

THE AWARENESS OF QUALITY ASSUARANCE PROCESS IN SRI LANKAN SCHOOLS AMONG EDUCATIONAL OFFICERS

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Quality assurance (QA) is a systematic process to see whether a product or service is being developed in order to meet specified set of requirements. The QA process is mainly divided into internal and external evaluation. Internal evaluation is conducted at the school level, while zones, provinces and the Ministry of Education (MoE) lead the external evaluation. Even though certain initiatives have been introduced to QA in the school system, the evaluation process is not up to expected levels. As the officers' role is very important in the implementation of QA at school level, the objectives of the study are to investigate the QA methods the officers are aware of, their level of awareness and problems of awareness. The methodological approach of this study used mixed methods. The population of the sample targeted in the study was Sri Lanka Education Administration officers working in the provinces. In this study, questionnaires were distributed among 68 officers, selected from five provinces through stratified random sampling technique and 10 officers were purposely selected for the interviews. Questionnaire data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (13.0. version) software and interview data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. Some officers (30%) were aware of the QA process from the orientation programme when they were appointed to the Sri Lanka Education Administration Service (SLEAS). The majority of officers (50%) had awareness by participating in external evaluation programmes. Further, some officers (20%) had participated in preparing QA guideline with MoE. According to the responses of the offices, some zonal education offices (10%) had conducted refresher programmes for officers on QA. However, some officers (7%) were not satisfied with the training they received in relation to the QA process. Therefore, those officers (4%) thought that their awareness on QA circular and guideline were not enough. Further, officers specified some problem causing areas, in which they don't have sufficient knowledge on QA processes such as-; awarding marks for the evaluation criteria, reporting, and making the recommendations. Therefore, they suggested that MoE should conduct training to establish a trainers pool at the provincial level and train all teachers, principals and officers through the pool, to conduct training programmes on a practical sessions and not on a theoretical basis. In addition, officers suggested that training programmes should not be conducted once but it should be conducted continuously throughout the year. This study recommends training programs for officers be carried out at the national level with innovative training modes. Therefore, when designing training programs, it is essential to consider the officers' expectations and their ability levels. After conducting the training programs, follow-up support should be given for officers to practice, plan and try out and collaborate with others.

Keywords: awareness, quality assurance, Officers, thematic analysis