Publisher: Centre for Behaviour and Wellness Advocacy, Ghana
Co-publisher: Cherkas Global University, USA
Has been issued since 2014
ISSN 2410-4981. E-ISSN 2508-1055
2025. 12(3): 220-242

DOI: 10.13187/jare.2025.3.220

Journal homepage:
http://kadint.net/our-journal.html

Student Teaching Evaluations as Tools for Quality Assurance within the Sub-Saharan African Higher Education: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges and biases associated with Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET) in sub-Sahara African (SSA) higher education and their implications for quality assurance. Using a systematic review guided by PRISMA 2020, 80 peer-reviewed studies (2014–2024) in English were analysed. The search focused on SET challenges and biases within SSA higher education. SET research fluctuated over the decade, with peaks in 2020 and 2022 (11 studies each). South Africa led in publications with 20 studies (25.0 %), followed by Ghana and Kenya, highlighting notable regional disparities. Methodologically, mixed-method approaches were most common, with 26 studies (32.5 %), followed by qualitative and quantitative approaches. Key challenges were reliability issues (73 studies, 91.2 %), administrative constraints and low response rates (70 studies, 87.5 % each), and cultural misalignment (67 studies, 83.7 %). Significant biases included grading leniency in 67 studies (83.7 %), gender stereotypes in 60 studies (75.0 %), and language bias in 53 studies (66.2 %). The resulting implications were distorted teaching effectiveness (74 studies, 92.5 %), unfair promotions (73 studies, 91.2 %), low morale (70 studies, 87.5 %), and compromised quality assurance (66 studies, 82.5 %). Proposed alternatives featured student learning outcomes in 71 studies (88.7 %), peer evaluations in 70 studies (87.5 %), and self-assessments in 64 studies (80.0 %). Key recommendations were regular tool validation (74 studies, 92.5 %), awareness training (73 studies, 91.2 %), and standardised instruments (70 studies, 87.5 %). These factors undermined teaching quality and morale. Alternatives like learning outcomes, peer and self-evaluations, and multi-source feedback were suggested. Recommendations included training, regular review, anonymised, standardised tools, and mixed methods to enhance fairness, reliability, and policy alignment in SSA's faculty evaluation.

Keywords: Student Evaluations of Teaching, Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Faculty Evaluation, Sub-Saharan African Universities, Systematic Review.

1. Introduction

Student evaluations of teaching (SET) have become a widely used mechanism for assessing instructional effectiveness and informing quality assurance policies in higher education institutions worldwide (Spooren et al., 2013). Within the sub-Saharan African (SSA) higher education concern,

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Received: 27 August 2025 Revised: 01 December 2025 Accepted: 05 December 2025
Published: 30 December 2025

SET play a crucial role in faculty performance reviews, accreditation processes, and pedagogical improvements (Seldin et al., 2010). However, despite their widespread use, the reliability and validity of SET have been widely debated due to inherent challenges and biases that compromise their objectivity and effectiveness (Uttl et al., 2017).

A growing body of literature highlights multiple biases that influence student evaluations, including gender and racial bias, as well as non-instructional factors such as grading leniency, course difficulty, and instructor popularity (Boring et al., 2016; MacNell et al., 2015). Research suggests that female and minority instructors often receive lower evaluations, irrespective of their actual teaching effectiveness (Valencia, 2020). Similarly, students' perceptions of their instructors are frequently shaped by factors unrelated to pedagogical quality, such as physical appearance, personality traits, and even course scheduling (Esarey, Valdes, 2020). These biases undermine the credibility of SET as an objective tool for evaluating teaching performance and ensuring quality assurance in higher education.

Despite these concerns, SET remain a dominant method for assessing faculty effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained SSA institutions where alternative evaluation methods, such as peer reviews and classroom observations, are less feasible due to financial and logistical limitations (Machingambi, Wadesango, 2011). Moreover, existing studies on SET have largely focused on Western contexts, with limited research examining how these challenges and biases manifest within SSA higher education settings (Marsh, 2007). This knowledge gap raises important questions about the validity of SET in SSA institutions and their implications for faculty development, institutional reputation, and overall educational quality.

Given the increasing reliance on SET SSA higher education, it is imperative to critically examine their effectiveness and explore potential strategies to mitigate biases. This systematic review aims to synthesise existing literature on the challenges and biases in SET, specifically within the SSA higher education context. By addressing these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse on higher education quality assurance and inform policy recommendations for more equitable and effective faculty assessment practises.

The reliance on SET as a primary tool for evaluating teaching effectiveness has been a subject of intense debate in higher education globally. While these evaluations are intended to provide insights into teaching quality, their validity and reliability have been increasingly questioned due to the presence of various biases and methodological limitations (Hornstein, 2017; Quansah et al., 2024). In the SSA context, where higher education systems are undergoing significant transformation, the use of SET presents unique challenges that warrant closer examination

One of the primary concerns with SET is their susceptibility to biases related to gender, race, and ethnicity. Research has shown that female instructors and instructors of colour often receive lower evaluation scores compared to their male and white counterparts, even when teaching identical courses (Chávez, Mitchell, 2020). This bias can have significant implications for faculty career progression, particularly in contexts where SET are heavily weighted in decisions related to promotion and tenure. Moreover, the lack of student training in providing objective feedback further exacerbates the problem, as students may base their evaluations on factors unrelated to teaching quality, such as personal preferences or grading leniency (Hornstein, 2017).

In addition to biases, the methodological approaches used in studies on SET vary widely, which complicates the interpretation and comparison of findings. While some studies rely on classical measurement theories, others employ more advanced psychometric models, such as Generalisability Theory (GT) and Many-Facet Rasch Modelling (MFRM) (Quansah et al., 2024). These advanced models offer a more nuanced understanding of the sources of variability in SET, but their application in the SSA higher educational context remains limited. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a systematic review that examines the methodological approaches used in studies on SET in SSA and identifies best practices for future research.

Furthermore, the SSA higher education landscape presents unique challenges that may further complicate the use of SET. These challenges include resource constraints, increasing student numbers, and the need for quality assurance in a rapidly evolving educational environment (Kay, 2022). In this context, the reliance on SET as a primary tool for evaluating teaching effectiveness raises significant concerns, particularly given the potential for these evaluations to be influenced by factors unrelated to teaching quality. Therefore, it is imperative to systematically review the existing literature to understand the trends, methodological approaches, and challenges

associated with SET in SSA higher education. The primary objective of this systematic review is to explore the challenges and biases associated with SET in higher education institutions across SSA. Specifically, the review seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What yearly trends and methodological approaches are discussed in studies on SET in SSA higher education?
2. What key challenges are discussed in studies on SET in higher education institutions across SSA?
3. What forms of biases (such as gender, race, age, and grading leniency) are discussed in studies on SET in SSA higher education?
4. What implications of student biases are discussed in studies of students' evaluation of teaching performance within the SSA higher education?
5. What alternative student evaluation methods are discussed in studies on evaluations of teaching performances within the SSA higher education?

2. Methodology

Study inclusion and exclusion criteria

To ensure a comprehensive and relevant review, studies were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria were:

– Studies published between 2014 and 2024 to capture the most recent trends and discussions.

– Research focusing on SET within SSA higher education institutions.

– Empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses that examine biases, methodological approaches, and quality assurance in SET.

– Studies published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable conference proceedings.

– Studies available in English to ensure accessibility and consistency in analysis.

The exclusion criteria were:

– Studies focusing on primary or secondary education rather than higher education.

– Research conducted outside the SSA region without direct relevance to SSA higher education.

– Opinion notes, Lecture notes, author commentaries, and editorials lacking empirical or systematic analysis.

– Studies with insufficient methodological rigour or unclear findings.

Database search and study selection

Information Sources

To ensure a comprehensive and systematic review of the literature on SET in SSA higher education, multiple academic databases and other sources were consulted. The primary databases searched included Google Scholar, PubMed (for education and social science studies), ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR and African Journals Online (AJOL). These databases were chosen to capture a broad range of peer-reviewed studies, policy papers and empirical research on the subject. In addition, the reference lists of relevant articles were manually searched to identify additional studies that met the inclusion criteria. The final search of each database was conducted to ensure the most recent and pertinent literature was included in the review.

Structured Search Strategy

A structured search strategy was employed to maximise the retrieval of relevant studies. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were used to refine searches and enhance precision. The general search strategy included: ("student evaluations of teaching" OR "teacher ratings") AND ("bias" OR "limitations" OR "challenges") AND ("higher education" OR "university") AND ("quality assurance" OR "teaching effectiveness") AND ("Sub-Saharan Africa").

For bias-focused research outputs, the search string consisted of: ("gender bias" OR "racial bias" OR "age bias" OR "grading bias") AND ("student evaluations of teaching") AND ("higher education" OR "university") AND ("Sub-Saharan Africa"). For studies addressing quality assurance and policy-related implications, the search strategy applied: ("student feedback" OR "faculty evaluation") AND ("quality assurance" OR "higher education policy") AND ("Sub-Saharan Africa").

Filters were applied where relevant, including restrictions to peer-reviewed journal articles, studies published between 2014 and 2024, and English-language publications.

To strengthen the search and ensure adequate representation across the region, this general search was complemented by a country-specific search strategy to capture research outputs focused on individual countries in SSA. Countries included in the search string were: “Angola” OR “Benin” OR “Botswana” OR “Burkina Faso” OR “Burundi” OR “Cabo Verde” OR “Cameroon” OR “Central African Republic” OR “Chad” OR “Comoros” OR “Congo” OR “Democratic Republic of Congo” OR “Côte d’Ivoire” OR “Djibouti” OR “Equatorial Guinea” OR “Eritrea” OR “Eswatini” OR “Ethiopia” OR “Gabon” OR “Gambia” OR “Ghana” OR “Guinea” OR “Guinea-Bissau” OR “Kenya” OR “Lesotho” OR “Liberia” OR “Madagascar” OR “Malawi” OR “Mali” OR “Mauritania” OR “Mauritius” OR “Mozambique” OR “Namibia” OR “Niger” OR “Nigeria” OR “Rwanda” OR “São Tomé and Príncipe” OR “Senegal” OR “Seychelles” OR “Sierra Leone” OR “Somalia” OR “South Africa” OR “South Sudan” OR “Sudan” OR “Tanzania” OR “Togo” OR “Uganda” OR “Zambia” OR “Zimbabwe.”

Selection Process

The selection process followed a two-stage screening approach. In the first stage, two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of retrieved studies against the inclusion criteria. Articles that did not meet the criteria were excluded at this stage. In the second stage, full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Any disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion or by consulting a third reviewer. Automation tools, such as Rayyan QCRI, were used to facilitate the screening process and enhance efficiency. A PRISMA 2020 flow diagram documented the selection process, including the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and included in the final synthesis. The process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework by Page et al. (2021), an update of the PRISMA technique by Moher et al. (2009). The study selection process focused on education-related databases, including ERIC (n = 1,358), ProQuest Education Database (n = 274), and Taylor & Francis Online (n = 506), yielding a total of 2,138 potential studies. Additionally, studies were retrieved from digital libraries and repositories, including Journal Storage (JSTOR) (n = 11), SpringerLink (n = 18), and ScienceDirect (n = 11).

After removing 826 duplicate records, 1,143 studies were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria, leaving 169 studies for further screening. These studies were assessed for relevance to the challenges and biases in SET and their implications for quality assurance in African higher education. Following this screening, full-text retrieval was attempted for all 147 studies; however, 52 were studies not in SSA, reducing the total to 116. Further exclusions were made, removing 29 books and 32 non-English studies, bringing the total to 55. From digital libraries and repositories, 40 studies were sought (JSTOR: n = 11; SpringerLink: n = 18; ScienceDirect: n = 11), of which 9 were not retrieved. Additionally, 30 studies from education-focused databases were assessed for eligibility, of which 7 were excluded due to language barriers or insufficient specificity regarding SET challenges and biases. Similarly, 25 studies from digital libraries and repositories were assessed, with 8 books excluded. In total, 55 studies were selected from databases, while 15 were obtained from digital libraries and repositories. Ultimately, 80 studies met the inclusion criteria and were deemed directly relevant to the challenges and biases in SET and their impact on quality assurance in SSA higher education.

Grouping Findings from Selected Articles

A literature matrix was developed to categorise and map the characteristics of the selected studies on student SET in SSA higher education institutions. The matrix consisted of multiple columns representing key study features and rows representing individual studies. Each study was carefully analysed and independently evaluated by the authors based on the following criteria: (1) year of publication and author(s), (2) country and institution of focus, (3) research methodologies used (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches and data collection instruments), (4) key challenges and limitations of SET in SSA, (5) influence of biases (gender, race, age, grading leniency) on SET, (6) implications of biased SET on faculty performance, promotion, and quality assurance, (7) alternative or complementary methods for assessing teaching effectiveness, and (8) policies and best practises for mitigating biases and improving SET reliability.

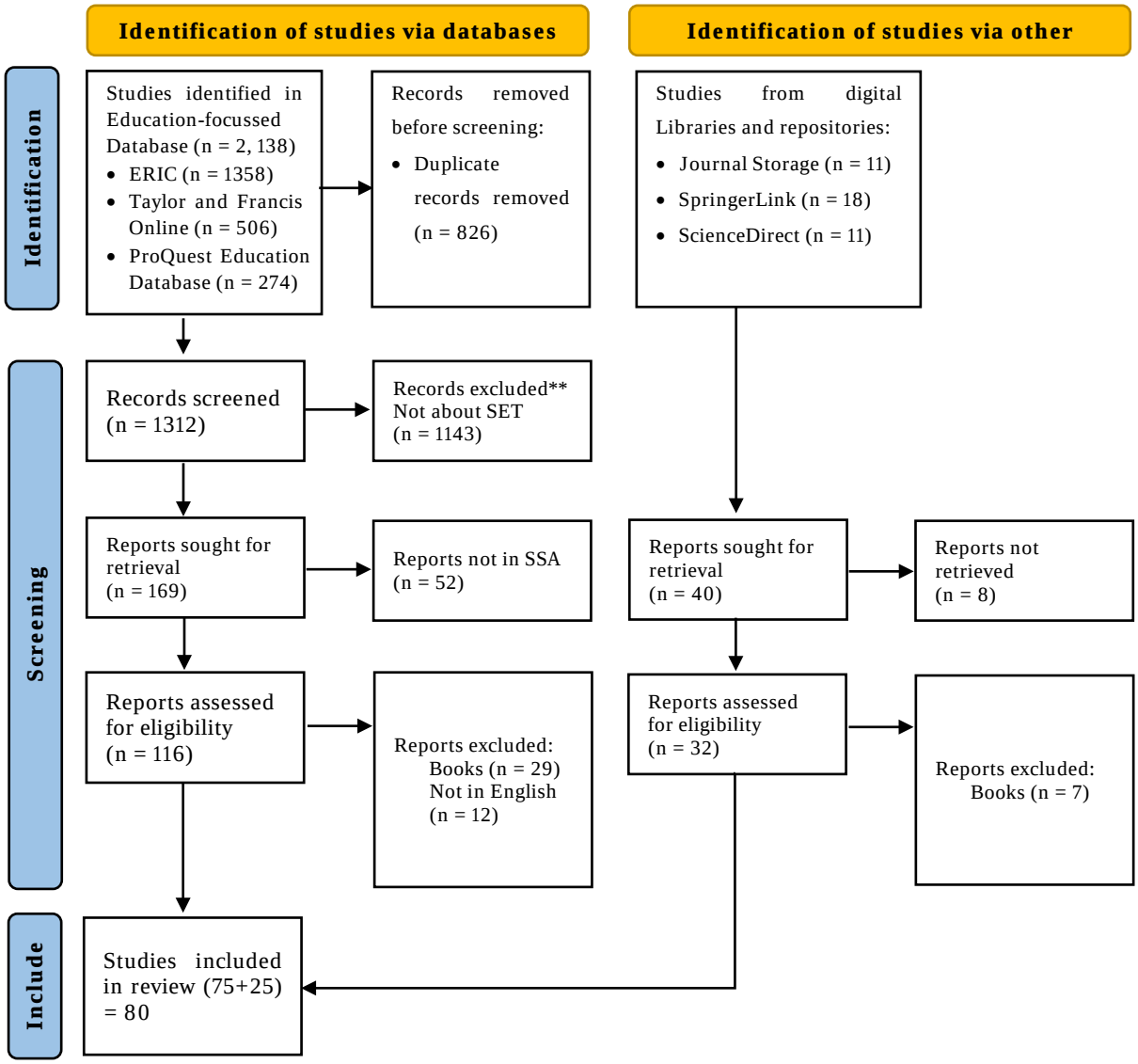

Fig. 1. Flow diagram for the selection process of SET-related studies
Source: Author's Construct, 2025

A colour-coding technique was applied to distinguish different themes, followed by an iterative discussion process to ensure consensus on the naming and categorisation of codes. This analysis resulted in the identification of five thematic areas: (1) key challenges and limitations of SET in SSA, (2) influence of biases (gender, race, age, grading leniency) on SET in SSA universities, (3) implications of biased SET on faculty performance, promotion, and quality assurance, (4) alternative or complementary methods to SET for assessing teaching effectiveness, and (5) policies and best practises to mitigate biases and improve SET reliability. To ensure accuracy and consistency in coding, we refined our categorisation over multiple iterations. The final themes reflect the most significant findings from the reviewed literature and serve as the basis for the analysis and synthesis. The methodological characteristics of studies on Tertiary SET and their Implications for Quality Assurance in African higher education institutions are presented in Table 6.

Quality Criteria and Assessment

To ensure quality in the selection process, a systematic assessment was conducted based on predefined criteria. This assessment enabled us to code key themes and concepts related to SET, as outlined in the study objectives. Following the thematic structure, five key categories were identified: (1) key challenges and limitations of SET in SSA education, (2) influence of biases on SET in SSA universities, (3) implications of biased SET on faculty performance, promotion, and

quality assurance, (4) alternative or complementary methods to SET for assessing teaching effectiveness, and (5) policies and best practises to mitigate biases and improve SET reliability. Intercoder reliability was ensured by calculating the agreement level across the authors involved in the review process. The obtained Krippendorff's alpha coefficient exceeded the recommended threshold of $\alpha = 0.8$, indicating high reliability and credibility in the classification of studies. This rigorous assessment reinforced the validity of the selected themes and ensured that the findings accurately reflected the literature on SET in higher education institutions in SSA.

3. Empirical Results

The results align with the research questions. The first part examines SET research trends within SSA higher education, highlighting yearly publication patterns and country contributions, with Ghana and South Africa leading. The second part explores methodological approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The third part identifies challenges such as reliability concerns, low response rates, and cultural biases. The fourth part analyses biases in SET, including grading leniency and gender influences. The fifth part reviews alternative evaluation methods like peer reviews and classroom observations. Finally, the study discusses policies for improving SET reliability, such as structured evaluations and anonymised reviews. These findings provide insights into the role of SET in SSA higher education quality assurance.

Yearly studies on SET in SSA higher education

Figure 2 shows the yearly publication distribution of studies on SET and their implications for quality assurance in SSA higher education, indicating a fluctuating research trend over the years. The data reveals no period of sustained stability, with annual outputs varying considerably. The peak years for research output were 2020 and 2022, each with 11 studies (13.8 % of the total). In contrast, the lowest output was recorded in 2021, with only 3 studies (3.8 %). Other years show moderate activity, such as 2014 with 10 studies (12.5 %) and 2017 with 9 studies (11.3 %). The most recent years, 2023 and 2024, saw a decline to 7 (8.8 %) and 5 (6.3 %) studies, respectively. These findings highlight that while there is consistent scholarly attention to SET's role in quality assurance, the interest has been volatile rather than showing steady growth, with a noticeable downturn in the most recent data.

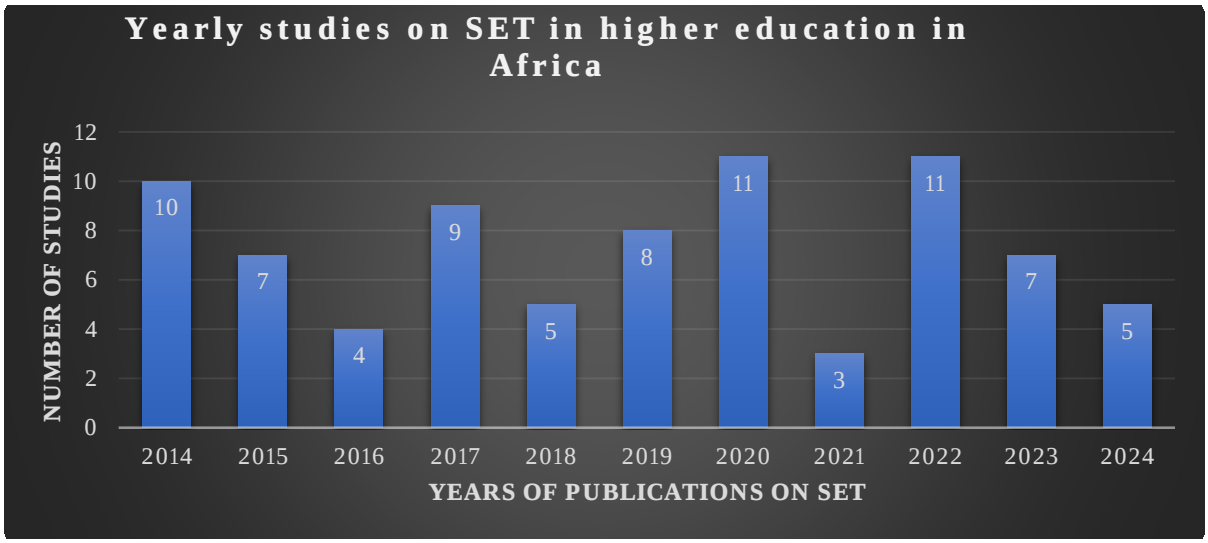

Fig. 2. Trends in selected studies on SET
Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Country contribution of studies on SET in SSA higher education

Figure 3 shows the country-level contribution of studies on SET and their implications for quality assurance in SSA higher education, highlighting significant variations in research output. South Africa recorded the highest number of studies with 20 (25.0 %), demonstrating the strongest academic engagement in SET-related quality assurance discussions. Ghana followed with

12 studies (15.0 %), while Kenya contributed 10 studies (12.5 %). Nigeria was the next largest contributor with 7 studies (8.8 %). Tanzania and Zimbabwe each accounted for 6 studies (7.5 %), while studies focusing on multiple Sub-Saharan countries contributed 5 (6.3 %). Uganda and Namibia each provided 4 studies (5.0 %). Other notable contributors included Malawi and Ethiopia with 2 studies each (2.5 %), and Rwanda and Somalia with 1 study each (1.3 %). These findings indicate that while SET research is present across the continent, scholarly output is concentrated in a few countries, with South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya leading the discourse.

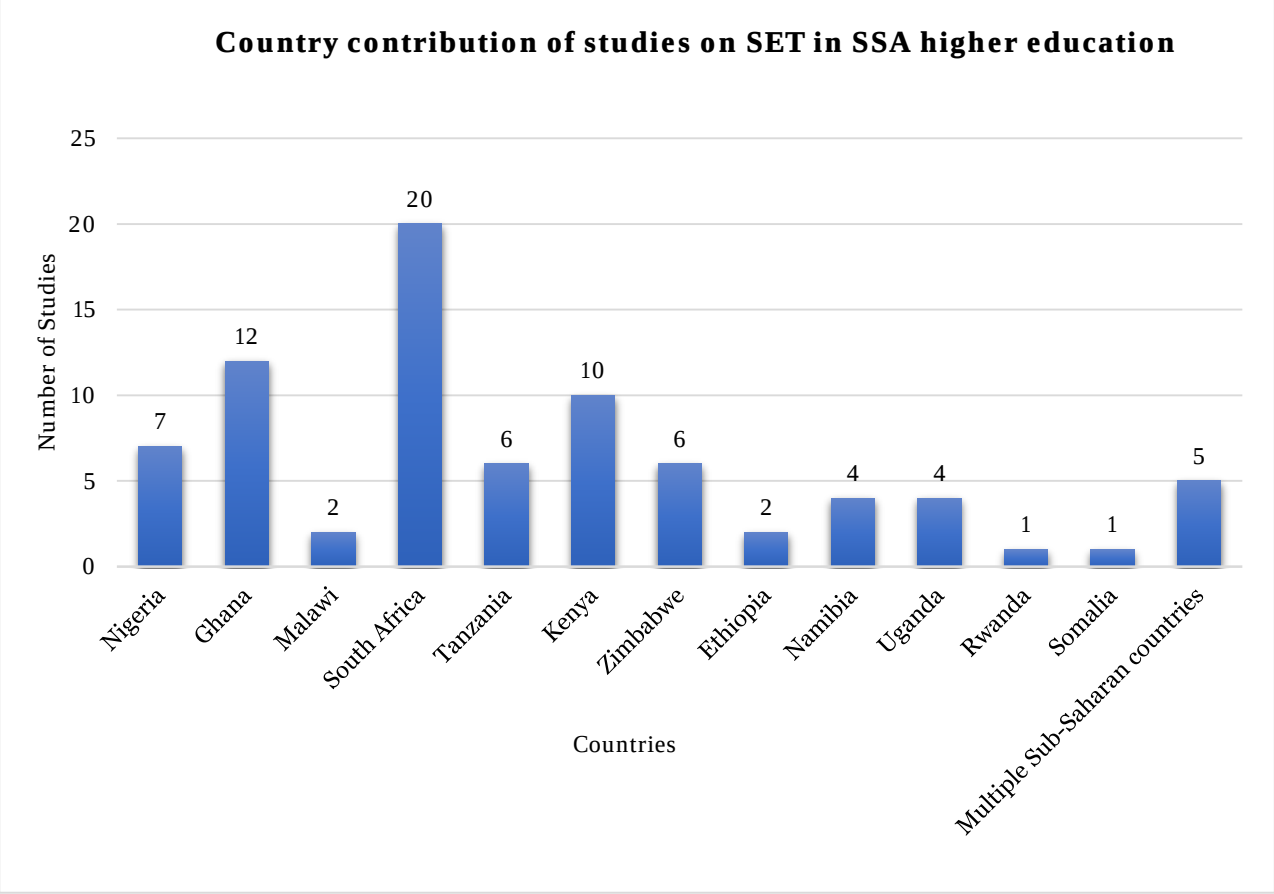

Fig. 3. Country contribution of studies on SET
Source: Author's Construct, 2025.

Methodological approaches of studies on SET in African higher education

SET in SSA higher education show a diverse use of methodological approaches, with mixed-method studies being the most common. As detailed in Table 1, 26 of 80 studies (32.5%) employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both questionnaires and interviews to enhance data triangulation.

Qualitative studies accounted for 25 (31.2 %) of the total, while quantitative approaches were used in 20 studies (25.0 %). Additionally, 9 studies (11.2 %) utilised a desktop review approach. These findings indicate a balanced preference for methodologies that provide in-depth and triangulated insights, rather than a dominance of a single approach. A detailed analysis of the data collection instruments reveals a strong emphasis on empirical data collection. Interviews were the most frequently used single instrument, featured in 26.2 % of all studies (either solely or as part of a mixed method). Questionnaires followed closely and were used in 22.5 % of studies. The use of secondary data was also notable, comprising 21.3 % of the methodological instruments, which includes documents for desktop reviews and supplementary data in qualitative and quantitative studies. The subjects or respondents in these studies included various groups: undergraduate and graduate students; faculty members and lecturers; quality assurance officials and administrators; and library and information science professionals.

Table 1. Methodological details of the SET-related studies

Approach	Number of studies	Percentage	Instrument			
			Questionnaire	Interview	Questionnaire & Interview	Secondary Data
Quantitative	20	25.0 %	18(22.5 %)			2(2.5)
Qualitative	25	31.2 %		21(26.2 %)		4(5.0)
Mixed Method	26	32.5 %			26(32.5 %)	
Review	9	11.2 %				11(13.8 %)
TOTAL	**80**	**100 %**	**18(22.5 %)**	**21(26.2 %)**	**26(32.5 %)**	**17(21.3 %)**

Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Other respondent categories included medical and health education professionals; education stakeholders and policymakers; and business and industry professionals. Additionally, tutors and college educators, and specialised groups in fields like engineering, STEM, and economics were also included. The significant use of interviews and mixed methods suggests that rich, contextual insights are highly valued in SET research within the African higher education context.

Challenges associated with SET in higher education institutions across Africa

Figure 5 highlights the key challenges and limitations associated with SET in higher education institutions across Africa, revealing widespread and severe concerns about their effectiveness and implementation. The most frequently cited issue was reliability and subjectivity issues, reported in 73 studies (91.2 %), reflecting predominant concerns over bias and inconsistent evaluation outcomes. This was followed by a three-way tie among significant challenges: low response rates and engagement, administrative and technological constraints, and cultural and contextual misalignment. Both low response rates and administrative constraints were each identified in 70 studies (87.5 %), indicating major problems with student participation and institutional capacity. Cultural misalignment was noted in 67 studies (83.7 %), emphasising the need for more locally adapted evaluation frameworks. Finally, the lack of training on evaluation usage was highlighted in 62 studies (77.5 %), suggesting that faculty and administrators often struggle to interpret and apply SET data effectively. These findings suggest that SET systems in Africa face a complex set of interconnected and severe challenges that are likely to undermine their reliability, fairness, and overall impact on quality assurance.

Table 2. Challenges associated with SET in higher education institutions across Africa

Indicators	No of studies (%)
Low Response Rates & Engagement	70 (87.5 %)
Lack of Training on Evaluation Usage	62 (77.5 %)
Cultural & Contextual Misalignment	67 (83.7 %)
Reliability & Subjectivity Issues	73 (91.2 %)
Administrative & Technological Constraints	70 (87.5 %)

Biases influencing SET performances in African universities

Table 3 highlights the biases influencing SET in African universities, revealing significant concerns about fairness and objectivity. The most frequently reported bias was grading leniency vs.

strictness, cited in 67 studies (83.7 %), indicating that students may rate instructors more favourably based on perceived leniency in grading. Gender stereotypes in perceptions were noted in 60 studies (75.0 %), suggesting that male and female instructors may receive different evaluations due to implicit biases. Language and accent bias were identified in 53 studies (66.2 %), highlighting challenges faced by instructors whose speech patterns differ from students' expectations. Both race and ethnic bias in multicultural institutions and age-related bias were each reported in 52 studies (65.0 %), reflecting disparities in student perceptions based on instructors' backgrounds and potential discrimination against younger or older faculty members. These findings suggest that a wide range of significant biases in SET may compromise their reliability and fairness, raising critical concerns about their use in academic decision-making across African universities.

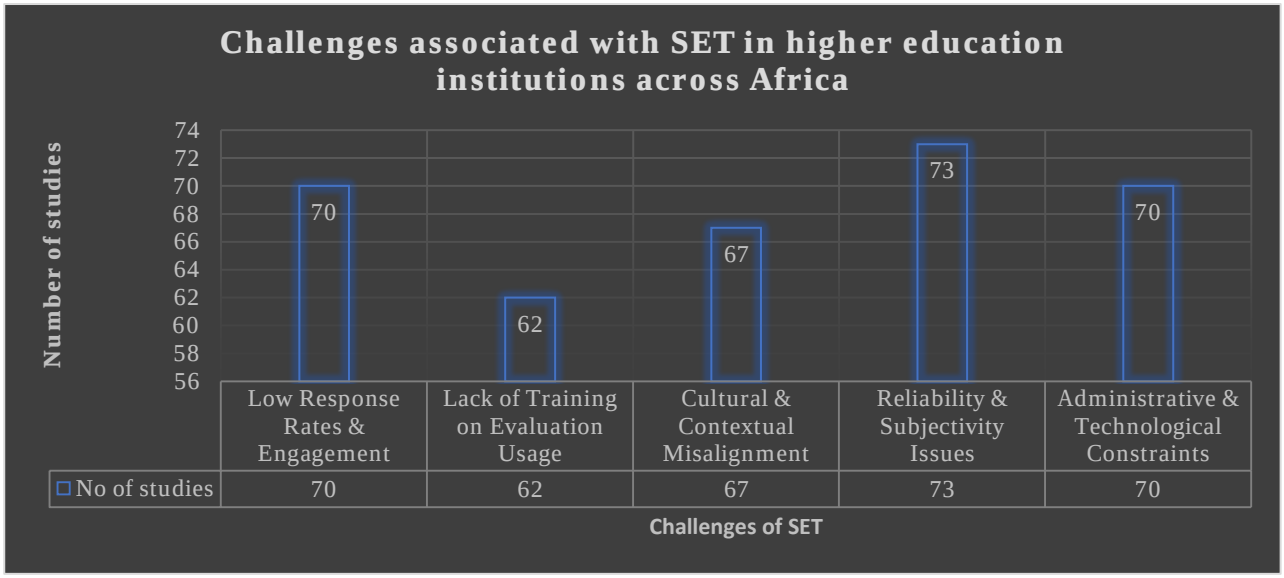

Fig. 5. Challenges associated with SET in higher education institutions across Africa
Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Table 3. Biases influencing SET in African universities

Indicators	No of studies (%)
Gender Stereotypes in Perceptions	60 (75.0 %)
Race & Ethnic Bias in Multicultural Institutions	52 (65.0 %)
Age-Related Bias	52 (65.0 %)
Grading Leniency vs. Strictness	67 (83.7 %)
Language & Accent Bias	53 (66.2 %)

Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Implications of student bias in evaluations of teaching on quality assurance in African higher education

The reported implications of biased SET on faculty performance assessment, promotion, and overall quality assurance in higher education highlight significant concerns for academic fairness and institutional integrity, as presented in Figure 6. The most frequently cited consequence was the limited reflection of true teaching effectiveness, reported in 74 studies (92.5 %), suggesting that SET may not accurately measure instructional quality. This was closely followed by concerns over unfair promotion and tenure decisions, identified in 73 studies (91.2 %), indicating that biases in SET can significantly disadvantage faculty in career progression. The impact on institutional quality assurance measures was noted in 66 studies (82.5 %), raising questions about the reliability of SET in ensuring educational standards. Furthermore, the reinforcement of inequities in academia was highlighted in 65 studies (81.2 %), underscoring how SET biases perpetuate systemic disadvantages. Finally, discouragement and low morale among faculty were reported in 70 studies (87.5 %), pointing to the profound negative psychological impact of biased evaluations. These

findings reveal an overwhelming consensus that biased SET can severely undermine faculty development, distort quality assurance mechanisms, and perpetuate inequities in higher education.

Methods of SET across African higher education institutions

Table 4 presents alternative or complementary evaluation methods compared to traditional SET for assessing teaching effectiveness in African higher education, highlighting diverse approaches aimed at improving assessment reliability. The most frequently cited method was student learning outcomes and performance metrics, identified in 71 studies (88.7 %), emphasising the importance of measuring actual learning achievements. This was closely followed by peer evaluations by faculty, reported in 70 studies (87.5 %), suggesting that colleagues can provide valuable insights into teaching effectiveness. Self-assessment and teaching portfolios were highlighted in 64 studies (80.0 %), allowing instructors to reflect on their teaching practices.

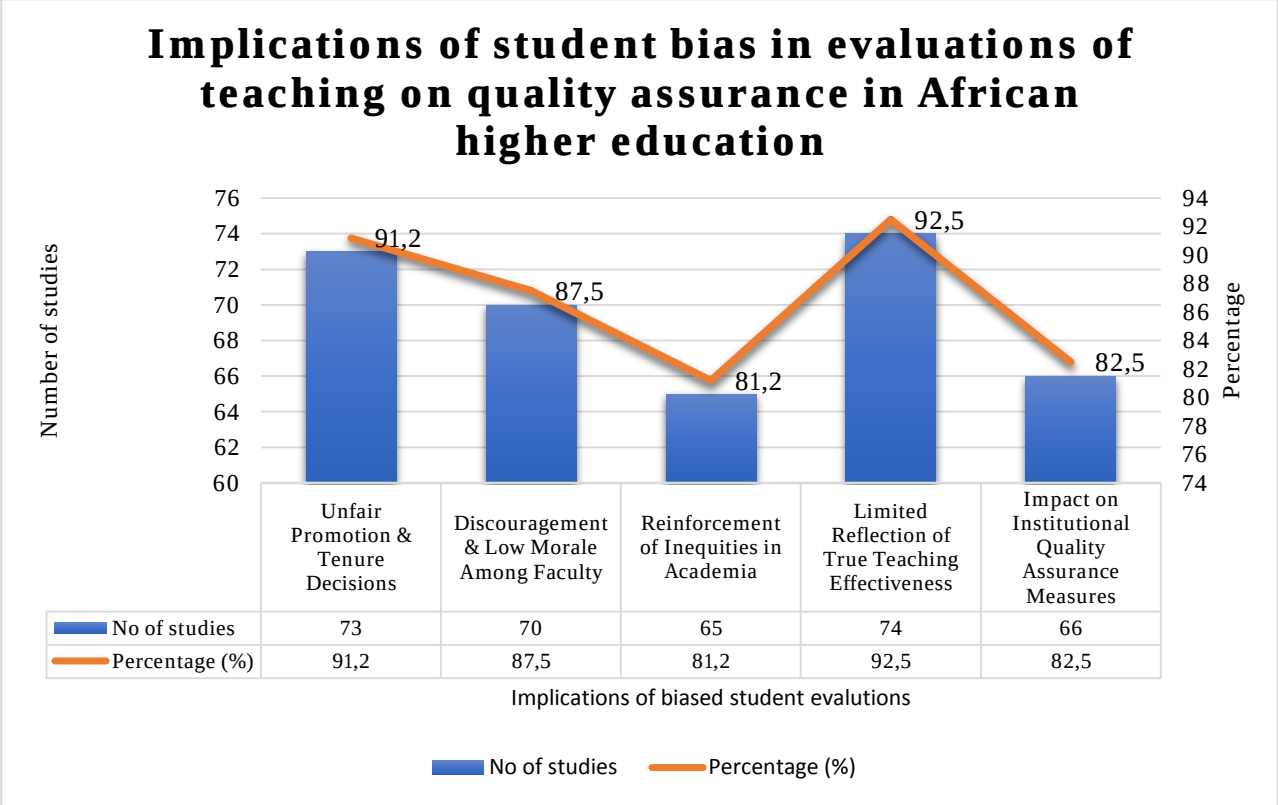

Fig. 6. Implications of biased SET
Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Classroom observations by experts appeared in 63 studies (78.7 %), indicating the usefulness of direct assessment by experienced educators. Finally, multi-source feedback (360-degree evaluation) was noted in 62 studies (77.5 %), promoting a more holistic review incorporating multiple perspectives. These findings suggest a strong consensus on the value of multi-faceted evaluation systems, with all complementary methods being supported by a large majority (over 75 %) of the studies. Integrating these methods can provide a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of teaching effectiveness than SET alone.

Table 4. Alternative SET methods

Methods	No. of studies (%)
Peer Evaluations by Faculty	70 (87.5 %)
Self-Assessment & Teaching Portfolios	64 (80.0 %)
Classroom Observations by Experts	63 (78.7 %)
Student Learning Outcomes & Performance Metrics	71 (88.7 %)
Multi-Source Feedback (360-Degree Evaluation)	62 (77.5 %)

Source: Author's Construct, 2025.

Approaches for mitigating biases of student evaluations to enhance quality assurance in African universities

Table 5 outlines reported approaches that can mitigate biases and enhance the reliability of SET for quality assurance in African universities. The most frequently cited strategy was the regular review and validation of SET tools, reported in 74 studies (92.5 %), highlighting the need for continuous refinement to maintain reliability. This was closely followed by awareness and training for students and faculty, identified in 73 studies (91.2 %), emphasising the critical role of educating stakeholders on the appropriate use of SET. Structured and standardised evaluation instruments were recommended in 70 studies (87.5 %), ensuring consistency in how teaching effectiveness is measured.

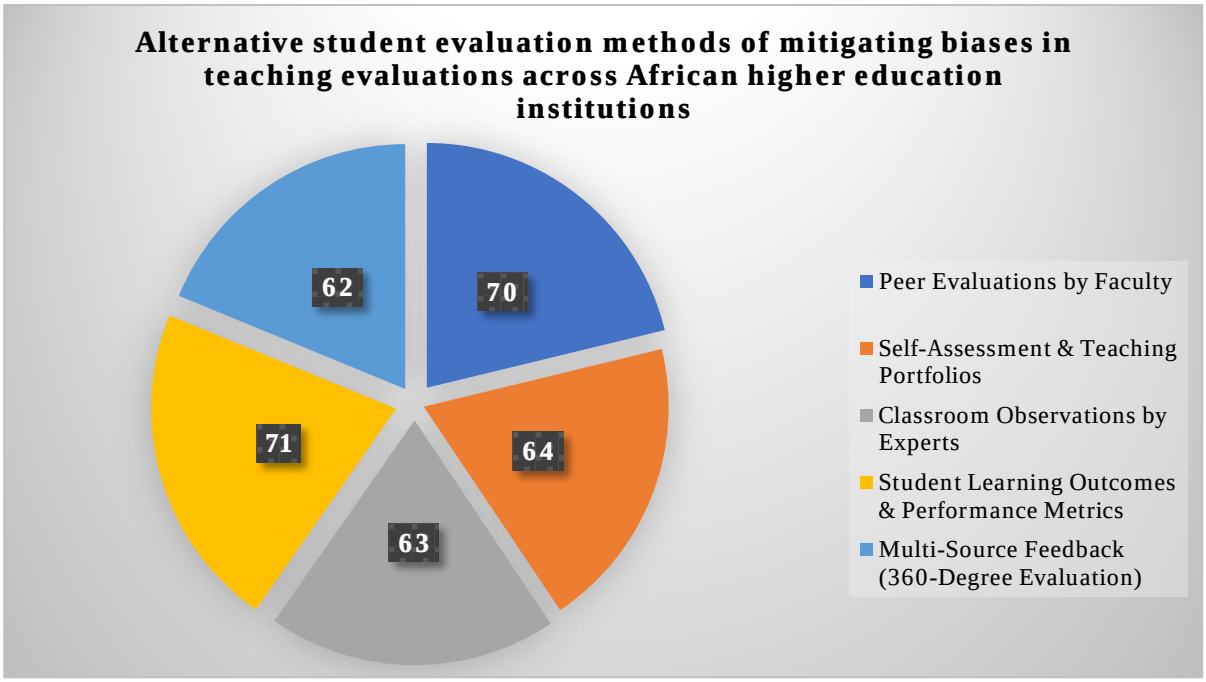

Fig. 7. Alternative SET methods
Source: Author's Construct, 2025.

Weighting SET with multiple assessment methods was supported by 68 studies (85.0 %), suggesting that integrating complementary evaluation approaches can improve fairness. Finally, blind or anonymised review processes were noted in 56 studies (70.0 %), reducing potential bias by concealing instructor identities. These findings indicate a strong consensus on a multi-faceted approach and that implementing well-designed policies can significantly improve the credibility and effectiveness of SET in African higher education.

Table 5. Policies and best practises to mitigate biases in SET

Indicators	No of studies (%)
Structured & Standardised Evaluation Instruments	70 (87.5 %)
Awareness & Training for Students & Faculty	73 (91.2 %)
Weighting SET with Multiple Assessment Methods	68 (85.0 %)
Blind or Anonymised Review Processes	56 (70.0 %)
Regular Review & Validation of SET Tools	74 (92.5 %)

Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Table 6. Methodological characteristics of studies on tertiary SET and implications for quality assurance in African higher education institutions

№	Author(s)	Year	Country of Study	Research Approach	Research Design	Sample Instrument Used	Sample Used or Number of Articles
1.	Akanmu, S.O.	2023	Nigeria	Mixed	Survey and Quasi-experimental	Questionnaire Interview	260 students and 48 lecturers
2.	Amuche, A.C.I., Umar, M.H.	2019	Nigeria	Quantitative	Survey	Questionnaire	2600 students
3.	Anderson, A.B., Boateng, R., Ansong, E.	2017	Ghana	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	54 participants (40 students, 10 lecturers, 4 administrative staff)
4.	Batizani, D., Mpundu, M.	2024	Malawi	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	240 participants (200 students, 38 university managers, 2 NCHE officers)
5.	Bhuiyan, M.M.Z.U., van As, A.S.	2022	South Africa	Quantitative	Descriptive	Questionnaire	48 students
6.	Chikazinga, W.W.N.	2018	Malawi	Quantitative	Descriptive	Questionnaire	52 lecturers
7.	Choma, I.A., Raymond, B.	2022	Tanzania	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	34 participants
8.	Coker, W.	2018	Ghana	Qualitative	Case Study	Document Extraction	Not specified
9.	Dattey, K., Westerheijden, D.F., Hofman, W.H.A.	2019	Ghana	Quantitative	Survey	Questionnaire	1,100 students (696 from public, 404 from private universities)
10.	De Klerk, D., Benvenuti, S., MacGregor, A.	2022	South Africa	Qualitative	Phenomenological	Interview	19 questionnaire respondents; 8 focus group participants
11.	Ebert, A., Pistor, P., Sella, S.	2017	Tanzania	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	142 graduates
12.	Effah, A.G.	2020	Ghana	Quantitative	Descriptive Survey	Questionnaire	96 tutors
13.	Elijah, M.S.	2017	Kenya	Quantitative	Descriptive	Document Extraction	Not explicitly specified
14.	Fitchett, J.M., Sheridan, C.M.	2023	South Africa	Qualitative	Not explicitly specified	Interview	Not explicitly specified
15.	Garwe, E.C.	2021	Zimbabwe	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	33 participants (2 ministry officials, 6 ZIMCHE members, 15 university research directors, 10 researchers) and multiple documents over 2010–2020 period
16.	Garwe, E.C., Zunguze, M., Kanda, M.	2024	Zimbabwe	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	23 participants (6 senior administrators, 7 program coordinators and academics from various departments, and 10 students.)
17.	Gavu, E.K.	2018	Ghana	Mixed	Not	Questionnaire	312 respondents

№	Author(s)	Year	Country of Study	Research Approach	Research Design	Sample Instrument Used	Sample Used or Number of Articles
					explicitly specified	Interview	
18.	Gumbo, J.R.	2017	South Africa	Mixed	Case study	Questionnaire Interview	Not explicitly specified
19.	Haile, V.T., Szendrő, K., Szente, V.	2020	Ethiopia	Quantitative	Cross Sectional	Questionnaire	450 samples
20.	Hassan, S., Wium, W.	2014	South Africa	Mixed	Epistemological	Questionnaire Interview	22 first year students studying a science-based subject
21.	Hinson, C. .	2016	Ghana	Quantitative	Descriptive	Questionnaire	203 respondents
22.	Ibrahim, A.	2020	Nigeria	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not explicitly specified
23.	Igbojekwe, P.A., Ugo-Okoro, C.P., Agbonye, C.O.	2015	Nigeria	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not explicitly specified
24.	Kadhila, N., Iipumbu, N.	2019	Namibia	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not explicitly specified
25.	Kadhila, N., Nyathi, S. F.	2015	Namibia	Mixed	Not explicitly specified	Interview Questionnaire	360 students
26.	Katende, D., Namutebi, E.	2024	Uganda	Quantitative	Case Study	Questionnaire	215 students
27.	Kay, J.	2022	Kenya	Mixed	Cross Sectional	Questionnaire Interview	21 lecturers, 562 students
28.	Shange, J.	2015	Rwanda	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	Not explicitly specified
29.	Kigozi, E.	2020	Uganda	Qualitative	Not explicitly specified	Interview	80 student teachers (20 from each of 4 PTTCs)
30.	Kofi, K., Addo, P. K., Owusu, F.	2022	Ghana	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	62 faculty members
31.	Dansieh, S.A.	2015	Ghana	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	567 questionnaires administered (502 responses), 17 academic and administrative staff interviewed
32.	Lembuka, M.	2023	Tanzania	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	specific number not stated
33.	Lumadi, M.W., Acquah, B.Y.S.	2014	Ghana	Quantitative	Descriptive Survey	Questionnaire	52 trainee Economics teachers (21 females, 31 males) and 2194 Senior High School students (1332 males, 862 females)
34.	Machingambi, S.	2017	South Africa	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	35 academics who participated in teaching excellence awards
35.	Maiyo, J.K.	2018	Kenya	Mixed	Descriptive Survey	Questionnaire Interview	70
36.	Makondo, L., Ndebele, C.	2014	South Africa	Quantitative	Descriptive Survey	Questionnaire	118 volunteer lecturers
37.	Maiyo, J.K.	2020	Kenya	Mixed	Descriptive Survey	Questionnaire Interview	70 respondents (67 % response rate)
38.	Makondo, L., Ndebele, C.	2014	South Africa	Quantitative	Descriptive Survey	Questionnaire	118 lecturers
39.	Makoni, R.P.	2015	Zimbabwe	Qualitative	Phenomenological	Interview	17 lecturers

№	Author(s)	Year	Country of Study	Research Approach	Research Design	Sample Instrument Used	Sample Used or Number of Articles
40.	Malunda, P.N., Atwebembeire, J., Bazanye, N.K.	2024	Uganda	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not Explicitly specified
41.	Martin, M.	2018	Multiple countries	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	311 higher education institutions (survey) and 8 university case studies
42.	Mashiri, P.	2014	Zimbabwe	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not Explicitly specified
43.	Slabbert, R.	2024	South Africa	Qualitative	Survey	Interview	12 experts
44.	Mrema, D., Ndayambaje, I., Ntawiha, P., Ndabaga, E.	2023	Tanzania	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	46 participants (4 quality assurance directors, 8 senior quality assurance officers, 10 academics, 24 student cabinet members)
45.	Mrema, D., Ndayambaje, I., Ntawiha, P., Ndabaga, E.	2023	Tanzania	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	46 respondents from 4 universities
46.	Munyae, M.M., Kigwilu, P. C.	2020	Kenya	Mixed	Not Explicitly specified	Questionnaire interview	122 valid questionnaires (105 students and 17 employees)
47.	Muya, S.M.	2019	Kenya	Mixed	Descriptive	Questionnaire interview	119 students (determined sample size), with 178-180 respondents for various quantitative questions
48.	Netshifhefhe, L.P.	2020	South Africa	Qualitative	Descriptive and Explanatory	Interview	24 interviewees
49.	Netshifhefhe, L., Nobongoza, V., Maphosa, C.	2016	South Africa	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not Explicitly specified
50.	Nsibande, R.	2022	South Africa	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	Not Explicitly specified
51.	Ntim, S.	2014	Ghana	Quantitative	Survey	Questionnaire	120 respondents from 30 private universities
52.	Odera, A.O.	2020	Kenya	Mixed	Sequential Exploratory	Questionnaire Interview	Not Explicitly specified
53.	Odhiambo, G.O.	2014	Kenya	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	public universities; 1 quality assurance agency; 16 participants (2 VCs, 2 QA directors, 8 deans, 4 QAA heads)
54.	Ojo, F.Y.	2014	Nigeria	Quantitative	Survey	Questionnaire	100 lecturers
55.	Nwokonko, R.N.	2022	Nigeria	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not Explicitly specified
56.	Omar, A.M., Kisige, A.	2023	Somalia	Quantitative	Non-experimental, descriptive, and cross-sectional	Questionnaire	108 academic staff members

№	Author(s)	Year	Country of Study	Research Approach	Research Design	Sample Instrument Used	Sample Used or Number of Articles
57.	Onditi, E.O., Wechuli, T.W.	2017	Kenya	Qualitative	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not Explicitly specified
58.	Padayachi, R.A.	2015	South Africa	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	Not Explicitly specified
59.	Pawandiwa, P., Ndlovu, M.J., Shava, G., Charumbira, J., Mathonsi, E.	2022	Zimbabwe	Mixed	Exploratory	Questionnaire Interviews	60 respondents (9 Vice Chancellors, 9 Ministry officials, 21 Faculty Deans, 15 ZIMCHE board members, 6 Student Representatives)
60.	Petersen, M.	2016	South Africa	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	16 individual university teachers from eight different faculties at SU.
61.	Piason, V., Maxwell, C.	2021	Zimbabwe	Mixed	Case Study Descriptive Design	Questionnaire Interview	67 students from the E-Business course, plus an additional group for interviews
62.	Ansah, F., Nudzor, H.P., Swanzy, P.	2017	Ghana	Mixed	Convergent	Questionnaire Interview	450 students (225 from a public university, 225 from a private university college)
63.	Quansah, F.	2020	Ghana	Quantitative	Three-facet partially nested random balanced	Questionnaire	30 lecturers and 600 students (20 students from each of 30 classes
64.	Saidi, A.	2020	South Africa	Qualitative	Review Study	Document Extraction	Multiple conference presentations and referenced literature (exact number not specified)
65.	Santally, M.I.	2016	Multiple African countries	Qualitative	Case Study	Document Extraction	Analysis of programme documentation, feedback from 487 successful participants across multiple cohorts
66.	Sevnarayan, K.	2022	South Africa	Qualitative	Phenomenol ogical	Interview	10 students and 6 lecturers"
67.	Siraj, M.N., Hágen, I.Z.	2020	Ethiopia	Mixed	Cross-Sectional Survey	Questionnaire Interview	295 (74 instructors, 191 students, plus department heads and FGD participants)
68.	Sospeter, M., Amuli, A., Hassanal, I.	2022	Tanzania	Mixed	Sequential Explanatory	Questionnaire Interviews	113 respondents
69.	Steyn, C., Davies, C., Sambo, A.	2019	South Africa	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	161 students (from 220 registered) participated in the evaluation exercise, generating 481 recommendations
70.	Surujlal, J.	2014	South Africa	Qualitative	Exploratory	Interview	12 academics (purposive sample)
71.	Taylor, N.	2023	Multiple SSA Countries	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	4 detailed country case studies (Rwanda, Uganda,

№	Author(s)	Year	Country of Study	Research Approach	Research Design	Sample Instrument Used	Sample Used or Number of Articles
							Senegal, South Africa) + data from 16 additional countries (33 % of 48 SSA countries)
72.	Tennant, G., Khamis, T.	2017	Multiple African Countries	Mixed	Case Study	Questionnaire Interview	429 students (from 700 enrolled, 61.3 % response rate) across 26 courses
73.	Tomas, N., Aukelo, M., Tomas, T.N.	2022	Namibia	Quantitative	Descriptive cross-sectional survey	Questionnaire	148 respondents
74.	Tomes, T., Coetzee, S., Schmulian, A.	2019	South Africa	Quantitative	Comparative experimental	Questionnaire	334 respondents (167 in opinion-based group, 167 in prediction-based group)
75.	Moodley, V.R.	2019	Multiple African Countries	Qualitative	Phenomenol ogical	Interview	11 academic leaders from 6 countries
76.	Ubong, B., Okpor, M.O.	2019	Nigeria	Desktop Review	Review Study	Document Extraction	Not explicitly specified
77.	Uiseb, I.	2017	Namibia	Qualitative	Case Study	Interview	Not explicitly stated
78.	Van der Bank, C.M., Van der Bank, M.	2014	South Africa	Qualitative	Case Study	Document Extraction	Not explicitly stated
79.	Waweru, S.M.	2021	Kenya	Qualitative	Descriptive	Interview	113 participants for one participants per college 46 respondents
80.	Wilson Kasule, G., Wesselink, R., Noroozi, O., Mulder, M.	2015	Uganda	Quantitative	Exploratory	Questionnaire	570 participants (managers: 130; teaching staff: 200; students: 240)

4. Discussion

The findings of this review highlight key trends in research on SET and their implications for quality assurance in higher education across Africa. The yearly distribution of studies indicates fluctuating research activity, with relatively stable publication rates between 2014 and 2017, followed by a decline in 2018 and 2021. However, the resurgence in 2019, 2020, and a peak in 2022 and 2023 suggest a growing academic interest in SET, likely driven by increased institutional focus on teaching quality and accountability. The variation in research output across the years may reflect shifts in policy priorities, funding availability, and evolving debates on SET effectiveness in African higher education. SET in African higher education are heavily concentrated in Ghana and South Africa, followed closely by Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania. These countries have shown strong academic engagement with SET, indicating an active discourse on its implications for quality assurance. In contrast, contributions from countries such as Rwanda, Somalia, and Lebanon are minimal, suggesting potential research gaps or lower institutional emphasis on SET. The dominance of a few countries in SET research highlights the need for broader regional engagement to ensure diverse perspectives on its role in quality assurance across different educational landscapes.

In terms of methodological approaches, SET studies in African higher education are largely quantitative, with most relying on survey-based data collection. While qualitative and mixed-method studies provide additional insights, they remain less utilised, potentially limiting deeper explorations of faculty and student experiences with SET. The relatively low adoption of desktop review approaches further emphasises a preference for primary data collection over secondary document analysis. This trend underscores the importance placed on direct empirical evidence in assessing the effectiveness of SET as a quality assurance tool. Regarding study subjects and sample

sizes, the findings indicate a research focus on undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty members, reflecting the primary stakeholders involved in SET processes. Quality assurance officials and administrators also receive notable attention, reinforcing the role of institutional leadership in implementing and interpreting SET results. However, limited studies on specialised groups, business and industry professionals, and policymakers suggest an underexplored dimension of SET research and its broader implications beyond academia.

The SET in Africa face significant challenges and limitations, primarily centred on low response rates, lack of training, cultural misalignment, reliability issues, and administrative constraints. Low response rates and student engagement are critical concerns, as online evaluations often lead to procrastination or neglect, while absenteeism further reduces participation, as noted by Akanmu (2023) and Netshifhefhe (2020). Anonymity, though encouraging honesty, can result in superficial feedback, exacerbated by students' lack of training in constructive evaluation methods, as indicated by Chikazinga (2018) and Choma and Raymond (2022). Additionally, the digital divide in Africa limits access to online evaluations, particularly in regions with poor internet infrastructure (De Klerk et al., 2022; Kadhila, Nyathi, 2015). Cultural and contextual misalignment further complicates SET, since tools developed in other regions may not capture the unique realities of African higher education (Akanmu, 2023; Dattey et al., 2019). Reliability and subjectivity issues persist, with students often rating instructors based on personal biases, such as grading leniency or course difficulty, rather than teaching effectiveness (Amuche, Umar, 2019; Akanmu, 2023). Administrative and technological constraints, including high costs of paper-based evaluations and underutilised digital infrastructure, further hinder effective SET implementation, as pointed out by (Chikazinga, 2018) and (De Klerk et al., 2022; Maiyo, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires improved training, better technological integration, and culturally adapted evaluation frameworks to ensure SET's reliability and impact on teaching quality.

Additionally, SET in African universities are significantly influenced by biases related to gender, race, age, grading leniency, and language, undermining their reliability and fairness. Gender biases are prevalent, with female lecturers often receiving lower evaluations despite comparable or superior teaching performance, reflecting societal stereotypes and institutional prioritisation of research over teaching, as reported by (Chikazinga, 2018) and (De Klerk et al., 2022). Racial and ethnic biases further distort SET outcomes, as students may rate instructors based on their ethnic background rather than teaching quality, thereby perpetuating broader societal prejudices, as emphasised by Batizani and Mpundu (2024) and Coker (2018). Age-related biases also play a role, with younger faculty perceived as inexperienced and older faculty viewed as outdated, regardless of their actual teaching effectiveness (Effah, 2020; Ebert et al., 2017). Grading leniency significantly impacts SET, as students tend to rate instructors more favourably if they perceive grading policies as lenient, creating incentives for faculty to lower academic standards to secure higher evaluations (Akanmu, 2023; Amuche, Umar, 2019). Language and accent biases further complicate SET, as instructors who teach in non-dominant languages or have accents differing from students' preferences often receive lower evaluations, regardless of teaching quality, as pointed out by (Dansieh, 2015) and (Kadhila, Iipumbu, 2019; Kigozi, 2020). These biases highlight the need for systemic reforms, including training students to provide constructive feedback, contextualising evaluation results, and supplementing SET with peer reviews to ensure a fair and comprehensive assessment of teaching effectiveness.

Biased SET significantly impact faculty performance, promotion, and institutional quality assurance in African universities. Unfair promotion and tenure decisions often arise from overreliance on SET, which is influenced by grading leniency, gender, race, and age biases rather than actual teaching effectiveness (Akanmu, 2023; Amuche, Umar, 2019). Faculty members from marginalised groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities, face systemic inequities in career progression due to biased evaluations, reinforcing existing disparities in academia (Batizani, Mpundu, 2024; Effah, 2020). This reliance on SET discourages faculty, lowers morale, and pressures educators to prioritise favourable evaluations over rigorous teaching standards, ultimately compromising educational quality (Coker, 2018; Ebert et al., 2017). Furthermore, SET's limited reflection of true teaching effectiveness undermines institutional quality assurance, as small numerical differences in scores are often overinterpreted, leading to misguided decisions (De Klerk et al., 2022; Makondo, Ndebele, 2014). To address these issues, institutions must adopt holistic evaluation frameworks, integrating peer reviews, classroom observations, and faculty self-

assessments to ensure fair and accurate assessments of teaching quality (Dattey et al., 2019). Strengthening quality assurance processes requires reducing overreliance on SET and implementing diverse evaluation metrics to support equitable faculty development and institutional decision-making (Anderson et al., 2023).

Alternative or complementary approaches to SET are essential for a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of teaching effectiveness. Peer evaluations by faculty offer a holistic perspective, as they provide insights into teaching quality that SET alone cannot capture (Chikazinga, 2018; Dattey et al., 2019). Also, self-assessment and teaching portfolios encourage reflective practises, enabling faculty to document and improve their teaching methods over time, as demonstrated by Batizani and Mpundu (2024) and Effah (2020). Classroom observations by trained experts provide objective, in-depth evaluations of teaching practises, complementing student feedback with professional insights (Coker, 2018; Hinson, 2016). Measuring student learning outcomes and performance metrics, such as pre- and post-course assessments, offers a direct measure of teaching impact, reducing reliance on subjective evaluations (Akanmu, 2023; Bhuiyan, van As, 2022; Makondo, Ndebele, 2014). As suggested by Kadhila and Iipumbu (2019) and Ebert et al. (2017), multi-source feedback, or 360-degree evaluations, integrates input from students, peers, and supervisors, ensuring a balanced and reliable assessment of teaching effectiveness. These methods, when combined, create a robust framework for evaluating teaching quality, addressing the limitations of SET and promoting continuous improvement in higher education.

Policies and best practises to mitigate biases and improve the reliability of SET include the development of structured and standardised evaluation instruments, such as the Lecturer Teaching Effectiveness Scale (LECTAS), which ensures psychometric soundness and reduces subjectivity (Akanmu, 2023; Amuche, Umar, 2019). Institutions should provide awareness and training for both students and faculty to enhance understanding of SET's purpose and reduce biases stemming from personal or contextual factors (Batizani, Mpundu, 2024; Kadhila, Iipumbu, 2019). Weighting SET with multiple assessment methods, such as peer reviews, self-assessments, and teaching portfolios, ensures a more balanced and comprehensive evaluation of teaching effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2023; Coker, 2018). Implementing blind or anonymised review processes can minimise biases related to gender, race, or personal preferences, fostering fairer assessments (Hinson, 2016; Katende, Namutebi, 2024). Regular review and validation of SET tools, including statistical rigour and periodic revisions, are essential to maintain their reliability and relevance over time (Chikazinga, 2018; Dattey et al., 2019). According to Ebert et al. (2017), Bhuiyan and van As (2022), and Makondo and Ndebele (2014), institutions can adopt these practises to enhance the credibility of SET and ensure its meaningful contribution to teaching quality and professional development.

Limitations of this Empirical Review

This study is subject to several noteworthy limitations. Firstly, it included only studies published in English, thereby excluding potentially relevant literature in French, Portuguese, and other African languages. Given the multilingual nature of higher education research across the continent, this linguistic restriction may have inadvertently omitted important perspectives from regions where these languages dominate academic discourse. Secondly, the search strategy, although rigorous, may have been constrained by the exclusion of certain potentially relevant terms, such as "student feedback systems" or "faculty performance appraisal tools," which might be used in some institutional or regional contexts to describe processes similar to SET. The absence of these alternative terminologies in the initial search parameters may have led to the omission of a small number of relevant studies.

Next, the review was limited to publications available through the second quarter of 2025 and excluded studies published before 2015. While the initial aim was to capture research spanning the past two decades, preliminary screening revealed that older studies tended to reiterate themes already addressed in more recent literature, particularly regarding common challenges such as low response rates, bias, and cultural misalignment. As such, their exclusion was intended to maintain thematic currency and relevance; however, this temporal restriction may have reduced the historical depth of the analysis. A further limitation is that most of the included studies relied heavily on descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, or interview-based methods. Consequently, many of the reported challenges, such as administrative constraints, bias in evaluations, or the overreliance on

SET for faculty promotion, are primarily self-reported and were not independently verified in this review, necessitating cautious interpretation to avoid overstatement or overgeneralisation.

In addition, studies that focused on SET in non-tertiary settings or that examined teaching quality without explicit reference to formal evaluation systems were excluded. This approach, while ensuring a clear focus on SET in higher education, may have limited insights into how evaluation practises and attitudes are shaped earlier in the educational pipeline. Furthermore, the deliberate exclusion of opinion pieces, theoretical papers, and non-empirical works narrowed the conceptual range of the dataset, potentially overlooking nuanced theoretical debates and alternative conceptualisations of teaching effectiveness that could have enriched the analysis.

Finally, significant geographical gaps remain, as some African countries were either minimally represented or absent from the dataset due to a lack of published research within the review period. This absence should not be interpreted as evidence of the absence of SET-related challenges or innovations in those contexts; rather, it underscores the need for targeted research to capture a more comprehensive, regionally balanced understanding of SET in SSA higher education.

5. Recommendations

The main findings of this literature review yield several interrelated recommendations that emphasise the need for sustained institutional commitment and scholarly attention to enhancing SET systems in SSA higher education. Persistent challenges such as low student response rates, limited digital literacy, misalignment of evaluation tools with cultural norms, and administrative constraints necessitate that universities adopt a more strategic and context-sensitive approach to SET implementation. Institutions should actively explore mechanisms to increase student participation, including targeted incentives, integrating digital skills training into academic support programmes, and expanding accessible, user-friendly feedback platforms. Such initiatives, if embedded within institutional quality assurance frameworks and supported by adequate resource allocation, would help ensure that SET results are both representative and reliable, even in the face of fluctuating engagement levels.

The review further identified the influence of biases, particularly those related to gender, race, age, grading leniency, and language, which can distort SET findings and undermine the fairness of faculty evaluations. Addressing these concerns will require both structural and cultural reforms. At the structural level, institutions should prioritise the adoption of standardised, context-appropriate evaluation instruments and consider integrating anonymised review processes to reduce subjective bias. At the cultural level, awareness-building programmes for students and faculty could promote more informed, objective participation in evaluation processes, thereby enhancing trust in the system. Such interventions would position SET as a fairer and more equitable component of faculty assessment, contributing to a balanced institutional culture of teaching quality assurance.

Another recurring concern is the overreliance on SET outcomes as the primary metric for faculty promotion, retention, and performance appraisal. While student feedback is an important indicator, sole dependence on this measure risks incentivising superficial teaching practises rather than rigorous and innovative pedagogy. Future policy reforms should promote a more holistic evaluation framework that integrates multiple sources of evidence, including peer reviews, self-assessments, classroom observations, and measures of student learning outcomes. Multi-source feedback systems such as 360-degree evaluations which offer particular promise for producing a more balanced and comprehensive view of teaching effectiveness.

The review also underscored the limitations of applying SET frameworks developed in Western contexts without adapting them to the unique cultural and institutional realities of SSA universities. Locally developed or modified instruments, created in consultation with faculty and students, would better reflect the values, priorities, and pedagogical practises of SSA higher education. Such culturally grounded tools could improve the validity of evaluation data and foster stronger faculty engagement with the process.

Research evidence shows that studies on SET in SSA remains heavily dominated by descriptive statistical analyses and thematic approaches. While these have provided foundational insights, they limit the ability to generalise findings across contexts. There is a compelling case for more sophisticated methodological approaches such as regression modelling, ANOVA, and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test relationships between variables and generate robust, data-

driven insights. Mixed-method and longitudinal studies could further deepen understanding by tracking the long-term impact of SET reforms and identifying persistent structural challenges.

Faculty development emerged as a crucial yet underutilised area for improving teaching quality. Institutions should invest in structured training and mentorship programmes that focus on pedagogical innovation, student engagement techniques, and the interpretation of SET data for continuous improvement. These efforts should be reinforced by independent quality assurance mechanisms, including faculty performance audits and feedback loops, to ensure that evaluation findings translate into tangible teaching enhancements rather than punitive measures.

Finally, the review highlights the critical importance of responsible data interpretation in decision-making processes. Misinterpretation or overemphasis of SET scores risks distorting personnel decisions and damaging faculty morale. Higher education institutions should therefore prioritise targeted training for academic leaders, administrators, and quality assurance officers on how to interpret and apply SET results as one component of a broader, contextually informed faculty evaluation strategy. Such an approach will ensure that teaching quality assurance systems are not only more accurate and equitable but also more responsive to the dynamic realities of SSA higher education.

6. Policy Implications

The findings highlight the need for systemic changes and institutional policies to improve the implementation and fairness of SET. Institutions should adapt SET tools to reflect SSA educational realities by involving faculty and students in the development process and ensuring evaluation criteria align with local teaching and learning environments. Additionally, independent quality assurance mechanisms should be established to supplement SET with faculty performance audits, longitudinal studies, and feedback loops, enabling continuous improvement in evaluation systems. SSA higher educational institutions are encouraged to explore multi-source feedback systems, such as 360-degree evaluations, which combine student feedback with peer and supervisor assessments for a more balanced and fair evaluation of faculty performance. Finally, comprehensive training should be provided to administrators and decision-makers to ensure responsible interpretation of SET data, emphasising its use as one component of a broader faculty assessment strategy rather than the sole determinant of teaching quality.

7. Research Implications

The findings underscore the need for methodological advancements and further research to address gaps in SET studies. Researchers should move beyond descriptive statistics and thematic analysis by incorporating inferential statistical tools such as ANOVA, PLS-SEM, and regression analysis to provide more robust and generalisable insights into the impact of SET on teaching quality. Future research should also focus on underrepresented regions, such as Rwanda and Somalia, to ensure diverse perspectives and address regional gaps in SET literature. Additionally, there is a need for research focused on developing and validating SET tools that are culturally and contextually aligned with SSA higher education systems, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in local contexts.

8. Practice Implications

At the institutional level, actionable steps are needed to improve SET implementation and outcomes. To address low response rates and ensure reliability, institutions should adopt strategies such as incentivising participation, integrating digital literacy training, and improving accessibility for students. Biases related to gender, race, age, grading leniency, and language can be mitigated through the implementation of structured and standardised evaluation instruments, blind or anonymised review processes, and awareness training for both students and faculty. A more holistic evaluation framework should be adopted, integrating peer reviews, self-assessments, classroom observations, and student learning outcomes assessments to ensure fairer, more comprehensive evaluations of teaching effectiveness. Complementary assessment methods, such as peer evaluations, self-assessment, and expert classroom observations, should be integrated into faculty evaluation processes to enhance validity and reliability. Finally, institutions should establish structured faculty development programmes focused on pedagogical skills, student engagement techniques, and SET interpretation to help faculty improve their teaching practises and ensure the effective use of SET results.

9. Conclusion

This paper has provided a comprehensive review of the challenges, biases, and implications of SET in SSA higher education institutions. The review synthesised relevant literature to examine the validity, reliability, and fairness of SET as a quality assurance tool, particularly in resource-constrained environments. The findings highlight significant concerns related to biases (gender, race, age, grading leniency, and language), low response rates, and institutional overreliance on SET for faculty performance assessments and promotions. These limitations undermine the effectiveness of SET in measuring true teaching effectiveness. Additionally, the review identified alternative and complementary evaluation methods, such as peer evaluations, self-assessment, classroom observations, and student learning outcomes, as essential strategies to enhance the robustness of faculty assessments. It also emphasised the importance of structured evaluation instruments, training programmes, and multi-source feedback mechanisms to mitigate biases and improve the reliability of SET. Overall, while SET remains a widely used tool in SSA universities, its effectiveness is hindered by inherent biases and methodological shortcomings. Institutions must adopt a more holistic approach to faculty evaluation, integrating diverse assessment methods and policy interventions to ensure fair, objective, and meaningful evaluations that contribute to educational quality improvement.

10. Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was not necessary for this study, as it involved a systematic review of previously published literature. The results are intended for submission to peer-reviewed journals for publication.

Funding

The authors received no funding for this research.

Author Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest. Moreover, the authors confirm that they have not used artificial intelligence (AI) to aid in the writing of this manuscript except for improvement of readability.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Prosper Dzifa Dzamesi: Conceptualisation, Writing, Review & Editing, Supervision, Writing of the original draft.

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Dominic Sabeng Amoateng: Writing, Review & Editing, Visualisation, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualisation.

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Conflict of interest.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The data presented in this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgemenst

The authors extend their gratitude to all the scholars whose works were reviewed in this study. Their research served as the foundation for this systematic review.

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