

Assessing Best Practice Implementation of Quality Assurance in Basic Education by Establishing Standards and Measuring Program Effectiveness

Nndowiseni Anniekie Ravhudzulo

University of South Africa,
P.O Box 27401, Sunnyside, Pretoria, 0132.

Abstract

Quality assurance (QA) is a process-centered approach to ensuring that a company or organization is providing the best possible products or services. It is related to *quality control*, which focuses on the end result, such as testing a sample of items from a batch after production. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, quality assurance focuses on enhancing and improving the process that is used to create the end result, rather than focusing on the result itself. Among the parts of the process that are considered in QA are planning, design, development, production and service. The Department of Education in the Northern Province is faced with a massive need for effective continuing professional development in the Province=s educators, at both General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) phases. In the areas of Science, Mathematics, Technology and English, subject knowledge is poor. In the proposed CSR SBINSET, teachers are part and parcel of their own development.

Keywords: assessment, basic education, quality assurance, continuous self-renewal model, professional development, school based in-service education and training

INTRODUCTION

According to Boissiere (2004) the concern for quality has been at the core of the motivating forces for reforms in education. Achieving quality in education has increasingly become crucial in strategic improvement plans of developing countries. While the concept of quality and its priority indicators may differ from country to country, it is commonly considered as a determining factor in facilitating the implementation of education for all initiatives. Professional development of teachers needs to undergo transformation not only for it to survive but to thrive in relation to the new challenges being given to higher education across the country. According to McLoughlin and Visser (2003) educational quality assurance is a matter of accountability and national interest.

This paper explores assessing best practice implementation of quality assurance in basic education by establishing standards and measuring program effectiveness through the significance of Continuous Self-Renewal (CSR) model in School based in-Service education and training programme. The paper argues that Continuous Self-Renewal for primary school teachers ensures that the teachers remain on the cutting edge of new developments in the field of basic education. The Importance of the study to the scholars is for them to realize that the CSR Model is responsible to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Basic Education and General Education and Training (GET) phase, to encourage

the development and sustain a capable teaching service.

The State of Education in South Africa

There is a big concern with the high matric failure rate which is still unacceptably high and teachers' qualifications and skills have not been upgraded yet. There is a lack of management skills and capacities as well as a lack of teacher commitment and low staff morale in the field of teaching. As a result, there were a variety of projects (e.g. whole school development projects, culture of learning and teaching in schools projects, Tirisano, etc.) attempting to restore and build a culture conducive to teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the introduction and implementation of a new curriculum in 1998 (Curriculum 2005 with its embedded outcomes-based approach) caused great uncertainty, because it required a different mindset and a new approach to learning from teachers and added a new vocabulary to teaching and learning. Little training was done to ensure that facilitators implemented the curriculum correctly, giving rise to a variety of concerns and uncertainties. The critique against the haphazard implementation was confirmed by the committee appointed by the minister of education, Prof. Kadar Asmal, who questioned the effectiveness of Curriculum 2005 (news.24.com/, 2000). There is still an ongoing debate on the viability of this curriculum. This obviously does not lend a helping hand in securing that quality teaching

and effective learning take place in schools (news.24.com/, 2000).

Basic Education in South Africa

According to the Children’s Bill of Rights, April (1996), every child has the right to education that aims to develop his or her personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to the fullest extent, no matter how poor or wealthy the child’s parents are. Education should foster respect for a child’s parents, for the child’s own cultural identity, language and values, as well as for the cultural background and values of others.

Definition of Quality Assurance

According to Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary, quality assurance is “A programme for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, service, or facility to ensure that standards of quality are being met” In order to address the formulated aim of this paper, it is appropriate to determine what quality assurance is and which mechanisms and procedures exist to assist in processes that are intended to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Defining quality assurance is not easy, as different people, institutions and stakeholders have different notions and priorities concerning this concept. Smit, Wilkinson and Büchner (2000:184) succeeded in compiling an amalgamated definition of quality assurance, which contains the basic elements of definitions found in other literature of individuals such as Becher (1999:228), Campbell (1999:1), Fourie and Strydom (1999:18), Harman (1998:331), Singh (1999:6-7), Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:70). This definition provides a "working definition" for our discussion (see Table 1).

Table 1: An amalgamated definition of quality assurance

Policies	that	ensure	that	teaching	is maintained
Attitudes	will	assure	the	quality	scholarship enhanced
Means		confirm		of	education
Actions		guarantee			
Procedures		demonstrate			
A system		certify			
Attention					

Source: Smit, Wilkinson and Büchner (2000:184)

It is imperative to understand the meaning of *quality assurance* (QA) which is a process-centered approach to ensure that a company or organization is providing the best possible products or services. It is related to *quality control*, which focuses on the end result, such as testing a sample of items from a batch after production. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, quality assurance focuses on *enhancing* and *improving* the process that is used to

create the end result, rather than *focusing* on the result itself. Among the parts of the process that are considered in QA are *planning, design, development, production* and *service*.

When it comes to quality control, it is regarded as a process that is used to *ensure a certain level* of quality in a product or service. It might include whatever actions a business deems necessary to provide for the control and verification of certain characteristics of a product or service. Most often, it involves *thoroughly examining* and *testing* the quality of products or the results of services. The basic goal of this process is to *ensure* that the products or services that are provided *meet specific requirements* and characteristics, such as being *dependable, satisfactory, safe* and *fiscally sound*.

The Purposes of Quality Assurance

According to Van Damme (2000:11) the purposes or functions of the quality assurance system are reflected in quality assurance mechanisms and procedures. He distinguished the following four purposes:

- Improvement of teaching and learning;
- Public accountability;
- Client information and market transparency;
- Steering the resources and planning processes of an education system.

The mechanisms and procedures which a school could implement with the specific view to enhancing quality in teaching and learning, are learner admission and selection criteria, internal assessment and examination, external examiners, learner development and support services, programme planning, staff appointment, staff (peer) appraisal and staff development.

Implementation of Quality Assurance in Basic Education

Quality improvement is the commitment and approach used to continuously improve every process in every part of an organization, with in intent of meeting and exceeding expectations and outcomes through *establishment of standards* and *monitor compliance on structure standards and process standards*. All standards of practice provide a guide to the knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes that are needed to practice safely. They reflect a desired and achievable level of performance against which actual performance can be compared. Their main purpose is to promote, guide and direct professional nursing practice.

PURPOSE OF STANDARDS

- To give direction and provide guidelines for quality teaching and learning activities.

- To provide a baseline for evaluating quality of teaching and learning.
- To help improve quality of teaching, increase effectiveness of learning and improve efficiency. (Quality assurance)
- To improve documentation of implementation provided i. e maintain record.
- Help to determine the degree to which standards of teaching and learning maintained and take necessary action time.

Advantages of Standards

- They establish norms and allow community members and individuals to know what level of service to expect/ demand. Because they are written down they can be made public.
- They demonstrate quality provision and act as a bench mark to monitor quality performance.
- They improve efficiency and lead to better utilization of resources.

The Need for Quality Assurance Practices

Quality assurance experts such as Kells (1988) Vroeijenstijn 1993; 1995) propose that, to ensure the efficiency of a quality assurance system, it should be an internally driven process. Such an approach towards quality will obviously be in co-existence with an external quality assurance system (e.g. professional boards and government agencies and systems). The task is not to implement a prescriptive quality assurance system, but rather to develop, by means of a participatory and comprehensive approach, a system that will be owned by all. With such an approach both those who manage (e.g. principals and head of departments) and those who are managed (e.g. facilitators) will be made aware of their responsibilities with regard to establishing quality in their management and teaching functions.

Strategies for Establishing Quality Assurance in Basic Education

The strategies used for quality assurance in education include:

- (a) *Monitoring*: It refers to the process of collecting data at intervals about ongoing projects or programmed within the school system. The aim is to constantly assess the level of performance with a view of finding out how far a set objectives are being met (Ehinderu 2001).
- (b) *Evaluation*: This is a formal process carried out within a school setting. It is based on available data which are used to form conclusions. It could be formative or summative. The aim of evaluation, a quality assurance strategy, is to see how the system can be assisted to improve on the present level of performance (formative) (Ijaiya 2001).
- (c) *Supervision*: Supervision might involve inspection, but it goes beyond inspection and includes attempt at bringing about improvement in the quality of instruction. It involves staff as essential part of the

process. It is a way of advising, grinding, refreshing, encouraging and stimulating staff (Onocha 2002).

(d) *Inspection*: Usually involves an assessment of available facilities and resources in an institution with a view to establishing how far a particular institution has met prescribed standards, it is more of an assessment rather than an improvement induced exercise (West- Burham 1994).

(e) *Quality control*: The issue of quality control cannot be over- emphasized. It is one of the strategies for establishing quality assurance in the inferior education system at all levels. Ojedele (2007) views that; quality control should be of concerns to the country in its drive towards technological development.

Quality Assurance Mechanisms and Procedures of CSR Model

In the development of the CSR Model, classroom observations were also part of the research. Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures that were observed were that facilitators came to class prepared, did minute to minute evaluation of learners and presented well-prepared lessons and activities. The classroom observations brought meaningful insight to the research. It was interesting to discover that in basic education, there are different kinds of learners. On this case two learners had hearing disabilities; two had severe eyesight problems; there were learners with special educational needs learning disabilities. These problems existed over and above the environmental, social and financial problems experienced by most of the learners. In the classes which were observed, it was clear that the facilitators still had their learners' well-being and quality education at heart. Team effort in the different grades and the Foundation Phase was clearly recognized .

Detailed Description of CSR Model for Best Practice

The following is a detailed description of a proposed CSR Model for assessing best practice implementation of quality assurance in basic education and establishing standards to measure the effectiveness. The CSR model is guided by a framework of five conditions which focus on (a) learning, (b) shared power, (c) experiences in the classroom, (d) an interrelated set of personal, educational, and social reference points and (e)constructive and critical actions.

Functioning of CSR Model

The CSR Model that is envisaged concentrates on the practical usefulness of teaching methods for the working situation of the teacher. Two important principles to be considered are **first**, *the development of learner-ready teaching materials for classroom use* and **second**, *the engagement of all stakeholders involved in the teaching-learning situation*. This ensures that intervention made at classroom level has

a direct impact on the quality of education provided. Of immediate concern to CSR is the implementation of improved teaching and learning techniques. It is this resolve to support educational transformation that sets CSR Model at the cutting edge of change to the educational practice of basic education.

Firstly, CSR Model offers afternoon workshops on a regular basis to assist all teachers with classroom discipline, subject based issues, general methodology and meaningful communication with the young learners. Workshops are also conducted for school managers and other stakeholders in primary schools. *Secondly*, CSR Model acknowledges the fact that radical change to the existing educational system immediately places teachers under considerable strain to come to grips with trends in classroom development. CSR Model provides teachers with the necessary support to acquire specific classroom skills and to offer them ongoing support towards their professional development.

Staff requirements for CSR model

The staff supporting the assessment of best practice implementation of quality assurance in basic education and the establishment of standards and measuring of effectiveness in the programme within the CSR model is drawn from various sources. These include, amongst other sources, curriculum advisers already working at District and Regional levels, existing Departmental INSET staff and lecturers from rationalised Colleges of Education.

❖ CSR model should aim at the improvement of teaching methods

The CSR model proposed in this paper is based on several principles, the most important I analyse below. Mahaye (2000:210) states the following about the improvement of teaching through CSR Model: A...a teaching method is a particular technique a teacher uses to help learners gain the knowledge which they need to achieve a desired outcome. Teaching methods need to be improved because some teachers received inadequate training and are therefore un/underqualified.

❖ The CSR Model Should be Based on Peer Support through Reflective Practice

According to Lindeque (2000:79) teachers do not perform their teaching tasks in isolation, but as members of a team. A healthy relationship between teachers can be of benefit to the individual teacher. CSR is designed to enable primary school teachers to develop their professional skills through self-study, peer support and group effort.

Effective peer support can be given by one teacher to another in the form of mentorship. Peer coaching, advising teachers, co-operative professional and mentoring are all examples of CSR model teacher development.

❖ CSR Model Should be Built on Support for Professional Development

Teachers, particularly in under resourced rural schools, find it difficult to transfer knowledge and methods learned in workshops to their classrooms. CSR model views professional development to be a process whereby education professionals regularly enhance their academic knowledge and pedagogical understanding in order to improve their practice, as well as question the parameters and purposes of what they do.

❖ The CSR Model should Include Knowledge, Skills, Values and Attitudes

The CSR model encourages teaching that is learner-centred with emphasis on groupwork and developing the ability of learners to think. The inclusion of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in CSR Model encourages teachers to become facilitators of the teaching-learning situation and to use groupwork and team work. The shift is away from objectives and towards outcomes. Learners should know, should be able to do, and should acquire values through their learning experiences.

❖ The CSR model should cover Strategies for Better Teaching

Within the CSR model, classroom activities are knitted together by the teaching strategy that the teacher uses to help the learner attain the desired learning outcomes. Within a strategy there are a variety of teaching methods. Mahaye (2000: 210) explains that A...a teaching strategy is a broad plan of action for teaching-learning activities with a view to achieve one or more specific outcomes. The CSR Model aims to provide teachers with opportunities and experiences to extend their range of teaching strategies.

❖ Instructional Tasks and Quality Expectations of CSR model

The teachers are expected to have sound knowledge of their subject areas to be able to select appropriate and adequate facts for planning of lesson notes, effective delivery of lessons, proper monitoring and evaluation of students' performance, providing regular feed-back on students' performance, improvisation of instructional materials, adequate keeping of records and appropriate discipline of students (Ayeni 2010). They must also have access to information which is up-to-date, reliable and relevant to the educational needs of students (Ayeni 2010).

❖ Whole-school evaluation and Quality Assurance of CSR Model

The CSR Model considers whole-school evaluation as the cornerstone of the quality assurance system in schools. It enables a school and external supervisors to provide an account of the school's current performance and to show to what extent it meets national goals and the needs of the public and

communities. This approach provides the opportunity for acknowledging the achievements of a school and for identifying areas that need attention. For CSR Model, whole-school evaluation implies the need for all schools to look continuously for ways of improving, and the commitment of Government to provide development programmes designed to support their efforts.

❖ Implementation of the Effectiveness of Programmes

When implementing CSR, investments in time, resources, support structures and arrangements for planning and co-ordination are considered. Provisions for support, encouragement and assistance are pre-requisites in the process of mastering the innovation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the research has reached its aims, there are some unavoidable limitations. Because of the time limit, the research was conducted only in a small population of privileged schools in the Northern Province participating in school development project. Therefore, to generalize the results for larger groups, the study should have involved more schools at different provinces. Only those schools within the Northern Province were allowed to participate in the research.

CONCLUSION

Quality Assurance in education depends on teachers' quality and effective curriculum delivery; consequently, teachers are expected to cultivate interest in continuous learning for professional development while the principals should organize school-based training program for capacity building, no matter how proficient they are deemed to be. This will no doubt improve the quality of curriculum delivery and outputs that meet set standards and expectations of the society.

The paper proposed a system of Continuous self renewal (CSR) education practise that ensures that primary school teachers in the Limpopo Province of South Africa can adopt and harness so that they remain on the cutting edge of developments in education. It is hoped that the framework of Continuous Self Renewal can be applied in other provinces in South Africa. The paper argued that the success of the Continuous Self Renewal programme within the School Based In-Service education and Training depends on the State=s intervention through providing human and financial resources. The CSR can further register success if the primary school teachers are motivated; possess the will to work in the project so that they can realize professional development needs.

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