

Quality Assurance in School Assessment for Education Improvement: The Analysis of Experiences from Secondary School English teachers in Dar es Salaam

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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance is inevitable in school assessment for the improvement of education since; the best school assessment is the tool to understand the skills and competences which the student has acquired through teaching and learning process. The skills and competences acquired will help the student to exist in the era of rapid change. Therefore, the Quality assurance should focus on enhancing and improving the process that is used to prepare the assessment, rather than focusing on the result itself. The study highlights the principles of assessment which include validity, reliability, transparency, inclusivity and equitability, relevance, manageable and practicable in ensuring the quality of assessment in school assessment. The study was conducted in ten (5) government schools and ten (5) private schools in Dar-es-Salaam Region. The study used survey methodology to collect primary data. A total of sixty-four (64) teachers participated in the research. Data were collected through questionnaire. The result showed that Teachers were found to assess students mainly for assigning grades rather than assessing for learning. Furthermore, the findings from the study revealed that teachers had inadequate knowledge in the area of assessment principles and quality assurance in assessment. It was also found that large classes and teaching workloads affected the quality of assessment in schools. However, for ensuring the quality of school assessment, the study recommends that, teachers should get refresher courses on the principles of assessment in order to equip them with the effective assessment skills. It is also suggested that the teaching process especially in the area of assessment be monitored closely by the inspectorate division in order to ensure its quality.

Key words: *School Assessment, Principles of Assessment, Quality assurance*

INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance of assessment is planned and systematic process of ensuring that the requirements of the assessment system, competency standards and any other criteria are applied in a consistent manner. Quality assurance mechanisms or procedures are an integral part of assessment system (Pellegrino, 2014). Classroom assessment refers to any procedure or activity that is designed to extract information on the knowledge, attitudes or skills acquired by a learner or group of learners in a classroom environment over a period of time. It is also an exercise which assists policy makers in deciding on educational matters and how to obtain feedback about the learner's progress, strengths, and weaknesses (Omari, 2011). Assessment is important component in education for bringing together all of the elements needed for a leap in educational improvement (Popham, 2008).

Assessment enables transformations in learning process and outcomes. Assessment is needed for improvement, so as to give opportunities for the academic community to engage in self-reflection of its learning goals to determine the degree to which these goals correspond to student and societal needs and to evaluate if students' activities and performances coincide with the academic community's expectations. Teachers of English Language have a habit of assessing students without considering principles which are required to be followed when preparing assessment. What the paper is arguing so far is that because English Language Teachers do not adhere to the appropriate principles when preparing assessment to their learners, consequently students do not seem to acquire the creative use of the target knowledge and skills. It must be emphasized that the lack of use of the principles of assessment when preparing assessment would result to a negative consequence since it would lead to low quality of education. The advantages of using principles when preparing assessment of the students is that the teacher can exactly be sure that he/she is assessing what was supposed to be assessed, the results are reliable, students have basic information before the assessment, assessment is accessible by all students regardless of their physical abilities, assessment tasks address the intended skills and knowledge, there is relation between the number of questions and the time allocated for completion, thus helping teachers target their instructions for greater effectiveness and make responsive instructional adjustments. In this respect, teaching and assessing are intertwined. The overlap is beneficial to students in that they regularly receive feedback in the course of learning, and it is also beneficial to

teachers because they regularly receive information about their teaching methods and activities. Assessment allows active student involvement through self- and peer assessment, which make them useful instructional tools. Teachers should analyze and compile students' responses to find out which students are missing achievement targets and how. If analyzed well, data that result from regularly administered variety of formative assessments can provide useful information about quality of education. In fact, specific students' misconceptions or misunderstandings in answering a given set of items can yield precise indicators to guide immediate teacher follow-up instruction (Popham, 2006: 86). This study is significant in the sense that the findings of the study would enable the teachers of English to use the required principles in preparing assessment to their learners.

Statement of the Problem

Managing quality processes become critically important for education institutions generally, but especially for secondary schools. In Tanzania, the general concept of Quality Assurance is not new. Inspectorate Department is responsible for ensuring the practice of quality processes. However, part of their dilemma lies in distinguishing among the related functions of quality improvement and quality assurance in classroom assessment. In order to ensure Quality Assessment teachers, need to understand and apply basic principles of assessment which includes validity, reliability, transparency, inclusivity and equitability, relevance, manageable and practicable.

Purpose of the Study

This paper was intended to examine the extent to which the quality of school assessment is ensured especially among English Teachers in secondary schools for the improvement of education. The focus of this paper is on analyzing the validity of the school assessment; examining the reliability of the school assessment; and evaluating the practicability of the school assessment.

Literature Review

There are a range of reasons why we assess students. Some of those reasons are such as; to create learning opportunities, to motivate, to provide feedback to students and to staff, to provide a grade, to act as a quality assurance mechanism internally and externally. Classroom assessment has received increased attention from the assessment experts in recent years, since teachers are responsible for evaluating instruction and students learning, there is a

widespread concern about the quality of classroom assessment. Classroom assessment embraces a broad range of activities from constructing test and performance measures to grading, interpreting, standardized test scores, communicating test results and using assessment results in decision making (Harlen, 2007). The term “quality assurance” means the maintenance of a desired level of quality in a service or product. Quality assurance in school assessment refers to the practices where by academic standards i.e. the level of academic achievement attained by students are maintained and improved. One of the means of maintaining quality in school assessment is by adhering to the principles of assessment when preparing assessment for the students. The failure to follow principles when preparing assessment in Tanzanian Secondary Schools is a very big challenge. Despite of its essential importance, many teachers do not consider them when preparing assessment of their students. Quality assurance does not happen at the level of instruction.

After all, the instructors have no idea if their students are actually learning, regardless of how good their lecturers or other instructional materials might be, until they test students’ understanding, mastery or knowledge. Therefore, the only way a teacher can know if a student has learned a skill or knowledge set is through some of assessment. It’s fair to say quality assurance happens at the assessment level of the learning process (Gabriel et al, 2015). In traditional classes, assessment and instruction are highly integrated parts of classroom experience; students are examined only on the material directly covered in a class. The process of assessment, however must be more structured and formal than the learning process if the purpose of the assessment process is the assurance that student have mastered a given discipline. Assessments are critical as indicators of quality because, if structured well students who pass the disciplinary assessments indicate subject matter mastery of that discipline (Race et al, 2002). Few studies have been done regarding the Quality Assurance in School Assessment for Education Improvement. For example, Black et all (1998) *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice* in this study they reported that one of the outstanding features of studies of assessment in recent years has been the shift in the focus of attention, towards greater interest in the interactions between assessment and classroom learning and away from concentration on the properties of restricted forms of test which are only weakly linked to the learning experiences of students. This shift has been coupled with many expressions of hope that improvement in classroom

assessment will make a strong contribution to the improvement of learning. Similarly, Brown (2011), conducted a study on how assessment can enhance student learning, the results showed that there is a tendency of universities not being serious on assessment by commenting that, too many universities pay insufficient attention to assessment: usually the mechanics are adequately managed, but the purposes and practices are less well thought-through, relying on 'tried and tested' approaches, which in reality are neither. Some would even say that our current assessment system is broken, that nothing less than a radical overhaul can save it from falling into total disrepute. In many universities, time-consuming and expensive complaints often centre on student dissatisfaction with what are sometimes, in truth, poor or even reprehensible university assessment practices. More students and their (fee-paying) parents are taking universities to court, questioning not just the fair implementation of assessment processes, but also the academic judgments on which grades are based. Hills (1991), when investigating on teachers' assessment practices the results showed that teachers were not well prepared to meet the demand of classroom assessment due to inadequate training. Most of the previous studies, however, were done in Developed countries with focus on the quality assurance in different levels of education with regards to assessment practices. In this study the researchers investigated Quality Assurance in School Assessment for Education Improvement basing on principles of assessment.

Research Methodology

Research Design, Sample and Sampling Procedures

Descriptive survey research design was used. This design was found to be an ideal as it enabled an in-depth study of the relevant variables to be made in order to find out the existing conditions in schools. Studies that are concerned with people's opinions and what they do, and different type of educational facts finding, can utilize this research design. (Franked and Wallen, 1993). The population under this study comprised of about 100 English Teachers and about 20 secondary schools in Dar es Salaam Urban. A random sampling technique was used to select the schools and the categories of respondents to be included in the sample. In this study the selected sample included 64 teachers from 10 schools of which five were government schools and five were private school. The formed sample of teachers and schools were randomly selected.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using semi structured Questionnaire. Questionnaire was used for its suitability to this study as it allowed the researcher to reach a large sample within limited time and ensure confidentiality of the information given by the respondents. The questionnaire was designed for teachers; it sought to find out the application of principles of assessment in classroom assessments and also to identify challenges which had affected teachers' effort to ensure quality assurance in their assessments. These challenges include inadequate knowledge in the area of assessment principles, large classes and teaching workloads. A total of 75 questionnaires were distributed to 10 secondary school teachers. Out of which 64 questionnaires which is 85 percent were filled and returned. A total of the 11 sampled population which is 15 percent did not return the questionnaires.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

To ascertain the validity and reliability of the research instruments the researcher presented the questionnaire to experts and other senior staff in the Faculty of Education at OUT, who were the authority for scrutiny, advice and verification. Their observations were used to restructure the instruments.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through SPSS programme where simple descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were also employed.

Results and Discussion of the Findings

Demographic characteristics of the participants

The characteristics of the teachers were revealed through the analyzed demographic information. The data shows that; the percentage of male teachers was big (77%) as compared to the percentage of female teachers which was found to be only 23% of the sampled population.

Teaching Experience of the Teachers

The Study sought to find out the experience of teachers who were involved in the study as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Composition of Participant by Teaching Experience

Experience	Female	Male	Total	Percent
Less than 5 years	3	8	11	17.2
6-10 years	5	25	30	46.9
11-15 years	4	8	12	18.8
16-20 years	3	5	8	12.5
More than 20 years	0	3	3	4.7
Total	15	49	64	100

Table 1 presents the categories of participants according to their English Language teaching experience. The Table shows that, 17 percent of the teachers who participated in this study had the English Language teaching experience of less than five years. On the other hand, the majority of the sampled population 47 percent had been teaching English Language for 6-10 years, whereas, 19 percent had the teaching experience for a period of 11-15 years. Participants with the teaching experience of 16-20 years were 13 percent whereas the most experience teachers with above 20 years of experience were only 5 percent.

Level of Education of the Teachers

The level of education of the participants has been categorized in Table 2.

Table 2: The Level of Education of the participants

Level of Education	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Diploma in Education	2	3.1	3.1	3.1
University Degree(Non-Education)	1	1.6	1.6	4.7
University Degree(Education)	55	85.9	85.9	90.6
Post Graduate Diploma/Degree	6	9.4	9.4	100.0
Total	64	100.0	100.0	

The data in Table 2 shows that most of the teachers in the sampled group which is 85.9 percent had the highest level of university degree in education. However, only 3.1 percent of the participants had the lowest level of education which is Diploma in Education. Furthermore, the data shows that 9.4 percent had Post Graduate Diploma/Degree and 1.6 percent had a Non-Education University Degree.

Teaching Work Load of Teachers

The researcher wanted to find out about the teaching work load of the teachers as it has effects in the Quality Assurance in Assessment. The results show that 39.1 percent of the participants were teaching 1 subject while 61.2 percent were teaching more than 1 subject. The study went further to find out about the number of period which teachers have per week. The results show that 26.5 percent had more than 20 periods per week while 73.4 percent of the teachers had 1-20 periods per week. The study also wanted to identify the number of students per class. Table 3 shows the number of students per class.

Table 3: Number of Students per Class

Number of Students per Class	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<= 30 students	5	7.8	7.8	7.8
31-40 students	12	18.8	18.8	26.6
41-50 students	25	39.1	39.1	65.6
51-60 students	14	21.9	21.9	87.5
61-70 students	2	3.1	3.1	90.6
71-80 students	2	3.1	3.1	93.8
81-90 students	2	3.1	3.1	96.9
91-100 students	1	1.6	1.6	98.4
>100	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	64	100.0	100.0	

The findings revealed that 64.1 percent of the respondents were teaching classes which had more than 40 students. But on the other hand, 26.6 percent of the teachers had less than 40 students in their classes. In most cases teachers with big classes tend to prepare assessments which require short answers or multiple choice questions. However, synthesis, evaluation and analytical kind of questions are more likely to have a higher level of validity and reliability in the assessment. James *et al.* (2002) suggest that larger class sizes pose significant challenges in the assessment of student as large classes may limit the amount of feedback provided to students. There is a doubt that growing class sizes encourage academic staff to focus on time-efficient assessment techniques. Hence the assessment may focus on the lower levels of intellectual complexity; that is, assessment tasks that merely reward superficial, shallow or reproductive approaches to learning and that fail to direct students into the type of study that leads to the higher-order learning objectives. Assessment methods demanding less complex analysis and synthesis or demanding less rich forms of student

responses may significantly diminish the quality of learning. Of course, well-developed written examinations can provide a high level of validity and reliability in measurement of some types of learning.

Teachers’ Knowledge on the Quality Assurance in Assessment and Principles of Assessment

The study aimed at getting the information on the extent to which teachers has knowledge on the Quality Assurance in Assessment and Principles of Assessment. The results were as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Training Attended on Quality Assurance and Principles of Assessment

Training Attendance	Level of Agreement in %	
	Yes	No
On the quality assurance in assessment in teacher training	59.4	40.7
On the principles of assessment in teacher training	71.9	28.2
In-Service training on the quality assurance in assessment	29.7	70.3
In-Service training on the principles of assessment	37.5	62.5

The data in Table 4 indicates that, 59.4 percent of the participants have attended training on Quality Assurance in teachers’ colleges while 40.7 percent were not trained. Teachers who were trained on the Principles of Assessment in teachers’ college were 71.9 percent while 28.2 percent were not trained. Moreover, the findings show that, 70.3 and 62.5 percent of the teachers did not obtain In-Service Training on the Quality Assurance in Assessment and Principles of Assessment. These questions were critical to the present study since the study aimed at checking the Quality Assurance in the School Assessment which is measured through the Principles of Assessment. The principles were sought to see whether the assessments given were valid, reliable, transparent, inclusive and equitable, relevance, manageable and practicable. The results of this study indicate that about 40 percent of teachers were not trained on Quality Assurance while 28.2 percent of the teachers were not trained on the Principles of Assessment. Furthermore, the data indicates that there is lack of In-Service Training. Hence, this is the great drawback to Quality Assurance in School Assessment if about half of teachers were not trained in Quality Assurance. Similar studies on the issue of teachers’ knowledge on the principles of quality

assurance in assessments are widely conducted in some countries. For example, Gunter et al (2016) conducted a study on teachers' professional knowledge for teaching English as a foreign language and found out that most of teachers lacked profession knowledge on quality assurance. Test scores varied across pre-service teachers from different programs and stages, which adequately reflect differences in the learning opportunities they had during teacher education.

Validity

On the question of validity as part of principle of assessment; the researchers wanted to find out if the intended learning outcomes are considered when preparing the assessment. The data shows that 50 percent of the participants were doing all the considerations but 49 percent were not considering the intended learning outcomes when preparing the assessment. This question aimed at assessing whether the assessment was valid or not. Generally, the results indicate that about half percent of teachers do not consider this part of validity principle when preparing the assessment. On considering the level of learners in preparing assessment, the study found out that 90.6 percent of the teachers consider the level of learners when preparing the assessment; on the other hand, 9.4 percent of the participants were preparing the assessment without considering the level of learners. However, this finding indicates that validity of assessment was highly considered in this aspect by teachers. On the issue of validity McMillan (2013) conducted a research across America and found out that most of teachers violated the principle of validity on class assessment as part of quality assurance. Similar issues on reliability, transparency and inclusivity were survey across states in America.

Reliability

Another interest of the study was to see if there was consistence in the response of candidates when asked the same questions in different test, the study revealed that, 59.4 percent of the respondents confirmed that there was no any consistence in the response of the candidates when asked the same questions in the different test while 40.6 percent of the candidates agreed that there is consistence in the responses of the candidates. In this case it is concluded that there was no reliability in assessment since more than 50 percent confirmed that there was no consistence.

Transparency

On responding to whether the teachers provide the students with basic information before the assessment; a total of 79.7 percent of the participants agreed that they give their students the basic information before the assessment while 20.3 percent confirmed that they do not give any information before the assessment. The aim of this question was to assess the transparency of teachers in assessment as part of Quality Assurance Principles. The findings (79.7 %) indicate transparency of teachers in assessment was observed.

Inclusive/equity

Respondents were asked if the assessment they prepared benefited all groups in relation to prior experiences or geographical location; the findings revealed that, 76.6 percent of the respondents do prepare the assessments which benefit all groups in relation to their prior experience or geographical location. Furthermore, the data indicates that 23.5 percent of the teachers' assessments do not benefit all groups in relation to their prior experience or geographical location. Furthermore, in responding to question whether assessment is accessible by all students regardless of their physical abilities or not; 85 percent of respondents agreed that the assessment was accessible to all student inclusively. Ten percent of respondents denied that the assessment did not include all students; and five percent did not respond to the question. The two questions above aimed at assessing whether teachers applied the principle of inclusive and equitable. Since, Inclusive education is one of the current interests of quality education in Tanzania in particular and East Africa in general. However, generally the principle is applied, although to some extent it is not applied. Therefore, for the Quality School Assurance this principle is of critical importance for teachers to observe.

Relevance

One of the aims of the study was to find out the extent to which the assessment tasks address the intended skills and knowledge. The data shows that, 52 percent of the respondents agreed that the assessment task do address the intended skills and knowledge. On the other hand, 48 percent of the respondents said that their assessment did not reach the intended skills and knowledge. Academic assessment should be about assessing both knowledge and skills. When devising assessment tasks it is important that it addresses the skills you want the student to develop. In addition, they should be set in a

context that is seen as having 'real purpose' behind the task and that there is a sense of a 'real audience' – one beyond the tutor – for whom the task would be done. This observation generally concludes that the assessments provided by teachers on the issue of relevance are questionable. It is assumed by this study that about half of the assessment (48%) conducted did not reach the learning goals if the assessment tasks did not attain the intended skills and knowledge. A study of factors affecting provision of quality education in community secondary schools in Arusha district council in Tanzania (Lyimo, 2017) found out that the assessments provided by teachers were somehow irrelevant and not coherent to the syllabus.

Practicability of Assessment

The respondents were also asked if they consider the relationship between the number of questions and the time allocated for the completion when preparing the assessment tasks. The results indicated that, 53.8 percent of the sampled population considers the relationship between the number of questions and time. However, 46.2 percent responded that could not consider this kind of relationship. This means that students could not complete the questions on time. This concludes that the assessment was not practical in the sense that students were unable to complete questions within the allocated time/use little time to complete questions. A similar study was conducted by Koller & Trautwein (2003) on the time management on assessment. Although the study focused on home works, it was found that 70% of students could not complete homework because the questions demanded more time than the given time and deadlines. Teachers did not take a balance between the tasks provided and the time given to complete the tasks.

Challenges facing Teachers when Preparing Assessments

The study also wanted to find out whether teachers face any challenge when preparing assessment or not. The results indicated that 71.2 percent of the participants face challenge when preparing assessment for their English Language learners due to lack of text books, mixed ability level of students, teaching work load and lack of enough knowledge on assessment. A total of 28.8 percent confirmed that they do not face any challenge during the assessment preparations. As the findings indicate, teachers face a lot of challenges in implementing the principles of Quality Assessment. Among most critical challenges includes the large size of classes, unavailability of teaching and learning materials, lack of appropriate textbooks and reference books,

linguistic background of learners and lack of training in Quality Assurance in assessment. A number of studies and reports have critiqued teacher preparation. One of the interesting studies was conducted by Ginsberg and Kingston (2014) on the preparedness of teachers on the era of accountability. It was found out that most teachers lack preparedness for assessment because much of their time is spent in rushing to complete the syllabus. Teacher education was found to include more of the different ways for assessing outcomes than any other profession, only few teachers would apply the knowledge gained during training.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from this study that most of principles of assessment were not either understood or practiced by sampled teachers. For example, the most important principles of assessment such as validity, reliability, relevance and practicability were not observed by most of the teachers. The study further indicates that transparency and inclusiveness principles were observed by teachers. Despite its central role in the assessment process, teachers have a lot of challenges in assessing their students. There is evidence, however, that the quality of those practices were deficient in many ways. Problems that have been identified in this study such the large size of classes, unavailability of teaching and learning materials, lack of appropriate textbooks and reference books, linguistic background of learners and lack of training in Quality Assurance in assessment are the evidence that teachers are there for performance or grading of student marks. The focus in assessment should not be on diagnostic and formative aspects only, but rather on how assessment principles are based. Observations of classroom assessment in Dar es Salaam schools do not present a very different picture. Although this should not be interpreted as providing a description that is applicable to all schools in Tanzania, it is implicit that they apply to many schools. This study concludes that, there was little by way of assessment of students' basing on assessment principles to ensure Quality School Assessment as the way of improving Quality Assurance in Education.

Recommendations

Given that the conclusions of this study is made on classroom assessment that the research has outlined represent general practice, or even a significant amount of practice, in schools in Tanzania, then a change, not only in assessment practices but also in teachers' general approach to instruction, will

be required if assessment is to contribute significantly to the improvement of Quality Assurance in Assessment. This change will require teachers to increase their efforts to seek the active role in application of principles of assessment. At a more fundamental level, teachers may need to appreciate that learning is more than improved examinations results, more than the acquisition of information, and that learners should not only acquire, but also generate, master, develop, and create knowledge.

One of the main steps in changing is to recommend teachers be trained thoroughly in managing principles of assessment in order to equip them with assessment skills. Language teachers should be trained that assessment should be an integral and frequent aspect of teaching, in which the assessment focuses on validity, reliability, transparency, inclusive, relevance and practicability. Teachers should develop reasonable, but challenging, expectations for all pupils, using a variety of methods in a variety of situations. To ensure this is done Ministry of Education, in collaboration with stakeholders, should develop overall policies for assessment, in which the goals of assessment systems (public examination, national assessments, classroom assessment) are aligned. The second but most important recommendation of this study is to improve Inspectorate Department of the Ministry of Education. The general teaching process especially in the area of assessment be monitored closely by the inspectorate division in order to ensure its quality. Inspection department is the ministry's 'eye' in quality assurance for primary and secondary education, in terms of quality teachers, availability of books, improved school environment and many other things. It is also further recommended that the Government of Tanzania should consider establishing an independent school inspectorate to increase the level of trust by school teachers and leaders and transparency of the inspectorate.

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