

Full Length Research Paper

An assessment of quality assurance and standards officers competence: Implications for training

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Accepted 14 May, 2015

Training of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASO) is essential for effective performance of their duties. However, this training is rarely based on the officers' own identified needs. This diminishes the training relevance and effectiveness. The purpose of this study was to establish from the QASO themselves the extent to which they were competent in five skills commonly suggested in the literature as relevant to their work performance. The selected skills were human relations, knowledge of the subject, supervision approach, report writing and action research. The study also sought to find out what topics would be of interest to the QASO from their own perspectives. The study was carried out in Kisumu District in the Republic of Kenya. The sample size was 8 QASO, who responded to a Questionnaire and interview schedule. Findings of the study were that competence of QASO on the five skills was average. They needed further training in all these. The study further suggests a list of topics for inclusion in training programme for the QASO on priority basis.

Keywords: Perception, quality assurance and standards, competencies, curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO) is a recent term coined to refer to the education officer responsible for supervision of curriculum implementation in schools. This is a new term commonly used in place of the traditional term of "inspector". The term "inspector" portrayed the QASO as a person who comes from above to see that policies developed at the central education office are being implemented in schools. This notion created a rift between the inspectors and the teachers. Teachers tended to shy away from interacting freely with the "inspector" for fear of fault finding and victimization (Wanzare, 2006). The new term of QASO is intended to remove the stigma associated with the inspector and to portray the officers as people concerned with improving quality and standards of education by working as partners with the teachers (Farrant, 1994). Therefore, QASO are expected to enhance education effectiveness and efficiency by working in collaboration with teachers and schools.

In Kenya, education reforms often fail to achieve desired outcomes due to ineffective and inefficient supervision (Rep. of Kenya, 1988, 1999). This has led to calls for the strengthening of the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS), particularly improving the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the officers who carry out the role of supervision of education in educational institutions.

Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASO) are persons appointed by the DQAS, which is a department in the Ministry of Education, to supervise curriculum implementation in the schools (Wanzare, 2006). In order to play their role effectively, the QASO require special skills specific to the job (Etindi, 2001). However, there is currently no special training of QASO in the colleges of education in Kenya. Instead, QASO are appointed from among classroom teachers, head teachers and Teacher Advisory Center (TAC) tutors. Such appointees would normally have merely undergone primary teachers' training without specific training as QASO (Etindi, 2000). Therefore, they need special training as QASO because this job is not the same as that of teaching. QASO training has usually been done through In-Service Education

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Education and Training (INSET) courses organized from time to time (Republic of Kenya, 2000).

Despite the efforts made to train QASO through INSET, doubts have been raised over the relevance of the INSET course content (Indoshi, 2001). INSET activities would be most effective if the participants are ready for the topics addressed and if they feel that the courses are high on their priority list of problems (Indoshi, 2001). Very seldom however, are structured surveys undertaken to identify the felt needs of the participants (Etindi, 2000; Kithuka, 2006; Wanzare, 2006).

Through a survey of the literature, five competencies relevant for the QASO training were identified. The competencies were human relations, knowledge of the subject, supervisory approaches, report writing and action research (Wanzare, 2006; Musaaazi, 1982; Etindi, 2000; Covey, 1989; Othieno, 1996). It was noted that these competencies are often incorporated in QASO INSET courses without due regard to their relevance. This may lead to wastage of resources. INSET programmes would be more effective if the target group is involved in identifying their own felt needs. This is what motivated this study, that is, to offer the QASOs opportunity to identify their training needs which would guide future INSET courses and increase the relevance and effectiveness of their training.

Specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Establish perception of the QASOs regarding their competency in human relations, knowledge of subject, supervisory approach, report writing and action research competencies.
2. Determine areas of need for INSET program for the QASOs.

METHODOLOGY

Venue and Sample

The study was carried out in Kisumu District in Kenya. The total number of QASOs in the district was nine out of which one was used for the pilot survey. Therefore, the study sample was eight. The QASOs were selected by saturated sampling technique.

Instruments

Data collection instruments were questionnaire and interview schedule. A Likert scale was designed to establish the QASO perceptions of their competence in human relations, knowledge of subject, supervisory approach, report writing and action research. The interview schedule sought the QASO opinions on the way they perceived their competence on the five skills covered in the questionnaire. The interview also gave the respondents the opportunity to identify their own felt needs to be incorporated in future INSET courses. The questions were open ended to afford the respondents a chance to speak for themselves.

Validity and reliability of the instruments

Three experts on the topic of study at Maseno University were asked to examine the instruments in order to establish their face validity. Their comments and judgments were used to revise the instruments and ensure that they address the objectives of the study more effectively. To establish reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. In the pilot study, the same questionnaire was administered twice to the same respondent at an interval of two weeks. The mean scores of the respondent on the two tests were correlated using the Person Product Moment Correlation formula, which yielded a coefficient of 0.78. This was considered high enough to judge the questionnaire as reliable (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000).

Data collection

The researchers visited the respondents at their places of work and administered the questionnaire and the interview schedule. All the eight respondents in the sample responded to the questionnaire and the interview schedule.

Data analysis procedure

Frequency counts were first worked out for the data collected through the Likert scale questionnaire. Mean scores of the respondents on each item of the Likert scale were then worked out. The statements on the Likert scale were scored as follows: Strongly Agree (S.A)=5 points; Agree (A)=4 points; Undecided (U)= 3 points; Disagree (D)= 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD)= 1 point. In the interpretation of the scores, a mean score of above 3 denoted a positive perception, a mean score of 3 denoted a neutral perception and a mean score of below 3 denoted a negative perception. Interview data was analyzed by searching through the interview data for words and phrases relating to the objectives of the study. Then categories and themes were developed as emergent trend that gave meaning to the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of QASOs on their Competencies

The survey covered perception of QASOs on their competencies in human relations, knowledge of subject, action research, report writing and supervision approach as presented below:

1. Competence in Human Relations

The QASO were asked to indicate the extent to which they applied specific competencies under the generic competency of human relations. Specific competencies tested were: warm welcome, explanation of intent, discussion of documents and visiting procedure. The QASO responses on the human relations competencies were as presented in Table 1.

From Table 1, it can be noted that human relations between QASO and teachers was average. In particular, teachers showed unwillingness to discuss their professional documents with the QASO. This suggests

Table 1. Perception of QASOs on their Human Relations Competence (n=8)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
1. Teachers warmly welcome me to their class	3	3	2	0	0	4.13
2. I inform teachers of my visit in advance	3	5	0	0	0	4.38
3. Teachers willingly discuss teaching problems	1	2	0	5	0	2.89
4. Teacher preparation is enhanced when I visit.	3	3	0	2	0	3.63
Overall Mean						3.76

Key: SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; U – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree; M – Mean

Table 2. Perception of QASOs on their Knowledge Competence (n=8)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
1. Am knowledgeable in in-service course organization for teachers	4	4	0	0	0	4.50
2. Am knowledgeable in development of teaching and learning materials	2	3	3	0	0	3.50
3. Am conversant with contemporary issues in teaching	1	1	1	0	5	2.13
4. Am competent in student guidance and counseling	3	2	0	2	3	3.75
5. Am knowledgeable in subject content and methods that I supervise	1	2	0	2	3	2.50
Overall Mean						3.28

Key: SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; U – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree; M - Mean

that there could be some uneasiness among the teachers regarding their encounters with QASO. One of them said that “ we have to keep teachers on toes and reprimand them if these documents are missing and that makes them strive not to get a bad label on them” This implies that teachers acted out of fear. The relationship was not genuine and may appear hypocritical. Yet the Handbook for Inspection of Educational Institutions in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2000) clearly states the code of conduct for the QASO. They should demonstrate a characteristic of being an outstanding teacher, establish and maintain a good rapport with teachers and display excellent interpersonal skills. Lack of adherence to this diminished the QASO effectiveness.

2. Competence in Knowledge

Specific competencies covered under this generic competency were: Knowledge in organizing induction’ and ‘knowledge in helping teachers’ in organizing induction courses, helping teachers to develop materials, knowledge of contemporary issues, knowledge of guidance and counseling and knowledge of subject content and teaching methods. Their perception of these competencies are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that QASO perceived their knowledge as average with a mean of 3.28. They had difficulties in being conversant with contemporary issues in teaching (mean = 2.13). They also lacked adequate knowledge in subject content and methods they supervised (mean = 2.5). This can be explained by the fact that their pre-service training did not cover supervision knowledge and skills. From the interview, only three officers were graduates

and the remaining were trained as primary school teachers. These officers were not confident to supervise teachers who are academically higher than them.

The purpose of supervision is to improve instruction. Lovell & Wiles (1983) observed that for QASOs to be able to perform the functions, the QASOs must have the following qualities:

- i) Willingness and eagerness for continued learning;
- ii) Qualified with sound, up to date knowledge of the subject areas;
- iii) Well trained in the techniques of evaluation and research methodology;
- iv) Experienced in teaching.

It is vital to note that the functions stated above are reportedly missing among most QASOs. The training of QASOs is essential as a means of providing them with the necessary skills unique to supervision and to facilitate their understanding of the appropriate methods regarding quality assurance and standards (Kithuka, 2006; Othieno, 1996; Nakitare, 1980; Mwanzia, 1985; Etindi, 2000; Glaser, 1990; Republic of Kenya, 1999).

3. Competence in Supervision Approach

The supervision approach adopted by QASOs is crucial in establishing rapport and effectiveness. The QASOs perceptions of their competence on supervision approach are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that QASOs perceived their competence in supervision approach as below average as revealed by an overall mean of 2.97. They could not effectively establish

Table 3. Perception of QASOs on their Supervision Approach Competence (n=8)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
1. I establish rapport with teachers during pre-observation meeting	0	0	3	2	3	2.00
2. I discuss lesson plan with teachers before observing their lesson	1	2	3	2	0	2.75
3. I inquire on the characteristics of the learners before observing the lesson	1	2	2	0	3	3.25
4. I consider teachers' views during post-observation meeting	2	3	3	0	0	3.88
Overall Mean						2.97

Key: SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; U – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree; M – Mean

Table 4. Perception of QASOs on their Report Writing Competence (n=8)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
1. I avail supervision report to teachers	2	1	5	0	0	3.63
2. I use standardized assessment tool in evaluating teacher performance	0	1	4	3	0	4.38
3. I consider teachers opinions when writing my report	3	1	3	1	0	3.75
4. I specify follow up activities for teachers in my reports	0	0	0	5	3	1.33
5. My supervision reports are usually comprehensive	5	3	0	0	0	2.00
Overall Mean						3.02

Key: SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; U – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree; M - Mean

ish rapport (mean=2) and discuss the lesson plan with teachers before observing the lesson (Mean =2.75). From the interview, it was voiced that whenever they visit schools, QASOs first report to the head teachers' office to sign the visitors book and to get the time table. After that, they enter any class without prior information to the teachers concerned. This approach did not help to create rapport with teachers during supervision.

QASOs were still applying traditional supervisory approach which is autocratic in nature (Wanzare, 2006). In autocratic style there is no room for dialogue between QASOs and teachers.

4. Competence in Report Writing

Report writing is an indicator of the officers' productivity and a good measure of the extent to which the QASOs expertise is available to schools. Opinions expressed by QASOs on their competence on this skill are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that QASOs perceived their competence on report writing as average (at an overall mean of 3.02). They felt particularly less competent in follow up of individual teachers to encourage improvement (Mean =1.33) and in writing comprehensive report (Mean =2.0). From the interviews it was established that the supervision reports were given to head teachers for filing but not to individual teachers, contrary to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education which recommend that QASOs

write their reports including detailed recommendations and avail them to the teachers (Republic of Kenya, 2000).

5. Competence at doing Action Research

Action research is essential skill of solving particular problems. Specific competencies covered under this generic competence were possession of skills in action research, improving education practice and collaboration with teachers on research. QASOs responses are reported in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that the competence of QASOs in report writing was poor at overall mean of 2.67. They were particularly weak in action research skills and collaboration with teachers to carry out action research as required. The Kenya Policy Framework on Education, Training and Research (Republic of Kenya, 2005 a, b) recognizes action research as a basis for attaining quality education. Hence, there is need for QASOs to have action research knowledge to undertake research on teaching and learning methodologies to improve quality of education, standards and performance.

Areas of Need for a Training Programme

In order to establish contents of a training programme for QASO, the study sought the opinions of the officers.

Table 5. Perception of QASOs on their Competence in Doing Action Research (n=8)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
1. I am competent in action research skills	0	0	0	1	6	2.00
2. I carry out action research to improve education practices	3	1	4	0	0	3.88
3. I collaborate with teachers in doing action research	0	0	4	1	3	2.13
Overall Mean						2.67

Key: SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; U – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree; M – Mean

Table 6. Prioritized Training Needs for QASOs (n=8)

Needed Supervision Competence	Frequency	Percent	Rank
1. Supervisory skill	8	100	1
2. Curriculum evaluation	7	87.5	2
3. Action research	6	75	3
4. Guidance and Counseling	6	75	3
5. Human relations	6	75	3
6. Communication skills	6	75	3
7. Report writing skills	5	62.5	7
8. Management of instructional materials	5	62.5	7
9. Knowledge of IT	4	50	9
10. Special needs education	3	37.5	10

Their suggestions are outlined in order of priority as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that supervisory skills were the most needed competence for the QASOs job performance. This may be based on the fact that they were appointed without prior training in instructional supervision. The training required for the QASOs may be considered on priority basis. This is essential in order to maximize resource use and training relevance for application in the job performance (Indoshi, 2001).

QASOs unanimously agreed that they needed additional training before and after recruitment. They felt that they do not appear credible at some time because they are normally picked from classroom without prior training in supervisory functions. The induction courses they get are too short to help them learn adequately about supervision. The prioritization of the training of QASOs is essential in addressing the question of maximizing use of resources against competing needs (Indoshi, 2001).

Conclusions and Implications

On the question of perceptions of QASOs on their competence in the skills of human relations, knowledge of subjects, supervisory approach, report writing and action research, it can be concluded that the QASOs competency was average. This implies that they were not fully trained on these skills. It implies the need for further training on the same. This may also involve pre-service training at university level.

On the issue of needed areas for further training, it is concluded that further training is indeed required on priority basis as shown in Table 6. To reap maximum benefits from investment in the training, the courses may have to be prioritized for cost effectiveness and relevance. High on the list of priorities are skills in supervision, curriculum evaluation, action research, guidance and counseling, human relations and communication skills.

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