

Opinions of Stakeholders on the Role of School Quality Assurance Practices in Curriculum Implementation in Secondary Schools in Tanzania

Joan Nteminyanda, Ernest Kira, Benedicto Msangya

Department of Education Curriculum and Instruction, Sokoine University of Agriculture, P.O.BOX 3038
Morogoro, Tanzania

Abstract:

This research aims to identify the opinions of education stakeholders (teachers, heads of schools, and education officers) on the role of School Quality Assurance (SQA) practices in facilitating curriculum implementation in secondary schools in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a single case study design. The sampling procedures included 13 participants selected through purposive sampling from schools, heads of schools, and district education officers, and convenience sampling for teachers. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using thematic data analysis. The findings focused on three main themes: SQA practices as motivation in curriculum implementation in secondary schools, SQA practices in leadership and management, and the approaches used by SQAOs to collaborate with teachers in facilitating curriculum implementation. The study suggests that comprehensive studies are needed to understand the impact of the school quality assurance system on curriculum implementation in secondary schools. Additionally, further research is needed to explore different approaches used by educational leaders in schools.

Keywords: school quality assurance, practices, curriculum implementation

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1.0 Introduction

The role of School Quality Assurance (SQA) practices in curriculum implementation in secondary schools is a topic that attracts significant attention. Schools are feeling the pressure of global changes toward quality standards of education. SQA is intended to improve, maintain, assess, promote, and ensure the quality standards of education needed widely in schools (Markowitsch, 2018). The system has evolved from the old-style school inspection to a more comprehensive system that involves all key education stakeholders (Gustafsson et al., 2015).

Globally, school inspection was first introduced in France in 1801 and followed by England in 1838 (Gustafsson et al., 2015). However, the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Thailand marked new directions in the contemporary movement toward a school quality assurance system (Edwards et al., 2024). This evolution supports the concern with the culture of improvement and equality of educational procedures (Shahanga et al., 2021).

Stakeholders' opinions on the role of SQAOs differ across developed and developing countries. In developed countries, SQAOs are perceived as centers that ensure the production of standardized education outcomes, while in developing countries, they are viewed as institutions that ensure curriculum implementation suited to the relevant context (Weiss and Wehrden, 2021). Most developed countries,

especially in Europe and America, have adapted the system of school quality assurance and advanced to the point where nations conduct assessments, schools conduct evaluations, and teachers undergo appraisals to improve curriculum implementation in schools (Gustafsson et al., 2015).

Conversely, some regions in Africa and Latin America struggle with implementing SQA systems due to resource, infrastructural, and socioeconomic biases (Lamarra, 2019). In these contexts, the role of SQAOs extends beyond oversight to actively facilitating capacity building and supporting teachers and school leaders. Specific stakeholders within African regions may even consider SQAOs as key partners in addressing regional challenges and creating inclusive environments for learners by developing responsive curriculum outlines. For example, in Nigeria and Ghana, the practices have been effective, with these nations selecting monitoring and supervision as approaches to improving academic standards. However, barriers such as bureaucratic delays, teacher misunderstandings, and unwillingness toward inspection hinder effective learning (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Botswana has enhanced its inspection practices by integrating professionalism, transparency, and positive relationships between inspected agents and inspectors (Pule, 2014).

Studies conducted by various researchers in Africa acknowledge the successes and failures of school quality assurance activities in educational systems. For instance, studies have found that effective instructional facilities, infrastructures, and teacher enhancements are critical in curriculum implementation in Nigeria (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Similarly, SQAOs in Kenya have an average awareness of competence levels in different skills, indicating a need for more training (Okoth et al., 2018). In Uganda, barriers such as inadequate frequency of inspections and insufficient numbers of SQA officers lead to delayed feedback, hindering efficient curriculum implementation (Kosia and Okendo, 2018).

In Tanzania, the old system of school inspection was identified in 1978, and the shift from an inspection structure to a more holistic system of school quality assurance practice occurred in 2017, with a special focus on improving the quality standard of education (URT, 2017). Previous studies have been conducted on the opinions of educational stakeholders regarding the role of SQA practices in curriculum implementation in secondary schools in Tanzania. However, few studies specifically focus on the opinions of teachers, heads of schools, and educational officers on the role of SQA practices in curriculum implementation. For instance, a study conducted in Tabora examined the opinions of education stakeholders on strategies for improving decision-making in Tanzania's community-based secondary schools (Assey et al., 2022). Another study in Mbulu Rural District Council explored stakeholders' perceptions of school quality assurance in public secondary schools in Tanzania (Gitambo, 2017). Due to the limited literature exploring stakeholder ideas on school quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation in secondary schools in Tanzania, this study aims to identify the opinions of teachers, heads of schools, and municipal education officers on the role of SQA practices. The study focuses on motivation practices, improvement of leadership and management in schools, and approaches used by SQAOs to enhance curriculum implementation in secondary schools. The study will add to the knowledge base and assist in policy and practice reforms in the education system.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

General System Theory (GST), articulated by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1950s, serves as a conceptual background for exploring the opinions of stakeholders on the role of school quality assurance practices in facilitating curriculum implementation in secondary schools. GST focuses on the idea of a general system, emphasizing the interactions and interdependence of its components rather than viewing them as isolated elements. It centers on how these components work together to control the organization and outcomes of the system (Shaked and Schechter, 2017). This represents a paradigm shift from research to efficient implementation, addressing the current status, facets, and the ability to design methods to increase system effectiveness as a coherent whole.

In the context of this study, GST is particularly useful as it conceptualizes the school as a system comprising interactions between various components, including school quality assurance officers, teachers, students, instructional materials, and administration. This approach highlights the role of SQAOs in facilitating curriculum improvement and practices (Weiss et al., 2021). The theory focuses on how elements within a system work together to control its organization and facilitate the interaction of school components.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

This paper adopts a qualitative approach, which was appropriate for gaining a deeper understanding of stakeholders' opinions on the role of SQA practices in curriculum implementation in secondary schools. The qualitative approach is beneficial because it allows data to be obtained in the natural setting of the participants. It also provides the researcher with freedom and flexibility concerning research design, data collection, and analysis throughout the study (Hassan, 2021). The qualitative approach is highly flexible, allowing for emerging questions and generating detailed opinions and concepts for the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It enables the selection of a few participants from a large population sample to be studied (Pajo, 2019).

2.2 Research Design

A single case study method was employed in this study. This design is particularly useful for studying contemporary phenomena in their natural environment. It was selected based on Creswell and Creswell (2018) because it allows for a comprehensive study of improved school quality assurance practices by incorporating participants' opinions. This case study approach contributes to the generalization of outcomes within a similar context and enhances subject comprehension. It helped the researcher collect rich data on the role of school quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation from secondary school teachers, heads of schools, and one Municipal Education Officer (MEO) in Tanzania.

2.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Morogoro Region, which hosts the zonal office of school quality assurance in Morogoro municipality. This area was selected because it contains most of the information

concerning SQA practices in secondary schools, similar to other areas in Tanzania. The study area enabled the researcher to collect relevant information regarding quality assurance practices (Godwin et al., 2022).

2.5 Participants and Selection Technique

The study involved 13 participants: 8 teachers from both public and private schools, 4 heads of schools, and 1 district education officer. Teachers were selected to gain their perceptions of their actual experiences with school quality assurance practices in facilitating curriculum implementation in secondary schools. Participants were recruited purposively and conveniently due to their knowledge and experience in the study area. This technique allowed for a more representative sample. Convenience sampling was used to identify teachers from high and low-performing schools in the 2022 national exams. Both methods ensured the selection of participants with relevant information on quality assurance practices (Creswell and Creswell, 2023).

2.6 Data Collection Methods

2.6.1 Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data by asking face-to-face questions, allowing the researcher to modify the wording and order of questions during the interview. One day before the interview, the researcher made appointments with teachers after contacting the head of the school. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher collected data by conversing face-to-face with individual teachers, heads of schools, and the district education officer. The conversations were recorded using a phone recorder after obtaining permission from the participants. The purpose of interviewing these respondents was to identify and obtain detailed information on their opinions and understanding of the role of school quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation in secondary schools. This technique was important because it provided flexibility in clarifying questions if respondents did not understand them or if the researcher was not satisfied with the responses. An interview guide consisting of questions was constructed to systematically guide the interview sessions. Each session with teachers lasted 20 to 30 minutes, and the interviews with heads of schools and the Municipal Education Officer also lasted 20 to 30 minutes. This method was employed to produce more desirable data concerning participants' opinions and knowledge of SQA practices regarding curriculum implementation. Using an interview guide ensured order during the interviews while allowing for elaboration where necessary (Sundler et al., 2019).

2.7 Data Analysis

The study applied thematic data analysis, where the researchers employed a systematic approach to analyzing data within the context of the research question and the data collected during the study, following the step-by-step guidelines described by Sundler et al. (2016). The first step involved becoming familiar with the collected data and the interview transcripts by reading and re-reading the notes taken from the interviews and listening to the recorded interviews multiple times to generate initial codes. In the second step, the researcher created codes for themes that might exist in the data, leading to the

development of initial themes. The third step involved revising these themes in relation to the guiding interview questions and discussing their internal consistency, with codes being controlled to develop broader significant themes, aiming to reduce and simplify the data. In the fourth step, the themes were carefully reviewed to ensure they made sense according to the research questions. The fifth step defined the themes to identify the essence of what each theme was about. Finally, the sixth step involved writing up the report according to the research findings, generating a report on the paper, and using actual quotes from participants to support the conclusions.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted with a high level of ethical standards, following ethical guidelines (Bjärsholm et al., 2018). The researcher secured permissions, including an introduction letter from Sokoine University of Agriculture and approval from authorities such as the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government, and the District Education Officer. All activities were voluntary, and participants had the liberty to withdraw at any time. Participants were free to decide whether to participate after responding to the study explanation, thus providing informed consent. Privacy of responses was ensured by informing participants that all responses would be kept confidential.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the interviews with teachers, heads of schools, and one municipal education officer about the role of SQA practices in curriculum implementation in secondary schools. The discussion focuses on three main themes: the effect of SQA practices on motivation in curriculum implementation, the effect of SQA practices in facilitating quality leadership and management, and the approaches used by SQAOs to communicate with teachers in schools. Additionally, the analysis used key quotes from participants to describe how SQA practices impact educational processes and provide a broad understanding of the issues.

3.1 SQA Practices as Motivation in Curriculum Implementation

There is evidence that the introduction of SQA practices in schools can enhance teachers' morale and foster the effective delivery of curricula, which is one of the themes that emerged from this study. The findings provide a somewhat confusing understanding of how SQA practices are viewed by stakeholders, such as teachers, heads of schools, and the MEO. Participants in the study largely share similar views regarding the impact of SQA practices on motivation among teachers and the curriculum. SQAOs are commonly portrayed by teachers as essential for enhancing teaching and maintaining the quality of education. For instance, Teacher 2 from School 1 mentioned that:

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“The SQAOs assist in improving teaching and supporting teachers in teaching and learning and moral support” (Teacher 2, School 1).

Similarly, Teacher 1 from School 2 emphasized the corrective role of SQAOs:

“In general, it was agreed that SQAOs are very useful especially in enlightening teachers, particularly in correction and enhancement of teaching and learning. They assist to encourage and awaken the teachers to perform their duties effectively and obey the law.” (Teacher 1, School 2).

These viewpoints highlight the concept that external inspection can increase accountability processes and, therefore, improve practice. However, when Teacher 1 from School 4 uses the term ‘watchdogs’ to describe SQAOs, it introduces a significant shift in perception. The participant stated:

“Ownership of this role has been given to School Quality Assurance and Oversight SQAOs. While these are viewed as necessary agents tasked with ensuring standards are met, their role may also be interpreted as a guarding one.” (Teacher 1, School 4).

This reflects a duality in the perception of quality assurance: it can be seen as a driving force, a positive motivator for engaging in activities, as well as a source of pressure associated with task execution. Viewing SQAOs as watchdogs can undermine the supportive nature of the supervision relationship, negatively impacting teacher self-confidence and the relationship between teachers and SQAOs. The role of SQA practices in curriculum implementation is acknowledged by Head of School 1 (HOS 1) and the MEO. HOS 1 stated:

““We, teachers, believe that SQAOs are the key factor in facilitating appropriate and best education delivery.” (HOS, School 2).

The MEO commented:

“SQA is the heart of the school. Also agreeing with the fact that SQA practices are at the center of education quality control, the MEO made it clear that SQAOs are at the heart of the school due to their role in encouraging teachers to overcome challenges.” (MEO, 2023).

These perspectives reiterate the role of SQAOs in enhancing and guiding teachers. However, they also raise questions about how oversight and support are related. This aligns with Mbuya and Amos (2024), who suggest that practices perceived as disciplinary can be nerve-racking for teachers. Although this study’s findings suggest potential problems, it does not delve deeply into how these dynamics play out in real life. For example, while the motivational aspects of SQA practices, such as enhancing quality, encouraging innovation, and promoting accountability, are acknowledged, the stress from intense monitoring and pressure is not equally described. On the other hand, studies by Mritha and Onyango (2022) recommend a positive relationship between quality assurance and educational performance improvement, alongside implementation control. Therefore, SQA practices should be more supportive rather than merely supervisory. This study implies that SQAOs can improve their role by focusing on formative feedback and staff development instead of a disciplinary ‘police’ role.

3.2 The Role of SQA Practices in Facilitating Quality Leadership and Management in Secondary Schools

The findings show that leadership of learning and leadership of people are supported by SQA practices. SQAOs are considered to provide direction and support for enhancing, promoting, and maintaining efficient practices in governmental and school organizational management, with the overarching goal of improving education standards. During the interviews, participants credited SQA practices with leading and managing curriculum implementation efficiently. The Municipal Education Officer (MEO) highlighted the significance of collaboration between SQAOs and the education management team. One of the participants said:

“There is good cooperation through the information they provide, especially on schools that we can’t physically visit and upgrade. For instance, the details indicating registered schools with low standards and those that do not meet the required criteria.” (MEO).

This quote reveals key information that is helpful in management and understanding. The MEO further emphasized the benefits of internal quality assurers in schools, noting their contribution to monitoring and conflict resolution despite some challenges:

“There are also internal quality assurers who are very useful in supervising their colleagues’ compliance with the curriculum. However, an issue of concern is that since they have no training on school quality control, they only know that implementing the curriculum requires developing a lesson plan and a scheme of work. Curriculum is well and alive in school, hence, the SQAOs assist in solving different issues including teacher-student conflict.” (MEO, 2023).

This highlights the role of SQAOs in enhancing internal management functions and handling issues that arise in the educational setting. Support for this view is echoed by Head of School 1 (HOS 1), who remarked on the monitoring responsibilities of internal quality assurers:

“Internal quality assurance concerns the process of monitoring. Also, the HOS do regular monitoring and supervise remedial classes.” (HOS 1).

Head of School 2 (HOS 2) also noted the impact of internal quality assurers in ensuring curriculum implementation in secondary schools. During one of the interviews, a participant observed:

“We have internal quality assurers who observe each teacher to ensure they deliver what is contained in the existing curriculum.” (HOS 2).

These statements reflect a unified opinion on the need for strict internal control in education. Teachers also recognize the benefits of SQA practices in addressing challenges and guiding improvements. School quality assurance plays a role in identifying difficulties and suggesting solutions. Additionally, the role of SQAOs in enhancing teaching standards and evaluating teacher performance was highlighted:

“SQAOs contribute to evaluating teaching; they also contribute to raising and enhancing teaching standards and monitoring teachers.” (HOS 2).

However, there is a noted deficit in the training of internal quality assurers, which might affect their efficiency. The MEO also raised the issue of insufficient training for internal quality assurers in schools, which might impair their ability to support curriculum implementation and address internal challenges. The literature supports high-quality assurance practices in leadership and management (Wani, 2014), but it also highlights possible difficulties such as the preparation of those involved in internal quality assurance (Mapunda, 2023). The findings of this study confirm that SQA practices are useful for leadership and management improvement. However, there is a strong need for professional development for internal quality assurers to optimize their performance.

3.2 Approaches Used by SQAOs to Collaborate with Teachers in Curriculum Implementation in Schools

The study reveals that the practices employed by School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs) in cooperation with teachers for curriculum implementation have several issues. Mainly, these approaches

are regarded as an old system of school inspection, rewarding wrongdoers with punishment. Participants voiced concerns that SQAOs' practices resemble previous inspection models, which pay little attention to offering constructive feedback aimed at improving instructional practice. Some participants described the approaches used by SQAOs as more of an attack, lacking positive direction. For example, HOS 2 said:

"Even though SQAOs employ aspects that are sometimes inappropriate, they provide directions and make noise. When they come to school, they expect everything to be set and on point. If they realize things are not ready, they use harsh language." (HOS 2).

Similarly, Head of School 3 (HOS 3) said:

"We regard the role of school quality assurance as the old system of inspection because during their visit, SQAOs look at several things such as books, lesson plans, schemes of work, and teaching materials, but they do not inquire whether the books being used are current or not." (HOS 3).

This sentiment was echoed by Head of School 4 (HOS 4), who highlighted that SQAOs act more like judges than supportive guides:

"School Quality Assurance Officers are of no use; they lack quality materials; their practices are not useful for growth." (HOS 4).

Teachers also shared similar sentiments. One participant remarked:

"We are afraid of SQAOs because they demoralize us with unfriendly language and even harass us, so teachers run away from SQAOs." (Teacher 2, School 2).

Teacher 2 from the same school continued:

"The problem is their approach to teachers, which causes others to refuse to be inspected and hide away from their sessions when they see SQAOs." (Teacher 2, School 2).

These findings are consistent with Medard and Mwila (2022), who pointed out that weak motivation and lack of required competencies among SQAOs may compromise the implementation of recommendations and reduce their benefits. According to Ibrahim et al. (2017) and Gitambo et al. (2017), constructive criticism from external assessors can improve the quality of teaching and teachers' feelings toward teaching. This indicates low satisfaction with how SQAOs are conducted, suggesting a need for more positive, relationship-based models. Enhancing the ability of SQAOs to give feedback that will enhance curriculum implementation and improve working relations with teachers would also enhance teaching performance.

4.1 Conclusion

The research identifies major issues with the strategies of School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs) in secondary schools. Participants, including teachers, heads of schools, and a municipal education officer, depicted SQAOs as using formalized and outdated inspection procedures that do not motivate schools to

improve. Instead, they focus on rote learning and enforcing potentially illegitimate rules. This criticism aligns with earlier research, which found that disciplinary attempts demotivate teachers and hinder the practice of recommendations. The results indicate that although SQAOs are important in curriculum implementation, there is a need to transform their methodologies to promote support and cooperation between SQAOs and teachers.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Recommendations from the Findings

The study recommends reforming SQAOs' approaches by encouraging the adoption of positive, participative, and constructive behaviors rather than punitive measures. Seminars should focus on developing interpersonal and intergroup skills, especially regarding constructive feedback for teachers' professional improvement. Moreover, to enhance stakeholder engagement, it is crucial to involve teachers and academics in setting the principles of quality assurance, always considering practitioners' views to develop practices that satisfy their needs and remain feasible.

4.2.2 Recommendations for Further Studies

Further research should perform longitudinal studies to identify the effects of integrated quality assurance changes on teacher performance and curriculum delivery. Additionally, future studies should examine the specific requirements of SQAOs and the impacts of different types of feedback in various educational environments.

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