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The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies Status of Quality Assurance and Standards in Education in Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract:

While the role of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers in quality education has been a topic of much discussion, there has also been a clarion call for the Ministry of Education to streamline activities in the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards with a view to making it more effective and efficient in the provision of quality education in tandem with its vision. This study attempted to answer the grand tour question of what meaning QASOs make of navigating through their constitutional mandate including impediments encountered. This question was addressed through a phenomenological design to allow for respondents' voices to emerge through ten interviews. Themes of inadequate human resources, finances, legal framework and under professionalization were emergent. MoE had the capacity and potential to address these emergent issues by implementing some of the numerous recommendations suggested in the studies carried out on Quality assurance and standards including formation of a Quality Assurance and Standards Council that would go a long way in professionalizing Quality Assurance and Standards in Kenya.

Keywords: *Quality assurance and standards officer, quality education, assessment, inspection.*

1. Introduction

Education constitutes the major engine for sustainable human development as well as the fulcrum around which every activity revolves. There ought to be high investment in education because it is believed that education is for national growth and development. The importance of quality education cannot be overemphasized. According to UNESCO (2000), Quality in education is the degree to which education can be said to be of high standard, satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living. During the World Education Forum that was held in Dakar in the year 2000, participants committed themselves to improving all aspects of the quality education. As stated in the policy framework of the Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005, the overall goal is to achieve Education for All (EFA) guided by the national philosophy of education.

Education philosophy in Kenya emphasizes the provision of holistic quality education and training which involve the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. It further espouses the values of patriotism, equality, peace, security, honesty, humility, love, respect, tolerance and democracy. Among the determinants of quality in education, are the availability of qualified and motivated teachers, a conducive environment for teaching and learning, including the curriculum, facilities, the resources available for their provision, and the tools for evaluation?

In Kenya, just like in other East African Countries, the responsibility for the education system is vested in the Ministries of Education (MoE). Supervision by inspection has long been and still is a major device employed by these Ministries of Education (in countries in East Africa) to monitor education quality. The Kenyan philosophy of education embraces "the inculcation of a high-quality instruction" this quality has been equated with high standards, namely, a set of criteria against which an institution or system is judged. Suffice to note that Moe's vision is to "have a globally competitive quality education, training and research for Kenya's sustainable development". In order to achieve this vision, the Ministry has endorsed Vision 2030 and shall focus education and training towards achieving the goals of the Vision. The Mission of MoE is to provide, promote, co-ordinate quality education, training and research for empowerment of individuals to become caring, competent and responsible citizens who value education as a life-long process. Education in the country is guided by sessional paper 1 of 2005 and no. 14 of 2012, vision 2030 and the Basic Education Act of 2013 (which aligns the new constitution 2010 and vision 2030 to the education sector).

In Kenya, the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) is the professional arm of MoE charged with the establishment of standards of education in schools and colleges (MoEST 1999). DQAS is mandated to undertake issues of quality and standards through independent assessment/ inspection. The Directorate's functions include establishing, maintaining, improving quality and standards in all educational and training institutions whether public or private other than Universities. Other functions are undertaking institutional reviews, organizing and conducting subject mastery and pedagogical skills, upgrading for teachers and tutors, conducting teacher proficiency, assessment of new institutions for registration, maintaining and disseminating lists of approved learning and

teaching materials, supervising and coordinating the implementation of curriculum in all educational and training institutions and coordination of co-curricular activities at all levels, (MOE 2007).

The purpose of Quality Assurance and Standards assessment is to provide an independent evaluation of an institution's strengths and weaknesses in order to support institutional management and other stakeholders in reforming the institution. According to Nyakwara (2009), these functions are performed by quality assurance and standards officers who monitor schools to find out whether they are producing the desired results.

According to UNESCO (2014), there is the basic assumption that supervisors/inspectors actually do assist improvements in the quality of performance of the pupils by systematically monitoring the instructional process in schools by guiding teachers to achieve higher standards of teaching and evaluating objectively the teaching learning process. Inspectors/supervisors help in maintaining as well as upgrading performance standards. They thus affect through teachers rather than directly upon pupils. QASOs as agents of educational administration undertake routine administrative tasks and roles e.g. routinely monitoring the maintenance of the supply of resources, monitoring their effective use, determining the supply and accountability of teachers. Thus, they monitor not only quality control but also the supply and utilization of fiscal and material resources.

The Douglas Odhiambo Task Force (MoE 2012), formed to realign education to the constitution of Kenya pointed out that the purpose of Standard and Quality Assurance should be to identify strengths and weaknesses at schools and wider institutional level so that schools may maintain effective school management systems, improve the quality of education provided and raise the educational standards achieved by pupils. The overwhelming question that elicited this study then is why there is such low-quality delivery at almost every level of both basic and higher education. In addition, this despite the fact that systems of inspect and supervision have been in existence from antiquity to the present.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study was predicated on Organizational Role Theory (ORT) was developed in the 1960s and provides insight into the processes that affect the physical and emotional state of an individual in the workplace that affects their workplace behaviour (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn & Rosenthal, 1964).

ORT focuses on the manner in which individuals accept and enact an array of roles in task-oriented and hierarchical systems (Biddle, 1986; Madsen, 2002). In an organizational context, role behaviours are the recurring patterns of actions that are considered important for effective functioning in that particular role and in that particular organization (Biddle, 1986). As suggested by Katz and Kahn it focuses on the roles within the organization and the interaction between roles and the impact this has on achieving organizational goals

Social position is a central concept associated with roles. Social position refers to the identity that stratifies people in different social groups such as, for example, teacher, mother, and manager. From a role behavior standpoint, each position has a characteristic role associated with it. In addition, according to the predictions of role theory, roles are induced through shared expectations of behavior (Biddle, 1979). The pragmatic view on roles suggests that expectations are instilled in the individual during socialization and individuals who are assimilated into groups conform to their expected roles. Another important defining characteristic of roles, especially from a structural role theory perspective, is their functionality for the social systems in which they are embedded

As a theory of human behaviour, Organizational Role Theory (ORT) is underpinned by four basic assumptions associated with Role-taking, Role-consensus, Role-compliance, and Role-conflict (Parker, 2005). The first assumption relates to role taking. This assumption states that an individual will 'take' or accept a role that is conferred upon them by their employer. In the organizational context, it is assumed that an individual will 'take' the role required by their employer when they accept unemployment position. Employees may be required to enact an array of roles, and that this may be problematic if the resultant complexity of results in an employee being unable to enact them according to the expectation of others

The second assumption relates to the existence of role-consensus between employers and their employees. This assumption states that for organizations to function optimally there needs to be consensus regarding the expectations of enacted roles and the manner in which they interact. Role-consensus serves to underpin the commonly held norms and conceptions that give rise to consistency in behaviour and an adherence to the organization's culture

The third assumption relates to role-compliance. This assumption states that each role has a set of behaviours that are well defined and consistently adhered to by employees. In the organizational context, this compliance is underpinned by the job description that sets the objectives of each position and dictates the behaviours expected in each position to achieve these objectives. Role compliance is also directed by HR policies and the setting of performance objectives

The final assumption relates to the role-conflict. This assumption states that conflict will arise when role expectations embedded in one role conflict with the expectations associated with another role.

3. Discussions

3.1. Lack of Adequate Quality Assurance and Standards Officers

The researchers established that Kakamega County lacked adequate quality assurance and standards officers to effectively carry out their mandate. The county comprises 13 sub counties and 37 educational zones. Each sub county had only one QASO except one Sub County that did not have a QASO. The county education office had two QASOs (one was the County quality assurance and standards office while the other QASO was acting as the deputy county director of education. The county education office could thus not form a full panel to effectively carry out a full standards assessment in any primary, secondary or college within the county. For any such

assessment, QASOs had to be sourced from various sub counties. The county had 934 public primary schools and 360 public secondary schools. When the private institutions are added, the figure for the primary institutions raises to above 1000 while that of secondary schools is about 400.

The scenario was even worse at the sub county level. Each sub county had only one QASO based in the sub county education office. This officer could also not be able to form a panel to carry out a full standards assessment in any learning institution in the sub county without sourcing for QASOs from other sub counties. The researchers established that under an ideal situation, a sub county should have at least eight QASOs at the sub county education office (sub county QASO and two deputies- one for primary and another for secondary and six QASOs in charge of various disciplines: co-curricular, In-service training, guidance and counseling and heads of subject panels. There should be other QASOs in the field in charge of the various wards in the sub county to oversee curriculum implementation at that level.

Most respondents interviewed could not tell the current organization of the DQAS because the elaborate structure that was known in the dispensation of the Inspectorate could not suffice. One respondent had this to say: *“How can a county as big as Kakamega, the second largest in the country only have 12 QASOs? How can they monitor what is going on in the schools? The last time MoE recruited QASOs was in 2008 and yet there has been natural attrition, others have found greener pastures and still others have retired. Does MoE have these data?”* The pertinent questions then that beg for an answer are: How is assessment structured at the national, county and sub county levels? Who has the responsibility of supervision? And is the responsibility organized by levels of education e.g. by primary, secondary, vocational or non-formal or is it organized by subject areas? Who has the responsibility for quality control and with what consequences? These are indeed overwhelming questions that respondents did not have straight answers for. Indeed, several studies related to the area of quality assurance and standards (Mwaura 2014, Optuma 2015, Republic of Kenya 2003 and MoE 2012) concur to the fact that one of the major challenges hindering the effectiveness of quality assurance and standards is the inadequate human resource.

3.1.1. Inadequate Funding

All respondents interviewed were in agreement that QASOs were not adequately funded to effectively carry out their work. From the county education office, it was evident that quality assessment programmes had been organized for secondary schools. However, funding for these assessments was also provided by the secondary schools through the Education Improvement Fund (EIF) which was levied to schools. Primary schools were rarely assessed because they did not contribute to this kitty of EIF and the secondary schools could not share their kitty with the primary schools. The researchers observed that in the 13 sub counties 4 had at least one vehicle in the education department which was functional. In other sub counties, the vehicles were not functional and this complicated matters for the QASO as he/she could not effectively move round schools to carry out his/her mandate. Under such circumstances the QASOs were forced to use public transport which included motor bikes as some of the terrains were unfriendly to small personal vehicles. Public transport had its own challenges especially during the very dry and wet spells. One respondent pointed out that the practice of schools contributing money for EIF was an idea that had been muted during the era of western province and therefore it was only in counties that constituted the former western province (Kakamega, vihiga, Bungoma and Busia) that had funding for EIF for assessment of secondary schools. In other counties in the country, it was unlikely that effective standards assessment was being carried given that such funding was not provided by MoE. A respondent confided thus: *“I know of several counties where assessment is not done due to funding challenges. Here we are lucky that EIF supports assessment. Now that such levies have been banned, I can assure you that there will be no assessment unless MoE comes in to fund it.”*

Ngware et al (2011), contend that quality education comprises of three interrelated aspects namely: Quality of human and material resources available for teaching (inputs), Quality of teaching practice (process) and Quality of results (outputs and outcomes). Without financial resources for the QASOs to move out to the schools to ensure the quality of inputs and the processes being followed, then the output is not likely to be the desired one. This could be one of the reasons why there is an outcry on the quality of education not only in the Kakamega County but in the nation as a whole.

Suffice to point out that it is very difficult to penetrate the question of how quality assurance and standards is financed and what slice of the education budget is diverted to schools' assessment. This is because none of the respondents interviewed could explain how the department of quality assurance at the sub county level was funded and how much funding if any was received. Although each sub county director of education received funding in form of Authority to Incur Expenditure (AIE), there was no vote head on Quality Assurance activities related to inspection/assessment. This was an indicator that quality assurance had not been budgeted for at both the sub county and county levels. Majority of the respondents interviewed were not sure whether the directorate of Quality assurance and standards at the headquarters in Nairobi knew the cost of carrying out a quality standards assessment in a learning institution as it had not given any direction on the same and it was up to the QASOs to define the parameters to be costed in such an assessment. Most QASOs interviewed pointed out that that they had been faithful in submitting their costed work plans to their superiors and supervisors at the headquarters yet they were expected to carry out their duties effectively without the funding that had been factored on the work plans. A respondent had this to say: *“Year in year out, we normally submit our costed work plans to DQAS yet no funding is given. Find out for yourself if any QASO has received any funding on account of his/her work plan not just here in this county but in the country as a whole.”* This finding on inadequate funding for QASOs was corroborated by Wasanga (2004), who contends that one of the major challenges that QASOs face is inadequate budgetary allocation and tools of trade for their effective functioning.

3.1.2. QASOs are under Professionalized

Most respondents interviewed were of the opinion that few QASOs demonstrated little professional commitment, often lacked the ability to guide teachers on academic issues as a result of lacking the basic professional competencies to fulfill their complex multidimensional and shifting roles. They cannot assist the teachers to improve in their effective performance. They are structurally constrained by lack of finances to support teachers in addition to lacking personal financial incentives to act as competent professional. According to Stillman & Grant (as cited in UNESCO 1992), this resulted in QASOs concentrating on the administrative rather than facilitative tasks. All QASOs interviewed pointed out that they had not had any in-service training in the last five years on issues related to pedagogy. For most QASOs, the last time they met as a group of QASOs was during the induction on the new quality assessment index tool in 2009. Other meetings that QASOs had been called to attend were at county level on sensitization of some new and upcoming ideas in the curriculum. Both oral and written submission (on the function of quality assurance and standards in the county) to the Task Force on Education for Kakamega County revealed inefficiency, ineffectiveness, apathy, unsatisfactory level of performance and doubtful capacity on the part of some QASOs.

While QASOs are expected to provide external scrutiny on how the curricula is being implemented at the school level, studies have (JICA & IDCJ, 2012, MOE 2012, Ogamba 2011) have found out that Quality Assurance is impeded by QASOs inadequacy of relevant skills and competencies to add value to the quality and standards in education. Under such prevailing circumstances, it is very difficult for the QASOs to form a determinate group; one that will be recognized and consulted regularly and contribute significantly to educational policy development. Small wonder then that the voice of the directorate of quality assurance and standards remained silent even when important debates like the one on the rationale upon which analyzed 2016 KCSE results was hinged on and the curriculum review were on going. Some of the Studies carried out in this country (Ajuoga et al 2010 and Etindi 2001) have reiterated the need to have QASOs capacities built, knowledge and special skills improved if they are to be effective in their roles.

Other than quality control and improvement, QASOs are a conduit between the administration at the ministerial level (which is entrusted with formulation of educational policies) and those at the grass root level who are charged with the implementation of the of the policy decisions. In this regard QASOs act as the eyes and ears of the central ministerial system and also as a link between the top and bottom levels of the ministry thus provide a crucial linkage in the policy formulation and implementation gap.

The study established that most QASOs had lost the morale of carrying out their work. Indeed, for most of them the enthusiasm with which they commenced their work upon their first appointed as Inspectors/QASOs had waned due to a myriad of reasons. Majority of the QASOs cited neglect by the directorate's leadership in articulating challenging facing QASOs in the country as a whole and perceived failure to solve these challenges. Over half of the respondents interviewed pointed out that quality assurance work was becoming more strenuous given that adequate direction was not forthcoming from the directorate to the field yet the field officers were expected to navigate through their own way of working in the field and ensuring that everything worked well. One respondent was very categorical: *"I am working here as I plan for my exit to greener pastures. I have 10 of my colleagues whom we were appointed with at the same time but have since exited and are doing much better than I am here."*

Some cited the challenges of working with officers from Teachers Service Commission (TSC) who have assumed some of the role of QASOs just by the mere fact that TSC is an independent commission. Most QASOs interviewed pointed out that although they had raised complains following the ministry hierarchy, there seemed to be no solutions to the challenges raised. On the contrary, it would seem that TSC was not under any obligation to receive instructions from MoE. One of the functions of QASOs of offering professional advice and guidance to teacher, head teachers and principals to improve the teaching and learning process has been wrestled away from the QASOs by TSC. In the county TSC have taken over the function of organizing for capacity building workshop for teachers and mounting of subject based insets including Strengthening of Science and Mathematics Education (SMASE), which was initially a national programme coordinated DQAS. A respondent was very bitter about the sour relation with TSC officer: *"TSC want to do everything that was done by the ministry, why this is the case, yet our own director is very quiet? Who should speak on our behalf if not the director? The priorities of MoE are now wanting especially with regards to development of human resource. Unless it improves everyone will run away from it and especially from the DQAS."*

3.1.3. Inadequate Legal Framework

Wasanga (2004) contends that one of the challenges facing the inspectorate in Kenya is inadequate legal provision, which limits enforcement of inspection recommendations. Unlike the public health, officers who have been given authority to close down a learning institution, which has defied or not adhered to its recommendations, quality assurance and standards officers do not have that authority. In the old Education Act (Cap 211, section 18 Laws of Kenya) just as in the current Basic Education Act 2013, a QASO is authorized to enter and inspect any school or any place at which it is reasonably suspected a school is being conducted, at any time, with or without notice, and to report with respect to the school or any aspect thereof.

Most respondents were demoralized that reports written by QASOs were not being taken seriously unless they were of specific interest to someone at the apex of the MOE. Most respondents were able to highlight some of the reports they had carefully drafted after consultative meetings and stakeholder complaints. All the respondents concurred to the fact that TSC was not keen on acting on recommendations of reports written by QASOs from MOE as it was toying with the idea of establishing its own quality assurance and standards department. It was thus common for QASOs to visit a school two years after an initial visitation only to find recommendations from the previous report not implemented or acted on. A respondent revealed that: *"Some of the challenges impeding curriculum implementation is the fact that TSC does not want to act on our reports especially those touching on change of leadership."*

All respondents made reference to a Task Force - chaired by Prof. Douglas Odhiambo—which was constituted by the then minister for Education Prof. Sam Ongeru specifically to align education to the new constitution that Kenya had promulgated in August 2010 (MOE 2012). The Task Force looked into the issue of Quality assurance in the education system at all levels and compiled an extensive report in its chapter five.

The Task Force noted the following challenges within and without the directorate that made it a challenge for the Quality Assurance to be effective and efficient:

- a) The Directorate reports take long to be acted upon because of heavy bureaucratic structures.
- b) The Directorate faces financial and infrastructural constraints. For instance, it is not provided with adequate transport to enable its officers to reach as many institutions as they would wish to.
- c) Quality Assurance officers are often directly recruited from serving teachers who may lack the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to deliver on standards and quality assurance.
- d) Officers recruited in the Directorate most often are deployed to other departments of the education sector such as Education Officers, further aggravating staff shortage.
- e) There is no specific scheme of service for the officers to give them incentives to work.
- f) Standards and quality assurance services are irregular and rarely reach the target institutions.

The task Force came up with the following recommendations to militate against the aforementioned challenges:

- a. Standards Quality Assurance officers should be aptly trained to equipped with relevant skills and competences.
- b. There should be a specific scheme of service for the quality assurance personnel.
- c. Proper recruitment mechanisms should be put in place to avoid enrolling less qualified officers in this very important education service.
- d. Standards Quality Assurance services should be provided with adequate funding and the necessary infrastructure, such as vehicles, to facilitate research etc.
- e. Standards Quality Assurance officers should receive appropriate and regular training, retraining and in servicing to ensure they possess relevant skills and competences.
- f. Managers of institutions should be integrated into the standards and quality assurance delivery services, receives regular training, and in servicing to enable them effectively monitor standards and quality of curriculum delivery.
- g. Mechanisms should be established to ensure that standards and quality Services in ECDE are coordinated on policy at national level and effectively devolved to counties for implementation.
- h. More benchmarking opportunities are provided in developing countries to enhance the capacity of SQA officers.
- i. Standards Quality Assurance service programme should apply to all institutions including foreign curricula ones.

Suffice it to point out that the Task Force found out that the quality assurance role was weak and ineffective and subjected to severe resource constraints. It pointed out that to maintain standards effectively required regular institutional visits by trained and well-resourced specialists. It was also found out that only a relatively small share of education resources was allocated to support this function. The Task Force contended that the challenge in Kenya remained that of addressing the need for an effective and adequately financed sustainable SQA and support service to teachers and all learning institutions.

The report recommended that the Standards and quality assurance services should be integrated to an overall national system under the Education Standards Quality Assurance Council (ESQAC), which is pending. The leadership at MoE has argued that allowing such a council to exist would create more confusion at the expense of quality in education.

3. Conclusion

The study explored an array of impediments faced by the modern day QASOs to the effective performance of their duties in the present environment. The respondent group was generally aggrieved with lack of organizational aid right from the ministry headquarters to the bottom level. Despite a plethora of research suggesting the need for more QASOs, funding, motivation, and awareness of DQAS to QASOs working condition, this study indicated that the appointing authority of the QASOs was largely unaware of their plight in the field. Making Quality Assurance more efficient and effective only required the good will of MoE in following the spirit and the letter while implementing recommendations based on studies carried out.

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