

Discursive Construction of External School Quality Assurance Policy Actors' Power in Selected Secondary Schools in Tanzania

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Abstract

In 2017, the School Quality Assurance (SQA) policy was adopted and implemented in secondary schools in Tanzania. Since the beginning of its implementation to date, not much is known about how SQA policy discourses construct external SQA policy actors' power versus internal SQA policy actors. This study analyzed how SQA policy discourses discursively construct external SQA policy actors' power in selected secondary schools in Tanzania. Since policies are implemented through the production, distribution, and consumption of texts and discourses, the study was mainly based on textual and discourse analyses. Findings indicate that SQA policy discourses reconstructed the power of external SQA policy actors rather than the internal SQA policy actors and stakeholders. It is argued that by empowering external SQA policy actors, SQA policy implementation becomes more or less the same as school inspection. It is recommended that an effective SQA policy implementation needs to empower internal SQA policy actors because they interact daily with teachers and students to improve teaching and learning, curriculum, school leadership, school environment, and community engagement.

Keywords: *School Quality Assurance Policy, Power, Policy Actors, Secondary Schools, Discourse*

INTRODUCTION

School supervision system for quality improvement began in Western Europe at the end of the 18th century and sparked to other countries after

the establishment of public schools. In those days, it was considered an essential tool to ensure that all education staff operated in the same rules and regulations and followed a similar programme (De Grauwe, 2007).

School inspection is vital as a means of monitoring teaching and learning by adhering to the stipulated curriculum and set standards (MoEC, 1995). Tanzania inherited the school inspection policy from the colonial rule. After independence, school inspection was sustained to improve the quality of education. Before the 1990s, the policy was faced with inadequate competent personnel; shortage of transport, offices, equipment, and housing; and inspectors' inability to take appropriate and immediate corrective measures where necessary (MoEC, 1995). Efforts were made to strengthen it through Education and Training Policy (ETP) adopted in 1995 because of emphasis on education decentralisation and liberalisation policies that required closer monitoring of schools as well as horizontal feedback mechanisms between the inspectors and education agencies, managers and administrators at zonal, regional and district levels.

Despite the efforts made since 1995, school inspection continued to be less effective due to factors similar to those mentioned above, especially those related to human and financial resources (MoEVT, 2014). Another major weakness of school inspection was the emphasis on centralization where the inspection reports were disseminated to a few actors, including the Commissioner for Education as required by the law (URT, 2002). In addition, school inspectors concentrated on identification of schools and teachers' strengths and limitations in teaching and learning (Matete, 2021). As such, school inspection struggles for power were high between school inspectors who had legal powers, and teachers who had professional powers. By 2010, school inspection was severely criticized, not only in Tanzania, but also in many other countries like Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia, and Uganda (Matete, 2021).

With such limitations, the inspection system needed reforms in its organization, purpose, and processes. There was also a need for more stakeholder involvement and alternative techniques (MoEVT, 2014). Thus, transformation from school inspection to School Quality Assurance (SQA) was stated clearly in the ETP issued in 2014. Emphasis was put on reviewing, renaming, and resourcing the School Inspectorate into SQA to ensure quality education provision in accordance with policies, standards,

and procedures. The actual SQA policy was issued in 2017 together with three SQA policy documents, namely: School Quality Assurance Handbook (SQAH) (MoEST, 2017a), School Quality Assurance Framework (SQUAF) (MoEST, 2017b), and Guideline for Ward Education Officers (MoEST, 2017c).

SQA policy emphasized on broadening the structure, scope, and core functions of SQA to include grassroot level actors such as Ward Education Officers (WEOs), heads of school (HoS), teachers, parents, and community as stated:

The desire to provide holistic and collaborative approach on quality education prompted the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) to shift from the previous system of inspection to a School Quality Assurance System (SQAS) using the Whole School Approach (WSA) involving various stakeholders, including members of the community (MoEST, 2017b, p. iii).

Such emphasis aimed to improve the SQA processes as well as school management and administration by empowering school boards, HoS, and parents instead of school inspectors who were far from the schools. Education policymakers believed that such reforms would improve accountability and quality control in schools. However, the reforms continued to be top-down and government-directed, aiming at improving school functioning and education practices from the top, an approach that has been inefficient in education services provision in Tanzania (Matete, 2021).

SQA policy implementation was to be guided by what was called SQA principles and procedures which included “strengthening Quality Assurance System (QAS); improving resources (supply of inputs, adequate human, fiscal and material resources); improving the quality of teaching and learning; improving transparency and accountability; and strengthening community engagement” (MoEST, 2017b, p. 6). Based on these principles and procedures, SQA policy implementation involved internal and external policy actors. Internally, there were considered to include internal school quality assurance team (IQAT), school managers and administrators, and teachers. On the other hand, external actors were district education officers, School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs), and WEOs.

Since the adoption of the SQA policy in 2017 in secondary schools, not much is known about how SQA policy discourses construct external SQA policy actors' power versus internal SQA policy actors. The purpose of this study was to critically analyse the distribution of power among policy actors in the implementation of SQA policy reform in secondary schools.

Conceptualizing School Quality Assurance as Supervision

SQA can be conceptualized as a process that involves both supervision and counselling tasks (Corey et al., 2020; Glanz & Zepeda, 2015; Sullivan & Glanz, 2013). Supervision is understood as “the process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue for the purpose of improving teaching and increasing student achievement (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013, p. 24). As such, supervision deals with stimulating, coordinating and guiding the constant teachers' growth, both as individuals and groups, to improve an effective instructional performance (Glanz & Zepeda, 2015).

In conceptualizing SQA as a form of supervision, there are multiple and complex roles and responsibilities of supervisors. For example, according to Corey et al (2020), these multiple roles are teaching or coaching, mentoring, consulting, and counselling. Others are advising, administrating, evaluating, recording and documenting, empowering, and advocating. Some of these functions are described as follows: A supervisor as a teacher has the task of “assigning readings, suggesting a literature search on a specific topic, offering suggestions for attending workshops, and discussing with the supervisee any number of related topics.” (p. 23). As a coacher, a supervisor has to instruct, demonstrate, model, guide, and provide positive and negative feedback, and suggest strategies. As a mentoring process, supervision involves two people working in a similar task-the mentor and mentee. The former is a more experienced person and plays the role of providing knowledge, advising, counselling, challenging, and supporting the later to develop experience as a professional.

As counselling, supervision helps the supervisee to develop professionally. However, this process cannot be conducted exclusively to avoid the personal concerns of the supervisee because it is difficult to separate personal from professional and they affect each other. The supervisor has to help the supervisee deal with issues of personal strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the supervisee's practice as a clinician (Holloway, 2016).

As administrators, supervisors provide services required by supervisees as guided by policies and procedures for the organization, licensing body, or professional association (Glanz & Zepeda, 2015). Service provisions are also guided by laws, regulations, and ethics that supervisees must follow in performing their work. As evaluators, supervisors monitor and evaluate the supervisees and provide that information on performance and personal behaviour of the supervisees to such organs as the licensing boards, professional associations, universities, and prospective employers (Corey et al, 2020).

As recorders and documenters, supervisors record and document the events happening in all supervisory sessions in order to protect both the supervisee and the supervisor (Holloway, 2016). All issues raised during supervision sessions are recorded and documented for future references. As empowerers, supervisors empower the supervisee by developing their ability and authority to perform their professional responsibilities (Glanz & Zepeda, 2015). Finally, as advocates, supervisors develop their clients' welfare by teaching them various skills which would enable supervisees to practise their work effectively and efficiently.

Based on these explanations, it seems that: First, effective SQA as supervision is an intervention that takes place on a daily basis. Second, SQA has to focus on improving working relationships as well as teaching and learning processes. Third, the aim of SQA is to enable the growth of teachers and students who are the major players in improving teaching and learning processes. Fourth, supervision involves the supervisor and supervisee with the former having more professional knowledge than the latter. Fifth, supervision evaluates and monitors the process of teaching and learning as well as other processes that are geared towards improving teaching and learning.

Similarly, Milne and Reiser (2012) and Milne (2009) support what they call evidence-based clinical supervision model. This model states that supervisees' professional practice can be improved by the supervisor helping them to experience, reflect, conceptualize, plan, and experiment their practices based on the available research evidence, and supervisees' values and preferences. Thus, SQA practices need to rely on the best available research-based evidence.

The Political Model of School Quality Assurance Policy Implementation

The implementation of SQA policy in educational institutions involves a complex interplay of power dynamics and political processes, as highlighted by various scholars in the field. The political model, as discussed by Ball (2012a) and Bush (2020), provides a useful framework for understanding the nature of policy implementation within schools. According to this model, the entire process of education policy, including SQA policies, is inherently political due to the negotiation and bargaining that takes place among various interest groups within the educational system.

Political model of policy implementation focuses on the distribution of power and influence among different actors within schools. This model emphasizes the role of bargaining and negotiation between these actors, leading to the formation of interest groups and alliances that work towards specific policy objectives. However, as power accumulates within dominant coalitions, conflicts naturally arise (Bush, 2020). This viewpoint underscores that educational policy processes are not simply neutral or technocratic endeavors but are shaped by power struggles and differing interests.

Fowler (2014) further strengthens the link between power and educational policy, asserting that power is inherently intertwined with the outcomes of policy processes. This is particularly relevant in schools where power relations are institutionalized, and school administrators wield power through their organizational positions. In the context of SQA policy implementation, school administrators engage with various influential individuals and groups, such as teachers, parents, students, local authorities, and education officers. The interactions between these stakeholders can lead to tensions and struggles over control, resources, and influence in the policy implementation process.

These power dynamics can manifest in micropolitical struggles, a concept highlighted by Ball (2012b) and Lindle (2020). Micropolitics refer to the use of power by individuals to influence others and protect their interests within their daily work routines. This exercise of power can lead to both conflicts and cooperation among individuals as they vie for desired outcomes. The education policy implementation process is inevitably colored by these micropolitical struggles, as each group seeks to maintain

and enhance their power and resources, thus shaping their identity and interests.

Decisions made within schools can trigger micropolitical struggles. Lindle (2020) identifies a range of decisions, from formal policy implementation to resource allocation, that can lead to conflicts due to limited resources or differing priorities. Hinnant-Crawford (2016) underscores the significant influence of teachers on policy implementation within classrooms, staff rooms, and the broader school environment. Teachers' interactions with students, families, and colleagues are shaped by their power and influence, further underscoring their role in policy enactment.

To improve policy implementation, a focus on teachers and students is crucial. Effective education policies should place teachers and students at the center of the process, acknowledging their influence and impact on policy outcomes. Studies on school inspection (Kambuga & Dadi, 2015; Kosia & Lyamtane, 2018; Matete, 2021) have revealed that traditional approaches, such as periodic visits by school inspectors, have had limited success in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. This underscores the need for a more inclusive and collaborative approach that considers the perspectives and insights of those directly involved in the educational process.

In conclusion, the implementation of SQA policies in schools is a highly political process involving bargaining, negotiation, and power struggles among various stakeholders. The political model, as outlined by Ball and Bush, provides a framework for understanding these dynamics. Power relations, institutionalized within schools, shape policy outcomes, and micropolitical struggles further influence the implementation process. Teachers and students play significant roles in policy enactment, necessitating their inclusion in policy development and implementation. To enhance policy outcomes, a shift towards more inclusive and collaborative approaches, considering the intricate power dynamics within schools, is vital.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding SQA policy implementation requires a review of theoretical studies on education policy analysis. One of the recent theories in education policy analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

(Fairclough, 2015). CDA is a theory and method of analysing the ways in which individuals and institutions use language to achieve particular ends (Fairclough, 2015). CDA examines how social structures and power inequities are historically and discursively reproduced through oral, written, visual and or multimodal texts. Thus, CDA is critical for exposing the hidden power relations reproduced through the SQA policy discourses and texts. Such hidden power relations are important to understand because they construct political struggles during SQA policy implementation. For Fairclough (2015), these can be critically analyzed by examining the relationship between language and social practice which consider every instance of language use as a communicative event consisting of three interrelated dimensions and procedural stages for analysis which are text, a discursive practice, and social practice.

In the first dimension, the SQA policy discourses and texts were analyzed for their forms and meanings to discern the embedded social power relations, hegemony, ideologies, beliefs, and perceptions that define the third dimension of discourse as social practice. Fairclough argues that text analysis focuses on four main aspects: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure.

The second dimension is the analysis of discursive practice which deals with the processes of SQA policy texts production, distribution and consumption. With its procedural stage of interpretation, analysis informs how the SQA policy discourses position WEOs, SQAOs, teachers, and students. Analysing subject positions determines key elements of discourse that embody certain constraints on content, subjects, and relations, or on experiential, expressive and relational meanings. Analysis involves answering the questions: “what is going on?” Which determines the “content”, “who is involved?” which determines the “subject”, and “in what relations?” which determines the nature of the relationships among social subjects (Fairclough, 2015).

The third analytic dimension is discourse as social practice, which assumes that in the social world, individuals, groups, and institutions are involved in political, social, cultural, and economic activities reshaped by power and hegemonic relations produced and reproduced through discourses. This dimension corresponds to the procedural stage of explanation which deals with the ways in which discourse produces, and is reproduced by, social structures of power relations and social struggles,

which may either sustain or change these relations and struggles. This study intended to analyse how SQA policy discourses discursively construct external SQA policy actors' power as compared to internal SQA policy actors in selected secondary schools in Tanzania.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach guided by social constructionism philosophy (Lock & Strong, 2010). This study was guided by the assumptions that SQA policy discourses are constructive and constitutive of social subjects, relations, and objects. Seven schools located in Kongwa, Chemba, Chamwino and Dodoma Councils within Dodoma region, were purposively selected to make a case study for deeper understanding of the SQA policy implementation. These councils had schools involved in the SQA policy piloting stage for school self-evaluation between 2015 and 2019.

The participants were selected through purposive and maximum variation sampling based on their involvement and experiences in the implementation of SQA policy. Purposive sampling enabled to obtain information from four Heads of Schools, five SQAOs, three WEOs, and three subject teachers by virtue of their positions and experiences with SQA policy implementation. The use of maximum variation sampling helped the development of diverse responses and expands representation.

Data were generated through face-to-face interviews and review of policy documents. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with Heads of Schools, SQAOs, WEOs, and School Board members. Documents collected and analysed included SQA reports, school Quality Assurance Handbook (SQAH), School Quality Assurance Framework (SQAF), and WEO guidelines. The use of these two data collection methods helped the triangulation of data to obtain more authentic findings across data sets and thus reduced the impact of potential bias that could occur.

Data were analysed through thematic and CDA methods. Thematic analysis started with transcription of audio-recorded interviews to develop transcripts of qualitative data and reduce them to specifically interpretable themes and sub-themes. Transcription was followed by coding of transcripts according to categories that coincided with the major question. CDA was guided by three stages of description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 2015).

FINDINGS

It was found that despite the emphasis on transformation from school inspection to SQA, there was unequal distribution of power between the external and internal school quality assurers. For instance, external school quality assurers (the WEOs and SQAOs) were more empowered than internal school quality assurers and other stakeholders such as subject teachers, heads of schools, school management committees, heads of subject departments, and the Internal School Quality Assurance Team (IQAT). Findings on how external school quality assurers were empowered over internal school quality assurers and other stakeholders are presented in the subsequent sections.

The Empowerment of Ward Education Officers

Data analysis generated ten discourses that were constructed to empower WEOs. The discourses are as described hereunder:

The discourse of academic qualifications and teaching experience

The SQA policy discourses emphasized the minimum qualifications and experience that one had to possess to become WEO. The minimum qualification was a Bachelor's degree or above and must have worked as a teacher for at least seven years. Additionally, they had to show managerial competencies, as emphasized:

Competence in teaching; adhering to ethical and teachers' code of conduct guide; have experience in managerial position such as being a head teacher, or deputy head teacher or academic master/mistress; having at least seven years of experience in teaching; showing some managerial competencies like communication and interpersonal skills, report writing and planning (MoEST, 2017b, p. 21).

In practice, the challenge with these qualifications was that even HoS and teachers supervised by WEOs have similar qualifications. It was found that the WEOs who supervised the schools did not meet all these qualifications as reported:

Unfortunately, most WEOs I know have first degree and very few have Master's degree in education. You can't find many of those with higher qualifications. Even in terms of code of conduct, it is difficult to easily trace and know someone's background in terms of ethical conduct. So, it means it is difficult to ascertain all those requirements. They are just written. You can easily identify the educational levels but not the ethical

conduct. It is also difficult to find those with at least seven years of working experience (Interview with WEO).

As stated by this respondent, the challenge in practice was the difficulties involved in tracing someone's background information that would tell his or her ethical conduct.

Revision of position nomenclature from Ward Education Coordinators (WECs) to WEOs

It was also found that transition from school inspection to SQA required the revision of the nomenclature of the position of WECs to WEOs which was defined through the 2014 ETP, which states:

The implementation of Education and Training Policy shall be managed by the Ward Education Officer who shall be the coordinator for the implementation of Education and Training Policy for government and private schools at the level of pre-primary and basic education, secondary education, adult education and non-formal education. Ward Education Officer shall also be an inspector for the nearby schools in their ward and shall be accountable to the District Education Officer (MoEVT, 2014, p. 66).

The quotation above shows that with the adoption of SQA policy, the tasks of WEOs were expanded to supervising both primary and secondary schools located in their wards. However, WEOs' position was not supported by the existing Education Act 1978 since the amendments were not done.

The discourse of "I" and "my"

The WEOs were also empowered by reconstructing some knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards their work through the frequent use of the pronouns "I", and "my" throughout the Guidelines for their work (See p. 1, 3, 14, 15, 31). For example:

I have an important part to play in reinforcing the drive for school quality. I am an agent for continuous school improvement, because I am close to schools. I know them well through frequent visits and have close working relations with the HoS, teaching staff, School Committees and communities. While SQAOs have only intermittent contact with schools, I provide close-to-school support on an on-going basis. (MoEST, 2017c, p. 7).

The personal pronouns “I” and “My” represent loyalty, integrity, commitment, views, and personal perceptions of the speaker. These pronouns empowered WEOs with knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes relevant in the SQA process. In terms of knowledge, WEOs were made to believe, think, and act to serve the interests of SQA policy, such as the knowledge and beliefs on the government policy transformation from school inspection to SQA. Moreover, such pronouns were manipulative and were used by SQA policymakers to indicate, designate, and identify WEO’s responsibilities in the policy implementation. In addition, such pronouns persuaded other policy actors to enhance good relationship that would facilitate sharing those responsibilities through collaboration that enhances team work in the policy implementation. Further, they were also used to construct WEOs’ identity by creating positive impressions and commitment from heads of schools, SQAOs, teachers, and other actors at the LGA.

The discourse of supporting SQA visits

WEOs were also required to support SQA visits by performing eight roles and responsibilities which were called “steps”. These steps included:

- Step 1: Pass on to the school the formal notification of an SQA visit
- Step 2: Distribute SSEF (school self-evaluation forms) and provide guidance on how to fill in SSEF
- Step 3: Receive the SSEF from the school
- Step 4: Uploading the SSEF on the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Database
- Step 5: The on-site visit by the SQAOs
- Step 6: Final Report and School report card
- Step 7: Follow-up immediately after an SQA report is received
- Step 8: Follow up on recommendations and provide continued support (MoEST, 2017c, p. 31-32).

By performing those roles and responsibilities, the WEOs were empowered over other policy actors and stakeholders in the policy implementation process. These steps were considered relevant for supporting the preparation of SQA visit.

The discourse of influencing learner’s achievement

Through the discourses of “My role in relation to learner’s achievement”, the WEOs were empowered to support internal quality assurers by encouraging schools to keep up-to-date records of learners’ achievement

in the form of regular classroom assessment as well as formal examination results. The excerpt below illustrates this finding:

Teachers need to know how their children are progressing to determine their teaching strategies. I support the HoS and the internal quality assurance team to ensure that this is happening. This involves encouraging schools to keep up-to-date records of learners' achievement, in the form of regular classroom assessments as well as formal examination results. (MoEST, 2017c, p. 20).

From the exact above it means SQA policy empowered WEOs to influence learners' achievement by supporting teachers and the school management to keep and submit regularly summarized data on students' assessment and examination results to the district as well as useful management information data for allocating resources for school functioning. WEOs were also required to ensure information accuracy.

The discourse of influencing the quality of teaching for good learning and assessment

Through the discourse of influencing “the quality of teaching for good learning and assessment” (MoEST, 2017c, p. 21), the WEOs were empowered to encourage classroom observation and feedback among heads of schools and IQAT. Classroom observations was framed such that teachers were observed like objects presupposing that they lack subject matter and pedagogic knowledge. Additionally, the WEOs were empowered to evaluate heads of schools' ability to evaluate lessons by conducting joint classroom observation. This joint observation reconstructed the WEO's power and heads of schools' knowledge of effective teaching, and the ability to conduct quality lesson observations and provide feedback; and develop teachers' competencies in schools.

The discourse of supporting the quality of the curriculum in meeting learner's needs

Through the discourses of supporting “the quality of the curriculum in meeting learner's needs” (MoEST, 2017c, p. 24), the WEOs were empowered through ensuring the availability of the latest curriculum documents to HoS and teachers; developing teachers' awareness of curriculum changes; ensuring that schools provide for all aspects of the curriculum. Others are ensuring the identification of the curriculum contents that teachers find difficult, and ensuring that teacher professional development activities were designed around those contents. Also, they

were empowered to emphasize the role of literacy and numeracy and knowledge of language or science.

The discourse of developing the quality of leadership and management

Through the discourses of "How I develop the quality of leadership and management' (MoEST, 2017c, p. 25), WEOs were empowered to influence school development planning by understanding and communicating the purpose, steps and responsibilities in school self-evaluation and school development planning. They also influenced professional leadership by assisting school leaders to lead "the teaching process and managing the teaching force in their schools through clear goals and expectations about teacher performance; and influence financial management by ensuring that schools follow correct financial procedures for holding, spending and accounting for funds" (p. 25).

The discourse of affecting the quality of the school environment and its impact on welfare, health and safety

Through the discourse of "How I affect the quality of the school environment and its impact on welfare, health and safety" (MoEST, 2017c, p. 28), WEOs were empowered to make frequent and regular visits in schools. Through these visits, the WEOs were expected to develop knowledge of the school atmosphere in terms of its neatness, tidiness, and learners' happiness or if it had scaring atmosphere with teacher absenteeism and classroom attendance, students' misbehaviour and sadness. All such practices ensure that schools had physical, emotional and moral environment which supports learning.

The discourse of influencing community engagement

Through the discourse of "My role in community engagement" (MoEST, 2017c, p. 26), the power of WEOs was reconstructed by emphasizing them to take a unique position in establishing good relations between the school and the community. This was supported by an interviewed WEO:

Our focus is also on ensuring that the involvement of parents and the community in monitoring student learning takes place. This is largely a factor and that is why even during the inspection, SQAOs have to involve various groups to gain a common understanding including parents, school boards and even students themselves. This is different from what it was during the inspection policy. (Interview with WEO).

Community engagement was enhanced by the WEOs by making regular visits to the schools to discuss with the HoS about community-related issues. They also had power to meet school board members by attending board meetings as scheduled and provide feedback to the HoS. They also encouraged schools to communicate with parents and the wider communities through the use of school notice boards.

The Empowerment of School Quality Assurance Officers

Data analysis resulted in the development of nine themes which we refer to as discourses. They are: academic qualifications and experience; signing the code of conduct; SQA pre-visit preparation; On-site visit; meeting with school leadership and reporting to higher levels; focus group discussion with parents; focus group discussion with staff; talking to learners; and preparing the Final SQA Report and School Summary Report. Each is discussed as follows:

The discourse of academic qualifications and experience

The “qualifications” discourse required SQAOs to possess a “Bachelor’s Degree with Education, and above coupled with classroom teaching experience of not less than ten (10) years.” (MoEST, 2017b, p. 21). However, the recommended qualifications may be considered inadequate for effective SQA process and practices because many secondary school teachers and heads hold similar qualifications. Hierarchically, the SQAOs may need to possess higher academic qualifications for their supervisory effectiveness.

The discourse of signing the code of conduct

SQAOs were also empowered by “signing the Code of Conduct” which was framed by using the discourse of “I will” (MoEST, 2017a, p. 6). This discourse constructed loyalty, integrity, commitment, and involvement in their responsibilities and accountability in policy implementation. This finding is demonstrated in the following excerpt:

The Code of Conduct is essential to ensuring that the core values are in place and are visible in practice. All SQAOs will sign the Code of Conduct before undertaking any whole-school visits. This means that everyone will be committed to demonstrating professional and respectful behaviour and communication at all times. (MoEST, 2017a, p. 6).

However, the weakness of this empowerment is that policymakers constructed objectivity in SQA process by assuming that any SQA who

work based on the codes will be fair, impartial, respectful, confident, able to plan and manage, communicate, and provide feedback. This assumed objectivity may be difficult since SQAOs are human beings with their own motives, objectives, interests, knowledge, background, and motivation.

The discourse SQA pre-visit preparation

The discourse of SQA pre-visit preparation empowered SQAOs by reshaping WEOs to support SQA visits. WEOs were required to make “preparations and procedures prior to a SQA visit by the SQAOs” and make “follow-up and on-going support following a SQA visit” (MoEST, 2017c, p. 30). These two roles were to be attended by performing eight roles and responsibilities as illustrated above. By performing those roles and responsibilities, WEOs empowered SQAOs than other policy actors in the policy implementation process. Moreover, the SQA policy empowers SQAOs to use “information provided by the school to prepare” (MoEST, 2017a, p. 9) for visit, and to “write a short pre-visit plan (PVP) to share with the team members electronically in advance of the visit” (p. 9). This practice still constructs unequal power distribution between the SQAOs, WEOs, and other SQA policy actors.

The discourse of “on-site visit”

Through the discourse of “on-site visit”, SQAOs were empowered to visit, observe, and report classroom teaching and learning to enhance the overall quality of the school. This is demonstrated as follows:

The SQA team will engage in a range of activities in order to gain a full and accurate picture of how well the school is functioning. In addition to the documentation and supporting evidence provided by the school, the SQA Team will collect evidence through ... direct observation of learning and teaching in classrooms and other learning areas (MoEST, 2017a, p. 10).

This means that during their visits to schools, SQAOs were empowered to observe, collect evidence, and report for feedback on the impact of school leadership and management, the curriculum, and the school environment. These discursive practices reproduced the power of SQAOs over school management, administrators, teachers, and students because the role of all these stakeholders in the observation of classroom teaching and learning is not emphasized by the policy.

The discourse of meeting with school leadership and report to higher levels

During the school visits, SQAOs were empowered to meet with the school leaders and managers and report the findings to higher levels as illustrated:

Meetings with the HoS and other school leaders, such as specialist staff, academic leads, and Heads of Departments provide valuable evidence on the quality of leadership and management. During these meetings, SQAOs will ask key questions linked to the Domains, focus areas for follow up from the SSEF, or to better understand learner attainment data. In order to have a full picture of the quality and impact of leadership and management on the school and community, the SQA team leader will also arrange to meet with members of the SMC/SB [School Management Committee/School Board]. (MoEST, 2017a, p. 15).

This discursive framing empowered SQAOs to any ask questions related to the SQA domains. The role of the school managers and administrators in the meeting is not defined. This means that the school managers and leaders are positioned as passive providers of answers to questions and data required by SQAOs. This framing means that the SQAOs dominated the meeting which becomes the site for the production and reproduction of their power over the school managers, leaders, administrators.

The discourse of focus group discussion with parents

The discourse of “focus group discussion with parents” (MoEST, 2017a, p. 15) also empowered the SQAOs because they led, moderated, and reported the discussion. Parents’ role in the FGD was not explicitly stated. Instead, the discussion was required to “align with the SSEF, Domains, and the Quality Indicators” (p. 15). Parents’ active participation in the proposed FDG would be determined by their knowledge of SSEF, Domains, the quality indicators; their educational level; awareness with school activities; and full involvement in SSE. However, this is not the case because all parents who were interviewed had no idea of SSE, its role, and how it was used in the school as supported by a parent:

We really know nothing about the existence of SQA. We know there is school inspection where the school inspectors come and inspect the school. The school inspectors have not engaged us in their work; we only know their existence through parents’ meetings where we are told they came and suggested so and so. (Interviewed Parent).

The discourse of focus group discussion with staff

The discourse of “focus group discussion with staff” (MoEST, 2017a, p. 15) was also empowered the SQAOs and not staff because the former determined who would be the invited staff, the number, what would be discussed, and how it would be discussed. The discussion was to align with the SSEF, domains, and quality indicators. This framing limited invited staff to expose their fellow staff or bosses’ weaknesses as supported by one teacher:

There is no good way of giving oral feedback after the inspection as all teachers are invited together with school officials. The SQAQO begins to explain our weaknesses. You will be surprised to find even administrative issues being discussed in the presence of all teachers. We think this is really awkward. (Interviewed Subject Teacher)

In such circumstances, it is unlikely that invited staff would freely talk on the weaknesses of the individuals in the school community. Such discussions will likely on reporting shortage of textbooks, teachers, classrooms, large class sizes, and or poor students’ participation.

The discourse of talking to learners

The discourse of “talking to learners” (MoEST, 2017a, p. 13) empowered the SQAOs to determine what, how, and when to talk with learners in classrooms. It was expected that students would be free to talk in the FGDs with SQAOs matters related to their understanding and attitudes towards teaching and learning. However, since SQAOs were visitors, students’ discussion freedom was limited as reported by a teacher during an interview:

There is a requirement in quality assurance that students sit together with the SQAOs for them to provide feedback related to teaching and learning. Only few students might have the courage to the visitors. Even at our homes we are not socialized to just talk family issues to a visitor. It can’t just happen as expected. (Interviewed Subject Teacher)

This implies that students had limited freedom to discuss what and how they were taught and evaluated in the presence of their fellow students. Moreover, the effectiveness of the discussion depended on the SQAOs’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes to encourage students to talk.

Preparing the Final SQA Report and School Summary Report

SQAOs were empowered to prepare the Final SQA Report and School Summary Report. This is clear in the policy document which states:

The SQAOs will use the evidence gathered to make judgments on the quality of the school's work. These will be summarised in written bullets outlining the factors that support learning, the factors that limit effective learning, and recommendations for action for each Domain. These findings are then put together by the SQA team leader to form a report that provides a comprehensive analysis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The findings made by the team are based on the evidence presented and therefore these findings are final. The judgments made in the report cannot be challenged but any factual inaccuracies contained in the report will be addressed.

From the above statement, in most cases, it is clear that the reports were an outcome of SQAOs' judgments rather than those of other SQA stakeholders because the SQAOs dominated the school visit preparation, classroom observation, and the discussions with school leadership and management, staff, students, and parents. The report cannot be an outcome of the joint efforts between SQAOs, school management, administrators, teachers, students, and parents as planned by the SQA policymakers.

DISCUSSION

The major finding indicates that in the context of education quality improvement, the discourse surrounding SQA policies has resulted in external policy actors such as SQAOs and WEOs gaining more influence than internal policy actors. Despite the intention to transform from school inspection to SQA to empower internal actors, the actual implementation has continued to empower external actors. This is contradictory to the goal of enhancing education quality through empowering internal stakeholders. Furthermore, this contradicts the stated SQA principles, which focus was on improving QAS, transparency and accountability, community engagement, resources, and improving teaching and learning.

The impact of empowering external actors in implementing SQA policies can be understood by using the concept of power, domination, and control, as discussed by Fairclough (2015), Foucault (1978), and Fowler et al., (2019). These theorists emphasize that power dynamics are central, with powerful participants in discourses exerting control over the contributions of less powerful participants. This control over discourse leads to limitations in the scope of content, affecting knowledge, beliefs, social relations, and subject identities. Foucault's (1980) concept of power/knowledge further supports this idea, highlighting the connection

between language, knowledge, and power. He argues that those who control discourse also control what can be known, influencing ideologies, beliefs, and identity. In essence, Foucault contends that language and knowledge are inherently political.

Thus, as the findings have shown, in the context of SQA policy implementation, WEOs and SQAOs controlled school leaders, school boards, teachers, students, and parents. That is, they determined their knowledge, power, and identity in SQA processes and practices. As such, SQA does not differ from school inspection that failed to improve quality of teaching and learning in schools (Kambuga & Dadi, 2015; Matete, 2021; Kosia & Lyamtane, 2018). For example, in improving the quality of school leadership and management as quality component, the process was framed in ways that empowered WEOs and SQAOs to evaluate school leaders as they lead learning and people, and manage resources. The opportunity for school leaders to share their leadership experiences, opinions, views, and discuss with the SQAOs and WEOs to arrive at a consensus in school leadership and management decisions was constrained because school leadership practices were evaluated without leaders' voices. In other words, the school leaders were considered as *tabularasa* and thus disempowered. The discussion between the external policy actors and the school leaders is inevitable which could have allowed power sharing. Without power sharing it is difficult for the SQAOs and WEOs to conduct objective evaluation of the school leaders' performance as an input to SQA process.

Similarly, in the classroom visits and observation, external policy actors were empowered than school managers, leaders, teachers, and students because their roles in the classroom observation was not emphasized. Teachers and students who are the major players in teaching and learning game, were positioned as passive cogs to be visited, observed, and reported without their voices. Moreover, they were also positioned as passive feedback recipients and providers of evidence on the impact of school leadership and management, the curriculum, and the school environment on the quality of teaching and learning. SQA policymakers assumed that SQAOs and WEOs can visit and observe classrooms and obtain all the information they wanted without engagement of the school management, administrators, teachers, and students.

Considering SQA as supervision and counselling as rightly advocated by Corey et al. (2020), the empowerment of WEOs, the so-called “close-to-school supervisors”, is difficult to improve quality because the policy implementation misses the elements of both practising supervision and counselling. It misses supervisory elements because the SQAOs, WEOs, IQAT, and most school heads, lacked the skills for practising supervision which were necessary for effective supervision of others in a variety of school or educational settings (Corey et al. 2020). Effective SQA need to involve daily interaction with teachers and students which need to be done by heads of school and departments rather than WEOs and SQAOs.

Considering supervision as teaching, the way the SQA was practised constrained the supervisors to perform the teacher's role and the more reliance on outside visitors constrains coaching, instructing, demonstration, modelling, guiding, and providing feedback on proper strategies. It constrained discussing teachers' fears, hopes, frustrations, or professional training requirement.

The empowerment of external as opposed to internal policy actors also constrains the provision of advice because of power relationship between the two. SQAOs gave more orders rather than providing advice. As advisers, supervisors have to empower supervisees to learn decision making related to professional role performance. Similarly, resource limitations may constrain provision of advisory services by WEOs and SQAOs. Instead, they end up writing reports which sometimes are not accessible (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013).

Moreover, although SQA policy implementation encouraged monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work and school management, it does not fully involve subject teachers as supervisees and students as learners. As supported by Educational Supervision Theory (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013), effective evaluation of teachers as supervisees has to involve monitoring and evaluation. This provides relevant information on their performance and personal behaviour to provide feedback to teacher certification authorities, universities, and employers.

In addition, the current SQA policy implementation needs to rest on the foundations of Evidence-based Clinical Supervision Model (Milne, 2009; Reiser, 2021). This model states that supervisees' professional practice can be improved by the supervisor helping them to experience, reflect,

conceptualize, plan, and experiment their practices based on available research evidence, supervisees' values, and preferences. However, the way SQA was practised in schools relied more on the evidence provided by external policy actors.

The impact of over-empowering external SQA policy actors on the success of the policy implementation may be discussed using the political model which emphasizes the concept of SQA policy empowered external policy actors to dominate internal policy actors. Similar to school inspection, this kind of power is about domination of school boards, school heads, teachers, students, and parents. However, this form of power is likely to produce conflicts, contests, competitions, and resistance (Ball, 2012b, Bush, 2020; Hoyle, 1999; Lindle, 2020, 2014). This is because of the following reasons: First, internal policy actors like school heads and heads of departments also possess positional power which may limit the implementation of what external policy actors want. Second, most external policy actors have similar qualifications with school heads and subject teachers. Teachers' possession of professional power and its impact in the policy implementation is supported by O'Neill (2005). O'Neill argues that teachers can exert considerable influence over education policy at the point of implementation in centres, classrooms, staff rooms and the institution as a whole. Teachers can also influence the nature of the relationships they enjoy with students, families and fellow teachers. This implies that since SQA policy implementation does not recognize teachers' power by constraining their direct involvement, teachers may resist, either passively or actively, and constrain the achievement of policy objectives. An effective SQA policy must put teachers and students at the centre of the implementation process. Third, external policy actors were just visitors to the schools and they lacked resources to implement the functions or powers provided in and through the policy.

Like during the school inspection era, during the SQA era struggles also emerge between external policy actors and teachers because teachers have professional power based on their knowledge and skills constructed in and through short and long-term professional training, as well as teaching experiences (Gonzales, 2019; Sorm & Gunbayi, 2018). For example, conflicts may emerge in the process of SSE and SQA visits between the personalities involved. However, SQA policymakers do not recognize the impact of such politics and assume that schools can be evaluated using

the rigid guidelines provided at the national level. Further, they consider SQA processes as being linear and objective.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that the SQA policy discourses still empowers much the external policy actors than the internal ones. Moreover, SQA policy implementation is constructed as a linear and objective process as contrasted to the fact that it is actually a complex and subjective undertaking. As such, it is practically still a replica of school inspection rather than SQA. Putting emphasis on external supervision dominated by WEOs and SQAOs renders it difficult to assure quality teaching and learning and the related processes at school. Besides, since external quality assurers visit schools periodically, it is difficult to bring transformation in the process of ensuring education quality. Given that internal SQA policy actors are disempowered, it means that SQA does not adequately provide information for teacher professional development to improve the quality of schools and that of teaching and learning.

Two recommendations are important. First, there is a need for the Government policymakers to review the current SQA policy to make it empower internal rather than external policy actors. This will make it different from the former school inspection. Second, the revised SQA policy has to focus more on internal supervision rather than visiting schools and classrooms from outside. Further studies might need to be done on the impact of the empowerment of external SQA policy actors and the effectiveness of school self-evaluation.

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