AOSIS

Education Development Officers as agents for promoting quality education at selected rural schools

CrossMark
click for updates

Authors:
Busisiwe G. Mbande – Kwayini[1]
Tando Rulashe[2]
Kutu S. Ramolobe[2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management & Commerce, University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa

[2]Department of Public Management & Leadership, Faculty of Humanities, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Tando Rulashe,
tando.rulashe@mandela.ac.za

Background: The quality of teaching and learning (T&L) has been a concern in South Africa and has received attention from global players such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the agenda of the Education for All (EFA) policy. In South Africa, quality teaching and learning (QTL) in secondary schools remains low and compromised despite the implementation of the EFA policy and the use of education development officers (EDOs).

Aim: The study sought to investigate the effectiveness of EDOs in promoting QTL at selected schools in the King Williams Town (KWT) district.

Setting: The units of analysis are selected schools in the KWT district in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa.

Methods: The study employed an interpretivism paradigm with a case study design and a qualitative approach to investigate the role of Education Development Officers (EDOs) in supporting QTL in selected secondary schools in the King Williams Town (KWT) District, while the data was interpreted thematically from the ten participants.

Results: Education development officers play a critical role in enabling School Management Teams in South Africa to achieve high-QTL. However, EDOs face a number of challenges such as a lack of human and material resources, teacher resistance, extracurricular activities, student and teacher absenteeism, programme alignment, and work overload.

Conclusion: The major conclusion of the study indicates that the challenges faced by EDOs can be overcome by employing four main strategies: stakeholder engagement, leadership, monitoring and evaluation, and training.

Contribution: This article has the potential to contribute to theory, concept, policy, and practice regarding the promotion of QTL in schools.

Keywords: quality teaching and learning; education development officers; circuit managers; schools; education.

Introduction

Different countries have used various strategies to promote quality teaching and learning (QTL) in higher education institutions. In Finland and Singapore, they attract some of the most highly qualified tertiary education graduates and provide them with appropriate professional development opportunities as well as continuing support to enhance effective teaching (World Bank 2018). Quality education is a priority for the international policy community. For more than two decades, the policy has shifted its focus away from issues of access, enrolment, and years of schooling completed towards issues of learning, skill acquisition, and teacher quality (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2007). In South Africa, according to the *South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996*, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in South Africa are required to use effective and efficient governance to ensure that students receive a high-quality education (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019). Although the word 'quality' is used everywhere, there are many different definitions and interpretations of it because it is a dynamic word (Ndou 2022). The definition of 'expressing quality' changes depending on the context and the user. Quality is typically conceived in a qualitative sense, referring to an entity's relative quality. It is commonly used to assess the level of satisfaction with similar products and services (NEEDU 2015). For this article, quality refers to the quality of teaching and learning (T&L) in schools. A

high-quality education system, according to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), can be achieved if it has good teachers at its core. The United Nations-developed criteria can be used to assess educational quality. In accordance with UNESCO (2005), the educational learning objectives for global citizens can be divided into three categories: knowledge (geography and history), attitudes (openness, positive orientation, sensitivity, self-esteem, respect, and tolerance), and skills (technical, critical, comparative, communication, coping and resilience skills).

Studies conducted in various settings show the importance of various stakeholders in promoting high-QTL (Ehren, Paterson & Baxter 2020; Mavuso & Moyo 2014; Myende, Ncwane & Bhengu 2022; Ndou 2022). According to Mavuso and Moyo 2014, support for schools should be an unquestionable requirement. This support concentrates on ways to involve students more effectively in schools as both students and as participants in the T&L process (James & Pollard 2006). To add to that T&L, the core business of the education system in any country demands the provision of effective leadership (Mavuso & Moyo 2014). According to Myende et al. (2022), strong leadership is needed to address the issue of high-quality education both at the district and school levels. A complex institutional ecology and rigorous, aligned, and coordinated teams and organisational units are necessary for any educational system to improve (Penuel et al. 2011). Circuit managers are some of the officials tasked with developing a high-performing educational system in South Africa, which is one of the structures charged with the goal of improving education (Bantwini & Diko 2011; Myende et al. 2022). All circuit managers have a crucial role to play in helping schools enhance the quality of T&L (Department of Basic Education 2012). According to Ehren et al. (2020), the circuit manager and subject advisor are both anticipated to visit schools to ensure their adherence to policy and curriculum implementations. They are also expected to support schools in putting provincial whole school evaluation recommendations into practice. However, in South Africa, the term education development officers (EDOs) replaced the term school inspector or circuit manager because inspection had an undemocratic connotation (Mavuso & Moyo 2015). School supervision began as an external inspection process, with department officials appointed to inspect both what teachers teach and what students learn (Mavuso & Moyo 2015). In some countries, such as Kenya, EDOs are still referred to as school inspectors, and their role is to maintain educational standards by ensuring that students perform well in their academic work (Harrison 2012). In light of the above, scholars conducted several studies on the role of stakeholders in promoting QTL; there is, however, scant information available on the role and perceptions of EDOs in promoting QTL.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of EDOs in promoting QTL at selected schools in the King Williams Town (KWT) district. The efforts to present a more complete picture of the role of various stakeholders in promoting QTL

have highlighted the critical importance of this research. The role of EDOs in promoting QTL in South African schools has received insufficient attention. As a result, this article expands current knowledge on the role of EDOs in promoting quality learning and teaching, as well as on leadership and context. The article will begin by discussing the problem statement, followed by the study's theoretical framework. Furthermore, the study's methodology will be discussed, followed by the findings and discussions.

Problem statement

District officials known as EDOs are in charge of overseeing and managing educational institutions by giving teachers access to resources and expert guidance (Department of Education 2008; Mavuso 2013). According to Ndou (2022), EDOs are frequently in contact with school principals during service meetings and other workshops and seminars, but they rarely meet with teachers to discuss development and support issues. Despite EDOs visiting schools to provide support, student outcomes in South Africa's Eastern Cape (EC) have not significantly improved (Mavuso & Moyo 2015). The EC province is known to have the lowest matric pass rate among all the provinces and the worst-performing provincial education department (Nkosi 2015). The province was in the bottom three worst-performing provinces in the country with an overall pass rate of 73% (Department of Education 2021). Furthermore, despite the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) policy and the use of EDOs in South Africa in general and KWT in particular, the quality of T&L in secondary schools remains low and compromised. Therefore, the study investigates the role of EDOs in promoting QTL at selected schools in the KWT district, EC province.

Theoretical framework

This article used Popper's theory of learning and the Deming Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act [PDCA]) as a framework for understanding the role of EDOs in promoting QTL in selected secondary schools. Popper's theory of learning adopts a constructivist outlook on educational practice that is grounded in the conviction that students will learn the materials presented to them as long as the students have some prior knowledge of the materials (Shah 2019).

To Popper, knowledge is socially constructed between the teacher and the student through a collaborative way of learning. Popper argues that there is no one way of doing things. Popper claims that we can improve our present theories by finding out their inadequacies (Chitpin 2013). In the South African case, the question is, do the policies and legislative frameworks still cater for the transformative approach to education that the country is in quest for? Given that the top-down approaches to addressing challenges in the education system have failed, what should then be altered to cater for the needs of the current challenges that arise amid all the policies and legislative frameworks meant to address them? Is the problem even in the policy landscape or the

issue is with the implementation of these policies? Such an approach to addressing quality assurance in T&L can be efficient if the leaders namely, EDOs, school principals and policymakers are willing to adopt an attitude that welcomes criticism and reasonableness, and are willing to go against their beliefs and values by accepting alternative ways of doing things (Chitpin 2016; Diller 2006).

The Deming Cycle (see Figure 1) is based on a four-stage model that consists of a PDCA cycle. According to De Grauwe and Carron (2007), the cycle is aimed at monitoring the quality of education. Dudin et al. (2017) state that the Deming Cycle is largely focussed on traditional and comprehensible indicators. The cycle is important in education because it provides a framework for ongoing improvement of T&L. The Deming Cycle can be used by EDOs to increase QTL by working with teachers to identify problems or areas for improvement in their teaching and assisting teachers in developing and implementing solutions to these difficulties.

Brown and Mashall (2008) elaborate on the four stages of the Deming Cycle to include:

- *Plan* – Define purpose, goals and objectives; collect data.
- *Do* – Identify needs; propose change; implement.
- *Check* – Monitor, evaluate and analyse change; compare old and new data.
- *Act* – Adjust strategies for improvement; refine and reinstitute.

The role of EDOs requires a comprehensive and strategic approach to effect the needed positive change in T&L in basic education. If the EDOs and authorities realise that the policies or legislative framework on the ground are not producing the desired results of quality education, they should be reviewed. This perspective will help in understanding the challenges facing the basic education system, especially the role played by EDOs in trying to enhance QTL. There is a need to comprehend the conditions under which most teachers continue to teach; what sustains these practices; and what these practices have on quality learning (Tabulawa 2013).
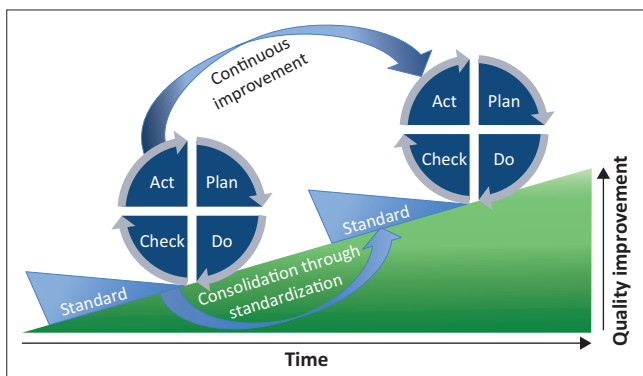
Source: As adapted from: Moen, R. & Norman, C., 2009, 'The history of the PDCA cycle', in *Proceedings of the 7th ANQ Congress*, Tokyo, September 17

FIGURE 1: The Deming Cycle.

The role of education development officers

The effects of the exclusionary education system, a legacy of the *1953 Bantu Education Act*, continue to be a burden today. Currently, despite the post-apartheid government's investment in education, QTL remains a difficulty. As a result, South Africa, like other countries, has devised strategies to improve the quality of T&L in schools. The post-apartheid government's mandate is consistent with the UNESCO's EFA objective. In order to fulfil the EFA agenda as well as its reform mandate, South Africa's current government replaced the old system of school inspection with a new structure marked by decentralisation of authorities. As a result, the designation of EDOs has replaced that of School Inspectors (Nonjobe 2006). Education development officers have a significant role to play in ensuring high-quality learning and education (Mavuso 2013). Additionally, Mavuso (2013) argues that the EDOs' function has changed over time from a traditional one of inspection and supervision to one of democratic support, which is seen as developmental in the South African setting (Mavuso 2013). The supervision of T&L is one of the many activities that EDOs are supposed to carry out (Saphier & Durkin 2013), and they are also expected to actively participate in their circuits' efforts to develop the instructional core (Hatch & Roegman 2012). Moreover, EDOs must have a diverse set of skills in order to create capacity and serve a wide range of stakeholders, including principals, teachers, and SGBs (Saphier & Durkin 2013). Furthermore, EDOs must not only establish settings for effective T&L, but they must also support principals in developing situations favourable to improve learning opportunities for students (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis 2010). According to Dienye (2011:15), 'excellent teaching, educator training, effective supervision, curriculum evaluations, the supply of defined learning targets, and entrepreneurial education are essential to stimulate national economic and social development'. Furthermore, Metcalfe (2018) concurs that EDOs work with schools to identify and solve significant challenges related to the management of curriculum coverage, whereas subject advisors train and support heads of department to oversee and support teachers in curriculum coverage.

Methodology

The study employed an interpretivism paradigm with a case study design. The phenomenological method is another name for the interpretive model. According to Creswell (2013), the interpretative paradigm is concerned with attempting to comprehend the individual's understanding of conditions; in this case, the researcher strives to explore the role of EDOs in supporting QTL. Thus, the study used the qualitative method. The qualitative method was based on a purposive and convenient sample of 10 participants from the schools in KWT district. Purposive sampling was used within the context of non-probability sampling by the researcher. Respondents in this study were purposefully chosen to answer particular questions. Baker et al. (2012) expand on this approach as a method intended to reflect the

characteristics of a certain group. Participants (*n* = 10) were three principals, two teachers and five EDOs. The profile of the participants is set out in Table 1. The participants were picked because they have experience with the topic at hand, and are likely to have information to contribute to the questions. For instance, EDOs will share information about their experiences and their role in promoting quality education, and teachers and principals were selected because they work collaboratively closely with EDOs.

The researcher collected data over a period of 13 months. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 participants (3 principals, 2 teachers and 5 EDOs) to gather qualitative data regarding the role of EDOs in promoting QTL. The interviews were scheduled to cover a duration of 30 to 60 minutes. Furthermore, the interviews were transcribed (the researcher used an audio recording device to record the interviews) and a document was created for each respondent. This was followed by a process of colour coding the content of each interview in order to identify common themes and major issues as they evolved. This study also used secondary data in understanding the phenomenon such as books, magazines, articles, newspapers, and government reports. These sources were used in developing the literature review as well as in analysing the findings in comparison with existing literature. This is meant to either support existing literature or contribute new ideas around the phenomenon under study. For data analysis, the study utilised a thematic technique. Thematic analysis used research objectives as major themes for this study as an easier method to organise and analyse data into patterns that emerged under each objective respectively (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Reliability and validity

In order to ensure validity and reliability, this study employed triangulation, whereby the results of the interviews were compared to those of other researchers that were identified as part of the literature review. This approach of using different tools against the other in ensuring validity and reliability is supported by Sekaran and Bougie (2009). The substantial and significant relationship between dependability and credibility is further highlighted and affirmed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) further emphasize the substantial relationship between

dependability and credibility, asserting that dependability in research is confirmed through a demonstration of credibility

Ethical considerations

Furthermore, the study complied with *the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act 4 of 2013*. Chapter 1, Section 2(a) of *the POPI Act 2013*, emphasises the right of privacy of individuals by protecting personal details from being used without the authorisation of the individual concerned. Moreover, the research was planned and carried out in line with Fort Hare University's Ethics Policy.

Findings and discussions

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of EDOs in promoting QTL at selected schools in the KWT district. This section presents data collected on the role of EDOs in promoting QTL at selected schools in the KWT district. For data analysis, the study utilised a thematic technique. Thematic analysis used research objectives as major themes for this study as an easier method to organise and analyse data into patterns that emerged under each objective respectively (Braun & Clarke 2006). Overall, the study's findings indicate that EDOs play a vital role in assisting School Management Teams (SMTs) to accomplish high-QTL. However, EDOs encounter a variety of problems in carrying out this function. These problems must be solved in order for EDOs to properly fulfil their purpose. The study's findings and discussions are presented below:

The role of education development officers in supporting school management teams in achieving quality teaching and learning

The teacher's perceptions were coined based on the teacher's preparedness and motivation. Teachers argued that teachers and students should be motivated enough to soldier on with the task ahead if QTL is to be attained. According to the EDOs, the perception is that QTL is the primary mandate of the schooling system. Achievement of this primary mandate requires the appointment of quality practitioners both at the classroom and management levels. Teachers and EDOs play complementary roles in QTL. While EDOs help and support teachers and school administrators, teachers are in charge of providing teaching in the classroom. Quality practitioners are officials who have the right skill set (must have the right training for the right grade and phase), the right personal value system, and the right attitude. One EDO pointed out an interesting notion relevant to these modern times and said the following:

> 'Quality teaching and learning requires the establishment of the right classroom – conducive to effective teaching and learning. The elements of the right classroom change with time. We are now talking of the 4IR [*fourth industrial revolution*] and there are new demands for a 4IR classroom. We can longer be relying on the chalkboard but have to embrace the smartboards and other 4IR tools. The right practitioners [*educators and the HODs/supervisors*] must have the right classroom management skills.' (EDO 4)

TABLE 1: Demographics of research participants.

Participants	Age (years)	Gender	Position	Code	Years of experience
Participant 1	59	Male	Principal	Principal 1	37 years
Participant 2	59	Male	Teacher	Teacher 1	34 years
Participant 3	55	Male	Teacher	Teacher 2	6 years
Participant 4	59	Male	EDO	EDO 2	12 years
Participant 5	57	Male	EDO	EDO 3	11 years
Participant 6	62	Male	EDO	EDO 4	34 years
Participant 7	53	Female	EDO	EDO 5	5 years
Participant 8	45	Male	Principal	Principal 2	11 years
Participant 9	51	Male	Principal	Principal 3	24 years
Participant 10	67	Male	EDO	EDO 1	32 years

EDO, education development officer.

The findings are consistent with Davidovitch and Yavich (2017), who claim that when interactive whiteboards are used for teaching purposes, students' achievements increase significantly. Teachers who use interactive whiteboards in the class, report an improvement in teaching quality. This rise is facilitated by the ability to conduct multimedia-rich lessons that capture students' attention and imagination in novel ways. The interactive whiteboard has the advantage of adapting how the study material is conveyed to the student's personal learning style. Furthermore, the comment above argues that quality T&L must respond to the demands of the economy by producing quality individuals ready for the world of work. Moreover, the EDOs also commented that the availability of attractive incentives to retain quality practitioners in their classrooms and their schools must be in place to avert the departure of quality teachers to management positions elsewhere. In this regard, QTL is possible if the school environment is also of quality. The study found that EDOs are presently playing critical roles in schools. According to the principals, the EDOs are offering support to the SMTs by helping them understand their function within the school and the broader education system.

According to the teachers, EDOs are visiting schools intending to assist them in terms of guidance or direction to staff (teachers), where leadership is limping or lacking; they help to cheer them up and direct them towards set goals, vision and mission. Furthermore, EDOs are helping in developing systems for checking and recording progress made by students towards the accomplishment of targets set. The EDOs, themselves pointed to EDOs presently monitoring how SMTs control T&L by looking at the control books that the Head of Departments (HODs) use to supervise teachers' completion of the syllabi. The EDOs regularly hold training sessions and workshops to equip the SMTs on strategies to encourage teachers to utilise modern methods of teaching to effectively impart their lessons. The EDOs in KWT district have other performing SMTs mentoring other School Management.

Teams on the best practices in their schools are more likely to accomplish quality T&L and the best results. One EDO made the following comment:

> 'EDOs are empowering SMTs on internal accountability which is lacking in our schools, curriculum management and delivery and capacitate the SMT on supervision and control of work.' (EDO 3)

The findings concur with the Department of Education (2008) which claims that EDOs must also deal with professional issues such as curriculum management and student achievement. In terms of curriculum management, EDOs must ensure that teachers deliver the curriculum in schools in accordance with departmental policies.

The challenges encountered by education development officers when supporting schools to improve the quality teaching and learning

The most commonly encountered challenge is resistance, in which teachers will feel threatened by the presence of the EDO. Most people always resent what is new. The attitude of both the EDO and teachers has an impact on how they associate and how they communicate and in most instances a break in communication can lead to misunderstands and undesired work relations. One teacher commented on the reason why probably there is a bad attitude against them as follows:

> 'We have no authority, by this I mean that even if an educator deliberately refuse to do his/her work nothing can the EDO do. Secondly, EDOs are not supported by the employer, Department of Education, may be because EDOs have no union. They do not receive respect they deserve, from the parents, educators and importantly from the Department of Education. Lastly, they do not have the necessary tools of trade.' (EDO 1)

The findings are consistent with Khan (2013), who claims that EDOs expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of orientation or professional development provided to them. The above comment demonstrates a lack of respect and recognition for support from both teachers and the Department of Education (DoE). As a result, the SMTs are sometimes reluctant to apply consequence management and do not report some of the challenges and transgressions of their staff for fear of being labelled by the teacher organisations as victimising their members. The non-academic activities, extra-mural activities and departmental workshops and training that distract the task of T&L seem to be contributing to a huge content gap and delay the curriculum coverage as noted by teachers and principals. The inconsistent implementation of the new service delivery model, which would have allowed each circuit to have an EDO assisted and allocated with a subject advisor to compose a Circuit Support Team during the onsite visits is regarded as a failure.

Education development officers still encounter challenges, firstly, in terms of regular monitoring, as their programmes are not aligned with the Head office and other sections within the Department. Head office would call their own workshops and other sections would have their programmes that compete and conflict with what the EDOs have envisaged to do on a particular day. Secondly, the non-compliance of schools on curriculum policies and consistent failure in curriculum coverage and Time on Task. In order for curriculum coverage to be effective, a comprehensive and integrated strategy needing different role players and stakeholders must be implemented (Bertram, Mthiyane & Naidoo 2021).

Solution for proposed challenges

Participants, in general, pointed to the improvement of teacher capacity and practices and ensuring the adequate supply of quality teachers. One principal said that there is a need to improve QTL by training teachers with the needed skills. Another principal argued that:

'The Instructional Leadership training workshop to be re-considered for newly appointed HODs and members of the SMTs.' (Principal 3)

However, some EDOs pointed out that progress is being made with the delegation of signing powers to District Directors for the appointment of Post level 1 (PL) teachers and to the Cluster Chief Directors for the appointment of HODs and Deputy Principals. Such progress needs to be complemented with the decentralisation of training to the District Education Development Centres (EDCs) and increased collaboration within Curriculum and Institutional Development Support & Governance (IDS&G). According to the principals, all the stakeholders involved in education should work together in fulfilling the aims and goals of the system. This is teamwork where each member has a role to play.

A strategic meeting for planning is highly crucial for the department to align all their programmes with the districts to be able to counter this challenge of conflicting programmes, and the sections to align their internal programmes. Principal 2 pointed out the following:

'By continuously providing intensive training of EDOs giving them all the resources they need and also make them account. Incentives in my opinion will also improve the situation.' (Principal 2)

Although the research participants were not tasked to conceptualise EDOs, in their response to what the role of EDOs is, it was clear that their characterisation of EDOs is like the one in the literature. That is, EDOs also known as circuit managers and formally known as school inspectors are mandated with issues of management and administration of schools. What is different, however, is that EDOs is the name that is mostly used in South Africa. In other countries, EDOs go with names such as Quality Assurance and Standards Officers in Kenya (Onzere 2015), education inspectors in Dubai (Alkutich 2015), and school inspectors in Zimbabwe (Tshabalala 2013). Education development officers are thus not only mandated with school inspection but also with a development model in schools, in which power is decentralised and management of schools bring transformation through quality education and learning. All things considered, as is obvious in the results of this study presented above, the developmental aspect of EDOs is still a challenge in South Africa and much still needs to be done for EDOs to fully deliver on their mandate.

The findings agree with Khan (2013), who claims that one of the most important aspects of the implementation process is capacity building, which necessitates proper training for all stakeholders. All EDOs required training to carry out their duties and responsibilities effectively. Furthermore, the comment suggests that incentives should be provided to EDOs for them to be motivated to support QTL-related programmes. The EDOs argued that the Department of Education must supply more vehicles so that the EDOs can visit schools regularly. Transport is to be looked at very

crucially as it assumes a significant part in deciding the frequency of the visits by the EDOs to monitor the functionality of the SMTs. The restructuring of EDOs to obtain subsidised cars should be a priority for the Provincial Department of Education.

Research participants revealed that QTL has everything to do with the dynamic relationship between the teacher and students. There are no conflicting views between what is in the literature with what the research participants stated. The singular, one-way approach of equating teaching with telling and listening with learning is challenged both in literature and in the research findings. In literature, Loughran (2018) argues that teaching should impact learning and that learning should influence teaching. This is in line with the constructivist approach where both teacher and student have a two-way conversation in class with the teacher playing a more facilitative role in teaching which is coherent with Popper's theory of learning. Research findings posit that such an approach cultivates independence in students and helps them to broaden their knowledge-acquiring skills making QTL possible. However, South Africa is still lacking both in capacity and resources to reach such levels of QTL. The problem for such a shortfall emanates from both the education system in South Africa and the triple difficulties of unemployment, inequality and poverty that the country has been grappling with for a long time. Although there is a lack of capacity to support the development of QTL, EDOs have been founded to give South African students with high-quality education.

Thus, for QTL to take place, there is a need to holistically address the challenges that both teachers and students face within the education system and outside the school system, in their communities (Bush et al. 2010). The role(s) of EDOs are broad and diverse both in literature review and research findings. In this study, the role(s) of EDOs are summarised as management and administration. Specific roles for EDOs under these two umbrella terms are overwhelming.

Education development officers' role in different countries is dependent on each country's quest for change after colonialism. For example, in Pakistan, Jaffer (2010) found just like in South Africa, that the role of EDOs has evolved from inspection and supervision to support in a bid to improve school performance. In South Africa, for example, inspection and supervision are terms that were seen as old-fashioned and undemocratic. Therefore, when South Africa gained its independence, these old-fashioned terms were replaced with the word support which denotes a developmental approach to school inspection (Mavuso 2013). However, in both countries, the shift is in terminology only with no significant results in practice (Biputh & McKenna 2010; Jaffer 2010; Mavuso 2013).

From both reviews of literature and research findings in this study, the role of EDOs concerning QTL is dependent on

mainly two major features, namely perceptions of EDOs by school management system (mainly principals) and teachers; and the legal framework that governs the EDOs. When it comes to the perceptions of EDOs by both the principals and teachers, EDOs are viewed through the approaching landscape that they employ in supporting schools. When it comes to South Africa, both the literature review and research findings in this study posit that EDOs do have a role to play in ensuring QTL.

What is clear in both the content review and research results in this study are the three significant perspectives that impact the job of EDOs. These are namely, the approach that the EDOs adopt in providing support to schools, their purpose in undertaking such inspections and lastly, the frequency of visits of EDOs to schools (Mavuso 2013; Nonjobe 2006; Tshabalala 2013). The approach that EDOs take in carrying out their support and/or inspection role affects the QTL. If teachers feel that the visits are to inspect them as they perform their duties, control them, and not support them, teachers tend to either become superficial or do duties that they normally do not perform in class just to get EDOs' approval (Mavuso 2013; Tshabalala 2013). Such an approach lacks the facilitative aspect in classroom instruction that is vital in QTL, and it does not support the growth of teachers. Jaffer (2010) also notes that Pakistan through the support received from EDOs, teachers develop professional skills that are useful for the improvement of their work performance and that of the students which lead to QTL.

Concerning the purpose of undertaking school inspection, in South Africa, the current methodology employed by EDOs has brought conflicting results. Teachers perceive school inspection to help them and students in achieving QTL. However, currently, EDOs' visits to schools are mainly concerned with controlling policy implementation and checking if teachers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, neglecting the developmental aspect of support. This has created an inimical relationship between the EDOs and teachers because teachers feel that EDOs are not there to help them but to control them. Such an outlook leads to EDOs sometimes not giving feedback to teachers on their areas of strength and weakness. When this happens, there will be no significant effect on the performance of teachers, and this will affect QTL in the end.

Lastly, the frequency of visits by EDOs was seen to have a positive implication on QTL. If teachers are aware that EDOs always come to schools when they are supposed to, it helps teachers to be dutiful and up to date with their work. In South Africa, the frequency of visits by EDOs is lacking because of transport challenges faced by EDOs. This needs to be addressed if South Africa is to achieve QTL. Challenges faced by EDOs in achieving QTL in the research findings of the study are somewhat correlated to the ones unearthed through a review of the literature. The lack of resources, both human and material, non-academic activities by learners, inconsistencies in policy implementation, lack of programme coordination, and work overload emerged as the major themes affecting EDOs during data collection. Findings from the literature review emphasise the inimical relationship between EDOs and teachers because of the issues discussed above, mainly the approach of EDOs in inspection and the purpose of EDOs in undertaking the inspection.

Moreover, from the literature, especially in the South African context, the indispensable changes with regards to changes in the role of EDOs from undemocratic to developmental ones are proving to be difficult to achieve on the ground (Biputh & McKenna 2010; Mampane 2020; Mavuso & Moyo 2015). This is a challenge that is also emanating from the *Bantu Education Act* of the apartheid system (Mampane 2020). This legacy has not been adequately addressed and as such, it hampers on the human resources needed to achieve QTL in secondary schools in South Africa. Apart from this, findings from the literature review reveal discrepancies in school governance, unprepared students, and teaching that is not effective as well as a lack of adequate support systems in place to help teachers and students alike (Mampane 2020). Lastly, external issues outside of the education system affect EDOs in achieving QTL (Bush et al. 2010). These are the triple challenges of inequality, unemployment, and poverty that South Africa as a country is grappling with.

Solutions to the challenges discussed above are numerous. In this study, a plethora of resolutions emerged such as addressing the issue of resource shortages in schools – both human and material ones. With human resources comes the issue of quality assurance during the interviewing of the teacher and who sits on the interviewers' panel. Currently, some discrepancies hamper finding a quality teacher because the EDOs who are mandated with the role to address QTL in schools do not have the power to choose a teacher, and this power is given to the SGBs. Apart from this, the EDOs even after inspecting teachers, have limited power to take necessary action to address the issues that they would have observed. There is a lot of red tape in the legal framework that governs EDOs.

Such challenges need to be addressed through policy consistencies, stakeholder cooperation, and programme alignments. The issue of changing the style of approach to support schools is also vital, because if teachers and EDOs are not on the same page concerning the developmental aspect of school inspection, it would be difficult to bring significant results in the QTL in secondary schools. The challenge of the lack of frequency of visits by EDOs to schools should be addressed by providing transport on time for EDOs to do their duties. There is need also to monitor how the EDOs use transport as there are issues of state transport used for personal agendas instead of service delivery. Lastly, QTL is a broad issue that needs all stakeholders involved in the education system to work together to address the challenges that are hindering the achievement of QTL. Achieving QTL is vital because when

QTL is realised, it has a positive effect on the challenges that are external to the school system such as unemployment and poverty. Thus, there is a complementarity effect between addressing QTL and addressing the external challenges which can make achieving QTL challenging.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study concludes that EDOs in the KWT district have been instrumental in supporting SMTs in achieving QTL. Education development officers presently are monitoring how SMTs control teaching and learning, capacitating SMTs on strategies to encourage teachers to utilise modern methods of teaching to effectively impart their lessons through training and workshops. The EDOs in KWT are facilitating SMTs in mentoring other novice SMTs on the best practices in their schools to achieve QTL and the best results. However, there are imminent challenges faced by EDOs when supporting schools to improve the QTL which has been mentioned above related to resources, working environment, the attitude of teachers, and misalignment of programmes and policies, only to mention but a few.

These challenges can be circumvented by using the four main strategies, namely, leadership, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and training. A framework of activities to be done as a way forward has been given above and gives a possibility of improving QTL in KWT district in the EC province of South Africa. This study recommends that the EDOs should first ensure Curriculum Enhancement Programmes through support and monitoring programmes are implemented, particularly, providing support strategic leadership, management and support services, Curriculum Policy, backing and Monitoring and Educational Enrichment Services. Education development officers should support and provide an enabling environment as well as directed help for schooling institutions inside the district to manage their job per education law and policy. Lastly, the government should endeavour to deliver resources such as stationery and textbooks timeously. Further studies in the research area of EDOs and QTL in basic education are advised.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and appreciate the assistance from the participants from the selected schools in the King Williams Town district.

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

This article is based on the research findings of the first author, B.G.M., as a successful Master of Public Administration student, complemented by insights from her research supervisor, T.R., as the second author and the public management expertise of K.S.R., the third author. Data generation and analysis took place during 2010/2021.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The data results and interpretations presented in this article are those that have been collected from mixed-methods research study by the researcher as a student. These data findings are therefore research results from a Master's dissertation that was completed in 2022 at the University of Fort Hare.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

References

Alkutich, M., 2015, 'Examining the impact of school inspection on teaching and learning; Dubai private schools as a case study', Publish thesis for Master in Education in Leadership, Management and Policy (LMP), Faculty of Education, The British in Dubai.

Bantwini, B.D. & Diko, N., 2011, 'Factors affecting South African district officials' capacity to provide effective educator support', *Creative Education* 2(3), 226–235. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2011.23031

Baker, R., Shum, S.B., Duval, E., Stamper, J. & Wiley, D., 2012, 'Educational data mining meets learning analytics', in *Proceedings of the 2nd international conference on learning analytics and knowledge*, pp. 20–20. https://doi.org/10.1145/2330601.2330613

Bertram, C., Mthiyane, C. & Naidoo, J., 2021, 'The tension between curriculum coverage and quality learning: The experiences of South African teachers', *International Journal of Educational Development* 81(4), 102353. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102353

Biputh, B. & McKenna, S., 2010, 'Tensions in the quality assurance processes in post-apartheid South African schools', *Compare* 40(3), 279–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920902955892

Bottoms, G. & Schmidt-Davis, J., 2010, The *three essentials: Improving schools requires district vision, district and state support, and principal leadership*, viewed n.d., from www.sreb.org.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, J. & Marshall, B., 2008, 'Continuous quality improvement: An effective strategy for improvement of program outcomes in a higher education setting', *Nursing Education Perspectives* 29(4), 205–211.

Bush, T., Joubert, R., Kiggundu, E. & Van Rooyen, J., 2010, 'Managing teaching and learning in South African schools', *International Journal of Educational Development* 30(2), 162–168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.04.008

Chitpin, S., 2013, 'Should Popper's view of rationality be used for promoting educator knowledge?', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45(8), 833–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2011.00803.x

Chitpin, S., 2016, 'Leading school improvement: Using Popper's theory of learning', *Open Review of Educational Research* 3(1), 190–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2016.1217742

Creswell, J.W., 2013, *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*, p. 11, SAGE Publications.

Davidovitch, N. & Yavich, R., 2017, 'The effect of smart boards on the cognition and motivation of students', *Higher Education Studies* 7(1), 60–68. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v7n1p60

De Grauwe, A. & Carron, G., 2007, *The organisation of supervision services, module 3*, pp. 1–34, International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris.

Department of Basic Education, 2012, *Government Gazette no. 35107 of 2012*, Government Printers, Pretoria.

Department of Education, 2008, *National senior certificate results*, Province of the Eastern Cape, Government Printers, Pretoria.

Department of Education, 2021, *National senior certificate – School performance report, 2021*, Government Printers, Pretoria.

Dienye, V.U., 2011, 'The educational and social implications of sexuality and sex education in Nigerian schools', *African Journal of Social Sciences* 1(2), 11–19, viewed n.d., from https://ssrn.com/abstract=1894185.

Diller, A., 2006, 'Constructing a comprehensively anti-justificationist position', in I. Jarvie, K. Milford & D. Miller (eds.), *Metaphysics and epistemology*, pp. 119–129, Ashgate, Aldershot.

Dudin, M., Ivashchenko, N.P., Frolova, E. & Abashidze, A.H., 2017, 'Institutional approach to establishment of a structural model of the Russian academic environment development', *European Journal of Contemporary Education* 6(1), 22–38. https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2017.1.22

Du Plessis, P. & Mestry, R., 2019, 'Teachers for rural schools – A challenge for South Africa', *South African Journal of Education* 39(Suppl. 1), s1–s9. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39ns1a1774

Ehren, M., Paterson, A. & Baxter, J., 2020, 'Accountability and trust: Two sides of the same coin?', *Journal of Educational Change* 21(1), 183–213. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-019-09352-4

Harrison, M., 2012, *The role of school inspectors in maintaining educational standards in secondary schools in Mwingi District, Eastern Province-Kenya*, MST-Department of Educational Management Policy and Curriculum Studies, Nairobi.

Hatch, T. & Roegman, R., 2012, 'Out of isolation: Superintendents band together to improve instruction and equity in their districts', *JSD* 33(6), 37–41.

Jaffer, K., 2010, 'School inspection and supervision in Pakistan: Approaches and issues', *Prospects* 40(3), 375–392. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-010-9163-5

James, M. & Pollard, A., 2006, *Improving teaching and learning in schools: A commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme*, TLRP Institute of Education, London.

Khan, A.M., 2013, 'Devolution of education: Opinions and reflections of executive district officers (EDOs) in Punjab', *Bulletin of Education and Research* 35(1), 31–46.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G., 1985, *Naturalistic inquiry*, pp. 289–331, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Loughran, J., 2018, 'Learning about self-study of teacher education practices', in J.K. Ritter, M. Lunenberg, K. Pithouse-Morgan, A.P. Samaras & E. Vanassche (eds.), *Teaching, learning, and enacting of self-study methodology: Unraveling a complex interplay*, vol. 19, pp. 1–7, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices, Springer, New York, NY.

Mampane, S.T., 2020, 'School inspection for quality leadership, teaching, and learning in South Africa: The current state of education school inspection', in J. O'Connor (eds.), *Strategic leadership in PK-12 settings*, pp. 234–250, IGI Global, Pennsylvania.

Mavuso, M.P., 2013, 'Education district office support for teaching and learning in schools: The case of two districts in the Eastern Cape', Doctoral dissertation, University of Fort Hare.

Mavuso, M.P. & Moyo, G., 2014, 'Education district office coordination of teaching and learning support programmes in South Africa: Eastern Cape perspective', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5(23), 1083–1089. https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n23p1083

Mavuso, M.P. & Moyo, G., 2015, 'The views of education development officers on their educational leadership practices', *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 11(1), 15–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2015.11890370

Metcalfe, M., 2018. 'Jika iMufundo 2015–2017: Why, what and key learnings', in P. Christie & M. Monyokolo (eds.), *Learning about sustainable change in education in South Africa: The Jika iMfundo campaign 2015–2017*, pp. 17–74, Saide, Johannesburg.

Moen, R. & Norman, C., 2009, 'The history of the PDCA cycle', in *Proceedings of the 7th ANQ Congress*, Tokyo, September 17.

Myende, P.E., Ncwane, S.H. & Bhengu, T.T., 2022, 'Leadership for learning at district level: Lessons from circuit managers working in deprived school contexts', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 50(1), 99–120. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220933905

National Education Evaluation & Development Unit, 2015, *NEEDU national report 2014*, Government Printers, Pretoria.

Ndou, N., 2022, 'Circuit managers' views on quality education at selected public schools in the Limpopo province, South Africa', *South African Journal of Education* 42(2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v42n2a1947

Nkosi, B., 2015, 'Eastern Cape education department aim to improve', *Mail and Guardian Africa's best read paper*, viewed 27 June 2018, from https://mg.co.za/article/2015-12-10-eastern-cape-education-department-aims-to-improve.

Nonjobe, S., 2006, 'An assessment of the role and function of school inspectors in secondary schools: The case of rural schools in the Eastern Cape, South Africa', Unpublished dissertation, University of Fort Hare.

Onzere, R.A., 2015, 'Influence of quality assurance and standards officers' activities on academic performance in public secondary schools in Trans-nzoia east sub county, Kenya', Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi.

Penuel, W.R., Fishman, B.J., Cheng, B.H. & Sabelli, N., 2011, 'Organising research and development at the intersection of learning, implementation and design', *Educational Research* 4(7), 331–337. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11421826

Saphier, J. & Durkin, P., 2013, *Supervising principals: How superintendents can improve teaching and learning in the classroom*, viewed 20 September 2019, from www.ocmboces.org.

Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R., 2009, *Research methods for business: A skill building approach*, 5th edn., International Journal of Information Technology and Management – IJITM, John Wiley and Sons Inc., Hoboken, NJ.

Shah, R.K., 2019, 'Effective constructivist teaching learning in the classroom', *International Journal of Education* 7(4), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v7i4.600

Silverman, D. (ed.), 2016, *Qualitative research*, Sage, London.

Tabulawa, R., 2013, *Teaching and learning in context: Why pedagogical reforms fail in sub-Saharan Africa*, African Books Collective.

Tshabalala, T., 2013, 'Educators' perceptions towards classroom instructional supervision: A case study of Nkayi District in Zimbabwe', *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education* 4(1), 25–32.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, *Decentralization in education: National policies and practices*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, viewed 18 October 2019, from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000141221.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2007, *Education for all by 2015: Will we make it?* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, viewed 18 October 2019, from https://reliefweb.int/report/world/education-all-global-monitoring-report-2006-education-all-2015-will-we-make-it.

World Bank, 2018, *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*, World Bank Publications, Washington, D.C.