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Quality assurance practices in school education: Comparative analysis of Sri Lanka and England

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Abstract

Quality assurance (QA) process is implementing as internal and external evaluation in the Sri Lankan school system. Internal evaluation is conducted at the school level, while zones, provinces and the Ministry of Education (MoE) lead the external evaluation. Even though, it has been introduced such initiatives to QA in the school system, the evaluation process has not been reached yet up to the expected levels. The purpose of this study is to suggest, how to enhance the existing practices of QA in Sri Lankan schools with learning from best practices on QA in school systems in England. A qualitative document analysis approach was adopted for this research. In this study, different circulars, guidelines, and handbooks which are published in Sri Lanka were referred. To get experiences on QA practices in

processes that can be applied to school evaluation process in Sri Lanka. They are;(i) conduct external evaluation through the independent teams, (ii)link evaluation findings with the school improvement plan, (iii) setup a strategic plan for the external evaluation to conduct needs based evaluation process,(iv) aware parents and other stakeholders about the findings of evaluation, (v)integrate ICT for different stages in this process, (vi) to prepare a mechanism by MoE to appoint and accredit evaluators based on the performance, (vi) prepare and send the effective, useful and strong report including strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. However, this study is only a preliminary study to compare Sri Lankan and England QA practices in the school system. Therefore, further research can be done to examine other factors that may facilitate the streamline the evaluation process in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, England, quality assurance, Evaluation process, Schools, internal evaluation, external evaluation, Ministry of Education.

1. Introduction

The Government of Sri Lanka is spending a large investment in physical and human resources for the education system. To ensure this investment in education is well utilized, it is necessary to put in place a way of assessing the effectiveness of schools, use of their resources and identifying where best to focus future development. These aims will be achieved best through having in place clear standards and continuous evaluation program focused on achieving excellence in education outcomes. Therefore it is needed to be strengthened the Quality Assurance (QA) process in schools.

QA process helps to increase customer confidence, improve work processes, efficiency and identify defects before they get into the final product (Kahsay, 2012). Birzea et al. (2005) explain that QA is a powerful tool to improve the effectiveness of education.

QA has increasingly become an important aspect in all countries, in the development of policies and structures at school levels. In recent years, QA practices in schools have been expanded in both developed and developing countries (European Commission, 2015). They are implementing various methodologies to enhance the quality of school system. It focuses on improving standards addressing different aspects such as achievement of students, quality of leadership and management of the school, quality of teaching, behaviour and satisfaction of students at school in order to assure quality and equity in schools (Silman et al., 2012; European Commission, 2018; Olibie et al., 2015).

In order to assure quality in school education it has taken various mechanisms in time to time by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Sri Lanka. Since 2015, a new QA mechanism introduced to the school system. It also consisted with internal and external evaluation process. Internal evaluation in Sri Lankan schools has been carried out by School Management Committees in the form of self-evaluations. The strengths and weaknesses of the schools are identified by zonal, provincial or national level teams as external evaluators (Ministry of Education Sri Lanka, 2014). MoE has prepared guideline and circular including criteria and indicators. Both external and internal evaluation processes are carried out using the common criteria and indicators mentioned in the above.

following problems were identified in the exiting QA practices in school system. They are;- (i) the inadequate provisions in the existing legal frameworks for educational institutes to empower the evaluation process, (ii) the majority of schools have not identified as this is their accountability and responsibility and schools give priority for quantitative expansion or physical infrastructure improvements than qualitative development in school (Senevirathne, 2013; Perera & Hettiarachchi, 2014) (iii) the officers in the education field fail to contribute continuously towards the process of school evaluation due to more responsibilities related to their specific subjects and other activities, (iv) Principals always complained about the lack of time to do internal evaluation and more paper work in existing evaluation process.

It is realized that the existing mechanism for development of quality in school system have not reached up to expected levels. Therefore, it is necessary to find out more reliable solution for the develop quality in schools as it needs to support the improvement of quality of the school education and increase the responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders. It is worthwhile to explore how other countries develop the quality in their education system using different QA practices. Therefore, in this research it is intended to explore QA process in England schools and seek possibility to apply those mechanisms in to the existing QA system in order to enhance the quality of schools and also to minimize the above mentioned problems in the existing process of QA in Sri Lankan schools.

1.1 Purpose of the study

This study examined the QA practices in schools in Sri Lanka and England, to develop new frameworks in response to Sri Lankan School QA process. In particular, this paper compared the QA policies and framework in these two countries.

First, background information on the QA practices in Sri Lanka and England is given, after which the QA policy and framework are analyzed and compared.

The following research questions informed this research:
RQ.1-What are the practices, processes and experiences of assuring quality in school education in Sri Lanka
RQ.2-What are the practices, processes and experiences of assuring quality in school education in England
RQ.3-What are the similarities and differences between the Sri Lanka and England school QA process

2. Methodology

A qualitative document analysis approach was adopted for this research. Documentary information provides multiple advantages for educational research. The advantages of this method include easy access to data, cost effectiveness and performance of data (Robson, 1993).
Documents were analyzed in this study by examining different published materials related to the QA in school system. The aim of document analysis in this study was to collect more data that were related to

practices in other countries, different types of online resources were used. Those documents provided essential contextual information to answer research questions of this study.
Those documents were very important for this study as (i) it gave more details about the initiatives of QA process in school system, (ii) structure of QA process, (iii) guidance about how implement QA process, (iv) task and responsibilities of the stakeholders and reporting mechanism, (v) strategies used by England in implementation of QA process in schools.

3. Overview policies, and the development of QA systems in Sri Lankan and England school system
Please see Appendix 1 attached below.

Discussion
RQ 1- What are the practices, processes and experiences of assuring quality inschool education in Sri Lanka

This study found that the existing QA process in Sri Lankan schools was introduced in the year 2015, under the circular No. 31/2014 and the manual of “How good Our school is it”? The internal and external evaluation programmes are introduced following the guideline. The main purpose of internal evaluation is to empower each school to understand their performance and external evaluation support to develop quality in schools.

According to the existing QA guideline the evaluation process of Sri Lankan schools has several steps. The first step is ‘**aware all stakeholders’** about the evaluation process (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2014). The past study (Sevenevirathne, 2019) indicates that ZEDs, PEDs and MoE conduct awareness programs for evaluation to schools and officers, from different sources such as capacity development programs, postgraduate diploma courses, self-studies, action research, workshops and orientation program. Khedkar and Pushpanadham (2018) show that in addition to the above methods, online forum can be used for the awareness programmes.

The findings of the present and prior research provide evidence that if relevant stakeholders have appropriate support and training, they would be able to engage in required tasks properly (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Geda, 2014). The findings supported the view of Hassan and Talib (2013) noted that when relevant stakeholders are properly trained, they understand what they are doing and why they are doing it.

As described in the literature ‘**establishment of internal evaluation committees’** in each school is the second step in the existing QA practice in Sri Lankan school evaluation process (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2014). Kalule and Bouchamma (2013) and Brien et al. (2015) also discuss the advantages of collaborative involvement than the individual effort. They highlight that if responsibility would be given for other staff, it creates a collaborative management, individual performance and all staff should be

Kalule and Bouchamma (2013) reveals that when implementing any process collaboratively as a team it helps to control the authoritarian behavior.

Further, this study found from literature that the main part of school evaluation process are '**planning and implement the evaluation processes** (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2014).The planning of evaluation programme is very important as it provide facilities for both evaluators and schools. Kalule and Bouchamma (2013) highlighted that when conducting evaluation without a plan and without prior notice to school, it can challenge the concept of evaluation, and it can be a traditional mode that is limited to evaluation rather than as a support to professional development.

In this study it was found that after finishing the internal and external evaluation programs it is required to '**conduct progress review meetings with the staff in school**' and it is a very important forum to present the findings of the evaluation programme. European Commission (2015) and Brimblecombe et al. (2013) also proved that the dialogue in the progress review meetings is very important to give opportunities to understand responsibilities of each other.

'**Preparation and communicate the evaluation report'** is the other important part in this process as it is identified as a good guidance for future action. And also evaluation report is one of the expectations of school improvement (Gustafsson et al., 2015).

The last step of the existing evaluation process is '**conduct feedback programs based on the findings and recommendations'** (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2014). According to the findings this is important, because, the feedback process is the treatment for the identified shortages on or by the evaluation programme. Kemethofer et al. (2017) and Reddy et al. (2017) come up with the same findings, as mentioning that the feedback of evaluation is the most helpful aspect in evaluation process and it pays more attention for the low stakes environment than high-stakes environment.

RQ 2- What are the practices, processes and experiences of assuring quality in school education in England

The researcher found that in England school inspection process is handled by an independent body and it has been established by an Act (Wilcox, 2000; Hutchinson, 2016; Abreu, 2016). In addition Ofsted is responsible directly to the Parliament. From the findings, it shows that well organized school inspection framework is available in England and it was prepared by Ofsted. The findings highlighted that more priority had been given for students learning and students' related other activities than school management and administration process (Steele, 2000; Abreu, 2016; Ofsted, 2019). Another important thing is, schools are encouraged to develop their own internal evaluation framework promoting school level accountability (European Commission, 2015).

The England school self-inspection process and school improvement plan has integrated. Therefore

information is collected via national level data, discussion and questionnaires from school community. The findings revealed that most developed external inspection processes are implemented in England.

External inspection in England has divided into three categories as; before the inspection, during the inspection and after the inspection.

This study found that Ofsted conduct a risk assessment before the inspection and the risk assessment is very important to decide the inspection date, number of inspectors, duration of the inspection etc (Ofsted, 2017; Ofsted, 2019). In addition, the Ofsted analyzes the schools' recent performance and any changes since the last inspection, when preparing the external inspection plan.
Further, before conducting the inspection, Ofsted collects information from variety of sources to get basic picture about the school and those information facilitate to prepare a pre- inspection report (Ofsted , 2017; Ofsted, 2019).

Another best practice found in England school external inspection is, lead inspector conducts telephone conversation with school leaders on the day before the inspection. It helps to prepare activity plan for inspection. Furthermore, this discussion is identified as a good opportunity for school leaders to explain their school's specific contexts and challenges (Ofsted, 2019). From the findings it is highlighted that another important thing is before the inspection, an inspector visits the school to understand about the school (Abreu, 2016).

It also highlighted that the frequency of inspections is decided based on the performance and circumstances of the particular school. Higher priority is given to the low performing schools in the school evaluation process (Ofsted , 2017; Ofsted, 2019).
A number of good practices are implemented in schools during the school inspection in England. In the day of inspection the lead inspector conducts a meeting with all inspectors and senior leadership in the school. This is very important to build a good relationship among inspectors and schools (Ofsted, 2017).

However, this study found that in England inspection process, the inspectors do not inspect all teachers. They collect evidence for teaching through discussions with curriculum leaders, selected teachers and pupils. Inspectors see how and what is going on in lessons and how lessons contribute to school's curriculum intentions.

It is also highlighted that ICT is an important tool in the school inspection process. They use ICT in several stages in the inspection process. It has allocated a page in the Ofsted website to collect information from parents. In addition to these they encourage schools to notify parents using its own electronic systems such as SMS messages and email. Further, ideas and suggestions from parents' staff and pupils are collected through online questionnaires.

from the website. In addition, once a school received its final report, it is required to make every parent and other relevant stakeholders aware of it. Another important thing is that school should send full copies of the report to the local media and to local libraries. If anybody is interested to see the report they need pay a small fee for that. Further this study found that after receiving the report school must produce response to the report and need to submit its action plan to Ofsted.

Another important thing found the study in the England school inspection process is that it provides information about the quality status of school for parents and parliament. It seems that the inspection findings do not limit only for schools, therefore, it seems that schools may get motivated to improve quality of school as external parties also would be aware of the performance level of schools (Wilcox, 2000; Hutchinson, 2016).

This study highlighted several success points regarding the inspector in England; (i) independent teams do the school inspection and all inspectors are directly employed in Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) (Abreu 2016), (ii) inspectors are appointed on contract basis and their service is extended depending on the level of performance (responsible, competent and effective in their work), (iii) Ofsted accredits inspectors to inspect particular subjects or aspects of the school (Ofsted, 2017), (iv) all inspectors are trained either by Ofsted, or by Ofsted-accredited trainers (Nasuwt, n.d.), (v) inspectors need to have teaching experience and 75% of them are head teachers or school leaders.

RQ 3- What are the similarities and differences between the Sri Lanka and England school QA process

Main functions of the leading agency	• Develop evaluation framework, material, • conduct capacity development of evaluators and principals • conduct monitoring programme • conduct research	• Development of evaluation framework • Conduct inspection • Prepare reports • Maintain website for school inspection • accredits inspectors • monitors the quality of inspections • Capacity development
Name of the School evaluation Framework	How our school is Good?	School Inspection handbook
Who developed the framework	Officers in the MoE, province, zones, In-service Advisors, principals and teachers.	Ofsted
Contents of the framework	• introduction, • introduction of evaluation fields, • awarding marks, • circular (31/2014) mentioning about the implementation procedures	• introduction of inspections, • period for inspection, • principles of inspection, • evaluation schedule and criteria
Type of school evaluation	Internal evaluation and External evaluation	Self-inspection and external inspection
Who involve for the evaluation	• Internal evaluation – School management committee and other staff • External evaluation - Officers in Moe, Province, Zones and In service Advisors (ISA)	• Internal evaluation – Schools • External evaluation -Inspectors (The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) • Inspectors appoint by Ofsted as contract basis. They are resisted inspectors
The focus of school evaluation	• leadership and management, • physical resources management, curriculum management, • teaching learning and attainment, • co-curricular activities, • student achievement, • student welfare, • school and community	• learning of students, • pupils achieve in their lessons, • test and examination results, • school leadership and management, • Pupils' attitudes and behavior, • care of pupils, • relationship with parents, • Quality of teaching and opportunities provided for pupils.
Process of evaluation	• Prepare evaluation plan • Conduct evaluation programme • Prepare report with SEQI • Send report to schools • implement feedback programmes • Send SEQI in all schools by zones and provinces to MoE end of year • Annual report is prepared by MoE in every year.	• Collect first-hand evidence • Meetings with leaders • Visit lessons Check pupils' work • Discuss with pupils about their work • Discussions with staff • Examine the school's records and documentation • Issues a pre-inspection report • Publish the final report on the website to aware public, about the performance of the school
Frequency of school inspection	Not defined	based on the performance and circumstances of schools
Notification to schools about the date of school evaluation	Some time	Inform the date of inspection
Duration of the school inspection	one day	Depend on the size of schools
Collect information from	Principals, Deputy and assistance principals, teachers, nonacademic staff, and documents	Principals, teachers, parents, students, other stakeholders and on different sources
Capacity development of evaluators	No systematic process	• All inspectors are trained either by Ofsted, or by Ofsted-accredited trainers. • Ofsted accredits inspectors to inspect particular subjects or aspects of the school
Evaluation report	Findings of evaluation report send only to schools and zonal education office.	Evaluation report send to schools, parents, local media and to local libraries and to publish the report on its website for anybody interest to see the report
Feedback of evaluation	• Schools are rank based on the results of the evaluations • Conduct progress review meetings about the evaluation programmes with province and zones	• Schools are accredited. • Her Majesty's inspectors (HMI) visit inspection process to monitor the work of an inspection team. • If the school has not made sufficient progress, it requires special measures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found that some similarities and differences in the process of evaluation of school system in Sri Lanka and England. When conclude them, while educational officers are conducting school evaluation process in Sri Lanka, England had identified, that carrying out the evaluation programmes by an independent body, provides more advantage than they are conducted by the educational institutions. The officers in the field of education in Sri Lanka have not been able to contribute continuously towards the process of school evaluation due to the range of responsibilities assigned to

do the internal evaluation programmes without thinking that these are the additional activities for a school. When it comes to Sri Lankan situation, integration of the evaluation findings and implementation plan has been limited only to instructions but not practiced, that it needs to give further attention on that.

Although Sri Lankan school evaluation process normally depends on the documents as evidences in evaluation process. But when it comes to England context they use various methods (discussion, observations, questionnaires, documents, voice records and previous data) to collect the evidences for self-evaluations and external evaluations. This study recommends to collect evidence from various sources to confirm the findings in Sri Lankan school evaluation process.

Based on the experience in the process of England evaluation process, Sri Lankan school evaluation process need to pay attention on conduct risk assessment, collect information from the various sources, prepare pre inspection reports and conduct pre visits in the schools, before carrying out an evaluation programme. Setup a strategic plan for the evaluation of schools which would ensure that each and every school is evaluated within a specified period, and also schools which are under risk should be evaluated more frequently. Further, conduct needs based evaluation process according to the levels of the performance of the schools.

Although England gives prior notice to the schools before the evaluation, in Sri Lanka some of the evaluation programmes carried out the traditional mode of evaluation without giving the prior notice. Therefore, this study suggests that inform the dates of the evaluations to schools and prepare a database including the dates of the evaluations that should be linked to all levels. Then all relevant stakeholders would be made aware of the dates of the evaluations.

This study found that in England school inspection process has introduced complaint procedures to schools to make complaints about the evaluation report. This is a good practice to be applied in the Sri Lankan school evaluation process as it gives opportunities to get trust of school for the evaluation report.

In England, the inspection report does not limited only for the schools. According to the experiences gain from England evaluation process, Sri Lankan school evaluation process need to pay attention to disseminate the evaluation report among all the relevant stakeholders, draws the leaders' attention towards the findings, preparing the action plan according to the recommendations and monitor the progress periodically.

As it was found, different ICT related (SMS, email, website, database, online forum) instruments are used for the school evaluation process in different stages in England, but Sri Lanka is still far behind in the use of ICT for evaluation process. Therefore a recommendation can be made to integrate ICT for different stages in this process. Parents and other relevant stakeholders can be made aware about the evaluation results through the electronic mode (Websites, SMS, Power point presentation, email etc.) To

As the study highlighted, in England action is taken (punishments, take necessary action for principals and teachers, arrange professional development programmes and provide improvement grant) for schools who did not achieve the expected performance level. From the findings the study concludes that although a strong feedback process is found in England school evaluation process, it is not adequate in the Sri Lankan evaluation process. This study recommends a mechanism should be established to help schools to implement evaluation recommendations and provide necessary actions on evaluation results by higher authorities. A feedback mechanism should be designed collaboratively both at the schools and the educational authorities. School management needs to develop the school action plans to monitor and measure the implementation of evaluation recommendations as per the responsibilities assigned for all the members of the staff.

A good lesson learnt from England school evaluation is on the nature of appointment and maintain quality of evaluators. The study concluded that it is a good practice to adopt as in England, that the evaluation process measures the performance of the evaluators and accredit them by Ofsted. This study identified as one of the very important factors, that all evaluators should have teaching experience to become an evaluator. In addition, evaluators should be helpful or supportive, argumentative, openly critical, hostile and experienced persons. Proper rules and guidelines for the evaluators should be developed with the specifications of duties and accountabilities. It is a major requirement for a systematic process to appoint qualified evaluators and to establish a specified institute to measure the performances of the evaluators and accredit them.

However, this study is only a preliminary study to compare Sri Lankan and England QA practices in the school system. Therefore, further research can be done to examine other factors that may facilitate the streamline the evaluation process in Sri Lanka.

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