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Systemic Barriers to Total Quality Management in Libyan Higher Education under Conditions of Institutional Instability

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A B S T R A C T

Despite the growing adoption of Total Quality Management in higher education, limited attention has been given to how institutional instability reshapes quality management practices in fragile systems, particularly in under-researched contexts such as Libya. This study examines the systemic barriers to implementing Total Quality Management in Libyan higher education, with a focus on the University of Zawia. Using a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 146 academic and administrative participants across multiple institutional levels. A structured questionnaire was employed to assess five dimensions of quality management, including leadership and strategic planning, organizational culture and human resources, infrastructure, monitoring and continuous improvement, and student orientation alongside external pressures. The findings indicate that the overall level of challenges is high (M = 3.54, SD = 0.93), reflecting deeply embedded structural constraints. The most critical barriers include political and economic instability, limited financial capacity, inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional follow-up mechanisms, and insufficient staff training. These constraints are not isolated operational issues but are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, shaping a systemic pattern of quality management limitations. This study reinforces the argument that Total Quality Management in fragile higher education contexts cannot be effectively understood through procedural or technical frameworks alone. Instead, it requires a context-sensitive approach that accounts for the interaction between institutional weaknesses and external instability. The findings highlight the need for integrated reforms involving strategic coordination, capacity building, and adaptive quality assurance systems supported by sustained regulatory and financial commitment.

Keywords: total quality management, higher education, quality assurance, institutional challenges

Introduction

Quality has become one of the central concerns of higher education institutions worldwide as universities are increasingly expected to demonstrate accountability, improve academic standards, respond to stakeholder needs, and contribute to national development. In this context, Total Quality Management (TQM) has emerged as an influential approach for enhancing institutional performance through continuous improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, teamwork, and systematic evaluation (Crawford & Shutler, 1999; Elbi & Krema, 2024; Husayn et al., 2025). Originally developed in industrial and business settings, TQM has gradually been adapted to educational institutions, including universities, where it is used to strengthen teaching, administration, student services, and organizational effectiveness (Asif et al., 2013; Oakland, 2014). The growing interest in TQM in higher education reflects the recognition that universities must move beyond traditional administrative models and adopt more integrated approaches to quality that address both academic and managerial dimensions (Elihami et al., 2024).

In higher education, TQM is not limited to the improvement of isolated functions; rather, it involves a comprehensive institutional philosophy that emphasizes leadership commitment, strategic planning, staff participation, evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement across all areas of university life (Kanji et al., 1999; Abdullaha et al., 2026). The application of TQM in universities is particularly important because higher education institutions operate in complex environments shaped by multiple stakeholders, including students, faculty, employers, governments, and society at large. As a result, quality in higher education must be understood as multidimensional, involving efficiency, relevance, effectiveness, and responsiveness (Harvey & Green, 1993; Aladi & Barkah, 2026). When properly implemented, TQM can support universities in building quality culture, improving institutional coordination, and strengthening their ability to meet changing educational and social demands. However, prior studies have often focused on the general benefits, implementation models, or descriptive perceptions of TQM, while giving less attention to how institutional and contextual barriers interact in fragile higher education systems.

Despite its potential, the implementation of TQM in higher education remains challenging, especially in developing and transitional contexts. Universities often face organizational resistance, limited resources, inadequate training, weak monitoring systems, and insufficient leadership support, all of which can reduce the effectiveness of quality initiatives (Psomas & Antony, 2017; Stensaker, 2008). In many cases, institutions may formally adopt quality assurance structures without fully embedding them in everyday institutional practice. This creates a gap between policy and implementation, where quality management becomes

procedural rather than transformative. The literature also shows that TQM in higher education requires more than technical compliance; it depends on institutional culture, human resource development, and the ability to convert evaluation into continuous improvement (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007; Sulistyowati et al., 2025). Although these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to concentrate on stable or general institutional environments and offer limited explanation of how political, economic, and organizational instability can intensify TQM barriers. Thus, the existing literature has not sufficiently addressed TQM implementation as a context-sensitive challenge in fragile higher education systems.

These challenges are particularly relevant in the Libyan higher education context, where universities operate under conditions shaped by administrative constraints, financial pressures, and broader political and economic instability (Yahya et al., 2025; Masoud et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Although quality assurance has gained increasing attention in higher education reform across the Arab region, the practical implementation of comprehensive quality management systems in Libya remains uneven. Institutions such as the University of Zawia are expected to improve academic quality and institutional performance while simultaneously dealing with limited infrastructure, resource shortages, and changing policy conditions (Omran et al., 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025; Masuwd et al., 2026). In such a context, examining the challenges of applying TQM is both academically and practically important. It helps identify the barriers that limit effective implementation and provides evidence that can guide institutional improvement efforts and policy development. More specifically, there is still limited empirical evidence on how internal institutional weaknesses and external contextual pressures jointly shape the implementation of TQM in Libyan universities.

Accordingly, this study investigates the challenges of applying TQM in Libyan higher education, with specific reference to the University of Zawia. It focuses on key dimensions commonly associated with successful quality management, including leadership and strategic planning, human resources and organizational culture, resources and infrastructure, monitoring and continuous improvement, and student focus alongside external contextual challenges. The study addresses a gap in the literature by examining TQM not simply as an administrative framework, but as a system of quality practices shaped by the interaction between internal organizational conditions and external instability.

By examining respondents' perceptions across these dimensions, the study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the institutional and environmental factors affecting TQM implementation. The contribution of this study is twofold: empirically, it provides evidence from an under-researched Libyan higher

education context; theoretically, it extends discussion of TQM in higher education by highlighting that quality barriers in fragile systems are interconnected rather than isolated. In doing so, it contributes to the growing literature on quality management in higher education and offers context-sensitive insights relevant to universities in Libya and similar settings.

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine the challenges of applying Total Quality Management (TQM) in Libyan higher education, with specific reference to the University of Zawia. The quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic measurement of participants' perceptions across a set of predefined dimensions and allows the researcher to summarize patterns through statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The target population consisted of academic and administrative personnel involved in university operations, since TQM implementation in higher education depends on both academic and managerial actors. A total of 146 respondents participated in the study, including faculty members, administrative staff, heads of departments, quality assurance officers, and deans or vice deans. The sample was drawn from different faculties and units within the university to ensure a broader institutional representation. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on five dimensions: leadership and strategic planning, human resources and organizational culture, resources and infrastructure, monitoring and continuous improvement, and student focus and external challenges. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaire was designed to capture the major institutional and contextual barriers affecting TQM implementation in the Libyan higher education environment. Before administration, the instrument was reviewed for clarity, relevance, and content appropriateness in relation to the study objectives and the higher education quality literature (Oakland, 2014). The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, in order to describe both the demographic profile of the respondents and their responses to each questionnaire item and dimension. Mean scores were interpreted using predetermined ranges to classify the level of challenge as very low, low, moderate, high, or very high. This analytical procedure was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to identify the perceived degree and pattern of TQM-related challenges rather than to test causal relationships. Through this method, the study generated an empirical overview of the main barriers influencing quality management practices at the University of

Zawia and provided a basis for discussing their implications for higher education policy and institutional improvement in Libya.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' Demographic Profile

In this study, the majority of respondents were male (63.0%), while female respondents represented 37.0% of the sample. This pattern may reflect the gender composition of academic and administrative staffing in some Libyan higher education institutions, where male participation in leadership and institutional decision-making positions often remains more visible. Although gender does not determine perceptions in a fixed way, differences in institutional roles and experiences may contribute to some variation in how quality management challenges are understood (Shalghoum et al., 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025). This distribution also suggests that perceptions of TQM may be shaped by organizational access and administrative exposure, particularly in contexts where leadership and management roles remain unevenly distributed.

Moreover, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 40–49 years age group (34.9%), followed by those aged 30-39 years (32.2%). Respondents aged 50 years and above accounted for 20.5%, while the youngest group, under 30, represented 12.3% of the sample. This distribution suggests that the study captured views from participants with relatively mature professional experience, which is useful in studies of institutional quality because experienced staff are more likely to have encountered administrative procedures, evaluation practices, and reform challenges over time.

Faculty members formed the largest group of respondents (46.6%), followed by administrative staff (19.9%). Heads of department and deans/vice deans each represented 12.3%, while quality assurance officers accounted for 8.9% of the sample. This diversity of positions is important because TQM implementation is a whole-institution process that involves academic leadership, administrative coordination, and specialized quality units. The inclusion of respondents from different institutional levels strengthens the study by allowing a broader understanding of the organizational challenges affecting quality management. It also reduces the risk of interpreting TQM solely from the viewpoint of one occupational group, thereby offering a more institution-wide perspective on barriers to implementation.

Respondents with more than 15 years of experience constituted the largest category (30.8%), followed by those with 11–15 years of experience (28.8%). Participants with 5–10 years of experience represented 26.0%, while those with less than 5 years represented 14.4%. This indicates that most respondents had substantial professional experience in higher education. From a quality

management perspective, experienced respondents may provide more informed judgments about institutional planning, administrative routines, staff development, and evaluation systems, since they are more likely to have observed both strengths and recurring challenges over time (Asif et al., 2013). This pattern is important because it suggests that the study's results are grounded in perceptions shaped by sustained institutional engagement rather than short-term observation.

Respondents came from a range of academic units, with the Faculty of Education contributing the highest proportion (22.6%), followed by the Faculty of Arts (16.4%), Faculty of Science (14.4%), and Faculty of Economics (13.0%). The representation of multiple faculties is valuable because the implementation of TQM may differ across disciplines depending on administrative structures, teaching practices, resource availability, and program requirements.

The majority of respondents (60.3%) had not received formal training in quality management or TQM, while only 39.7% reported having such training. This finding is particularly significant because staff training is widely regarded as a foundational requirement for successful TQM implementation. TQM depends not only on formal policies and leadership commitment but also on the ability of employees to understand quality standards, use evaluation tools, and participate in continuous improvement processes (Oakland, 2014; Maati et al., 2025; Baroud & Aljarmi, 2025). Limited training may therefore weaken institutional readiness for quality reform and partly explain why some quality initiatives do not progress beyond procedural compliance.

Overall, the demographic profile of the respondents suggests that the sample was sufficiently diverse in terms of gender, age, institutional role, experience, and faculty affiliation. At the same time, the data indicate several contextual factors that may influence respondents' perceptions of TQM challenges. For example, participants in leadership or quality assurance positions may be more aware of policy and planning issues, whereas faculty members may be more sensitive to challenges related to teaching, workload, and student services. Likewise, respondents with prior quality-related training may evaluate TQM implementation differently from those who have not received such preparation. Taken together, these characteristics suggest that the findings reflect a broad institutional reading of TQM challenges rather than a narrow or highly specialized perspective.

Leadership and Strategic Planning

Leadership commitment and strategic planning are widely regarded as core requirements for the successful implementation of TQM in educational institutions. TQM depends on the ability of senior leadership to provide direction, communicate quality goals, mobilize staff participation, and ensure that institutional planning aligns with long-term quality improvement efforts (Oakland, 2014; Baroud et al.,

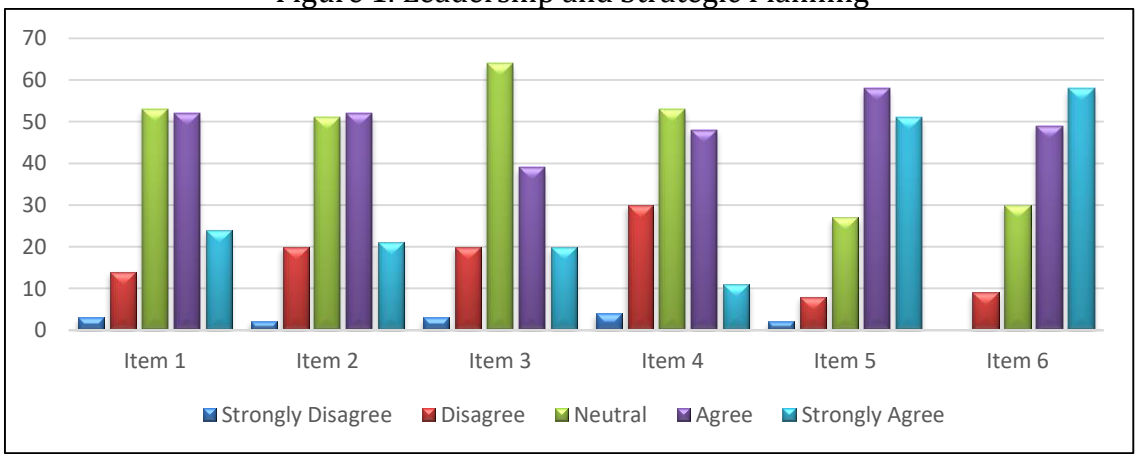
2025). In universities, weak leadership commitment often leads to fragmented planning, poor communication, and inconsistent implementation of quality initiatives (Kanji et al., 1999; Kasheem & Rusmana, 2025).

Table 1. Item-Level Analysis of Leadership and Strategic Planning

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	University leadership shows commitment to quality management principles.	3.55	0.95	High
2	Top management supports the implementation of Total Quality Management.	3.48	0.95	High
3	The university has a clear strategic plan for quality improvement.	3.36	0.95	Moderate
4	Quality objectives are well communicated to academic and administrative staff.	3.22	0.95	Moderate
5	Weak leadership commitment is a major challenge to applying TQM.	4.01	0.94	High
6	Lack of clear planning reduces the effectiveness of quality management initiatives.	4.07	0.92	High

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that respondents perceived this dimension at a generally positive but cautious level. The highest-rated item was Item 6, which stated that lack of clear planning reduces the effectiveness of quality management initiatives (M = 4.07, SD = 0.92), followed by Item 5, indicating that weak leadership commitment is a major challenge to applying TQM (M = 4.01, SD = 0.94). These findings suggest that respondents strongly recognized the negative consequences of insufficient planning and inconsistent leadership support. By contrast, the lowest-rated item was Item 4, which stated that quality objectives are well communicated to academic and administrative staff (M = 3.22, SD = 0.95), followed by Item 3 concerning the existence of a clear strategic plan for quality improvement (M = 3.36, SD = 0.95).

Figure 1. Leadership and Strategic Planning



Substantively, these results indicate that although respondents acknowledged some degree of leadership commitment, they were less convinced that such commitment was translated into clear institutional planning and effective communication. This pattern is important because TQM requires not only symbolic support from management but also structured and participatory planning processes. Strategic clarity is essential for embedding quality into university operations, while communication of quality goals is necessary for aligning academic and administrative units around shared standards (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007). The gap between perceived leadership commitment and planning clarity may therefore indicate that quality management at the university remains more declarative than operational.

These findings indicate that leadership support at the University of Zawia may be visible at a formal level, but less effective at the operational level where quality priorities must be translated into planning, communication, and coordinated action. This distinction is theoretically important because TQM is not sustained by managerial endorsement alone; it requires leadership that is strategic, participatory, and capable of embedding quality principles into institutional routines. The moderate scores for planning clarity and communication suggest that quality management may still function more as an administrative expectation than as a fully internalized institutional practice.

This pattern is consistent with previous studies showing that leadership is one of the strongest determinants of TQM effectiveness in higher education, particularly when linked to planning coherence and staff engagement (Kanji et al., 1999; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007). The present findings extend this discussion by suggesting that in the Libyan context, leadership challenges are intensified by weak planning structures and limited communication channels, which reduce the practical reach of quality initiatives even when support appears to exist in principle.

Human Resources and Organizational Culture

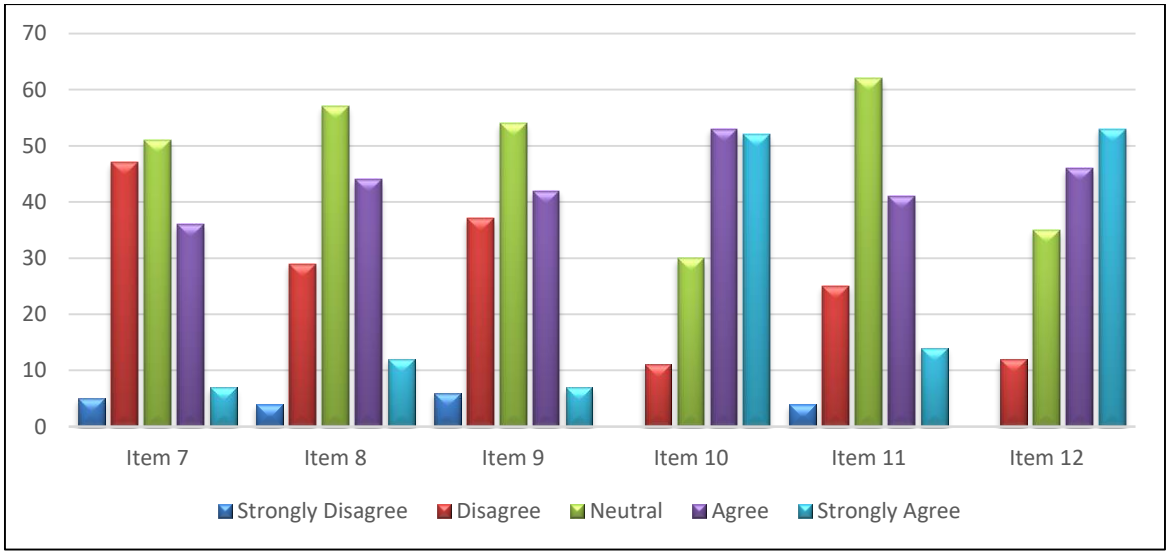
Human resources and organizational culture are central to TQM because quality improvement ultimately depends on the attitudes, competencies, and participation of staff members. Training, teamwork, staff empowerment, and openness to change are among the most frequently cited prerequisites for quality success in higher education (Alrumayh et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2025). Conversely, resistance to change, weak professional development, and traditional bureaucratic culture often undermine TQM implementation (Psomas & Antony, 2017; Lestari et al., 2025).

Table 2. Item-Level Analysis of Human Resources and Organizational Culture

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Staff receive adequate training on quality management practices.	2.95	0.95	Moderate
2	Employees are encouraged to participate in quality improvement activities.	3.21	0.95	Moderate
3	Professional development supports the successful implementation of TQM.	3.05	0.95	Moderate
4	Resistance to change among staff is a challenge to quality management.	4.00	0.93	High
5	The university promotes a culture of teamwork and continuous improvement.	3.30	0.95	Moderate
6	Traditional organizational culture makes TQM application difficult.	3.96	0.92	High

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, the strongest items in this dimension were Item 10, which stated that resistance to change among staff is a challenge to quality management (M = 4.00, SD = 0.93), and Item 12, which stated that traditional organizational culture makes TQM application difficult (M = 3.96, SD = 0.92). These results indicate that respondents saw organizational culture as a substantial barrier to quality reform. The lowest mean was found for Item 7, concerning whether staff receive adequate training on quality management practices (M = 2.95, SD = 0.95), followed by Item 9, which referred to whether professional development supports the successful implementation of TQM (M = 3.05, SD = 0.95).

Figure 2. Human Resources and Organizational Culture



The results suggest that the main challenge in this dimension is not simply a lack of willingness, but an institutional culture that has not yet fully adapted to the collaborative and developmental logic of TQM. Resistance to change is likely

reinforced by insufficient training and weak professional development, meaning that staff may be expected to implement quality practices without receiving the practical preparation necessary to do so confidently and consistently. In such conditions, quality procedures may be treated as external requirements rather than shared institutional commitments.

This interpretation aligns with prior higher education studies emphasizing that TQM succeeds when institutions invest in staff capacity, participatory culture, and continuous learning (Alhumud et al., 2023; Ho et al., 2023). The present findings contribute further by showing that in the University of Zawia context, organizational resistance and traditional administrative culture appear to function together, creating a human-resource barrier that weakens genuine quality ownership.

Resources and Infrastructure

The implementation of TQM in higher education requires adequate material and technological support. Financial resources, modern infrastructure, access to equipment, and reliable information systems are essential for ensuring that quality policies can be translated into everyday practice (Oakland, 2014; Abrahem et al., 2025). In developing contexts, however, resource constraints often limit the effectiveness of quality management systems and create a gap between institutional aspirations and operational reality (Materu, 2007; Husin et al., 2025; Taufikin et al., 2025).

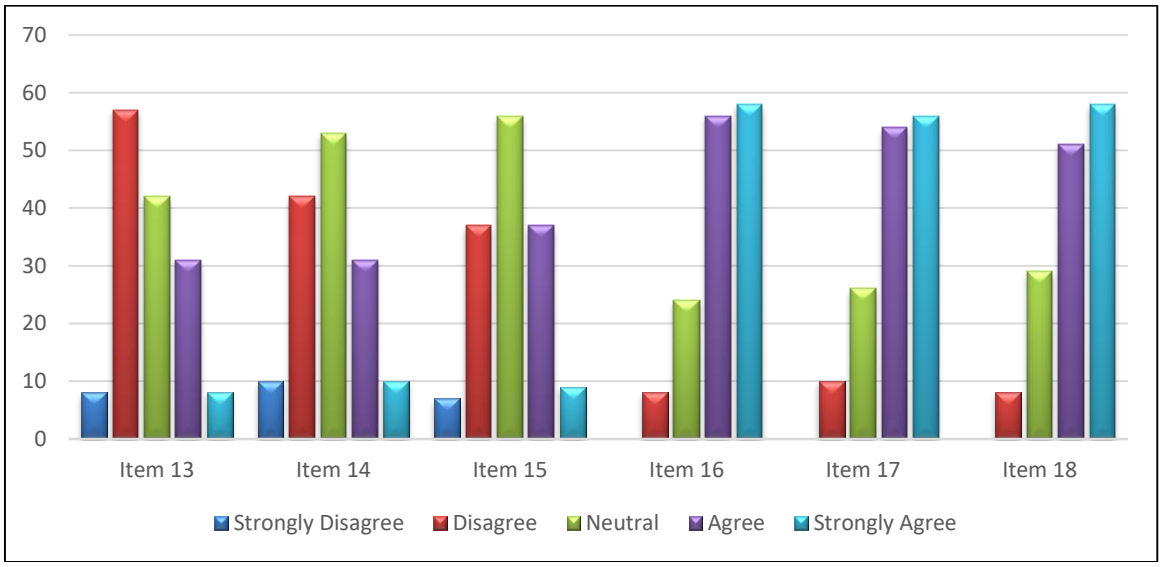
Table 3. Item-Level Analysis of Resources and Infrastructure

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	The university has sufficient financial resources to support TQM implementation.	2.60	0.95	Low
2	Technological resources are adequate for quality management processes.	2.74	0.95	Moderate
3	University facilities and infrastructure support quality improvement efforts.	2.88	0.95	Moderate
4	Limited financial support is a major obstacle to TQM application.	4.12	0.91	High
5	Shortage of equipment and technology affects the achievement of quality standards.	4.14	0.95	High
6	Lack of infrastructure weakens the implementation of quality management.	4.08	0.91	High

Table 3 and Figure 3 indicate that respondents perceived resource-related challenges very clearly. The highest-rated item was Item 17, which stated that shortage of equipment and technology affects the achievement of quality standards (M = 4.14, SD = 0.95), followed closely by Item 16, which indicated that limited

financial support is a major obstacle to TQM application (M = 4.12, SD = 0.91), and Item 18, concerning lack of infrastructure (M = 4.08, SD = 0.91). In contrast, the lowest-rated item was Item 13, which stated that the university has sufficient financial resources to support TQM implementation (M = 2.60, SD = 0.95), falling in the low range.

Figure 3. Resources and Infrastructure



These results show that respondents do not view TQM failure primarily as a conceptual issue; rather, they see it as strongly constrained by implementation capacity. In other words, quality reform may be recognized as desirable, but its institutional realization is weakened by inadequate funding, insufficient technology, and poor infrastructure. This makes resource scarcity a structural rather than incidental obstacle, since it affects multiple quality-related activities, including staff development, monitoring systems, learning support, and administrative modernization.

This finding is consistent with research on quality assurance in developing higher education systems, where institutional commitment often exceeds available capacity (Materu, 2007; Dill, 2007; Alsaeh et al., 2026). The present study reinforces that pattern in the Libyan context by showing that financial and infrastructural weakness is one of the most decisive factors limiting the translation of TQM principles into practice.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement are fundamental elements of TQM. Quality management is based on the systematic collection of data, the use of performance indicators, and the continuous review of processes in order to improve institutional outcomes (Oakland, 2014; Crawford & Shutler, 1999). In universities, effective quality assurance mechanisms depend not only on

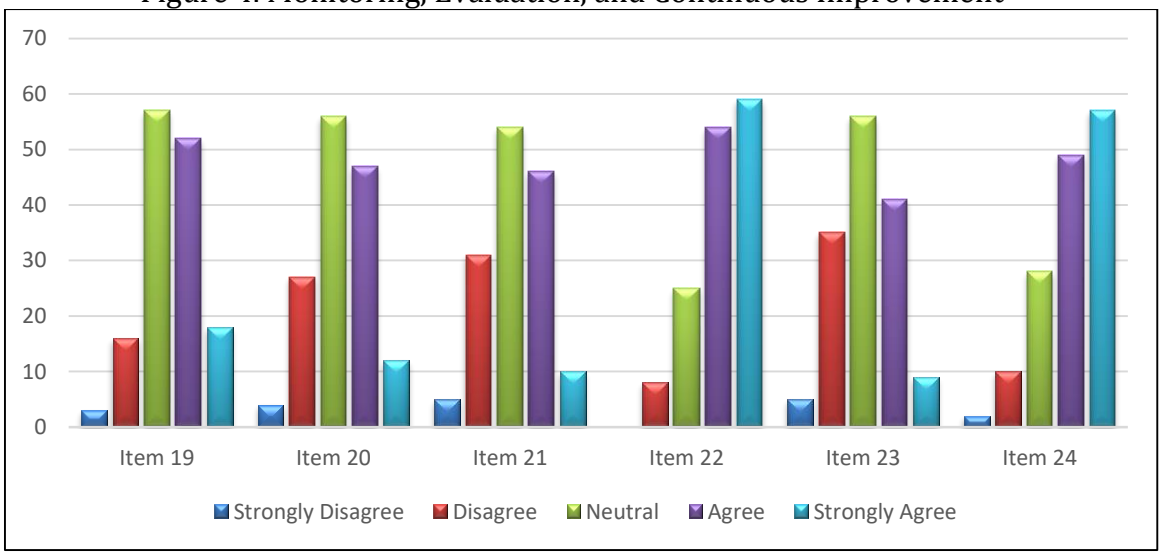
conducting evaluations but also on using their results for follow-up, decision-making, and institutional learning (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Alouzi et al., 2026).

Table 4. Item-Level Analysis of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	The university regularly evaluates its academic and administrative performance.	3.41	0.95	High
2	Performance indicators are used effectively to monitor quality.	3.28	0.95	Moderate
3	Evaluation results are used for institutional improvement.	3.19	0.95	Moderate
4	Weak follow-up after evaluation is a challenge to TQM implementation.	4.11	0.91	High
5	Continuous improvement practices are applied effectively in the university.	3.10	0.95	Moderate
6	Quality management processes lack proper monitoring and review.	4.01	0.95	High

Table 4 and Figure 4 show a mixed picture. The strongest item was Item 22, stating that weak follow-up after evaluation is a challenge to TQM implementation (M = 4.11, SD = 0.91), followed by Item 24, which indicated that quality management processes lack proper monitoring and review (M = 4.01, SD = 0.95). Meanwhile, the lowest means were found for Item 23, concerning whether continuous improvement practices are applied effectively in the university (M = 3.10, SD = 0.95), and Item 21, regarding whether evaluation results are used for institutional improvement (M = 3.19, SD = 0.95).

Figure 4. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement



This pattern suggests that the university may possess elements of a formal evaluation system, but lacks a sufficiently strong improvement cycle. Respondents seem to recognize that performance is assessed to some extent, yet they are less convinced that evaluation findings are systematically used to generate corrective action, institutional learning, or sustainable quality enhancement. The problem, therefore, is not only the presence of evaluation mechanisms, but the weakness of the link between evaluation and action.

This finding supports quality assurance literature that distinguishes between procedural assessment and transformative improvement (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Stensaker, 2008; Ayad et al., 2026). In the present case, the results imply that monitoring structures may exist more in form than in function, thereby limiting the feedback loop that lies at the center of TQM philosophy.

Student Focus and External Challenges

A student-centred orientation is a major principle of quality management in education, as institutions are expected to respond to student needs, improve support services, and use feedback to enhance learning environments (Alouzi, 2024; Almajri et al., 2025; Aljarmi et al., 2025). At the same time, universities do not operate in isolation. External factors such as public policy, political conditions, and economic instability can strongly affect institutional capacity to implement quality reforms, particularly in fragile national contexts.

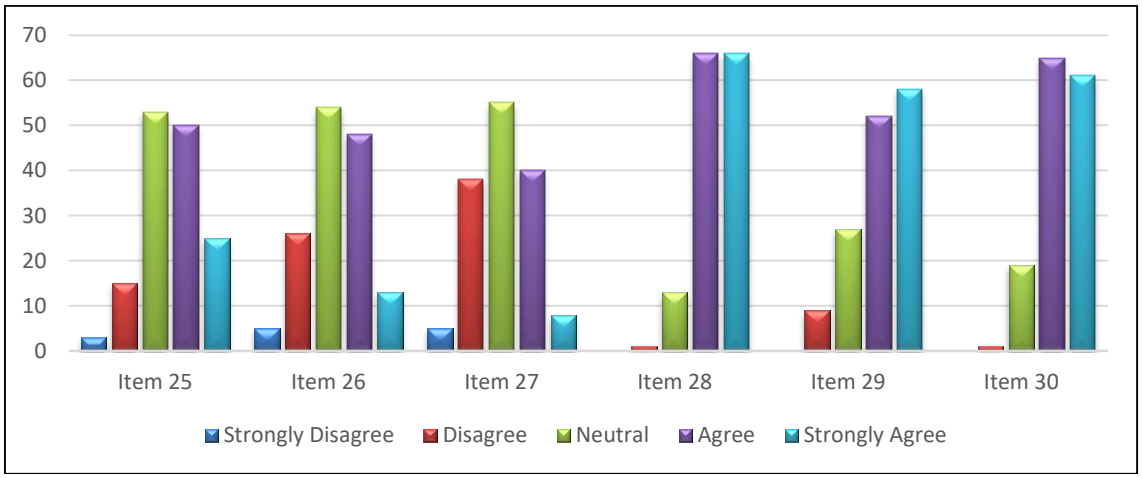
Table 5. Item-Level Analysis of Student Focus and External Challenges

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	The university considers student needs in its quality improvement efforts.	3.44	0.95	High
2	Student feedback is used to improve academic and administrative services.	3.26	0.95	Moderate
3	Student support services meet acceptable quality standards.	3.02	0.95	Moderate
4	Political and economic instability affects quality management in higher education.	4.35	0.78	Very High
5	Government policies and regulations influence the success of TQM implementation.	4.08	0.90	High
6	External conditions in Libya make the application of TQM more difficult.	4.27	0.77	Very High

As presented in Table 5 and Figure 5, the highest mean in this dimension was recorded for Item 28, which stated that political and economic instability affects quality management in higher education (M = 4.35, SD = 0.78), followed by Item 30, indicating that external conditions in Libya make the application of TQM

more difficult (M = 4.27, SD = 0.77). These two items reached the very high level, making them among the strongest items in the entire questionnaire. The lowest item in this dimension was Item 27, concerning whether student support services meet acceptable quality standards (M = 3.02, SD = 0.95), followed by Item 26, which addressed the use of student feedback to improve academic and administrative services (M = 3.26, SD = 0.95).

Figure 5. Student Focus and External Challenges



The prominence of external instability in this dimension is analytically significant because it indicates that respondents do not interpret TQM challenges as purely internal management failures. Instead, they perceive quality reform as deeply affected by a wider environment marked by instability, regulatory uncertainty, and constrained institutional continuity. This means that even where internal quality efforts exist, their effectiveness may be weakened by external pressures beyond the direct control of the university.

This interpretation is consistent with studies arguing that quality models developed in relatively stable environments may be difficult to apply fully in fragile higher education systems (Crawford & Shutler, 1999; Abdulghani et al., 2025; Abouzied et al., 2025). At the same time, the moderate ratings for student feedback and support services show that internal student-centered quality practices also need strengthening. The findings therefore point to a dual challenge in the Libyan context: universities must improve internal responsiveness while simultaneously navigating broader structural instability.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the application of Total Quality Management in Libyan higher education remains constrained by a wide range of interconnected challenges. The findings indicate that these challenges are not limited to one institutional domain, but extend across leadership and planning, human resources, organizational culture, infrastructure, monitoring systems, and the broader

external environment. The high overall mean suggests that respondents perceive the barriers to TQM implementation as substantial and persistent, rather than occasional or marginal. This confirms that TQM in higher education, particularly in fragile contexts, should be understood as a systemic process shaped by the interaction of institutional capacity and environmental pressures rather than as a purely administrative framework.

The findings showed that the most critical challenges included political and economic instability, inadequate financial support, shortages of equipment and technology, weak institutional infrastructure, and limited follow-up after evaluation. These findings suggest that universities such as the University of Zawia face a dual burden. They must improve internal quality systems while also operating under difficult external conditions. At the same time, the results point to weaknesses in staff training, professional development, communication of quality goals, and the use of evaluation results for continuous improvement, indicating that the institutional culture of quality has not yet been fully consolidated. The study therefore contributes theoretically by highlighting that TQM barriers in higher education are interconnected and context-sensitive, especially in systems affected by instability and resource constraints.

Overall, the study concludes that successful TQM implementation in Libyan higher education requires more than formal quality assurance structures. It demands strategic and sustained leadership, staff capacity building, stronger monitoring and review processes, improved infrastructure, and a supportive national policy environment. For the University of Zawia and similar institutions, quality management should therefore be approached as a comprehensive and long-term institutional transformation. Future improvement efforts will be more effective when they address both the internal organizational conditions of universities and the wider political, economic, and regulatory realities that shape higher education in Libya. Practically, the findings imply that university leaders should strengthen strategic coordination, communication, and staff development, while policymakers should provide more stable regulatory and financial support for quality reform.

This study is not without limitations. It was conducted within a single university context and relied on self-reported survey data, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other higher education institutions in Libya or beyond. In addition, the study primarily employed descriptive analysis, which means that the relationships among variables were not examined in greater statistical depth. Future research may address these limitations by including multiple universities, applying comparative or mixed-methods designs, and using inferential approaches to examine how demographic, institutional, and contextual factors influence TQM implementation. Such studies would provide a broader and

more analytically robust understanding of quality management challenges in Libyan and other transitional higher education systems.

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