



Strategies to Improve School Self-Evaluation in Public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine strategies for improving school self-evaluation (SSE) in public secondary schools in Nyamagana District, Tanzania. A mixed research approach and convergent parallel research design were employed. The study sample consisted of 113 respondents, including 101 teachers, 5 school heads, 3 ISQA leaders, 3 Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and 1 district school quality assurance officer. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16, and presented in tables, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data were coded, categorized, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed several strategies for enhancing SSE implementation, including providing SSE training for teachers and school heads, incorporating modern technology to facilitate SSE processes, ensuring effective communication of feedback from external quality assurance officers to school stakeholders, actively involving key stakeholders such as ISQA leaders, board members, and students, and allocating specific time in the school calendar for SSE activities. The study recommends that all key stakeholders be properly trained and motivated to ensure the successful implementation of SSE, ultimately improving its effectiveness in secondary schools.

Keywords: Strategies; school self-evaluation; public secondary schools

INTRODUCTION

School Self-Evaluation (SSE) is a reflective process whereby school staff assess their performance and identify areas for improvement in both student outcomes and professional development (Chapman & Sammons, 2013). It is conceived as a continuous process of evaluating school procedures and activities, designed to assist school leaders in determining the institution's strengths and weaknesses, thereby informing decision-making regarding areas of practice that require improvement (Capperucci, 2015). SSE has

become an integral strategy for enhancing educational quality and ensuring accountability. While external inspections have traditionally been relied upon, there is increasing recognition of the need for schools to adopt a more proactive approach to evaluating their performance. This process should be initiated and, at least in part, controlled by the school itself (Capperucci, 2015). The development of school capacities for self-review has followed closely after the introduction of external evaluation policies (Godfrey, 2020). As noted by Thompson (2021), SSE helps teachers and

other stakeholders recognize both the strengths and weaknesses within the school, enabling targeted efforts to improve overall performance. When implemented effectively, self-evaluation empowers schools to make internal decisions that improve both administrative and academic standards. By systematically collecting and analyzing performance data, schools can identify improvement priorities and create evidence-based plans for school development, which ultimately contribute to better student outcomes (McNamara et al., 2021). Furthermore, Stanley and Mhagama (2022) emphasize that Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) or SSE plays a critical role in improving educational quality and fostering better academic results for students.

SSE serves as an internal evaluation mechanism that equips schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses in a structured and supervised manner, facilitating continuous improvement (Varthana, 2022). Various countries have adopted SSE to promote school improvement. For instance, in Ireland, SSE was so successful that it became a mandatory practice for all schools in 2012 (O'Brien, 2019). In South Africa, SSE aims to enhance educator performance and ensure that all students have the best opportunities for success (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Similarly, in Kenya, SSE has proven effective in supporting student learning by monitoring and providing feedback on their progress, fostering communication, building supportive relationships, and promoting shared leadership. However, several barriers still prevent schools from fully realizing the potential of SSE (Mauka, 2014).

In Tanzania, secondary education faces a range of challenges, including insufficient facilities, overcrowded classrooms, limited funding, staff shortages, and a lack of transportation and materials for school quality assurance officers. These challenges have historically impeded comprehensive external evaluations, leaving many schools without consistent oversight (Medard & Mwila, 2022). In response to these challenges, the Tanzanian government adopted SSE in 2015, mandating that all schools, including secondary schools, implement self-evaluations starting in 2016. Schools are required to complete and submit the School Self-Evaluation form (SSEf) to the external quality assurance team before their visits at the end of each academic term (NSQAF, 2017). However, the performance of students, particularly in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE), has remained unsatisfactory. For instance, the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) results from

2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 indicate that only 32.01%, 35.10%, 33.84%, 36.95%, and 37.42%, respectively, qualified to join advanced-level education, teaching colleges, and vocational and intermediate education institutions (PORALG, 2019-2023). This suggests that the poorly implemented SSE process may be one contributing factor among others. This study explores strategies aimed at improving school self-evaluation practices, with the goal of enabling schools to identify their strengths, address weaknesses, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review refers to a comprehensive summary and assessment of academic research on a subject. It updates readers on the latest advancements and provides them with an overview of the important works in an area (Gann, 2016). The literature review serves as a critical component of this manuscript, comprehensively examining existing research on strategies for effectively implementing school self-evaluation. By summarizing significant discoveries, theoretical frameworks, and methodological techniques that have influenced discipline, this section seeks to place the current study into the larger academic conversation. This review lays the groundwork for the current study by identifying prevailing trends, gaps, and disputes through the synthesis of pertinent literature

Training

According to a study by O'Brien et al. (2022), the pragmatic model of professional development for teachers involved in leading school self-evaluation (SSE) could effectively address the persistent challenges schools face in implementing SSE. This means that professional development can provide workable and efficient answers to the continuing challenges schools face when implementing SSE. The study done by Thorpe (2022) found that successful implementation of school self-evaluation (SSE) is achievable when school leaders provide both professional and personal support. It highlighted that staff members' attitudes, commitment, and capacity to carry out SSE improved significantly when school leadership reflected and supported the process. Additionally, fostering a sense of ownership among staff through collegiality and collaboration further enhanced the effectiveness of SSE. In their study, Cobbinah and Eshun (2021) found that teachers do not have detailed knowledge about school self-evaluation therefore,

teachers agreed that authorities must organize training workshops for them to enhance their understanding and usage of school self-evaluation to improve performance in their schools. Similarly, Sehlapelo (2021) found that SSE was important for raising the quality of education as long as it was implemented correctly, and that teaching efficacy would be increased by SSE professional development.

Engage at Every Level

According to Gilbert (2024), self-evaluation should engage all essential staff members and provide valuable insights and analysis for enhancement. It needs to gather perspectives from not only teaching staff but also all leaders, to precisely reflect the practices in the school. A transparent, inclusive, and participatory school self-evaluation can be a potent instrument for encouraging introspection and discussion among the stakeholders regarding the goals and course of the institution (Varthana, 2022). This could be accomplished by fostering trust, open communication, equity and fairness, engagement, and ownership. Therefore, stakeholders have a chance to evaluate their methods, successes, and areas for improvement, and finally help them set reasonable goals and track the school's progress. O'Brien et al. (2021) found that the approach of involving students as co-researchers in SSE resulted in significant positive outcomes for the school and the individuals involved, but there were also several challenges including that it required more resources and time than usual in the case for an SSE process in Irish schools. Mauka (2014) performed a study that revealed that teachers considered that school self-evaluation was effective in improving students' learning and suggested that to improve the quality of education they provide, schools should involve all of their stakeholders in systematic reflection, taking into account the time implications, and working to make school self-evaluation a standard procedure for long-term school improvement.

Complete the School Improvement Cycle

For self-evaluation to effectively support continuous improvement, it must be deeply integrated into the school's improvement planning cycle. Ensuring that all components of this cycle are present is crucial, as omitting any part can weaken the overall effectiveness and impact of the model (Gilbert, 2024). By integrating self-evaluation into the continuous improvement cycle, schools can use the school cycle completion technique to improve their self-evaluation procedures. This entails methodically gathering and examining data at different

points throughout the school cycle, such as the conclusion of each term or academic year. By doing this, schools can pinpoint their areas of strength and growth, establish clear objectives, and create focused action plans. This cyclical method guarantees that self-evaluation is a continuous process that informs choices and promotes a continuous improvement culture rather than a one-time occurrence (Chapman & Sammons, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed research approach because the researcher aimed to gain a thorough comprehension of the study problem. A convergent parallel design was used because it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the problem under study. In the study, stratified sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling were used to obtain the optimal sample size for research participants. The study's target population was 1341 which included all public secondary school teachers, school heads, internal school quality assurance leaders, ward education officers, and district school quality assurance officers of the Nyamagana district. A sample of 101 teachers was selected from the public secondary school teachers' target population by using the Yamane formula (1967), while the percentile formula proposed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) was used to obtain the sample sizes for the school heads, ISQA leaders, and WEOs. The tools used for data collection included a questionnaire, interview guides, and a document analysis guide. The quantitative information gathered was analyzed through descriptive statistics with SPSS version 16's help, and the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis through which major themes were categorized based on the obtained information. The researcher adhered to all the ethical issues in conducting research including securing a research permit from vice chancellor-SAUT, RAS, and DAS of Mwanza region who wrote letters to allow the researcher to proceed with data collection in the field area. The researcher further observed confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, the potential for harm, respect, and trust before and during the study. Furthermore, the researcher followed the APA 7th edition referencing to avoid plagiarism.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study examined strategies for improving school

self-evaluation in public secondary schools in Nyamagana district, Tanzania. Figurative names such as interviewee I and interviewee II are used to present and discuss qualitative data from the interviews. This was done to hide the identity of respondents and thus maintain confidentiality and anonymity. The findings

from 101 teachers on the strategies to improve SSE in public secondary schools were converted into mean and standard deviation by the researcher and presented in Table 1 below, then the researcher discussed them as follows:

Table 1. Strategies for Improving School Self-Evaluation in Public Secondary Schools (N = 101).

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers and HoS to be provided with SSE training	101	3.62	.773
Incorporation of modern technology to facilitate SSE	101	3.70	.900
Feedback from external assurance is to be given to all school stakeholders	101	3.61	1.020
Involvement of other key stakeholders like ISQAT in SSE	101	4.02	.812
Specific time in the school calendar for the SSE process	101	3.72	.885

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 1 results reveal that teachers and HoS provided with SSE training had a Mean of 3.62 and SD of 0.773. This indicates that, on average, most teachers agreed that providing training and workshops for both teachers and school heads is crucial for school improvement. The standard deviation also suggests moderate agreement among the research participants. The incorporation of modern technology to facilitate SSE had a Mean of 3.70 and SD of 0.900, showing a general agreement on the importance of incorporating modern technology in school self-evaluation. The slightly higher standard deviation suggests some variability in teachers' responses. Additionally, feedback from external quality assurance delivered to teachers had a Mean of 3.61 and SD of 1.020, indicating general agreement on the need for feedback from external assurance to be shared with all stakeholders. The higher standard deviation suggests a wider range of teachers' opinions.

Furthermore, the involvement of other key stakeholders such as ISQA leaders in SSE had a Mean of 4.02 and SD of 0.812, indicating strong agreement on involving other key stakeholders like internal school quality assurance leaders, students, and parent representatives. The standard deviation suggests moderate agreement of teachers' opinions. Lastly, the results in Table 4.7 reveal that setting time in the school calendar for the SSE process had a Mean of 3.72 and SD of 0.885, showing general agreement among teachers on setting a specific time in the school calendar for the SSE process to be exercised. The standard deviation suggests more variability in the responses. The findings indicated that the overall Mean

was 3.83 and SD was 0.860. This shows that although SSE is being implemented, there is a need to introduce other strategies to ensure its effective implementation in public secondary schools. Additionally, themes were also revealed during the analysis of qualitative data collected through interview guide sessions as discussed below:

Providing SSE Training to Teachers and School Heads

Before 2018, school self-evaluation in Tanzania was conducted in primary schools only, after 2018, the process was introduced to be implemented in all public secondary schools. Training was given to ward education officers and school heads; teachers were not involved in these training seminars. School heads are responsible for filling out the school self-evaluation forms and submitting them before the external quality assurance visit. The findings revealed that the school heads were not submitting the SSEf to the required officers as stipulated in the quality assurance handbook (2017). When interviewed, an interviewee was quoted saying "In Nyamagana district, just one school brings their SSEf on time in every semester, some few schools bring after a good reminder, while the majority of them, do not bring the forms, some schools do not ever have a copy of the SSEf that was left to them" (Interviewee XII, July 2024).

This means that the school heads' knowledge of the whole process of SSE was limited thus SSE is not implemented as it should therefore, training and workshop seminars are to be offered to all school heads who are the implementers of SSE and all teachers who are the implementers of teaching and learning. Training

and workshop sessions for teachers and school heads are necessary as they help build the capacity for teachers and school leaders to engage in reflective practices and data analysis, which are crucial for the success of SSE. SSE training can help teachers work together, learn from each other's strengths, and overcome individual weaknesses for improvement. This aligns with Davis (2018), who emphasized that training sessions can foster a culture of collaboration among staff, encouraging them to share best practices and learn from each other.

In an interview with an ISQA team member in school E, the interviewee stated, "Other than being a member of the ISQA team, I am a teacher, and as a teacher, I only hear about school self-evaluation, but I have no idea what kind of evaluation this is. Therefore, I would suggest that teachers should be given training on the topic to familiarize themselves with it, which may help increase our performance and ultimately students' academic achievements" (Interviewee VIII, July 2024). This indicates that SSE is not known to teachers in the selected schools, possibly due to limited dissemination of information. Training teachers can enhance their understanding and utilization of SSE for school improvement. The findings agree with Cobbinah and Eshun (2021) who found that teachers do not have detailed knowledge about school self-evaluation therefore, teachers agreed that authorities must organize training workshops for them to enhance their understanding and usage of school self-evaluation to improve performance in their schools.

Incorporation of Modern Technology to Facilitate SSE

The process of school self-evaluation in Tanzanian public secondary schools involves school heads filling out the school self-evaluation forms once in every academic term and submitting them to the education quality assurance before their final visit. The paper forms are, however, prone to getting misplaced, burnt, and lost. The researcher found that most public secondary schools do not fill out the SSEf, and among the reasons for not doing so is that some school heads find doing paperwork tiresome and time consuming as the form is detailed to cover a broad range of issues including information on learners' achievements, quality of teaching, quality of leadership and management, and community engagement among others.

In an interview session, an interviewee claimed that "the school self-evaluation form involves a lot of paperwork and with our tight schedule, it is not easy to complete it

efficiently" (Interviewee 5, July 2024). This implies that school heads face a difficult time in implementing SSE due to the tiresome paperwork. This can however be simplified by the integration of electronic forms for SSE. Modern technology can significantly enhance school self-evaluation (SSE) by providing tools and platforms that streamline data collection, analysis, and reporting. Using modern technology in SSE offers numerous benefits that can significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation process. The benefits include modern technology allowing for precise data collection and management and ensuring that data is accurately recorded and easily accessible. It also provides real-time feedback, efficient reporting and analysis, enhances resource optimization, and facilitates transparent data sharing and reporting, which can strengthen accountability among all stakeholders. This is supported by Saubern et al. (2022) who affirm that it is appropriate for educational systems and schools to have access to tools and frameworks that can facilitate the efficient use of technology in the classroom because of the substantial and continuous investment in technology as well as the research showing that technology can enhance learning results. Digital tools like SELFIE (Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational Technologies) enable schools to assess their digital technology usage by gathering insights from teachers, students, and school leaders which is essential for effective implementation of school self-evaluation.

Communicating Feedback from External Quality Assurance to all Stakeholders

Communicating feedback from external quality assurance to all stakeholders is a crucial strategy for enhancing school self-evaluation (SSE). In the selected public secondary schools, it was found out that feedback from the external quality assurance is usually communicated to the teachers and school heads. However, if data for school self-evaluation is collected from other stakeholders like students and parents, it is just right that they too receive the feedback, so that they know where the strengths and weaknesses to overcome for better academic performance. By transparently sharing insights and recommendations from external evaluations with students, parents, teachers, and administrators, schools can foster a culture of openness and continuous improvement. This inclusive approach ensures that everyone involved understands the areas of strength and opportunities for growth, promoting collective responsibility and

collaboration in implementing changes. Regularly updating stakeholders on progress and actions taken based on feedback also builds trust and accountability, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable improvements in educational outcomes. This is supported by Medard and Mwila (2022) who recommended that, for best results, the external quality assurance feedback should not only be communicated to teachers and school heads but to all school stakeholders including students and parents, so that they too get to be knowledgeable on where to put more efforts for the school improvements.

Involving other Key Stakeholders in SSE

Involving key stakeholders such as representatives from students, parents, and the internal quality assurance leaders in self-evaluation is crucial for creating a comprehensive and effective evaluation, schools can create a more holistic and effective self-evaluation process that leads to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning outcomes. In the visited schools, it was found that only the school head fills the form of school self-evaluation, when asked about it, the school's internal quality assurance leaders who are teachers confidently revealed that they are not knowledgeable on the SSEf and that they do not even know how it looks like and what it is for.

In an interview with an ISQA team member in school E, the interviewee stated that:

"Other than being a member of the ISQA team, I am a teacher, and as a teacher, I only hear about school self-evaluation, but I have no idea what kind of evaluation this is. Therefore, I would suggest that teachers should be given training on the topic to familiarize themselves with it, and on how we can provide information which may help increase our performance and ultimately students' academic achievements" (Interviewee VIII, July 2024).

This means that the ISQA members are not aware of the SSE exercise as they are never involved in the whole process of data collection while filling the SSEf by the school heads. Therefore, there is a need to involve the key stakeholders including teachers, students, and parents in the school self-evaluation exercise to ensure their inputs are taken for school improvements as they know a range of information about the school that the school head alone may not know. This aligns with O'Brien et al. (2022), who suggested that involving teachers in SSE through professional development can address challenges in

implementing SSE.

Additionally, through an interview guide session with a HoS, the interviewee suggested strategies to improve SSE implementation, such as conducting practical evaluations to compare current performance with previous performance and involving students in the evaluation process (Interviewee III, July 2024). This highlights the importance of practical assessments and student involvement in SSE to enhance its effectiveness. Engaging students in the evaluation process can provide valuable insights for school improvement.

Another ISQA team member of school A emphasized the importance of involving teachers in the SSE process to empower them and improve the tool's utility (Interviewee II, July 2024). Empowering teachers to participate in SSE can lead to more effective implementation and utilization of the evaluation tool. The findings underscore the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, including SSE, to gather valuable input for school improvement. Engaging stakeholders like board members, parents, students, and ISQA team members can provide diverse perspectives necessary for enhancing school performance. This aligns with Varthana (2022), who emphasized the role of stakeholders in identifying areas for quality development in schools.

Setting Specific Time in the School Calendar for the SSE Process

Establishing a dedicated time in the school calendar for school self-evaluation (SSE) is a planned move that guarantees a systematic and comprehensive procedure. Schools can involve all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, and the quality assurance team—in a concerted effort to evaluate and enhance instructional procedures by setting out specific times for SSE. Comprehensive data gathering, analysis, and reflection are made possible by this planned strategy, which results in actionable insights and ongoing progress. A culture of accountability and continuous improvement is promoted via regularly scheduled SSE sessions, which also assist in integrating evaluation into the school's daily operations. In the selected public secondary schools, the researcher found that the school heads do not have any dedicated time to fill the SSEf together with other key stakeholders, due to this, they fail to successfully submit the forms to the quality assurance office on time, and when asked to do so, the school heads fill the form alone and in a rush without the presence of key stakeholders. The data inputs

therefore become the ideas of a single person.

In an interview guide session, the interviewee highlighted the need for schools to allocate specific time in the calendar for SSE to ensure its implementation (Interviewee XII, July 2024). This means that setting aside dedicated time for SSE can prioritize the evaluation process and promote its regular implementation. This aligns with Capperucci (2015), who emphasized the importance of encouraging schools to improve their practices through internal and external support, including engaging with the community.

Therefore, the findings of the study imply that the policymakers and the government of Tanzania should formulate national guidelines on the implementation of SSE and ensure public secondary schools conduct SSE as stipulated. They should ensure also the provision of workshops and training on school self-evaluation to all secondary school teachers and heads of schools, incorporating modern technology in facilitating the SSE exercise, effectively communicating the feedback results from external quality assurance to the teachers so they know where to put extra effort for improvement, reframing the school self-evaluation form to increase teacher ownership or engagement in the exercise, ensuring effective involvement of other key stakeholders such as ISQA team members, board members (parents), and students in the SSEs, ensuring the provision of adequate materials necessary to facilitate the implementation of SSE, and last but not least, increasing motivation means to ensure heads of schools are committed to conducting SSE accordingly to successfully reap the profits that school self-evaluation offers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective implementation of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) in public secondary schools requires the adoption of several key strategies. First, it is crucial to provide training and workshops for school heads and teachers to increase their familiarity with the SSE process. A lack of awareness among school stakeholders about the introduction of SSE has contributed to its ineffective implementation. Additionally, incorporating modern technology to facilitate the SSE process will enhance its efficiency and accessibility. Effective communication of feedback from external quality assurance officers to school stakeholders is also vital for improving the process. Involvement of key stakeholders such as ISQA leaders,

board members, and students will help to foster a more collaborative approach to school self-assessment. It is also important that all public schools allocate specific time in the school calendar for SSE activities to ensure their integration into regular school operations.

To further support SSE, policymakers in Tanzania should establish national guidelines that will guide its practical application. These guidelines will provide clear instructions for schools to follow, ensuring a standardized approach to school self-evaluation. Additionally, public secondary schools should take SSE seriously, ensuring that the school self-evaluation form is filled out accurately and submitted as required. This will improve teacher performance and, ultimately, the overall quality of education in Tanzanian public secondary schools.

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