

Evidence-Based Reform for Institutional Sustainability as Continuity: A proposed quality-assurance and accreditation metric framework for learning-space services in Anglophone Caribbean HEIs

Sub-Theme: Education Policy, Reform, and Evidence-Based Practices

Lisle A. Waldron

Research Overview

Technology-enabled physical learning spaces (e.g., hybrid-capable classrooms and lecture theatres) remain central to higher-education delivery even as virtual platforms receive growing strategic attention. In Anglophone Caribbean HEIs, rising recurrent platform costs and lifecycle renewal demands may tighten continuity headroom under fiscal constraint. This conference paper proposes that institutional sustainability-as-continuity can be strengthened by embedding strategy–operations alignment (SOA) metrics within quality assurance and, potentially, accreditation cycles, to improve how strategy is translated and how operational costs and risks are surfaced for decision-making.

Purpose

HEIs frequently articulate ambitions for digitally mediated teaching and institutional modernisation, yet operational arrangements for sustaining physical learning spaces and enabling platforms may remain under-specified, under-resourced, or weakly monitored. In resource-constrained settings, this can produce a strategy–operations disjunction: a persistent misfit between what senior-level strategies require and what operational systems (people, processes, assets, budgets, and vendor commitments) can reliably deliver.

This paper advances a translation-and-cost-visibility hypothesis for discussion and subsequent empirical testing: the disjunction may persist when middle-management processes insufficiently (a) translate strategic intent into deliverable operational specifications (service standards, lifecycle plans, workforce requirements, and governance routines), and (b) surface the full operational cost and risk profile of sustaining learning-space services (including recurrent subscriptions, renewal exposure, and hidden labour). Under conditions of rising recurrent costs and tightening fiscal headroom, this is framed as an institutional business continuity risk, not merely an efficiency concern: sustainability is treated as sustainability-as-continuity, namely the capacity to maintain minimum viable learning-space and platform services for teaching over time.

Accordingly, the paper proposes a policy-facing reform: quality-assurance (QA) and accreditation regimes should begin to treat continuity capacity and SOA evidence as measurable quality criteria, evidenced through routine measurement, review, and continual improvement. The proposed framework operationalises SOA capacity for learning-space services using auditable indicators across two domains: (a) governance specificity/formality (decision-right clarity, standards, escalation pathways, and evaluate–direct–monitor routines), and (b) cost and capacity visibility (lifecycle cost exposure, workload/capacity signals, service-cost drivers, renewal gaps, and explicit risk acceptance). The central hypothesis is that stronger SOA evidence (as captured by these indicators) will be associated with more sustainable-as-continuous and more equitable learning-space service performance. Equity is treated pragmatically as the consistency and

accessibility of service quality across units, campuses, and user groups, including differential exposure to disruption and uneven reliance on informal workarounds.

Methods

This conference paper is explicitly pre-empirical: it does not report findings and does not require institutional artefact access prior to writing. It performs two method-aligned tasks oriented to evidence-based reform.

First, it develops a continuity-oriented QA/accreditation metric framework grounded in widely understood QA logics: self-evaluation, external review, and continual improvement. Using the thesis framing (and, where useful, the literature review through research methods), the paper specifies (i) what “minimum viable” continuity means for learning-space services, (ii) which decisions function as internal policy instruments (service levels, renewal and procurement rules, lifecycle funding commitments, workforce capability investments, and explicit risk thresholds), and (iii) which evidence signals are necessary to prevent continuity trade-offs being managed implicitly through deferral or hidden labour.

Second, it outlines a planned explanatory sequential mixed-methods evaluation protocol for subsequent thesis execution. The quantitative component is framed as association testing between SOA evidence indicators (governance specificity and cost/capacity visibility) and continuity-relevant service performance proxies (e.g., reliability and preventable downtime, incident recurrence, response and resolution timeliness, backlog dynamics, cross-unit comparability, and deferral patterns consistent with renewal exposure). The qualitative component uses interviews with executive leaders, middle managers, and technical/service staff to explain how strategy translation, cost signalling, and risk acceptance operate in practice, including where incentives, role boundaries, or measurement weaknesses distort upward reporting. Integration is planned via a joint display connecting QA criteria → evidence signals → observed continuity patterns, culminating in a continuity-oriented governance-and-evidence package suitable for small-island, higher-education contexts.

Results & Discussion

Because findings are not yet available, the “results” presented are policy-relevant design outputs: (a) a continuity-oriented problem specification; (b) a reform logic model linking strategy translation and cost/risk visibility to continuity outcomes; (c) a proposed QA/accreditation metric set and review cadence for learning-space continuity; and (d) a planned evaluation protocol.

The paper proposes four reform components designed to shift operating culture from implicit continuity management to auditable, evidence-based practice:

1. Minimum viable service-level definition (proposed): a practical statement of minimum viable physical learning-space and enabling-platform services for teaching, including explicit continuity thresholds and acceptable degradation boundaries under fiscal constraint.
2. SOA evidence indicators (proposed): a small, auditable metric pack capturing (i) governance specificity (decision rights, standards, EDM routines), and (ii) cost/capacity visibility (lifecycle renewal exposure, workload signals, renewal gaps, and explicit risk acceptance), paired with continuity outcomes (reliability, preventable downtime, recurrence, backlog).
3. QA cadence and continual-improvement loop (proposed): routines that embed these indicators in periodic self-evaluation, require corrective-action tracking, and support escalation for reallocation, renewal, or service-level changes.
4. Decision rules and accountability (proposed): explicit thresholds and decision logs that document when to renew, defer with explicit risk acceptance, reduce service levels, reallocate resources, or rationalise platforms/services making strategy translation and cost reporting auditable rather than implicit.

In this framing, equity is treated as a governance test: reforms are assessed by whether continuity and support timeliness become less dependent on uneven local capacity and informal workarounds, thereby reducing differential exposure to disruption across campuses and user groups. The discussion argues that, for small-island states facing fiscal constraint, embedding continuity and SOA evidence into QA/accreditation expectations is a credible policy lever for improving reform feasibility and institutional resilience, without implying that any current accreditor already mandates such measures.

Keywords (max 5)

Education policy; quality assurance; accreditation; strategy implementation; business continuity