



The Impact of School Quality Assurance Practices on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Mafia District, Tanzania

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Abstract: *This study examined the impact of school quality assurance practices on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mafia District Council. The study was guided by two research objectives, namely to: identify strategies used by SQA to assess the school services on students' academic performance in public secondary schools; examine the challenges facing SQA during quality assurance exercises on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. This research employed a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design. The study utilized questionnaire and interview methods for data collection. Quantitative data were analysed by using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS while qualitative data were analysed by using content analysis. The findings revealed that school quality assurance practices were significantly influencing students' secondary school academic achievement. Furthermore, the strategies used by SQA to assess the school's services were significantly and highly correlated with students' academic performance. The study highlights the challenges facing SQA during quality assurance exercises, including inadequate facilities and a lack of teachers implementing SQA recommendations. It is recommended that the government increases budget for provision of SQA facilities providing regular training and seminars through in-service training programs in order to accommodate policy and technological changes.*

Keywords: *School quality assurance, Academic performance, Public secondary school, School quality assurance practices and Strategies used by SQA.*

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1. Introduction

Globally, students' academic achievement is the dream of every education stakeholder. The type of academic achievement should be of quality in nature. Quality education depends on teachers, school structure,

management, and the ability to improve teaching and learning. It is commonly accepted that quality teachers and instruction are the foundation of all quality education systems (Katete, 2023).

Quality assurance and control in education emerged as a growing policy viewpoint in the modern world at the

UNESCO-organized World Conference on Education for All Nations in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. Representatives of the international community agreed that all countries should concentrate more on improving the achievement of acknowledged and measurable learning outcomes in schools, especially in the areas of reading, numeracy, and basic life skills (UNESCO, 2022). The responsibilities of quality assurance and control include setting appropriate learning and teaching objectives, providing the material and intellectual resources to support these objectives, monitoring and improving learning and teaching performance on an annual basis, and evaluating the success of attaining learning and teaching objectives (Katete, 2023).

School quality assurance is a well-established practice in several nations. It has been practiced for many years. It was intentionally developed to monitor, assess, counsel, and support teaching and learning activities in order to raise and uphold educational standards globally (Mapunda, 2023). In Bangladesh, SQA significantly contributed to the increase in secondary education performance from 71% in 2020 to 81% in 2022 (BANBEIS, 2023). England, Sweden, and the Netherlands prefer "school inspection" over "quality assurance" due to its origins in France and global commitment to providing high-quality education for societal and national development. School quality assurance (SQA) in Africa, particularly in Uganda, has roots in colonial education. It has evolved since independence, serving as a management function for evaluating schools, assessing teachers, and maintaining educational standards. By 1969, Uganda had an inspectorate division, headed by the Chief Inspector of Schools (Peter & Mkulu, 2022).

Tanzania began quality assurance in education during the colonial era through school inspection. After independence in 1961, the School Inspectorate Department was established to support educational improvements. Tanzania's government enacted several educational programs and legislation after independence. Education Act No. 25 of 1978 created the Department of School Inspection (URT, 2011). This Act required school inspections to monitor instruction and guarantee compliance with curriculum and standards to maintain high education standards. Thus, the purpose was to oversee schools and assure efficient and effective education. Feedback was also intended for managers, administrators, and education agencies.

The 1978 school inspectorate inspection concept did not increase student results (URT, 2017). It lacked standards and regulations and was largely diagnostic with little quality assurance support. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) switched from

traditional inspection to School Quality Assurance in 2016. Learning goals, school development-planning, capacity building through school self-evaluation and sharing practice within and across schools, and community participation are central to this innovative method of School Quality Assurance (URT, 2017). While the old school inspection model focused on process and little on outcomes, the new model emphasizes outcomes and capacity building through school self-evaluation (URT, 2017). The study by (Makiya et al., 2022; Kingu & Wandela, 2022) found that follow-up visits, professional development, hospitable language, timely SQA input, regular school visits, teacher participation in SQA procedures, and visiting schools without prior notice all improved learning attainment.

However, reports show that students' academic performance in Tanzania is currently threatened, with students failed percentage of 42.91 in 2013 and 32.09 in 2015. This deterioration in national examination performance was due to compromised quality in education (HakiElimu, 2020). The performance of students in public secondary schools in Mafia District has significantly improved from 2016 to 2022, with a higher percentage of passed students (87.79%) and a decrease in failed students (12.21%) (NECTA, 2022), prompting the researcher to investigate the impact of school quality assurance practices on academic performance. This data highlights the importance of quality assurance in enhancing student outcomes.

School quality assurance (SQA) plays a crucial role in enhancing students' academic performance in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination. Studies (Leo et al., 2024; Ng'hoboko, 2024) indicates that better SQA implementation practices can improve students' performance, including aligning curriculum with learning objectives, using effective instructional strategies, implementing varied assessments, and providing comprehensive student support services. However, these studies cannot be generalized to secondary schools in the Mafia district, making this study necessary. The academic performance of secondary school leavers in Tanzania has significantly improved, rising from 77% in 2016 to 87.79% in 2022 (Mwanahanja, 2024). However, the impact of SQA activities on secondary school students' academic performance in Tanzania, particularly in the Mafia district, has not been fully investigated. This study aims to investigate the impact of SQA practices on students' academic performance in Tanzanian public secondary schools, using the Mafia district as a case study under the following specific objectives.

1. To identify strategies used by SQA to assess the school services on students' academic performance in public secondary schools

2. To examine the challenges facing SQA during quality assurance exercises on students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

2. Literature Review

One of the main educational factors influencing academic achievement in educational institutions is quality assurance. In the beginning, school quality assurance took the shape of a school inspection, according to Arcaro (2024) and Mtitu et al. (2023). During Napoleon's rule in France at the end of the 18th century, school inspections were first implemented globally (Ashagre & Furi, 2024). Many scholars agree that quality control and assurance are crucial to students' academic achievement in a variety of settings and at all educational levels (Katete, 2023); Leo et al., 2024; Makiya et al., 2023). According to the study by Kassim et al. (2024), quality assurance and control help to improve teaching, learning, and administrative processes, aid in student choice, serve as a means of public accountability, facilitate the recognition of award standards, and aid in the dissemination of best practices with the goal of improving higher education as a whole.

In many African countries including Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Namibia the establishment of school inspection services was accompanied by the introduction of formal public education (Fafunwa & Aisiku, 2022). After colonial liberation, there was a marked increase in the number of secondary schools in most African countries. However, the increased number of schools was complicated by the relatively slow growth in the number of inspection officers (Ashagre & Furi, 2024). External pressure prompted Ethiopia to build a quality assurance system (Kufi, 2023; Mesfin, 2023). Quality improvement became a by-product rather than a control structure of quality assurance since it was created to satisfy external accountability, according to Nukpetsi et al. (2023). In Ethiopia, quality assurance emerged as a key component of educational growth in 2003. By establishing the agency responsible for the relevance and quality of the educational system and accepting the proclamation on higher education, the government has acknowledged quality assurance since 2003 (Kufi, 2023).

In Kenya, quality assurance strategies and the issues of school inspection are vital in educational organisations because they are deemed to improve academic performance in schools in the country (Kukali, 2023); (Ogega & Ogochi, 2020). In Kenya, ensuring the quality of schools is adequate to verify the progress of education (Kagochi, 2022). The teaching and learning procedures in

the school are improved by the tactics employed by school quality assurance officers, which raises student achievement (Nandi East Sub-County). Teaching and learning are enhanced by the various tactics employed by quality assurance officials, such as mutual connections with teachers and classroom observations. However, as noted by Kagochi (2022), a lack of mutual respect, trust, and cooperation between school quality assurance officers and instructors tends to lower institutional working morale. But according to (Mritha & Onyango, 2022), schools with positive relationships with school quality assurance officials make a good impression because instructors are more willing to share their strengths and flaws and are more motivated to raise academic achievement.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in Tanzania changed from the old inspection system to School Quality Assurance (SQA) using the Whole School Approach (WSA) to provide high-quality education. This was done by involving community members and other stakeholders (Makiya et al., 2022, 2023; Medard & Mwila, 2022; Ng'hoboko, 2024). From a school inspection approach, the SQA department has shifted to a more comprehensive system that places a major emphasis on school progress (Paulo, 2022). In the old school inspection model, inspectors placed too much emphasis on the procedure and not enough on the results or on allowing schools to use the input from the inspection to improve (Paulo, 2022).

Despite this change, reports suggest that Tanzanian students' academic achievement is currently in jeopardy. Many Tanzanian academics agree that quality control and assurance are crucial to students' academic achievement at all educational levels under a variety of conditions. For example, Makiya et al. (2022) conducted a study on School Quality Assurance strategies in Arusha Region. The findings showed that regular visits, timely feedback, friendly language, professional development support, and involving teachers in SQA practices significantly improved learning achievement in Public Primary Schools. Katete (2023) explored the role of quality assurance and control practices in Tanzanian technical institutions, found that these practices significantly impact students' academic achievement by setting teaching and learning objectives, enhancing education quality control, enhancing tutor efficiency, enhancing accountability, and conducting quality audits. (Mapunda, 2023; Mganga & Lekule, 2021) study on School Quality Assurance in Tanzania, found that it positively influenced teachers' performance by assessing teaching and learning quality. On the other hand, school quality assurance practice in Tanzania faces some challenges such as lack of motivation, inadequate facilities, and teachers'

unwillingness to implement recommendations (Kassim et al., 2024; Mritha & Onyango, 2022; Ng'hoboko, 2024).

Although these studies took place, there is slight information about the impact of SQA practices on students' academic performance in public secondary schools and none of the reviewed studies were conducted in Mafia District. Therefore, this study sought to establish the impact of school quality assurance practices on academic performance in Mafia District.

3. Methodology

The study employed a convergent parallel design under a mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With this research design, researchers collect, analyse and compares quantitative and qualitative data in a single phase to determine whether the results corroborate or contradict one another (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The targeted population had a total of 136 people. The sampling procedures employed in selecting the required sample for the study were probability and non-probability. Under non-probability sampling, a purposive sampling procedure was used to select the 4 District School Quality Assurance Officer (DSQAO), 1 District education officer, 8 Heads of schools and 8 Ward education officers (WEO) because of their uniqueness in the area. Under probability sampling, simple random sampling was used to select 80 Teachers from 8 public secondary schools to reduce biases. The study used a sample of 101 respondents based on Krejcie and Morgan's Table. The study used Cronbach Alpha (with a reliability coefficient of 0.8) and content validity to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments. As a result, the researchers were able to adjust the devices to suit accurate and trustworthy data. The validity of the research instruments in this study was ensured by the expert judgments to look for a consensus. The researchers' supervisors discussed and gave feedback regarding the validity of the research

instruments. They indicated by a tick or cross for every item in the questionnaire if it measured what it was supposed to measure or not. Data triangulation was ensured by the employment of the two approaches. Semi-structured interview and questionnaire were used in data collection. Data from such respondents as heads of schools and DSQAO were interrogated using interview guide questions. Open and closed-ended questionnaire was directed to teachers. The questionnaires' administered return was 100%. Analysis of quantitative data was done descriptively (mean and standard deviation) and then presented in a table with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data was coded as collected from the open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interview. Their responses were summarized to get categories and descriptions given in narratives. The researchers asked the Mafia District Executive Director (DED) for permission to collect data from the target population while adhering to ethical guidelines, taking into account the participants' concerns about their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity as well as their free and informed consent.

4. Results and Discussion

The study sought to establish the impact of school quality assurance practices on academic performance in Mafia District with regard to the following research objectives.

4.1 The strategies used by SQA to assess the school services on students' academic performance

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores) were computed for strategies used by SQA to assess the school services impact on students' academic performance.

Table 1: the strategies used by SQA to assess the school services on students' academic performance

Descriptive Statistics on strategies used by SQA					
	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
SQA monitors how learning takes place, as well as how students are handled and instructed.	80	1	5	4.06	.817
SQA assesses the competencies of students.	80	1	5	3.17	1.325
SQA goes through students exercise books, teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans, lesson notes, teaching and learning materials and teaching presentations	80	1	5	4.15	.915
Teachers discuss teaching/learning problems with SQA outside classes	80	1	5	4.01	.864
Corrections usually done by SQA after supervision and advice are given to teachers	80	1	5	4.00	.968
There is improvement in students' internal assessments as a result of supervision of teachers by SQA.	80	1	5	4.04	.878
School quality assurance holds school leaders accountable for carrying out their responsibilities carefully and professionally, which helps to improve student academic performance	80	1	5	4.09	1.070
School quality assurance helps create mutual and trusting relationships between teachers, students, and parents.	80	1	5	4.16	.934
Overall views on school quality assurance strategies in secondary schools				3.96	.9714

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 1 indicates that the strategies used by SQA to assess the school's services on students' academic performance after including all parameters are (M = 3.96, SD =.9714). The average mean score indicated that the respondents agreed on the parameters, and the standard deviation was small, close to one, indicating that there was uniformity in responses, indicating that the respondents concurred to a large extent.

Qualitative data also concurred that the strategies used by SQA to assess the school services can enhance students' academic performance. The respondents said that school quality assurances set their strategies by passing through six domains of learning, including learners' achievement, quality of teaching, quality of leadership and management, and the quality of the school environment. He elaborated that when they are at school, their task is to check all teaching and learning documents (lesson plans, schemes of work, and subject logbooks), teaching processes and advise teachers on improvements. These, when implemented effectively, change the behavior of students.

One of the SQA elaborated:

The School Quality Assurance (SQA) develops strategies focusing on six domains and is divided into

three sections: prior to the inspection, during the inspection, and after the inspection. Before an inspection, a form is sent to a school to assess themselves, followed by a letter announcing the visit. After arriving, a meeting is held with teachers to inform them of the purpose of the visit. The next step is to evaluate the teaching and learning process in the classroom, seeking suggestions and improvement areas to improve students' academic performance.

Source :(**Semi-structured interview, SQA01, 2024**).

This revelation concurs with the study conducted by Makiya, Mnyanyi and Ngirwa (2022) in Arusha Region, Tanzania, who established 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. Paulo (2022) supports the findings by stating that the school quality assurance strategies in secondary schools included: providing guidance to

teachers on handling instructional materials, motivating teachers to work diligently, and helping teachers with the improvisation of teaching and learning materials. The findings of this study are also in agreement with those of Agapiti and Kitula (2022), who identified similar strategies, including classroom observation, fostering positive relationships between teachers and SQAOs, and promoting professional development for teachers.

4.2 The challenges facing School Quality Assurance practice

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores) were computed for the challenges facing SQA during quality assurance practices.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for The challenges facing SQA

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Insufficient teaching and learning facilities.	80	1	5	4.16	.863
Teachers failed to act on SQA recommendations because they were few in number.	80	1	5	4.35	.858
Overcrowded classrooms hinder teachers from using participatory methods as recommended by SQA	80	1	5	4.30	.664
Teachers' unwillingness to accept suggestions from SQA.	80	1	5	4.11	1.191
Lack of proper collaboration from schools	80	1	5	4.54	.885
Insufficient flow of resources at the school	80	1	5	4.09	1.046
Some of the SQA assess subjects that are unfamiliar with their specific academic areas.	80	1	5	4.48	.746
Shortage of fund and shortage of staff	80	1	5	3.76	1.138
Overall views on school quality assurance challenges facing SQA				4.224	.9234

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 2; indicates that the overall results on challenges facing SQA after including all parameters are (M = 4.224, SD =.9234). The average mean score indicated that the respondents agreed on the parameters, and the standard deviation was small, close to one, indicating that there was uniformity in responses, indicating that the respondents concurred to a large extent.

Thus, interview findings were not far from questionnaire findings on the challenges facing SQA. Commenting on the challenges facing SQA during quality assurance exercises, one of SQAS had the following to say:

“One of the challenges we face as school quality assurance is that most owners of the school (District Executive Director) do not act on the recommendation that was given by SQA after conducting a whole school visit due the scarcity of budget especially recommendation that need high budget to implement for example building classrooms, teachers houses and rehabilitation of different infrastructures” Another challenge is a

shortage of textbooks” Source :(Semi-structured interview, SQA03, 2024).

Medard and Mwila (2022) agreed with the findings of the current study by noting that challenges such as shortage of funds, shortage of staff, lack of working facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of transport and materials for SQAOs made it impossible for the guidelines to be effectively implemented thus impeding the acquisition of educational competencies among students in public secondary schools in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania. Nada and Nyoni (2022) identified several challenges faced by school quality assurers, including teachers' lack of competence in their subjects, limited financial resources, and the failure to implement recommendations. They also noted the lack of in-service training, insufficient educational materials, and a shortage of specialists for teacher support in guidance and counselling.

These findings align with those of Onyango (2022), who highlighted challenges faced by SQAOs, including insufficient motivation, inadequate quality assurance resources, teachers' reluctance to implement recommendations, lack of training on current quality

assurance skills, and limited time to conduct quality assurance activities. The ideas expressed above suggest that there are obstacles that school quality assurance officers were facing that, in some manner, these were preventing them from delivering services to schools. Furthermore, there were other problems that schools were confronting that were making it difficult for SQA to function successfully, significantly impacting students' academic achievement.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study reveals that school quality assurance practices significantly impact students' academic achievement. SQA visits, reports, and feedback during and after inspections help improve weak areas and make teachers and students accountable. This leads to improved academic performance in schools. However, challenges such as lack of training, staff shortages, insufficient funds, and overcrowded classrooms can hinder the implementation of these practices. Despite these challenges, the study concludes that successful implementation of SQA activities results in positive results for students' academic performance. The more frequently school quality assurance practices are operational, the higher the overall academic performance. Therefore, regular use of these activities in secondary schools can significantly improve academic performance.

5.2 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations that came out of the study:

1. The government should increase its budget to offer necessary resources and facilities, such as stationery and offices, as well as sufficient funding for school quality assurance personnel to operate efficiently.
2. School Quality Assurance experts should get training and seminars through in-service training programs in order to accommodate policy and technological changes
3. The Government should organize regular in-service training and seminars for teachers to help them stay updated with the latest teaching methodologies, policy changes, and quality assurance practices. These programs should also focus on enhancing teachers' capacity to implement SQA recommendations effectively.
4. School Quality Assurance should inspire head teachers, teachers and Students who perform well in their schools by giving them award and incentives at the end of the year.
5. The study recommended that further research should be conducted in other Tanzanian districts. This would provide a broader perspective on the impact of school quality assurance practices on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools.

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