a foundation for the current research by suggesting that the effectiveness of government-led QA in Nangarhar should also be evaluated from the perspectives of relevant stakeholders (Ryan, 2015). Harvey and Newton conducted an analytical study on external quality assessment and its organizational impacts. They argue that if quality

assurance focuses exclusively on compliance, accountability, and control, it may fail to drive genuine educational advancement. Therefore, this study is significant as it seeks to determine whether stakeholders in Nangarhar view the government's Quality Assurance (QA) system as a means to enhance actual quality, or merely as a process for monitoring and regulatory compliance (Harvey & Newton, 2004). Bardakci et al. analyzed the relationship between Quality Assurance outcomes and organizational change within universities. The findings indicate that the impact of QA varies across institutions and that formal assessment results alone are insufficient to demonstrate genuine quality improvement. Based on this, it is crucial for the current study to evaluate the effectiveness of government-led QA by considering stakeholder experiences and perceptions alongside formal documentation (Bardakci et al., 2024).

Governance, External Evaluation, and Quality Assurance Systems

Quality assurance in higher education is closely linked to governance, accountability, and institutional autonomy (Akhtar, 2026). Universities operate within an environment of competing demands from the state, the market, the academic community, and other stakeholders; consequently, a balance must be struck between the government's regulatory role and university autonomy (Garcia & Jamias, 2023). From this perspective, government-led quality assurance is not merely a tool for oversight but a mechanism for ensuring quality, accountability, and public trust (Azizi et al., 2026). This context sets the stage for the current study to evaluate stakeholder views on government-led quality assurance in Nangarhar, specifically in light of the government's regulatory and supervisory roles (Ebrahimi et al., 2025).

Zhang et al. provide an analysis of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area, demonstrating that clear standards and systematic evaluation mechanisms are crucial for quality assurance. The mere existence of standards does not guarantee quality improvement; their practical implementation, clarity, and the presence of a systematic evaluation process are equally essential (Zhang et al., 2019). Therefore, this study assesses the extent to which stakeholders in Nangarhar perceive government standards as clear, fair, implementable, and aligned with the actual needs of higher education (Akhtar, 2026). Choiruddin and Rohmah conducted a systematic literature review of the Government Quality Assurance System Model, examining quality assurance as a structured governmental system. From this perspective, standards, assessment, monitoring, accountability, and continuous improvement are viewed as interconnected elements (Rohmah, 2026). Consequently, a government-led QA system proves effective only when it extends beyond mere assessment and monitoring to incorporate practical mechanisms for continuous quality improvement. Building on this, the current study evaluates the practical operation, transparency, and effectiveness of such a system by examining the experiences of stakeholders in Nangarhar (Akhtar, 2026). Serrano et al. investigated the factors linking quality assurance systems to institutional performance. Their analysis demonstrates that the mere existence of a QA system does not guarantee high-level administrative or academic performance; rather, practical implementation and organizational factors are crucial (Serrano et al., 2025). Therefore, the effectiveness of QA must be assessed in relation to actual organizational performance and quality improvement outcomes. This perspective is significant for the current study, as it allows for an evaluation—based on the perceptions of stakeholders in Nangarhar—of the extent to which government-led QA is considered effective in enhancing quality, accountability, and institutional performance (Azizi et al., 2026).

Stakeholder Perspectives and the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance

Garcia and Jamias conducted a study on the concept of stakeholder-oriented quality assurance in higher education. The research indicates that various stakeholders hold differing perceptions of quality based on their respective needs, expectations, and experiences. Consequently, quality assurance should not be

evaluated solely from the institution's formal and managerial perspective; rather, the views of relevant stakeholders must also be incorporated (Garcia & Jamias, 2023). This perspective is fundamental to the current study, as it also examines stakeholder perceptions regarding government-led quality assurance, specifically within the context of higher education in Nangarhar (Akhtar, 2026). The effectiveness of the quality assurance framework in Afghanistan from the perspectives of Kabul University faculty members and officials responsible for quality assurance. The findings reveal that, although formal structures for quality assurance and accreditation have been established and monitoring and evaluation processes are in place, the system's outcomes do not always align with the expectations of beneficiaries (Rahimi & Ayubi, 2022). This study highlights a potential gap between the formal quality assurance structure and stakeholder perceptions. The current study differs by examining this same topic in Nangarhar—rather than Kabul—and by considering the views of a broader range of stakeholders. Azizi et al. analyzed faculty evaluation mechanisms, along with the associated challenges and opportunities, within the framework of the quality assurance system. Studies indicate that clearly defined assessment criteria, a transparent evaluation process, and appropriate feedback are essential for transforming assessment into a tool for quality enhancement rather than merely an administrative compliance exercise (Azizi et al., 2026). This discussion is significant for the current research because the perceptions of faculty and academic staff constitute a crucial stakeholder dimension in evaluating the effectiveness of government-led quality assurance (QA) (Akhtar, 2026). Wafa and Muhabat examined the role of monitoring and evaluation in enhancing higher education quality in Afghanistan. A comparative analysis of international experiences and relevant literature suggests that systematic, resource-backed, and technology-supported monitoring and evaluation are vital for quality, accountability, and continuous institutional improvement (Wafa & Muhabat, 2026). According to this study, the effectiveness of government-led QA should not be measured solely by the execution of the assessment itself but must also encompass feedback and institutional improvement. Consequently, the present study evaluates aspects of QA monitoring, evaluation, and practical quality enhancement from the perspective of stakeholders (Akhtar, 2026).

Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Afghanistan: Achievements and Challenges

Welch and Wahidyar have analyzed the establishment, development, and key challenges of Quality Assurance (QA) in Afghanistan. Their study indicates that QA is linked to the broader processes of higher education regulation, accreditation, and institutional improvement; however, the mere existence of formal structures is insufficient for the system's effectiveness (Welch & Aziz, 2022). Building on this foundation, the current study moves beyond the national-level discourse to specifically examine the perceptions of stakeholders in Nangarhar. Fahimi has investigated the current status and implementation challenges of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Afghanistan. The study emphasizes that the success of QA depends not only on the existence of standards but also on implementation capacity, institutional commitment, and the cooperation of relevant stakeholders (Fahimi, 2023). This discussion is significant for the current study, as it seeks to determine how stakeholders in Nangarhar evaluate the practical effectiveness of the government's QA system. Rahimi and Ayubi have provided a theoretical analysis of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation standards set by Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education. Their discussion focuses on the conceptual basis of these standards and the necessity of their practical implementation (Rahimi & Ayubi, 2022). The current study is significant because it bridges these theoretical standards with practical experience, evaluating the extent to which stakeholders in Nangarhar perceive the government's QA standards as clear, appropriate, and feasible to implement. The opportunities and challenges associated with implementing the first standard of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Afghanistan. The study indicates that the effective implementation of these standards

requires adequate administrative, academic, and human capacity (Ebrahimi et al., 2025). This finding is significant for the current research, as it reveals—through the perceptions of stakeholders—the extent to which government QA standards in Nangarhar are considered feasible and effective in practice.

Research Gaps Regarding Quality and Institutional Performance in Nangarhar

Akhtar investigated the relationship between perceived government capacity and quality assurance (QA) effectiveness in Nangarhar. While their study contextualized the QA discussion within the local setting of Nangarhar, their focus remained on the link between government capacity and QA effectiveness rather than on the direct perceptions of various stakeholders (Akhtar, 2026). Consequently, the current study expands this discourse by examining the experiences and assessments of diverse stakeholders. Awrang explored the relationship between knowledge management and organizational performance in Nangarhar, demonstrating that the performance of higher education institutions is linked to internal managerial capacities (Awrang & Nizami, 2024). This finding suggests that QA effectiveness cannot be evaluated in isolation from an institution's internal operations and managerial environment. Therefore, the present study assesses the practical effectiveness of QA through the lens of stakeholder perceptions (Ebrahimi et al., 2025). The impact of the abuse of power on educational and learning processes in Nangarhar. Their studies indicate that authority, accountability, and intra-institutional relationships can influence the quality of education. This issue is significant for the current study, as perceptions regarding government-led QA are linked not only to formal standards but also to transparency, accountability, and institutional practices (Azizi et al., 2026). Barlas et al. examined the relevance of higher education from the perspective of Afghan university graduates. The study indicates that quality should be evaluated not only in terms of learning outcomes but also regarding its alignment with societal, labor market, and professional needs (Barlas et al., 2024). This perspective reinforces the importance of stakeholder-based Quality Assurance (QA), as different stakeholders bring diverse experiences and criteria to quality assessment.

METHODS

This study employed an applied quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey design to assess, analyze, and understand the role of government in quality assurance in higher education. The study sought to gain in-depth insights from the participants' perspectives, experiences, and institutional perspectives to identify existing policies, challenges, and areas for collaboration. A Google Forms questionnaire was developed with 20 thematic questions to collect data. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and shared with participants via WhatsApp for data collection. Participants accessed the questionnaire through an online link and recorded their responses. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on the study objectives, research questions, and relevant literature on quality assurance in higher education and the role of government in quality assurance practices. To establish content validity and ensure the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items, the initial questionnaire was reviewed by 10 university professors with relevant academic expertise. Their feedback was considered in revising and finalizing the questionnaire. Subsequently, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 25 participants who were not included in the final sample. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. Following the expert review and pilot testing, the finalized questionnaire was administered to the study participants. This approach was an effective, fast, and easy method of data collection given the constraints of time, space, and resources. The study used purposive sampling to select individuals directly involved in quality assurance issues. The study covered 10 universities in Nangarhar Province, including nine private universities and one public university. A total of 183 quality assurance

staff members working in these institutions constituted the eligible population for the study. Of these, 153 quality assurance staff members responded to the questionnaire, representing 83.6% of the eligible population of 183. The diversity of participants helped to compare the views of different institutions. Among the 153 respondents, 45 (29.4%) were faculty deans, 10 (6.5%) were heads of quality assurance, 10 (6.5%) were academic deputies, 45 (29.4%) were responsible for quality assurance subcommittees, and 43 (28.2%) were executive managers and staff of quality assurance units. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize the participants' responses and identify patterns in their views regarding quality assurance practices, challenges, and government roles. The results are presented through tables, graphs, and numbers to facilitate transparency and analysis.

The study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical principles for academic research. As the study involved an anonymous, voluntary questionnaire and did not collect personally identifying or sensitive information, no formal institutional ethical approval was required under the applicable institutional procedures. The questionnaire was developed and administered in English through Google Forms. All 20 questionnaire items and their response options were presented in English, and the same English-language version was used for all participants. No translation or back-translation was undertaken because the instrument was administered exclusively in English. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by 10 university professors to ensure that the wording, clarity, and content of the items were appropriate for the intended participants.

Table 1. Sampling Frame and Respondent Characteristics

Category	Number	Participants
University	10	Public Universities (35), Private Universities (118)
Respondent positions	153/183	Faculty deans (45), Heads of QA (10), Academic Division (10), QA subcommittee coordinators (45), QA executive managers and staff (43)
Total respondents		153/183 (83.6%)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this study reflect the perceptions and experiences reported by the respondents rather than an objective assessment of government performance. Participants expressed mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of government support and regulation of quality assurance. While some respondents viewed the government's role as effective, others considered it only somewhat effective or ineffective. These findings therefore indicate how stakeholders perceive government-led quality assurance practices and should not be interpreted as an independent audit or objective measurement of government performance.

Table 2. Institutional Priority Assigned to Quality Assurance

Quality assurance priority	n	%
A top priority (central to our mission)	61	39.9
A priority, co-equal with other concerns	45	29.4
Important, but other concerns take precedence	36	23.5
Not important or outside our responsibility	11	7.2
Total	153	100.0

Table 2 indicates that the 153 respondents, 61 (39.9%) ranked QA as their institution's top priority, and 45 (29.4%) ranked it as an equal priority to other institutional concerns. In total, 106 respondents (69.3%) rated QA as a high institutional priority.

Table 3. Institution Type × QA Priority

Institution type	Top priority	Co-equal	Important but secondary	Not important	Total
Private	47	33	28	10	118
Public	14	12	8	1	35
Total	61	45	36	11	153

Note. Chi-square test: χ^2 (3) = 1.56, p = .668, Cramer's V = .101.

Table 3 shows that no statistically significant relationship was found between institution type and QA priority (p > .05). Cramer's V (.101) also indicates a weak association. Therefore, public and private institutions in this sample do not differ significantly in terms of QA priority.

Table 4. Availability of an Official Definition of Quality

Official definition	n	%
Yes	109	71.2
Currently developing	31	20.3
No	13	8.5
Total	153	100.0

Table 4 indicates that the majority of respondents (71.2%) said that their institutions have a formal definition for higher education quality. Only 8.5% of respondents reported that their institutions lack such a formal definition. This shows that the concept of quality has been formalized in many institutions, but 20.3% of institutions are still in the process of developing a definition.

Table 5. Factors Considered in Defining Educational Quality

Factor	n	% of respondents
Research and innovation output	110	71.9
Faculty quality and development	104	68.0
Student learning outcomes	97	63.4
Talent retention in Nangarhar province	90	58.8
Student graduation rates	89	58.2
Equitable access for rural and underprivileged students	80	52.3
Infrastructure and technology	80	52.3
Reducing dropout and attainment gaps	71	46.4
Employment outcomes of graduates	70	45.8

Note: This was a multiple-response question; therefore, percentages represent the proportion of respondents selecting each factor and do not sum to 100%.

Table 5 indicates that research and innovation output was the most frequently selected quality dimension (71.9%), followed by faculty quality and development (68.0%) and student learning outcomes (63.4%). This indicates that respondents consider quality to be a multidimensional construct.

Table 6. Institutional Data Capacity and Integration of Equity into Quality Assurance

Indicator	Response category	n	%
Capacity to collect disaggregated data	Yes, for all students	51	33.3
	Yes, for some categories	50	32.7
Capacity to collect disaggregated data	Planning to develop capability	26	17.0
	No	26	17.0

Capacity to collect disaggregated data	Total	153	100.0
Equity as part of QA	Yes	86	56.2
	Planning to integrate	37	24.2
Equity as part of QA	No	30	19.6
	Total	153	100.0

Table 6 shows that 33.3% of respondents reported that their institutions collect disaggregated data for all students, 32.7% reported this capacity for some categories, and 34.0% reported no current capacity or plans to develop it. In terms of equity, 56.2% of institutions consider equity to be part of QA, 24.2% plan to include it, and 19.6% do not include it. Overall, 80.4% of institutions are considering equity now or in the future. The findings indicate that institutional recognition of equity is higher than data capacity. Therefore, strengthening data infrastructure, staff training, and evidence-based QA systems is a critical need.

Table 7. Data Capacity × Satisfaction with QA

Data capacity	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
No	11	11	2	2
Planning	5	9	8	4
Some categories	5	7	26	12
All students	2	0	18	31

Note. Pearson Chi-square: $\chi^2(9) = 51.00$, $p < .001$; *Cramer's V = .333*; *Spearman's rho:* $\rho = .424$, $p < .001$.

Table 7 indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between data capacity and QA satisfaction. The Spearman correlation ($\rho = .424$) indicates a moderate positive relationship. That is, institutions with strong capacity to collect disaggregated data generally report higher satisfaction with their existing QA practices.

Table 8. Satisfaction with Current QA Practices

Satisfaction level	**n**	%
Very satisfied	49	32.0
Somewhat satisfied	64	41.8
Somewhat dissatisfied	25	16.3
Very dissatisfied	15	9.8
Total	153	100.0

Table 8 shows that 49 respondents (32.0%) were very satisfied and 64 (41.8%) were somewhat satisfied with current QA practices. Overall, 73.8% of respondents reported some degree of satisfaction.

Table 9. Major Challenges in Quality Assurance

Challenge	**n**	%
Insufficient staff capacity/skills	105	68.6
Weak government/accrediting-body collaboration	102	66.7
Lack of clear standards/definitions	92	60.1
Low alignment with job market	91	59.5
Resistance from faculty/administrators	90	58.8
Limited resources/funding	81	52.9
Data collection/analysis issues	77	50.3

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

Table 9 identifies insufficient staff capacity (68.6%), weak cooperation between the government and accrediting bodies (66.7%), and unclear quality standards (60.1%) as the most frequently reported challenges.

Table 10. Interest in a Regional QA Network

Response	n	%
Yes	91	59.5
Maybe / need more information	39	25.5
No	23	15.0
Total	153	100.0

Table 10 shows that the majority of respondents (59.5%) supported a regional QA network, and another 25.5% were potentially interested. In total, 85.0% of respondents either directly supported it or accepted the possibility of forming a network after further information.

Table 11. Regional QA Network Interest × Satisfaction

Network interest	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
Yes	7	17	23	44
Maybe	9	15	13	2
No	9	8	3	3

Note. χ^2 *(6) = 44.18,* $p < .001$; *Cramer's V = .380*

Table 11 indicates that there is a statistically significant association between regional QA network interest and satisfaction. Cramer's V = .380 indicates a moderate association. Respondents who support the formation of a network also have higher levels of satisfaction with QA practices.

Table 12. Government Effectiveness and Communication with Higher Education Institutions

Variable	Category	n	%
Government/MoHE Effectiveness	Very effectively	46	30.1
	Somewhat effectively	41	26.8
Government/MoHE Effectiveness	Effectively	35	22.9
	Ineffectively	22	14.4
Government/MoHE Effectiveness	Not sure	9	5.9
Government Communication	Regularly	49	32.0
	Occasionally	59	38.6
Government Communication	Rarely	30	19.6
	Never	15	9.8

Table 12 shows that respondents' overall perception of the government/MoHE's performance is relatively positive, but government interactions with institutions are mostly occasional (38.6%). This indicates that regular communication, coordination, and sustained institutional engagement are needed to further strengthen QA.

Table 13. Perceived Government Effectiveness and QA Satisfaction

Government effectiveness	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
Very effectively	4	4	10	28
Somewhat effectively	8	10	13	10
Effectively	5	7	16	7
Ineffectively	7	9	4	2
Not sure	1	2	4	2

Note. χ^2 *(12) = 44.46,* $p < .001$; *Cramer's V = .311* ; *Spearman's rho:* $\rho = .359$, $p < .001$.

Table 13 indicates that a statistically significant positive association was found between Government/MoHE perceived effectiveness and QA satisfaction. Spearman's rho (.359) indicates a moderate positive relationship. In general, respondents who rated government/MoHE performance positively also reported higher levels of satisfaction with QA practices.

Table 14. Areas Where Government Should Increase Its Involvement

Area	n	%
Faculty training and development	133	86.9
Monitoring and evaluation	109	71.2
Equity and achievement gaps	104	68.0
Collaboration between universities	100	65.4
Digital infrastructure/data tools	95	62.1
Unified quality standards	94	61.4
Accountability and transparency	87	56.9

Table 14 indicates that faculty training and development was the strongest demand for government involvement (86.9%). This finding supports the argument that human capacity is a central issue in QA implementation.

Table 15. Government Involvement Priorities and Desired Quality Assurance Reforms

Area / Reform	n	%
Faculty training/development	133	86.9
Monitoring and evaluation	109	71.2
Equity/achievement gaps	104	68.0
University collaboration	100	65.4
Digital infrastructure/data tools	95	62.1
Unified quality standards	94	61.4
Accountability/transparency	87	56.9
Clear unified national quality definition	121	79.1
Transparency/accountability	103	67.3
Training/capacity building	98	64.1
Education–employment data systems	97	63.4
Financial/technological support	94	61.4
Regular university consultation	92	60.1
Provincial QA units	89	58.2
Learning outcomes/improvement plans	88	57.5
Equity/inclusion	84	54.9
Government–institution dialogue	84	54.9

Table 15 shows that respondents most want from the government faculty training (86.9%), clear national quality standards (79.1%), monitoring and evaluation (71.2%), and transparency/accountability. These findings indicate that capacity building, clear standards, effective monitoring, data systems, and government-university collaboration are essential requirements for strengthening QA.

Table 16. Summary of Bivariate Statistical Tests

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Test	Statistic	p-value	Effect size
Institution type	QA priority	Chi-square	$\chi^2(3)=1.56$	.668	V=.101
Institution type	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(3)=3.52$	.318	V=.152
QA priority	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(9)=26.89$	.001	V=.242
Quality definition	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(6)=18.02$	.006	V=.243
Data capacity	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(9)=51.00$	<.001	V=.333

Equity integration	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(6)=20.10$	.003	V=.256
Network interest	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(6)=44.18$	<.001	V=.380
Government effectiveness	QA satisfaction	Chi-square	$\chi^2(12)=44.46$	<.001	V=.311
Government communication	QA satisfaction	Spearman	ρ=.287	<.001	Moderate
QA priority	QA satisfaction	Spearman	ρ=.334	<.001	Moderate
Data capacity	QA satisfaction	Spearman	ρ=.424	<.001	Moderate
Government effectiveness	QA satisfaction	Spearman	ρ=.359	<.001	Moderate

Note: $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant.

Table 16 shows that QA priority, quality definition, data capacity, equity integration, network interest, and government effectiveness are statistically significantly related to QA satisfaction ($p < .05$). The strongest bivariate relationship is observed with data capacity ($\rho = .424$), followed by government effectiveness ($\rho = .359$) and QA priority ($\rho = .334$). In contrast, institution type is not significantly related to QA satisfaction ($p = .318$). These results suggest that the public/private type of institution is less important than satisfaction; instead, data capacity, effective government support, and institutional priority to QA are more strongly associated with higher levels of stakeholder satisfaction.

Table 17. Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting QA Satisfaction

Predictor	**β**	**OR**	**p-value**	**Interpretation**
QA priority	0.210	1.234	.057	Marginal positive association
Data capacity	0.290	1.336	.004	Significant positive predictor
Equity integration	0.158	1.171	.222	Not significant
Government effectiveness	0.245	1.278	.012	Significant positive predictor
Communication frequency	0.055	1.056	.652	Not significant
Public institution	0.027	1.027	.904	Not significant

Table 17 shows that data capacity and government effectiveness are significant positive predictors of QA satisfaction. Data capacity is statistically significant with OR = 1.336, p = .004 and government effectiveness is statistically significant with OR = 1.278, p = .012. Other variables, including institution type, are not statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that stakeholders generally recognize the importance of quality assurance (QA) in higher education, but its institutionalization remains incomplete. Although many institutions have formal definitions of quality and report relatively positive satisfaction with existing QA practices, significant variation remains in how quality is understood and implemented. Importantly, QA priority was significantly associated with overall satisfaction ($\chi^2(9) = 26.89$, $p = .001$; $\rho = .334$, $p < .001$), suggesting that institutions giving greater strategic attention to QA tend to report more positive experiences. This supports the view of Akhtar and Niazi (2026) that quality should be clearly defined and embedded in institutional policy and practice. Practically, Afghan higher education institutions need to move beyond formal QA procedures toward continuous institutional improvement.

Government/MoHE effectiveness emerged as an important factor associated with stakeholder satisfaction. Government effectiveness was significantly related to QA satisfaction (χ^2 (12) = 44.46, $p <$ .001; $\rho = .359$, $p < .001$), and remained a significant predictor in the multivariable analysis (OR = 1.278,

p = .012). Respondents particularly emphasized faculty development, monitoring and evaluation, unified quality standards, and transparency as areas requiring stronger government involvement. These findings suggest that government responsibility extends beyond policy formulation to effective implementation, capacity building, monitoring, and institutional support. This is consistent with Azizi et al. (2026) and Fahimi (2023), who emphasize that effective QA should contribute to institutional improvement rather than function merely as a compliance mechanism.

The study found that institutions monitor several indicators, particularly research output, faculty quality, student outcomes, and accreditation-related measures. However, the capacity to collect and use disaggregated data remains uneven. Data capacity showed a significant relationship with QA satisfaction (χ^2 (9) = 51.00, p < .001; ρ = .424, p < .001) and was the strongest independent predictor in the multivariable model (OR = 1.336, p = .004). This finding highlights the importance of reliable institutional data for evidence-based QA. It also suggests that strengthening digital data systems, analytical capacity, and staff skills could improve both QA decision-making and the identification of differences in student outcomes.

Despite positive perceptions of QA, respondents identified several barriers to effective implementation, particularly insufficient staff capacity, weak government–institution collaboration, unclear standards, limited resources, and difficulties in data collection and analysis. These challenges indicate that the main problem is not simply the absence of QA awareness but the limited institutional capacity to translate QA policies into practice. The findings therefore support the argument that QA reforms in Afghanistan require sustained professional development, adequate resources, clearer standards, and stronger coordination between government and higher education institutions.

The analysis did not identify statistically significant differences between public and private institutions in either QA priority or overall satisfaction. Institution type was not significantly associated with QA priority (χ^2 (3) = 1.56, p = .668) or QA satisfaction (χ^2 (3) = 3.52, p = .318). Similarly, institution type was not a significant predictor of satisfaction in the multivariable model (OR = 1.027, p = .904). This suggests that the challenges and perceptions of QA are not confined to one institutional sector. Instead, they appear to reflect broader systemic issues affecting higher education in Nangarhar. Consequently, government interventions should be designed around institutional needs and capacity rather than based primarily on public–private status.

Overall, the findings are consistent with previous literature emphasizing clear quality definitions, evidence-based assessment, institutional capacity, and effective government leadership. Similar to international discussions of QA, the present study shows that formal policies alone are insufficient unless institutions have the data, skills, resources, and coordination required for implementation. The findings also extend the Afghan context by demonstrating quantitatively that data capacity and perceived government effectiveness are particularly important for stakeholder satisfaction. The practical implication is that higher education QA in Nangarhar should focus on a unified national quality framework, stronger institutional data systems, faculty and staff capacity building, transparent monitoring, and sustained government–institution collaboration. Scientifically, the study contributes evidence that QA effectiveness depends not only on the existence of standards but also on the institutional and governmental capacity to implement and use those standards for continuous improvement.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of relevant stakeholders on government-led quality assurance in higher education institutions in Nangarhar province. The findings, based on data from 153 respondents, indicate that the value of quality assurance is widely understood, but there are still

challenges in the areas of practical implementation of policies and standards, quality-related information systems, systematic use of quality indicators, data analysis, and capacity building. The findings also indicate that despite the existence of government legal and administrative frameworks, respondents' perspectives on their practical implementation and government support and coordination are not uniformly positive across all areas. Therefore, effective coordination, sustained support, capacity building, and evidence-based data use between the government and higher education institutions are considered essential to strengthen quality assurance. Overall, the study suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the practical implementation of existing mechanisms, systematic monitoring, data utilization, and institutional coordination to strengthen quality assurance in Nangarhar. As this study is based on the perceptions of stakeholders, its findings should not be taken as a direct assessment of the actual quality or performance of higher education institutions.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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