



Quality Assurance Strategies in Enhancing Learning Achievement among Public Primary Schools in Arusha Region, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigated the School Quality Assurance (SQA) strategies in enhancing learning achievement among Public Primary Schools (PPSs) in Arusha Region, Tanzania, using a cross-section descriptive design. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data from 226 participants. Qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach and quantitative data through descriptive statistics, ordinal regression and Spearman's rho correlation. The study revealed that visiting schools regularly, follow-up visits, releasing SQA feedback on time, friendly language, supporting professional development, visiting schools without prior information and involving teachers in SQA practices enhanced learning achievement. Poor transport facilities, shortages of SQAOs and inadequate SQA facilities limited the implementation. While insufficient fund caused SQAOs failure to visit every school in a year, delayed written reports made schools fail to implement SQA recommendations on time. The study recommended that the government of Tanzania should allocate required resources such as employing more qualified officers, adequate provision of funds and transport facilities to facilitate SQA practices. Furthermore, the government needs to support SQA by continuously conducting short courses on lesson preparation and classroom management in order to support teachers in improving teaching skills. SQAOs need to handle teachers in a friendly manner that promotes trust, thus enhancing quality of their exercise.

Keywords: SQA strategies, learning enhancement, learning achievement, public primary schools.

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Introduction

Quality Assurance practices are recognized as essential instrument in maintaining required educational standards (De Grauwe, 2007; Oluremi

and Oyewole, 2013). School quality assurance (SQA) programs, also known as School Inspection have existed for many years in history (De Grauwe, 2007); Machumu, 2012). In developed countries, it

started in France (1801) and England in (1839) (Wilcox, 2000). Since then, the practices in other European and American countries have grown in size and scope. Many developing countries in Africa adopted the idea of school inspection after independence (Kambuga & Dadi, 2015). The SQA practices are support services for controlling and promoting education improvement focusing on learning achievement (De Grauwe, 2007).

In Tanzania, the Ministry of Education established the School Inspectorate Department in 1978 whereby school inspectors were mandated to monitor and support education delivery and to ensure learning achievement in schools (MoEVT, 2010). School inspectors controlled and directed teachers to perform their duties instead of supporting and guiding teachers (Kambuga & Dadi, 2015). As a result, school inspection did not lead to the expected improvement (MoEST, 2017). Following the dissatisfaction with school inspection, the increasing demand for learning achievement and the experience from other African countries, Tanzania established School Quality Assurance Department to replace the school inspection in 2016. School inspectors were given a new name "School Quality Assurance Officers" (SQAOs). The SQAOs were mandated to monitor and provide advisory services to headteachers and teachers on school administrative activities and pedagogical skills rather than controlling and directing them (MoEST, 2017).

Tanzania experienced several fundamental policy changes and reforms in the struggle to improve quality education in primary schools specifically. Efforts to achieve Education for All, Millennium Development Goals, and Big Results Now are some of the reforms that emphasized learning achievement in primary schools (Swai, 2019).

Despite these initiatives, learning achievement in some primary schools in Tanzania is still not satisfactory. It is evident from the literature that some schools do not perform well academically to the extent that some pupils complete primary education without attaining fundamental learning skills in writing, reading and arithmetic (3Rs) (Sumra, Ruto and Rajani, 2015; Mmasa and Anney, 2016). Analysis of the 3Rs reports from primary schools and the Primary School Leaving Examination results in the Arusha Region from 2014 to 2018 shows that some pupils complete their primary education without mastering the 3Rs. For instance, in 2014, 2017, and 2018, the region had 334, 165, and 194

pupils, respectively, who completed standard seven with poor 3Rs mastery. This situation raises questions, especially for SQAOs whose roles include supporting, monitoring, and evaluating the quality of education delivery and learning achievement in the country.

Some studies such as Matete (2009); Kambuga & Dadi (2015); Charles (2015); Bakar (2016); Mutabaruka, Kazooba and Kemeza (2018) sought to establish the contribution of SQA in teaching and learning and provided limited information describing why the level of learning in PPSs is low. With the persistent poor learning achievement in some PPSs, there is a need to examine SQA strategies used by SQAOs to enhance learning achievement in PPSs in the Arusha region, Tanzania. This study therefore sought to answer one research question: what are the strategies used by SQAOs in enhancing learning achievement in PPSs, in Arusha region?

The Concept of Quality Assurance

Harvey and Green (1993) and Gandhe (2009) provide a heuristic framework for defining quality by suggesting that quality is viewed as value for money, as fitness for purpose, as transformative, and as excellence. Quality as value for money is focused on efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and return on investment or expenditure; it measures outputs against inputs. The quality as fit for purpose is the degree to which the educational product is consistent with the goals and fulfillment of the clients' satisfaction. For instance, the core goal of primary education is to equip children with basic learning skills in terms of 3Rs. Quality as transformation assesses quality as the ongoing process of providing learners with appropriate knowledge and skills. Quality as *excellence* relates to what extent resource inputs and transformation processes (teaching and learning) produce high-quality outputs (learners) that meet set standards and expectations of the society. In this study, SQA is defined as the systematic monitoring of curriculum delivery, evaluating and reviewing the resource inputs and transformation process (teaching and learning) to produce quality outputs (learners) that meet set standards and expectations of the society (Ayeni, 2011).

SQAOs focused on evaluating learners' achievement, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the quality of the school curriculum in

meeting learners' needs, the quality of school leadership and management and the quality of school resources and facilities (MoEST, 2017). A critical look at these explanations shows that ensuring quality in primary education is an imperative subject to bring success in learning.

Strategies used by School Quality Assurance Officers

SQA strategies are ways or methods employed by SQAOs to support educational delivery and ensure learning achievement. Several studies suggest that SQAOs can use various strategies to enhance learning achievement. Strategies reviewed include classroom observation, mutual relationships between teachers and SQAOs and supporting professional development for teachers.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observation is the main activity of SQAOs (MoEST, 2017). In the classroom, SQAOs observe how learning is being carried out and how pupils are managed and taught. They also assess pupils' competencies focusing on 3Rs. SQAOs also check pupils' exercise books, teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans, lesson notes, teaching and learning materials and teaching presentations (Fasasi and Oyeniran, 2014). Black and William (2010) argued that a classroom is a black box where someone may not see what takes place inside until someone goes in. In this case, therefore, classroom observation is a significant component of SQAOs supervisory role.

Aguti (2015); Bagaya, Ezati, Wafula and Rasmussen (2020) in their research about school inspection practices in Uganda revealed that classroom observations were not effectively carried out by SQAOs. Some officers spend most of their time assessing schemes and lesson plans to judge the performance of the schools. For the SQA to bear fruits, classroom observations should be a central focus of the SQAOs (Matete, 2009). In Tanzania, Matete (2009) and Jeremiah (2016) revealed that classroom observations were not conducted at the level required; because some SQAOs in the classroom tended to concentrate much on the availability of schemes of work and lesson plans, but how teachers present their teaching was given less attention. Matete (2009) suggested that for the SQA to bear fruits, classroom observations should be a central focus of the SQAOs.

Mutual Relationships

Titanji and Yuoh (2010) perceived that the teachers-SQAOs relationship is supposed to be built on norms

of collaboration and mutual trust to improve learning. Studies by Titanji *and* Yuoh (2010); Sullivan and Glanz (2005); Ahmad *et al.* (2013) discovered a superior-subordinate relationship between teachers and SQAOs that lacks respect, trust and collaboration. According to them, SQAOs tend to criticize teachers for mistakes, thus failure to see the positive things teachers do. Poor teachers-SQAOs relationships hinder effective SQA because in such a situation, it is not easy to convince school teachers to accept new ideas and changes. Schools that have a good relationship with the SQAOs would probably have a positive impact because teachers would be more open about their strengths and weaknesses and more sensitive to improvement suggestions (Ehren and Visscher, 2008).

Supporting Professional Development

Teaching is a complex profession that demands work that requires highly updated skills and knowledge of the subjects. Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2010) and Ayeni (2011) highlighted the importance of teachers' professional development as an important ingredient in school improvement. Fraser, Kennedy, Reid and McKinney (2007) conclude that teachers need access to ongoing, high-quality professional learning opportunities to develop and enhance the necessary skills and understanding. Despite teachers' possessing the right qualifications for teaching in primary schools, they must be given the support needed to seek and test new teaching methods and approaches (Fredriksson, 2004). SQAOs are instrumental in fostering professional development of teachers. De Grauwe (2001), in his study in Four African countries including Tanzania, found that the career development practices for teachers though existed a long time, was not satisfactory because the government had no insufficient funds to run workshops and seminars regularly.

Conceptual Framework

Inspired by the literature reviews, the conceptual framework in figure 1 (p. 51) is designed to respond to the research question: what are the strategies used in by SQAOs in enhancing learning achievement in PPSs in Arusha region?

Figure 1 shows how the independent and intervening/mediator variables interact and consequently enhance learning achievement. The two-headed arrow shows interactions between variables and their effect. .

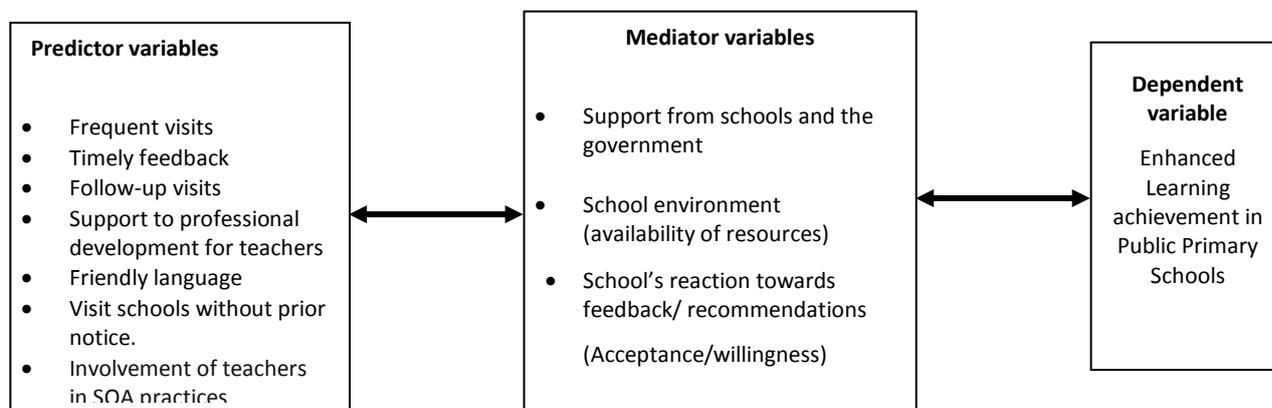


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

Table 1: Summary of Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Category	Target Population	Percentage (%)	Sample size	Sampling technique
Pupils	1353	10	135	Simple random
Classroom teachers	206	22	45	Stratified
Academic teachers	15	100	15	Purposive
Head teachers	15	100	15	Purposive
DSQAOs	14	100	14	Purposive
DEOs	02	100	02	Purposive
Total	1505		226	

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The decision to choose this design was determined by the purpose of the study and its philosophical basis, which aimed to develop a detailed understanding of the topic (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Population and Sampling

This study was conducted in the Arusha region with 552 PPSs from 7 districts. Following the academic performance criterion, researchers used purposive sampling to choose Karatu and Longido districts with 155 PPSs, whereby 15 PPSs (10%) were randomly selected. As seen in Table 1, the targeted population was 1,505 individuals including 1,353 pupils, 206 classroom teachers, 15 headteachers, 15 academic teachers, 14 DSQAOs and 2 District Educational Officers. Researchers used 10% to sample 226 respondents out of 1,505, consistent with Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) recommendations that a sample size of 10% to 50% is acceptable for statistical analysis. The study therefore sampled 135 pupils and 45 classroom teachers. Head teachers, academic teachers, DSQAOs and DEOs were all included in the study purposively because they were few.

Ethics Considerations

The researchers adhered to all ethical issues including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and freedom of the participant to participate. Respondents were also required to sign consent forms indicating their agreement or disagreement to participate in the study.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. It followed open and axial coding procedures which entailed data coding, organizing, exploring, comparing and merging to generate initial codes (Douglas, 2003; Deterding and Waters, 2021). Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics, ordinal regression and Spearman's rho statistics through the Statistical Packages for Social Science. The study used quotations from interviews to support the arguments and claims made by respondents (Thompson, 2009; Creswell, 2014). Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated to establish the relationships between and among variables.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the research instruments was done through research supervisors, experts and peers who appraised the research instruments and

provided guidelines that improved the validity. Using the SPSS, researchers calculated a Cronbach's Alpha to establish the reliability of the pilot study results. The test yielded a coefficient of .763. A coefficient above 0.6 is considered reasonable reliability for data analysis and reporting (Pallant & Manual, 2010).

Results and Discussion

The study was guided by one research question: what are strategies used by SQAOs in enhancing learning achievement among public primary schools in Arusha Region?

Through interviews, respondents were asked to describe strategies used by SQAOs in SQA practices. Strategies that emerged were visiting schools regularly, providing immediate feedback, making follow-up visits, supporting professional development for teachers, visiting schools without prior notice and involving teachers in SQA.

Regular Visit

During the interview, respondents declared that regular school visit helped teachers improve teaching and increased commitment to lesson preparation and presentation. However, financial constraints, the vast distance between schools, inadequate vehicles, shortage of SQAOs and impassable roads, especially during the rainy season, limited regular school visits. The situation was confirmed by a comment made by an officer during the interview: *"Inadequate funds, remoteness and impassable roads, especially during the wet season, affect inspection activities"* (Takwenya, an officer from District Y). Similarly, through questionnaires, it was revealed that the majority (60.0%) of respondents disagreed that SQAOs visited schools regularly. The finding correlates with those by De Grauwe (2001) and Mulkeen and Chen (2008) that schools in remote areas are less or not visited because they are not accessible. The totality of these problems may affect learning achievement because of limited opportunities.

Providing SQA Feedback on Time

SQA feedback is crucial as it enables schools to take necessary measures for education delivery improvement (De Grauwe, 2001). During the interview, most respondents accepted that SQAOs gave quick oral feedback after the school assessment through discussion. Written feedback reached schools with delays. In the same vein, responses through questionnaires showed that

55.6% of classroom teachers, 48.10% of pupils, and 58.3% of DSQAOs agreed that SQAOs provided verbal feedback just after the school assessment. However, about 35.6.7% of classroom teachers, 34.8% of pupils and 41.7% of DSQAOs disagreed. While the majority appeared to be pleased with the provision of feedback, some respondents complained that written reports were delayed due to inadequate resources like computers. Likewise, De Grauwe (2001); reported that poor secretarial resources like typewriters, computers and photocopiers delayed written reports in Tanzania.

Follow-up School Visits

During interview, a few respondents said that SQAOs did follow-up visits while the majority claimed that there were no follow-up visits. One of respondents made it clear that *"Follow-up school visits are relatively rare in some schools, not because SQAOs are lazy but because they are few and do not have sufficient facilities for doing their work as required due to limited budget (Irunde, the DCSQAO from district Y)*. These findings imply that while some schools benefited from follow-up visits, others did not. De Grauwe (2001) confirmed that although the SQAD planned for follow-up visits, the number of visits was not adequate because of financial and transport constraints.

Similarly, responses from the questionnaires showed that 80% of classroom teachers, 71.1% of pupils and 66.7% of DSQAOs disagreed that there were follow-up school visits. Rare follow-up school visits may adversely affect learning achievement in schools. According to Ahmad *et al.*, (2013), rare follow-up visit creates a sense of alienation among teachers.

Support for Professional Development

Professional development means to equip teachers with the necessary pedagogical knowledge, skills and attitudes, enabling them to produce high learning achievement. During interviews, some respondents appreciated that SQAOs provided managerial and pedagogical knowledge and skills to teachers and head teachers. However, some showed dissatisfaction with the professional development assistance received from the SQAOs. Through questionnaires, the results show that 75.6% of classroom teachers, 66.7% of pupils, and 75.0% of DSQAOs disagreed that SQAOs support professional development for teachers. Overall, responses indicated the rare professional development support for teachers by SQAOs.

Similarly, De Grauwe (2001) and Machumu (2012) maintained that professional development opportunities for teachers provided are seldom because of inefficient funds for SQAOs to run seminars. De Grauwe (2001) further asserts that the quality of primary education has deteriorated due to inadequate professional assistance provided to teachers.

Friendly Language

Some respondents during interviews reported that some SQAOs used friendly language when instructing teachers but some said that SQAOs used harsh words, especially to those teachers who failed to submit the needed documents while assessed. The questionnaires results showed that 37.8% of classroom teachers, 11.1% of pupils and 66.7% of DSQAOs agreed that inspectors used friendly language. However, 62.2% of classroom teachers and 78.5% of pupils indicated disagreement whereas 33.3% of the DSQAOs were neutral. On command language, one academic teacher said: *“Some SQAOs are more judgmental towards teachers than helpful. This may create psychological tension and fear among teachers”* (Mwinga, from school three). According to Matete (2009) and Machumu (2012), polite language may encourage teachers and pupils to work hard but the commanding language could create physical and social distance between schools and the SQAOs. Friendly language enhances mutual relationships between teachers and SQAOs.

Visiting Schools without Prior Notice

DSQAOs said that sometimes they preferred to visit schools without prior information in order to establish teachers' punctuality. During interviews, most head teachers said that SQAOs informed them about their visitations to prepare necessary documents needed during the assessment. This is worth noting since prior notification reduces

psychological tension and fear which are common among teachers during the assessment (Wilcox, 2000; Kiruma, 2013). However, information before encourages schools to window-dress in preparation for visitation (Aiyepetu, 1987). Some of the school heads, however, revealed that sometimes SQAOs visited schools without prior information.

Involvement of Teachers

Through interviews, respondents revealed that the involvement of teachers in SQA matters enhanced learning achievement because it made teachers aware of SQA issues, thus being accountable for the implementation of SQAOs' recommendations. However, according to teachers' responses, this strategy was not practiced as much as required. During the interview, one head teacher said: *“To enhance learning achievement, teachers need to have the capacity to take part in SQA issues. But in a real sense, SQAOs do not fully involve either building capacity for teachers in the whole process of SQA as equal partners”* (Mwajibu, from school one).

Correlation Results

The researchers employed ordinal regression to establish the relationship between the dependent variable (learning achievement) and the independent variables (SQA strategies). Levels of measurement for dependent variables were: 1 = excellent, 2 = very good, 3 = good, 4 = satisfactory, and 5 = unsatisfactory, and for independent variables were: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The correlation coefficient values and associated probability values (P-values) were used to ascertain the statistical significance of relationships. Ordinal regression and Spearman correlation provide an opportunity to get a complete picture of the contribution of SQA strategies to learning achievement.

Table 2: Respondents' perceptions on the influence of SQA strategies and learning achievement

Items	Coefficient (β)	SE coef	P-value
Frequent visits	.864	.214	.000***
Timely feedback	.407	.205	.047*
Follow-up visits	1.096	.215	.000***
Consistent support to professional development for teachers	.438	.132	.001**
Friendly language	.485	.161	.003**
Visiting schools without prior notice	.364	.105	.001**
Involvement of teachers in SQA practices.	.550	.235	.020*

Cronbach=722, No of respondents=192

As seen in table 2, the ordinal regression analysis revealed that independent variables were positively

associated with the dependent variable, with p-values <.05. This implies that SQA strategies had a

positive influence on learning achievement. Therefore, effective implementation of SQA strategies contributed significantly to learning achievement.

When comparing the strength to which the independent variables affected the dependent variable, the coefficient values (β) and P-values in Table 2 show that follow-up visit is the most significant factor that influenced learning achievement with ($\beta= 1.096$, $p=.000$); followed by frequent school visits ($\beta=.864$, $p=.000$; involvement of teachers in SQA practices ($\beta=.550$, $p=.020$); friendly language ($\beta=.485$, $p=.003$); supporting professional development ($\beta=.438$, $p=.001$); timely feedback ($\beta=.407$, $p=.047$); and visiting schools without prior notice ($\beta=.364$, $p=.001$). The results

indicate that while some of the factors may have a higher contribution as their correlation values are high, others seem to have little support for learning achievement as their correlation values are weaker. This implies that no one strategy can independently enhance learning achievement without the help of the others. A balance among all these strategies is necessary for effective learning achievement.

Moreover, the study used Spearman's rho correlation analysis to assess the association of independent variables (SQA strategies). Table 3 shows that five out of six independent variables associated positively except supporting professional development and visiting schools without prior notice.

Table 3: Spearman's rho correlations coefficient (β) for SQA strategies (N=92)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Learning achievement (1)	B	1.000	.496**	.443**	.461**	.411**	.501**	.342**	.459**
	Sig.	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Visiting schools frequently (2)	B	.496**	1.000	.260**	.162*	.230**	.311**	.222**	.284**
	Sig.	.000	.	.000	.025	.001	.000	.002	.000
Providing timely feedback (3)	B	.443**	.260**	1.000	.205**	.195**	.231**	.214**	.550**
	Sig.	.000	.000	.	.004	.007	.001	.003	.000
Making follow-up visits (4)	B	.461**	.162*	.205**	1.000	.102	.229**	.208**	.163*
	Sig.	.000	.025	.004	.	.161	.001	.004	.024
Supporting professional development (5)	B	.411**	.230**	.195**	.102	1.000	.440**	-.057	.246**
	Sig.	.000	.001	.007	.161	.	.000	.431	.001
The use of friendly language (6)	B	.501**	.311**	.231**	.229**	.440**	1.000	.127	.281**
	Sig.	.000	.000	.001	.001	.000	.	.079	.000
Visiting schools without prior notice (7)	B	.342**	.222**	.214**	.208**	-.057	.127	1.000	.207**
	Sig.	.000	.002	.003	.004	.431	.079	.	.004
Involvement of teachers in SQA practices (8)	B	.459**	.284**	.550**	.163*	.246**	.281**	.207**	1.000
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.024	.001	.000	.004	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

c. Listwise N = 192

Key: β = Spearman's rho correlations coefficient, Sig. = significant

The findings in table 3 correlate with findings of previous studies. For example, follow-up visit has a significant positive relationship with learning achievement. Similarly, Ehren and Visscher (2008) assert that follow-up of reports supports learning achievement and it motivates schools to implement SQAOS' recommendations (Ehren, Altrichter, McNamara & O'Hara, 2013). It further makes consistent checking of preparation of the lesson and checking of pupils learning progress (Gaertner, Wurster and Pant, 2014). Also, if there are no follow-up visits on recommendations, and if there is no way of assessing whether SQA delivers or not,

then this can waste public resources and time (Lyimo, 2015).

Furthermore, the finding that visiting schools regularly has a significant positive relationship with learning achievement is consistent with previous studies of Wanjiru (2014) and Lyimo (2015) that schools with higher frequencies of visits increase academic performance compared to those with lower frequencies of visits.

Finally, the findings that supporting professional development for teachers has a significant positive

relationship with learning achievement is in line with the finding of Kotirde and Yunos (2015) who affirmed that personnel with higher qualifications display more confidence in their work than their counterparts with a lower level of education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study came up with a number of conclusions: First, Visiting schools regularly, follow-up visits, releasing SQA feedback on time, friendly language, supporting professional development, visiting schools without prior information and involving teachers in SQA practices enhanced learning achievement. However, poor transport facilities, shortages of SQAOs and inadequate SQA facilities like computers limited the implementation. Furthermore, rare visitation impeded learning achievement due to limited opportunities to talk with teachers. Finally, insufficient fund caused SQAOs failure to visit every school in a year. Delayed written reports made schools fail to implement SQA recommendations on time. Such deficits may undermine the quality of school supervision and the quality of education provision.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the government of Tanzania should allocate required resources such as more qualified officers, funds and transport facilities to facilitate SQA practices. Furthermore, the government needs to support SQAD by continuously conducting short courses on lesson preparation and classroom management in order to support teachers in improving teaching skills. SQAOs need to handle teachers in a friendly manner that promotes trust, thus enhancing quality of their exercise.

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