Self Evaluation: A Case Study of a School in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract

External evaluation of schools purpose to monitor delivery of education with a view to ensuring adherence to stipulated curriculum and set standards as well as efficient and effective quality education. However, school improvement scholars in developed economies now argue that schools must take their own initiative to assess the extent to which the expectations of their stakeholders' are met. The argument is that by systematically gathering and analysing information about itself so as make value judgement, a school is likely to improve. In a country like Tanzania for instance, most schools have not embraced self-evaluation since they depend on external school inspection conducted by the inspectorate, which only targets 50% of total school population. As it is with other developing economies, minimal inspection is blamed on inadequate resources. Implying that most schools remain unsupervised following this target. A review of relevant literature shows that despite the problem as aforementioned, the studies known to me in Tanzania, the East Africa region or indeed Africa have not explicitly empirically explored the actual self-evaluation practices with a view to ascertaining the current needs, the challenges that schools face and the possible remedies. It is this knowledge gap that the proposed study sought to contribute to. This study was informed by relativist-interpretivist paradigm which is consistent with the qualitative approach and case study method. Twelve research participants who included the school leaders: the principal, the deputy principal, four HoDs, as well as six teachers all selected purposively. This study used semi-structured interviews, observations, focus group discussions together with document analysis to generate data, which were analysed thematically. All relevant ethical issues were considered. The contention in this study is that schools that evaluate themselves are in the need to show off what they offer rather than shiver in fear of people finding out their areas of weaknesses. The study not only provided a basis upon which the practices of self-evaluation could be based but has also added significant contributions to knowledge in school improvement scholarship.

Keywords: School Self-evaluation; School Improvement; Classroom Observation; Clinical Supervision.

1. Introduction

School Self Evaluation (SSE) is the process by which a school takes its own initiative to assess the extent to which it meets the expectations of its stakeholders; by systematically gathering and analysing information about itself to make value judgement. Thomas, Cees Glas & Scheerens (2003) define it as the type of evaluation done internally by its members. In a country like Tanzania, external school inspection aims at monitoring delivery of education, adherence to stipulated curriculum and set standards and ensuring efficiency and quality. The targeted number of schools as set by the inspectorate comprises of 50% and this is as a result of inadequate resources (Ministry of education and Culture Education and Training policy 1995-p.30). This implies that most schools remain unsupervised following this target. However, even with minimal external evaluation, the exercise has been a hiccup to most schools given the pressure from stakeholders of wanting to know if a school is worth the effort and resources pumped to meet its needs. Thus, the suggestion in this paper that, schools must begin to conduct their own evaluation if they are to not only give an account but also improve themselves (Macbeath's, 1999). This view resonates well with Thomas; Cees Glas & Scheerens (2003) who assert that schools that evaluate themselves are in the need to show off what they offer rather than shiver in fear of people finding out their areas of weakness. Our paper will, in this light, describe self-evaluation practices based on evidence from interviews and observations carried out by talking to school leaders and teachers of a secondary school in Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania.

2.   Background

Milimani is a mixed public secondary school situated in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam City. It has a student population of 800 with 350 girls and 450 boys. It has a total of 41 teachers being 25 males and 16 females. It has one head teacher (Miss Nicole-pseudonym) and one deputy head teacher and one academic master. Given its large number of students with limited classrooms of 14, the school operates on a double shift system.

3.   Presentation and Discussion of Findings

3.1 Routine self-evaluation practices

According to Miss Nicole self-evaluation (SE) forms part of her daily routine which includes monitoring and evaluating teachers' professional conduct as well as financial matters. Normally, such responsibilities are not documented; however she prefers that the academic master evaluates students' performance and teachers' class attendance while the deputy head teacher deals with students' discipline. Through document analysis the implication we got is that the practice has no agreed guideline since the routine is meant for a few individuals to keep the school running and not aligned to the school goals on the development plan (Rogers and Badham 1992).This is not different from the Kenyan context where the researchers have been teaching. The reason being that what could be referred to as self-evaluation are routine-checks that ensure efficiency and not effectiveness given the purpose they serve. However, MacGilchrist (2000) argues that effective schools are those that employ rigorous and systematic multi-dimensional approach to self-improvement. This implies that if schools are to improve then they must begin to invite both internal and external evaluation but in an agreed and orderly manner.

3.2 Evaluating Attendance and Attainments

The head teacher monitors time through attendance registers where teachers and non-teaching staff clock-in when they come in and when they leave the school compound. However, to ensure that lessons are attended she prefers that teachers sign class journals indicating the topic taught and this is left with the class monitors then collected by the academic master. According to the head mistress, the purpose is to contain teachers in school since most teachers would prefer to supplement their meagre salary by teaching in more than one school in a day. This implies that the main purpose is to keep students and teachers in school but not to monitor and ensure that quality teaching and learning takes place. However, the primary aim of self-evaluation should be to establish a culture in which everyone believes that they can make a difference and that school improvement is the responsibility of every member in the school community (MacGilchrist, 2000).

A talk with the academic master revealed that the school performs poorly in the national examinations. The reason is that "…. the school has no set target in terms of what an individual learner is expected to attain." This implies that without what MacBeath and McGlynn (2002) call 'baseline measurement' it is difficult for a school to tell whether it is making progress or not. If the school aims at effectively raising standards then it must begin to look at what happens inside every classroom and with every individual learner (MacBeath 2005).

3.3 Evaluating Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is evaluated through students' performance in the examinations at Milimani Secondary school. However, when asked if she conducts classroom observations or spot checks to monitor teaching and learning the head teacher responded "I avoid confrontation or even finding out more weaknesses like dirty classrooms and teachers' un preparedness to me that is the work of inspectors." This is not so different from my context where at no time during my teaching career has the principal observed my classroom teaching save for inspectors whose visits are more of routine with no feedback .This implies that whatever goes on in the classroom is a teacher's concern whose strengths and weaknesses await an external evaluator. MacGilchrist (2000) is of the opinion that evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning begins when school leaders employ strategies such as: examining pupils of work; observing teachers in classrooms; using pupils' survey; and

talking with pupils about their own learning. Kokeyo (2011) has observed that most school leaders lack skills in what she refers to as 'clinical supervision', hence, unable to conduct classroom observation effectively.

Kokeyo (2011) continues to argue that insiders such as: pupils, colleagues inform of critical friends and school leaders are the most suited to conduct classroom observation followed by reflections as they have the ability to contextualise strengths and weakness and use it for school improvement. Even so, classroom observations require experts who are able to take appropriate and corrective measures. This observation notwithstanding, clinical supervision skill is found to lack in most inspectorates in Tanzania (Education and Training policy, 1995) as well as school leaders. Miss Nicole justified her actions that classroom observation is the work of an inspector. However, Macbeath (2003) is of the opinion that students are the best judges of their own learning since they know their teachers strengths and weaknesses. If this is true then evaluation for effective school improvement should involve all stakeholders and so should not to be left to external evaluators as done in this school.

3.4 Evaluating for Inspection

According to the academic master, Milimani secondary school conducts self-evaluation inform of reflection following an external evaluation and also when preparing for the next inspection from the Ministry of Education. Mostly, in preparation for external evaluation, teachers' professional records such as schemes of work and lesson plans are checked by the headmistress to ensure the content and the methods used are in line with the Ministry requirements then writes down comments to respective teachers. Based on class discussions with M. Ed students at Rongo University College where the researchers are teaching, decisions on what to evaluate and the person to evaluate can be a controversial issue given the different interests that all stakeholders have concerning what they would wish that schools provide to the school community. Thus reflections before and after inspection as done in this school as MacBeath and Mcglynn (2002) say, is a stepping stone from which a school can begin to analyse their strengths and weaknesses together as a staff then agree on the best action to take. Similar to our context mostly self-evaluation is done when there is an inspection team visiting the school. However MacBeath (1999) views such systems as weak since they rely on being constantly policed through routine checks by an external body which should only act as an additional source of evidence after schools have conducted their own self-evaluation.

According to the headteacher, visits by school inspectors mean fault finding thus mostly does monitoring of the school programme as part of her daily routine but not to prepare for inspection. This is similar to Kokeyo(2011) view that most teachers view classroom observation by external evaluators as witch-hunting. However a talk with the deputy head teacher of Milimani revealed that even after inspection the school has not been able to improve on areas such as the school filing system, purchasing of class mark books to record students' performance and construction of laboratories due to financial constraints. The problem of resources cannot be overlooked, given that this is a school which depends on government funding. However, in adequate resources notwithstanding, matters concerning teaching and assessment could still be improved with minimal resources if the school initiates their own autonomous SSE to improve rather than give an account (Bubb, Early, Ahtaridou Jones & Taylor 2007). This is echoed by MacBeath and McGlynn (2002) that suppressing such short comings rather than addressing such problems will bar a school from improving and advices schools to diagnose their problems accurately by assessing their strengths and weaknesses.

4. Recommendations

4.1 For School Leaders

First, we wish to make the following recommendations. Although external evaluation is important, school leaders would benefit more if they conducted their own self-evaluation as a way of improving classroom instruction and quality service delivery. Also, school leaders need to hold discussion around self-evaluation and clinical supervision their significance to teacher capability, students' achievement and the school culture. That way, teachers would probably begin to have a positive attitude towards the practice. Furthermore, reflections of the lessons observed should be done collaboratively with verbatim evidence of the actual classroom teaching.

Second, we aver that the school leaders need professional development so as to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed for self-evaluation.

Third, school leaders would benefit more if they increased their interpersonal skills to enable them deliver feedback effectively. They need to engage in professional development to acquire skills such as assessing the developmental level of teachers. We feel this will contribute to meaningful engagement in the self-evaluation process as well as mitigate the problem of dealing with teacher's different temperaments and motivational levels.

4.2 Educational Leadership and Management Educators

Pre-service and in-service courses at all levels should include techniques of self-evaluation and clinical supervision in the leadership preparation training programmes in all institutions. These techniques could range from conferencing skills, reflection, scripting, various techniques of planning for evaluation such as goal setting and the planning. It could also include techniques of classroom observations like selective verbatim, records based on seating arrangements, use of audio and video-tapes, use of checklist among others.

4.3 The Inspectorate Department

Research has shown that if school self-evaluation model is appropriately applied, it can be used by school leaders as a guideline for improving classroom instructions in schools. However, school leaders need to be empowered on how to conduct self-evaluation in schools. Hence, the Ministry of Education would benefit more by training school leaders as well as the Inspectorate with the necessary skills and knowledge on how to conduct self-evaluation as this will contribute to school improvement.

5. Further Research

These findings are a contextualized study of one school and we based it on the views of twelve research participants. Nevertheless, the findings could be used in contexts with similar settings to inform school leaders and other stakeholders on school self-evaluation practices. However, the small sample restricts the scope of generalization of the research findings to other settings. Hence, it is recommended that a large scale study with more schools and research participants be conducted on the same topic. Since this study was conducted in a public co-educational school, a comparative case study of a public co-educational and a private school on the same topic is recommended for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Further, another area of study could be on the feasibility of school self-evaluation in the Kenyan context.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed routine checks and preparation for inspection as self-evaluation practices observed in the study school. Strengths and weaknesses in line with their effectiveness have been highlighted. A conclusion is reached that schools ought to have their own say for development and accountability which is done systematically with agreed criteria before inviting a critical eye which should only give additional information about the school.

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