

Education Stakeholders' Perceptions on the Status of External School Quality Assurance in Enhancing Teaching and Learning in Kaskazini Region, Zanzibar

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Abstract

This study investigated the education stakeholders' perceptions of the status of external school quality assurance in enhancing teaching and learning in the Kaskazini Region, Zanzibar. A qualitative study with a case study design was used. The study data was collected through in-depth interviews and documentary reviews. The findings indicate that the External School Quality Assurers were negatively affected by many difficulties, such as the incompetence of External School Quality Assurers caused by a lack of in-service training programs to update External School Quality Assurers' skills. Similarly, there was insufficient allocation of budget to carry out External School Quality Assurance practices effectively. The same challenges jeopardize External School Quality assurers' status and make them less effective in enhancing teaching and learning processes. Hence, the government should upgrade the status of External School Quality assurers and the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools by strengthening the External School Quality assurers in terms of resources, profession and authority.

Keywords: External School Quality Assurance, External school Quality Assurers, School Quality Assurance, Teaching and Learning

1.0 Introduction

Globally, the school quality assurance (SQA) unit has been thought to be a forward step to ensure the improvement of quality education in schools (Adewale, 2014). Thus, it has been advocated that quality assurance (QA) can play an important role in the education system (Hossain, 2017). SQA, out of the school system, is supervised by the external school quality assurers (ESQA) from the External School Quality Assurance (ESQA) Department. ESQA is the process undertaken by ESQ assurers to help schools gauge the quality of education for school development, including teaching and learning (MoEST, 2017).

ESQ assurers are expected to enhance education effectiveness and efficiency by working in collaboration with teachers and schools (Kashyap, 2022). In the case of Zanzibar, the quest for having quality education has always been the dream and can be traced back to soon after independence. After the Revolution in 1964, among the laws and Acts that were passed by the government, the most important one was the Education Act No. 6 of 1982 (MoEVT, 2018a), which led to the establishment of SQA by the name of School Inspectorate.

The new Education Act No. 10 of 2018 on SQA directed the establishment of the Government Agency known as the Office of the Chief Inspectorate of Education [OCIE] (MoEVT, 2018). The declaration of the OCIE in Zanzibar requires that ESQ assurers visit and observe all schools that they comply with the Ministry of Education's guidelines so that the education standards and quality are met (OCIE, 2018). To play their role effectively, the ESQ assurers need special requirements and skills specific to their job (Etindi, 200). However, the works of literature discovered that there is no SQA training that has been given before their appointment and no

specialized qualification is required (Kiruma, 2013; Mwinyipembe & Orodho 2014). Also, there is no special course of SQA provided in the colleges of education in Zanzibar. It should be noted that the position of ESQ assurers is currently not an official post.

Rather, ESQ assurers are appointed without any special criteria and standard of recruitment (Ololube & Mojor, 2013). Instead, the enrolment chosen among classroom teachers, HoSs and Teacher Advisory Centre (TAC) tutors (Mmbando & Hongoke, 2010). This is usually based on length of service but no application or interview procedure. There is no sufficient allocation budget to carry out ESQA practices effectively (Matete, 2009). Thus, based on this scenario, it was important to investigate the education stakeholders' perceptions of ESQA's status in enhancing teaching and learning in Zanzibar. The continued lack of empirical evidence on the ESQA status on improving instruction may jeopardize the students' learning in terms of their academic achievement. The key question in this study was: what is education stakeholders' perception of ESQA status in enhancing teaching and learning in Zanzibar?

2.0 Literature Review

ESQA has been playing a great role in the enhancement of teaching and learning and thus contributes very much to improving teaching and learning and eventually upgrading students' academic performance (Lupimo, 2104). It assists in the improvements of the quality of teaching and learning by monitoring the instructional processes in schools and guiding teachers to achieve higher standards of teaching (Kambuga & Dadi, 2015; OCIE, 2018). However, for the ESQ assurers to play their role effectively, they require special skills specific to their job (Etindi, 2000). It should be born in mind that it might be difficult to carry out SQA

practices and make supervision of instruction if a person is not competent in the SQA field (Kirume, 2013).

In that regard, therefore, ESQ assurers should be competent and knowledgeable in at least two or more subjects' areas (Matete, 2009). In that context, the recruitment of ESQ assurers should be done by the specific set of criteria (Mwinyipembe & Orodho 2014). Ololube and Major (2014) revealed that in Nigeria, there was no clear policy for identifying suitable candidates to be recruited as ESQ assurers and so many unsuitable personnel did find their way into the ESQA thereby rendering the integrity of the entire system questionable. To make them function effectively, ESQ assurers should be given the required in-services training to empower them to reach the appropriate level of conducting supervision and to meet the challenges of supervising instructional practice in the school context (Kiruma, 2013).

MoVTZ (2011) stated that there are written procedures regarding the ESQA roles and responsibilities, but clear lines of authority are lacking. It has been reported that ESQ assurers are often unable to make decisions on matters on SQA without consulting authorities, who may have little or no knowledge of the situation or school (Eya & Chukwu, 2012). Olalube and Major (2014) discovered that the ESQA in Nigeria lacked the autonomy to execute its services and, as a result, it was unable to implement recommendations based on ESQA processes. Also, they did not seem to be fulfilled with their work conditions. Mmbando and Hongoke (2010) and Lupimo (2014) found out that there was a lack of human and financial resources and, a transport problem. Again, a very insignificant budget was seen as the main hindrance to regular school QA visits. On top of that, as it was noted, the lack of authority of the ESQ

assurers to penalize schools was playing a notable role in irregular school visits. These challenges have been noted to affect the regular and efficient SQA in different parts of the country.

3.0 Materials and Methods

A qualitative approach and a case study design were used to get in-depth data on the education stakeholders' perception of ESQA status as a tool to enhance teaching and learning in secondary schools. An interpretivist philosophical paradigm was used to understand education stakeholders' perceptions regarding their understanding of ESQA status in enhancing teaching and learning. The study was conducted at Kaskazini Region in Unguja, Zanzibar. The region was chosen because in four years consecutively teaching and learning had not yet improved even though it applied ESQA (Ali, 2015, 2019, 2021). It was also reported that classroom supervision and observations were being inappropriately carried out by both ESQ assurers and HoSs in this region (Office of the Chief Inspectorate of Zanzibar, 2019).

The study used a purposive sampling technique to select participants, out of whom, 11 were EQAs, 12 were the HoSs, 1 REO and 2 DEOs. An in-depth interview was used to learn the participants' perspectives, experiences, and the world they live in (Abawi, 2014). The major advantage of using this method is that there is greater flexibility as the opportunity to restructure questions is always there (Kothari, 2004). The weaknesses of this method include its tendency to consume time (Abawi, 2014) and the bias of the interviewer in interpreting questions (Cohen & Morrison, 2007). The interviews were conducted through negotiation based on each respondent's convenient time. In the documentary review, the researcher reviewed documents related to the themes of the study such

as the number of Quality Assurers and their qualifications, the number of the ESQ Assurers' office, ESQA resources, ESQA forms, Office of the Chief Inspector under the Education Act No. 10 of 2018 of the SQA. In addition to that, different journal articles and academic reports were read to gain a deeper understanding of the SQA.

According to Shoba (2009), the analysis of documents provides valuable information that fills the gaps that might have been left by other data collection instruments, such as interview guides. However, it may also be biased and time-consuming (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Thematic analysis procedures were adopted to analyze the qualitative data from the interview as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data were analysed thematically along the study's objective and presented in narrative forms. All research ethics were observed including obtaining the research clearance. Informed consent was observed by making sure that honest and detailed explanations of the purpose of the study were adhered to and that plagiarism was avoided by paraphrasing or giving quotations and acknowledging the sources of the information used.

4.0 Results

Participants were asked about their perceptions of ESQ Assurer's status in enhancing teaching and learning in Zanzibar. The question was: what are the education stakeholders' perceptions of ESQ Assurers' status in enhancing teaching and learning in secondary schools? The following are the categories and themes which education stakeholders perceive to be ESQ Assurers' status.

4.1 Perception of Professional Skills

This study sought to know whether the ESQ Assurers were competent enough in their supervision approach and if they were well-qualified and knowledgeable in helping teachers to develop teaching materials, knowledge of guidance and counselling and knowledge of the subject content and teaching methods. Regarding this, the participants gave the following comments. Specifically, one school head had this to say:

Without training, ESQ Assurers will not match with the changes taking place in the education system. If they will not be aware of the educational changes, it is obvious that they will not be competent in their responsibilities at SQA. I suggest that the Ministry of Education provide relevant in-service training for quality assurers to keep them up to date (Interview with the HoS, School A, 5th June, 2021).

This observation was also made by the DEOs, who claimed that many ESQ Assurers and the HoSs lacked the knowledge and skill involved in instructional supervision because they were not professionally competent. This is because the criteria for selecting ESQ Assurers and HoSs were not pursued by the authority. It was noted that most of them were not knowledgeable of administrative responsibilities and even instructional leadership in particular. On this particular aspect, during the interview session, one of the DEOs complained that:

The accountability of ESQ Assurers and HoSs is below the standards. Their administrative ability is not good since they are not provided with leadership training. The standards used for recruiting the HoSs and the ESQ Assurers are not appropriate. The majority of HoSs and ESQ Assurers and even some of us lack this quality of being efficiently competent. There are no fixed criteria for appointing the HoSs and ESQ

Assurers. This is why the quality of education in Zanzibar has been declining from day-to-day (Interview with DEO₃, 5th June, 2021).

It was further learnt that ESQA training was lacking since many ESQ Assurers were incompetent in their job. This situation was found to hinder the instructional supervision process as well as teaching and learning. On this, one school head gave the following explanations:

ESQ Assurers have difficulties in being conversant with contemporary issues in teaching. They also lack adequate knowledge of subject content and methods they supervise. This can be explained by the fact that their pre-service training did not cover supervision knowledge and skills. These officers are not confident to supervise teachers who are academically higher than them (Interview with HoS, School J, 4th July, 2021).

In the same line of argument, the other school head argued that:

There is also a sense among some teachers and HoSs that status is affected because some ESQ Assurers lack academic qualifications. ESQ assurers must be more highly qualified than teachers, to give them respect and status (Interview with the HoS, School C, 4th July, 2021).

Based on the above quotations, the implication is that some of the ESQ assurers have unsatisfactory knowledge and skills in the instructional supervision. They supervise only as a part of their responsibilities. This leads to failure in helping HoSs and teachers. It was noted that ESQ Assurers had inadequate technical competency and knowledge of instructional supervision. In addition, it was discovered that the

recruitment of the ESQ Assurers was below standard, because there were no predetermined criteria or qualities used in selecting ESQ Assurers as professional quality assurers. This may consequently hinder the quality of the teaching and learning process.

4.2 Perceptions of Authority

This study sought to know whether the ESQ assurers had the full authority to make decisions for teachers and schools or to dominate all the equipment, trip training and school visits. On this, the participants had the following comments. To begin with, the ESQ Assurer₂ had these to say:

We have no legal authority over teachers. Sometimes, teachers go straight to the Ministry of Education and complain and decisions are made to omit the ESQ Assurers. These demoralize us. For an ESQ Assurer to be effective, we need the authority to exercise what we feel is good for the school (Interview with the ESQ Assurer₂, 5th July, 2021).

In the same line of argument, another ESQ Assurer said:

When we present our reports to the authorities concerned, we expect that they should take immediate action. For example, the educational officers such as REO and DEOs and the general secretary from the MoEVT are supposed to take action because we [ESQ Assurers have no authority to punish anybody (Interview with the ESQ Assurer₁, 5th July 2021).

On the other hand, the study findings depicted that some of the ESQ Assurers had low salaries and this was affecting their status as there was a shortage of human resources. On this issue, one ESQ Assurer had these to comments:

Since salaries in Zanzibar are determined by academic qualifications, there are frequent cases where the ESQ assurers earn less than some of the HoSs and teachers. Lack of academic qualifications, thus severely undermines status, and consequently authority in the ESQA department (Interview with the ESQ Assurer₄, 5th July 2021).

Based on the previous quotation, indicates that the opinion of ESQ Assurers and many other education stakeholders was that for ESQ Assurers to become successful agents of change in schools, their authority must be unquestioned, upheld and supported throughout the education system but within the legal framework to avoid absolute freedom.

4.3 Perception of ESQ Assurers' Working Conditions

The research further portrayed that the ESQ Assurers were faced with a great deal of limitations, which were constraining their support towards accomplishing the issue of quality instructional practices. It was realized that the ESQ Assurers' Department experiences very deprived working conditions; this is one of the problems which inhibit the ESQ Assurers' efforts. For example, the ESQ Assurers at Kaskazini Region always depended upon commuter buses when they needed to reach their offices. The worst thing is that many of them have offices, located in town areas, while they were living in rural areas. This was a serious problem for them since they had no enough money for that. One ESQ Assurer justified this fact as follows:

The ESQ Assurers have no any kind of motivation. We are considered as teachers. There is neither transport allowance nor commission given. We work unwillingly and thus the efficacy is not achieved. The type of transport we use to go to

*our offices is a bit hard. We pay the bus fare using our salaries
(Interview with the EQ Assurer₂, 5th July, 2021).*

Likewise, the ESQ Assurers justified that they used to visit schools without being given allowances. This shows that there was a poor allocation of resources particularly in tax collection. In addition, motivation or recognition was not considered important. This condition led to a lot of inconveniences for them. Thus, this evidence reveals why the ESQ Assurers were persistently receiving much blame from teachers and other education stakeholders for their habit of focusing more on administrative issues and teachers' working tools and neglecting to carry out classroom observation. In that case, they used to assess the school's performance by the few aspects of their interest only. The other ESQ Assurer said the following to verify this issue:

*We [ESQ Assurers] earn very little salary. We overwork, but we don't get any allowance. We are not offered even a bottle of water. Our tool makes our hosts inhospitable, and therefore we work all day long while starving. The training offered for both HoSs and ESQ Assurers is insufficient. Most of the HoSs are not accountable enough for their responsibilities. Besides, they have low skills in issues related to administration
(Interview with the ESQ Assurer₅, 5th July, 2021).*

On the contrary, the study results showed that human resources were scarce. Clarifying this issue, the ESQ Assurers highlighted that the number of schools did not collocate with the number of the ESQ Assurers. It was found that the small number of ESQ Assurers affected negatively the usual school visits. About this issue, one ESQ Assurer had the following to explain:

The basic inspection is conducted by three ESQ Assurers but they are not enough, and when we offer our suggestions, no one is listening to us. The entire school visit is done in three days, but they are not enough. It is a big load for us. Two days are meant for inspection and on the third day, we call a meeting with the administrative committee to discuss and draw a conclusion, and the DEOs are supposed to attend such a meeting but they normally do not attend (Interview with the EQ Assurer₄, 5th July, 2021).

In line with the above comment, the district education officer's point of view also confirms that school inspectors were very few to have an impact on instructional issues. One of the two DEOs commented:

We [DEOs] have ten ESQ Assurers in the Kaskazini Region. Three of them went for further studies. No one may expect ten ESQ Assurers to be precise and efficient when doing ESQA practices in both secondary and primary schools. It is unknown whether these ESQ Assurers make classroom observations or not, since in an actual sense, it is very hard for them to walk around all the classrooms and discuss with every single teacher (Interview with the DEO₂, 28th June, 2021).

The above quotations portray clearly how ESQ Assurers were discouraged by the poor working conditions. It is not expected for someone with financial problems and full of despair, and who has no optimism about the future of their own family, to fulfil their responsibilities to a required standard or to work efficiently. It was also discovered that deprived working conditions faced by the ESQ Assurers hindered the SQA practices in schools. Their working condition was extremely bad to the extent that they failed to perform their key duties in

monitoring and enhancing the quality and desirable standards of instructional practices in schools. According to these circumstances, the rank of ESQ Assurers was hardly recognized by the educational stakeholders. These issues were hindering improvement in instructional practices.

5.0 Discussion of the Findings

The findings indicated that ESQ Assurance status was still questionable since the study discovered that ESQ Assurers had inadequate technical competency and knowledge of instructional supervision. These findings are similar to those of Ololube and Major (2014) in Nigeria who found that there was no comprehensible guiding principle for selecting appropriate applicants to be recruited as ESQ Assurers and so many inappropriate personnel would determine their way into the SQA thereby rendering the honesty of the whole system questionable. Ololube (2013) similarly found that in Kenya most of the ESQ Assurers were not professionally qualified. They were carrying out their responsibilities in an unprofessional technique that had serious implications for instructional processes.

These findings also concur with those of Kiruma (2013) in Uganda who clarified that ESQ assurers might be unable to offer constructive recommendations to some aspects of the SQA process due to the shortage of knowledge, experience and skills. These findings entail that there is the necessity to recruit ESQ Assurers as per a set of standards. ESQ Assurers should be given the required in-services training that authorizes them to reach the suitable level of conducting the SQA process and to meet the challenges of supervising instructional practice in a school context. It may

be complicated to conduct SQA practices and carry out supervision of instruction if a person is incompetent in the field of SQA.

Regarding the ESQ Assurers' authority to make decisions about teaching and learning and teachers' performance, the study indicated that ESQ Assurers did not have the authority to be efficient. These findings are supported by what has been stated by Eya and Chukwu (2012), who found that ESQ assurers were often unable to make decisions on matters about SQA without consulting authorities who might have little or no knowledge of the situation or school. These findings are also in line with what was found by Ololube and Major (2014) in Nigeria that the ESQA lacked autonomy to execute its services and as a result it was unable to implement recommendations based on ESQA processes and it did not fulfil its work conditions. To establish this authority, there is a need to have a clear outline of what exactly ESQ Assurers are responsible for and what actions they are empowered to take to deal with issues. Ideally, this will involve consultation with a group of experienced educational stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, to establish what appropriate areas of authority should be included.

The study further found that most of the ESQ Assurers were not satisfied with their work conditions. First, they did not have good means of transport. They were also facing problems with a lack of field allowances, low salaries, and no incentives as well. The above findings attest to the suggestions given in the study done by De Grauwe (2001), who found that the four African countries including Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe were facing many challenges mostly based on the lack of resources, especially the means of transportation and funds for running SQA activities.

These findings concur with the study conducted by Matete (2009) in Tanzania and Ololube and Major (2014) in Kenya who discovered that school inspectors were suffering from poverty since there was a shortage of funds, especially for transport and subsistence allowances. This was making the ESQ Assurers unsuccessful in meeting the expenses related to transport and accommodation. It was found that the scarcity of funds had resulted in a deprived provision of accommodation and survival to the external quality assurers, something which led to the delaying of the achievement of the quality assurance programme.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the major findings, it was noted that the autonomy and authority of ESQ Assurers was still challenging for them to improve teaching and learning. It was also found that there was insufficient allocation of budget to carry out ESQA practices effectively. Hence, it is concluded that these situations jeopardize ESQ Assurers' status as they become less effective in enhancing teaching and learning processes. It is also recommended that the government upgrade the ESQ Assurers and the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools by strengthening the ESQA by considering the provision of appropriate and continuous training programmes. In line with this, MoEVTZ should create fixed standards or a criterion for appointing ESQ Assurers. Moreover, it should clarify areas of ESQ Assurers' authority and responsibility, and ensure these are supported by processes at all levels of the education system. Further, it should increase the budget for the successful implementation of SQA practices based on their human resources, materials resources and financial capabilities.

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