

Original Research Article

Assessment of School Quality Assurance Lesson Observation Tool in Enhancing Active Pedagogical Paradigm in Tanzania Secondary Schools

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to assess a lesson observation tool which is used to evaluate teaching and learning in secondary schools so as to enhance active pedagogical paradigm. The tool was established in 2017 to replace the so-called school inspection that has been in practice for several years. The study was guided by three objectives which include: (i) to assess the merits of the tool; (ii) to examine challenges that are faced by school quality assurers when implementing the tool; (iii) to get suggestions from the users on improving the tool. Qualitative approach was used as a method of data collection and data analysis. The total sampled respondents were 21 and all were school quality assurance officers from Dar es Salaam and Eastern zone. The findings of the study reveals that the tool is important to the school quality assurance officers as it leads, guides and acts as a roadmap for evaluation. Also, it gives uniformity in the process of assessing and report writing and enables quality assurers to provide useful feedback to teachers. There are three main identified challenges regarding the tool; these include, the mismatch between some sections in the lesson observation tool and judging criteria; time limit to make lesson observation; lack of teachers' awareness of the tool, which is used to evaluate the everyday teaching and learning process. The study concludes that the lesson observation tool plays a vital role in evaluating teaching and learning process and promotes quality teaching and learning, hence provision of quality education in the country. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the policy makers should review the lesson observation tool to see the way they can overcome the challenges that are affecting it for the purpose of improving teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Secondary education, Learner-centered approach, Lesson Observation Tool, School Quality Assurance

1. INTRODUCTION

School inspection or supervision is vital for accountability purpose in education. In Tanzania, school inspection has its historical background from the colonial error to current time. Experience tells us that school inspection in Tanzania was introduced during the German colon and its aim was to discipline teachers. During the British rule between 1919 and 1961 the role of school inspection was changed from teacher discipline to teacher accountability and school curriculum quality (URT, 1995). After independent in 1961, Tanzania established its own school inspection department and its responsibilities included: to monitor and evaluate the implementation of education policy; to assess the education standards and quality; to give advice to education stakeholders. The inspection gave feedback to education administrators, agencies, school owners and managers on provision of quality education (URT, 1995). In 2017, Tanzania renamed the school inspection to be school Quality Assurance (SQA) and the school inspectors are now called school quality assurers officers. The major purpose of the changes is to evaluate schools and not inspect schools. The establishment of the SQA also came with a lesson observation tool (LOT), which used in assessing the quality of teaching and learning process in secondary schools. The tool has its criteria, which are used to ensure uniformity in LOT and it saves time. A good number of teachers can be observed in a single day compared to

the previous tool (MoEST, 2017). This study is therefore aimed at assessing how the school quality assurance officers perceive about the tool and explore the ideas that will contribute to provision of quality education in the country.

The LOT for quality teaching and learning is very essential in observing teaching and learning process so as to provide useful feedback and advice to teachers (MOEST, 2017). However, not all what is written in the LOT can be practiced to link between theory and practice. Reed and Bergemann (2001) said that classroom observation is a bridge between the theory and practice.

It was stated earlier that the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training introduced the lesson observation tool for assessing and monitoring the pedagogical process in secondary schools. The tool is reflected on some of the theories such as constructivism theory suggests that active learning occurs when the learner is subjected to active pedagogy. Teaching and learning methods that stimulate active learning should be well planned and managed by the respective teacher, who facilitates the learning process. Anney et al, (2016) and Brame, (2016) list some of the teaching approaches that contribute to active learning include inquiring learning, demonstration, extended role play, dialogue, group discussion, critical thinking, debate, interactive lecturing, think pair sharing and problem solving. On the other hand, there are several studies that support the use of LOT for the purpose of providing quality education. For example, Matete (2009), Zaare (2012), and Shuaibu (2019) comment that lesson observation tool is a vital tool for teachers and supervisors in assessing students' active engagement during lesson. Through active participatory students become competent and creative on their learning.

Apart from teaching and learning, the lesson observation tool is also important are assessing and monitoring of time spent and resources used during the lesson. Time and resources are essential for active teaching and learning to occur. Teachers need to divorce time to plan for the lesson including type of resources needed for active engagement as the basic indicators for quality teaching and learning requires. Literatures such as Wabwoba, (2019), Kosia et al (2018), and Shuaibu (2019) emphasize on the use of resources such as teaching aids/models textbooks as well as real objects to easy the understanding to the learners. The learners should use their time effectively, to interact with their teachers and the available resources to make learning more active.

Environment is a crucial issue to interact with the learner to enable active learning. Learners need supportive environment, which gives comfort ability in learning. For example, active learning cannot occur in overcrowded classrooms because in such environment interaction is very limited. Other supportive environment includes infrastructure such as classrooms, laboratories and library (Kosia, et al, 2018; Chiaha & Nane-Ejeh, 2015). Bullying and harassment that has occurred inside or outside the school can also hinder learners' active learning. The teacher should also provide support and care to the learners and create a friendly environment to win the learners.

The teacher is a professional trained worker entrusted to implement the curriculum. He knows what is in the curriculum and the syllabus including the content which is needed to the learner. The teacher has psychology and philosophy of teaching which will require him to design the lesson making it competent and actively engaging to the learners. This framework shows that in order for active learning to occur teachers should actively adhere to pedagogical approaches that are required to be used to improve learning. Active learning requires a well-planned, structured and competent lesson, which will match with the lesson observation tool to lead to quality provision of education.

LOT considers learners as an important aspect in the teaching and learning process to occur. Learners need to be motivated to learn, creative when learning and be able to reflect the acquired knowledge to the real world situation. Learners become curious when interacting with

each other, teachers and other materials as it is shown. It promotes curiosity and critical thinking which enable them to construct interpret and reflect knowledge to the real life situation. All the concepts about active learning discussed in the literature are illustrated on the conceptual framework in Figure 1 below:

The Model of the Conceptual framework

(Intervening variables)

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

In response to the social constructivism theory (Brame, 2016), it requires active interaction between the teachers, learners, good supporting environment and resources to facilitate active learning. Active learning theory demands learner centered pedagogical approaches as well as the resources to be used in the process. The resources needed are such as teaching aids and models, books, real objects and other useful learning materials found in the indigenous learning environment. Based on Milner & Tenore, (2010) and Djigic & Sojiljkovic, (2011) arguments the mode of learning requires learners to think critically and collaborate with each other in smaller groups or in pairs to construct knowledge from their experience to enhance learning. It involves the use of lesson plan, teaching and learning resources for effective classroom delivery. The aim is to maximize learner performance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study focused on secondary school quality assurers from Dar es Salaam and Eastern Zone of Tanzania. A homogeneous purposive sampling procedure was used to select respondents from the quality assurer's population. Because the study was not intended to make generalization but rather a case study of how a given group of quality assurers perceive the

observation assessment tool they implement, the researcher used the information from the interviews in order to draw conclusion. A homogeneous sampling procedure was used because the respondents selected were required to share similar traits; that is, all the respondents selected were quality assurers who have experience of both the former and the current assessment tools. A total of 21 quality assurers, 9 male and 12 female were selected; all agreed to participate. The sample size of this study happened to very small due to the nature of the study. As it is mentioned earlier that purpose of the study was not to make a generalization of the findings about the population, but to learn about experience of a group of quality assurers who were sharing the same traits. The target population was a group of quality assurance officers who have the experience in the current and the former assessment tools in the Eastern Zone. The study involved 21 secondary school quality assurers who were selected purposively based on the criteria mentioned above. The researcher conducted a face to face interview at the work place of the respondents, which was tape recorded and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. The data collected were subjected to content analysis. Thereafter, the researcher engaged in a discussion and contextualized the data before drawing conclusion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overview

As it is stated earlier, this study was guided by three objectives which are: to assessing the merits of the LOT used in secondary schools; to identify some challenges that quality assurers face when using the tool; and to get suggestions from the users on improving the tool.

3.2 Merits of LOT

Findings of the study show that the current lesson observation tool has merits categorized into four themes:

3.2.1 Theme One: LOT as a Guide/ Roadmap

.It was explained that the tool is very essential as it acts as a guide or the roadmap when evaluating teaching and learning process. It assists and leads them step by step during assessing teaching and learning process, different from when they could do it without a tool. It leads to know and judge the way learners are engaged in the lesson and guides school quality assurance officers to make follow up if teachers if teachers do prepare themselves before they go to teach by observing their written lesson plans. This tool also guides these evaluators to observe if learner's activities done in small groups are displayed on the walls to enable further learning and comparisons. The study done by Zaare (2012) also explained the significance of using the lesson observation tool to evaluate teaching and learning process as it acts as the guide to the assessors who conducts the process.

The findings is supported by one of the key informant who says,

"Lesson observation tool is very important document as it is used as a roadmap for classroom assessment and evaluation as it shows about what is supposed to be done by both the teacher and the school quality assurance officer. All what is observed in the classroom will be written by the school quality assurance officer and will be used as evidence when sharing experience during giving feedback".

The given explanations show clearly the way it could be difficult to evaluate teaching and learning process without using the lesson observation tool. Everyone could use his or her own criteria for judgment because of lack of guidance. Malunda et al. (2016) said that the use of the lesson observation tool and portfolio supervision assist to improve pedagogical practices as it leads assessors on the steps to be followed when evaluating the process. The tool as a roadmap to school quality assurance officers is also supported by Wabwoba, (2019) who

conducted a study on the importance of using the lesson observation tool to guide teaching and learning process so as to improve learner achievement and performance.

3.2.2 Theme Two: Uniformity:

Uniformity is the state of being equal, similar, the same, alike or resembling. In every work category, if the leader assigns a worker a job to do, usually provide the way the work is supposed to look like. It is very important for the maintaining a systematic work. If the work is assigned without the leading instructions, there is a possibility of every one to report differently including differing in the format. The availability of the lesson observation tool enables uniformity among all school quality assurance officers when evaluating teaching and learning process. This uniformity is on how to observe time used (duration), steps used for observation, the way of recording and judging the process, giving feedback to teachers and all that is required by the lesson observation tool; as one of the key informant is quoted:

“The main advantage of using the lesson observation tool is to create uniformity among all observed teachers during teaching and learning process. It has provided guidance on things that need to be viewed/seen its availability, need and use during teaching and learning process”.

The school quality assurance officers are also expected to uniform in observing important documents as such as lesson plans and class journals to find out if a teaching process proceeds as it is required. The study done by Zaare (2012) observed that a well-structured lesson observation tool results in fair and uniform judgment and can improve teaching and learning process. These findings also supported by Chiaha et al. (2015) that insisted on the importance of using quality indicator tools to promote provision of quality education basing on uniformity aimed to reach international standards.

3.2.3 Theme Three: Evidence Keeping

The respondents explained that the lesson observation tool is like a checklist that records what was presented by the teacher as evidence and what was not presented; For example it records the availability or absence of documents such as lesson plans, teaching aids, teaching and learning resources, display of learner’s work to make a speaking classroom, presence or absence of learner’s continuous assessment records, learner’s classroom attendance including class journal and feedback done by sharing experience with the subject teacher. The presence or absence of such items will be indicated by putting a tick or a cross in a provided box alongside of the statement.

3.2.4 Theme Four: Giving Feedback and Sharing Experience

Feedback refers to responding to someone’s question, ideas or in response to the done activities so as to support or provide advice for improvement. Sharing experience is the consensus that is done by two or more parties for the purpose of resolving on a certain issue. The importance of the lesson observation tool includes giving feedback to teachers on teaching and learning process. It is useful in sharing of experience between the school quality assurance officers and teachers for the purpose of improving teaching and learning process. It assists evaluators and teachers to discuss on issues that are aimed at improving teaching and learning process to promote quality provision of education (MoEST, 2017). The respondents explained the issues under discussion during feedback provision include exchanging ideas on how the lesson was presented, teaching approach applied, teaching and learning resources including teaching aids used, how learners were engaged in the lesson and how to improve teaching and learning process to make learners creative, competent and reflective. Reed and Bergemann, (2001) explained that the classroom observation is a bridge between the theory and practice. What is written as the theory sometimes cannot be applied practically. Sharing of experience can make what is imperfect to be perfect.

3.3. The challenges of LOT.

3.3.1 Theme one is Teaching Approaches (Active Teaching using Learner Centered Approach)

The respondents who admitted that this part is challenging to them when making judgment were 19 out of 21. The remained two respondents out of 21 said that they do not see this as a challenge. They judge learner centered approach by ignoring the given criterion but take the process as a whole by ignoring the criteria if it binds them.

The mentioned challenge under this theme bases on the mismatch between the first section of the first part and it's judging criteria. The judging criteria lead school quality assurance officers to put a tick or a cross to show that the teaching process used or did not use learner centered approach. Some judging criteria can mislead if they stand alone since they cannot meet the real meaning as it is required if they stand alone. It was mentioned that the word "any" among the given criteria in this first section of the tool is the problem.

The given example outlined that if a teacher enters the classroom and encourages learners to ask questions only that will be regarded that active teaching by using learner centered approach method is applied. This is because the above criterion is also mentioned to hold chance and to stand alone in accordance to the word 'any'. This will require an evaluator to put a tick (√) which means that the lesson has been taught by actively using learner centered approach technique. Other respondents went further by saying that such means that the teaching has been done actively using learner centered approach by 100%. Putting a tick does not differentiate between the teacher who used four different teaching methods to the one who applied only a single technique like questions and answers. The respondents argued whether that will real present the meaning of learner centered approach because encouraging learners to ask questions does not necessarily mean that they will participate to ask questions.

However, some other criteria can stand alone, for example, when the science teacher guides the learners to perform practical activities. This is strong to stand alone. Other criterion cannot stand alone. Zaare study in Iran outlined the way the teacher can teach to facilitate the active learning process. However, the teaching approaches mentioned by Zaare, (2012) were inclusive when facilitating the process. It included discussion, group activities, games, integration of knowledge to promote critical thinking; active engagement of learners in the class and the way the teacher facilitates the process. One of the respondents' explanations says:

"The criteria which are laid down, some of them can mislead according to the context of an assessor/evaluator. Some of the criteria used do not really indicate the meaning of the learner centered approach. Other School quality assurance officers can overview the criteria as a whole to gain the real meaning, hence leading to fair judgment of whether learner centered approach has been used or not. The main objective here is to observe if the teacher is able to build competence to learners"

The main challenge comes when some judging criterion of the lesson observation tool are used and in the real situation, if stand alone can mislead the meaning of learner centered approach. So some judging criteria have light weight to represent what is required.

3.3.2 Theme Two: Learner Participation

Findings of the study show that 19 out of 21 participants said that there is mismatch between the criteria shown in the LOT and the reality. They argued that learner engagement depended on good facilitation by the teacher. Active learner engagement is not separated by the method of teaching applied by the teacher, the facilitator of the process. Barkley (2010) said that active learning involves both the instructor and the learner to promote it. Proper facilitation starts then active learner engagement follows and leads to learners to reflect and promote higher order thinking to them.

One respondent said:

“The second section of the first part is concerning with active engagement in the learning activities. This goes with the first section, which is about facilitation process done by the teacher. If the teacher did not facilitate learners it is obvious that they will not participate in the lesson. If the teacher used only questions and answers technique, then the same will be used by the learners. They will not have any other alternative, so long as the teacher did not facilitate the process properly”.

3.3.3 Theme Three: Teaching and Learning Resources

Respondents argued that the main challenge of the lesson observation tool in this part is absence of set criteria under which the observer may use to observe and judge the quality of the teaching aids presented to the learners. Teaching and learning resources simplifies teachers' work and make easy the learning process. It is found in the third section of the first part of the lesson observation tool. Matete's study also revealed the importance of using teaching and learning resources and analyzed them as charts, models text and reference books and real objects (Matete, 2009). Some respondents said that there was a challenge in using the tool in this part. The challenge is based on mismatch between its presence and use. However, the respondent's concern was on the presentation of the resources to learners that can reduce critical thinking and competence to them. The study conducted by Kosia et al insisted on the importance of effective use of teaching and learning resources for the purpose of improving learning (Kosia, et al, 2018). One respondent said:

“Some teaching and learning materials (teaching aids) are brought to learners when they are already labeled. They cannot create competence to learners”:

3.3.4 Theme Four: Preparation for Teaching Process

The documentary review is the second part of the lesson observation tool. It is not involved in making lesson observation judgment. This part has five sections to be worked upon by the school quality assurance officers. The challenges are based on contradictions between preparation and use of the lesson plans. The lesson observation tool wants the school quality assurance officers to observe lesson plans that are prepared two weeks prior to the whole school visit. It was explained by some respondents that a teacher could prepare the lesson plan for the purpose of presenting and showing it to the school quality assurance officers and not for their own use. Their major intention of their presentation is to show their accountability to their daily duties.

Teaching and learning process cannot be effectively done if the lesson preparation is not conducted. Preparing for the lesson is a long process which starts by a teacher to read carefully and analyze the syllabus. It enables the teacher to overview what can be done during a certain period of time, like for the whole year. Analysis of the syllabus is then followed by the preparation of the scheme of work for a particular class level. The scheme of work comprises of what will be done during the whole year and will include activities that will be conducted by both teachers and learners. It includes teaching and learning resources that will be used, what will be assessed and when tests and examinations will be administered. Generally, pre and post academic documents are required for proper preparation of teaching and learning process. For example, this tool requested the availability of lesson plan and continuous assessment records. Other records like the scheme of work and subject logbooks are not indicated in the documentary review although they are very essential to be checked to view its preparation, use and the extent to which teaching and learning process proceeds. One respondent said:

“The teacher can prepare the lesson plan only because s/he heard about the visit of the school quality assurance officers. They prepare lesson plans which are not used for that purpose. The reality is not there. It is prepared for the purpose of being

observed by the evaluators and not to be used during teaching and learning process”.

The school quality assurance officers will put a tick (√) that a teacher prepares them. What is the reality about it? Are such lesson plans useful? Did it assist a teacher to perform work systematically? Is teaching without preparation assist learners to be competent? These are some of the questions that a researcher needed to consider about the preparation before the lesson.

The first statement of the lesson observation tool which states “Can the teacher show the lesson plan of the same class from two weeks prior to the whole school visit” contradicts with the fourth statement which states “what is the number of lessons that the teacher was supposed to teach for the one week prior to whole school visit. The respondents were arguing that why the number of lessons demanded is for one week instead of two weeks as it was demanded in the first statement. It was also noted that the statement is questioning about the number of lessons instead of the best word that fits.

3.3.5 Theme Five: Learner’s Assessment

Some respondents explained that the presentation of learner’s continuous assessment to the evaluators is also a challenge. The challenge in this theme is that the tool do not state about the quality of assessment done as well as the number of presented records of continuous assessment that are needed to be presented at a certain period of time. The lesson observation tool is silent on this. Some teachers can present a single, two, three ect but all will be regarded that they presented the learners continuous assessment by putting a tick (√). This tick may represents that there was no problem on the assessment of learners regarding quality and the number of given exercises that have been recorded. Other respondents said that the assessment was done by 100%. The tool does not differentiate between the teacher who presented a single recorded continuous assessment marks with the one with four presented records. It was argued that it is not fair since it does not give picture of the reality. Further explanation was also given to show the nature of exercises prepared by the teacher whether it conforms to the table of specification, constructed to meet the respective domains or do not meet. The respondent said:

“The teacher can have a record of learner’s continuous assessment and the school quality assurance officers will put a tick (√) to show that s/he provided exercises and keep records thereof. It will not bother whether there was one exercise or two, three etc. The problem that arises is that; were these tests and exercises constructed to include the three Bloom’s taxonomy? Are they based on table of specification? Are they measuring knowledge, skills, understanding and reflection?”

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings it can be concluded that the lesson observation tool is very important to school quality assurance officers in enhancing teaching and learning process..It guides, leads and acts as a roadmap for them when evaluating teaching and learning process. It helps them to bring uniformity when evaluating the process, assist in keeping evidence of the observation process, helps in giving feedback and sharing experience with teachers under observation to promote provision of quality education. However, study findings indicated that the lesson observation tool has some challenges that impede quality functioning of the tool such as mismatch between the judging criteria and the real situation, the time taken for making

evaluation takes 20 to 25 minutes which can be an obstacle for the school quality assurer to observe further teaching processes, the respective teachers do not know the judging criteria which can lead them to go on repeating the same mistakes while teaching.

From the above conclusion the paper recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should review the Lesson Observation Tool on the outlined challenges and make improvement for the purpose of promoting quality teaching and learning.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher invites similar and different studies on the other parts of the lesson observation tool so as to get views and recommendations that will assist to improve this important document.

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