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**EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STANDARDS IN KENYA: OVERSEEING  
CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS –  
A CASE OF TAITA TAVETA**

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## EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STANDARDS IN KENYA: OVERSEEING CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS – A CASE OF TAITA TAVETA

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The study is an Action Research that critically analysed the function of Education Standards and Quality Assurance Council (ESQAC) in Kenya with respect to; overseeing curriculum implementation and delivery in Secondary Schools; particularly in the wake of dismal performance in National Examination by the students in secondary schools.

**Methods:** The location of the study was in Taita Taveta County in Kenya. Purposive sampling was used to select the three ESQAC Officers, while, stratified sampling was used to select 40 secondary schools in Taita Taveta County. Data was collected using Focus Group Discussion Schedules for ESQAC Officers and Questionnaires for Principals of Secondary Schools. Data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

**Results:** The study found that ESQAC officers carried assessment in fewer schools than was expected. That the number of teachers supported by the officers was low and few school follow-up cases by the said officers were reported. These shortcomings were found to be as a result of shortage of officers, limited financial resources and means of communication. Ministry of Education should operationalize ESQAC as Established in article 64 of the Basic Education Act 2013 and given mandate by Legal Notice No. 11, 2014.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** The Cabinet Secretary and the Principal Secretary (State Department of Early Childhood and Basic Education) in the Ministry of Education should operationalize ESQAC in article 64 of the Basic Education Act 2013 and given mandate by Legal Notice No. 11, 2014. This would enable parliament and other financing agencies to provide funds that would support ESQAC programs from National level to Taita Taveta County level. The Ministry of Education should through its training agencies introduce training package for those joining ESQAC as Officers and also to provide in-service training for existing Officers.

**Keywords:** *Education Quality Assurance, Standards council, curriculum implementation and delivery*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Taita Taveta County is among the six counties of Coast Region in Kenya. It comprises four Sub-counties, namely; Mwatate, Voi, Taita and Taveta with a population of 334,042. The county had 88 public and private secondary schools, with which 83 presented candidates for National Examination in the year 2017. There were a total number of 731 teachers teaching in these secondary schools.

Data in the office of Taita Taveta County Director of Education shows that Performance in National Examination by students has been dismal over the last five years. Many secondary school students do not attain quality grades after the four year course. These could be attributed to many factors including ineffective teaching and learning process, low self-esteem towards learning by the students, teacher shortage, un-conducive learning environment, weak supervision of teachers by the principals and heads of departments.

Total candidature from the year 2013 to 2017 was 22,971 out of whom 3,485 (15.2%) attained grade C+ and above, 8,077 (35.2%) got grades between C plain and D+, while 11,194 (48.7%) managed grades D plain and below. In Kenya, grade C+ is the minimum university qualifying grade, grades C Plain to D+ could qualify a candidate to pursue diploma or certificate course at middle level colleges, while grade D down to E leaves a candidate with either Artisan or no course at all to pursue.

The dismal performance in National Examination as illustrated above triggers a question on the role of a government body that is charged with responsibility of ensuring standard and quality of education offered. It would be of interest to understand Education Standards and Quality Assurance Council Operations (ESQAC) in Taita Taveta County with respect to standards and quality of Education in the secondary schools.

Quality assurance in the provision of education entails: setting of standards, assessment of the standards, monitoring of compliance with the standards, monitoring of outcomes after compliance with the standards and enforcing the standards where there is non-compliance. The purpose of Quality Assurance in the education sector is to ensure continuous quality improvement by maintaining conventional standards while following laid down policies in education. The central function is to oversee, promote and maintain standards in education processes particularly curriculum implementation and delivery (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2015 p.77)

Functions of ESQAC as provided in Article 64 of Basic Education Act 2013 include to; (i) ensure standards and maintain quality in institutions of basic Education; (ii) administer policies and guidelines set for basic education; (iii) Supervise and oversee curriculum implementation and delivery; (iv) in cooperation with county education, monitor the conduct of assessments and examinations in institutions of basic education; (v) Monitor and evaluate standards and quality in basic education.

### **1.1 Justification of the Study**

The government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education invest a lot of resources in Education. Through the program of free day secondary education, each secondary student is entitled to ksh. 22,240. This translates to nearly ksh 467 million per year in Taita Taveta County considering the current student enrolment of 20,983. Apart from the capitation that goes to operational and tuition cost of education, the Ministry every year disburses funds that go into infrastructure development, laboratory equipment, sanitary care, information communication technology and teaching and learning resources. The government further invests in education through provision of teachers, education officers and maintenance of offices. Apart from government investment, there is private cost that goes into education. Parents provide uniform, pay for boarding expenses; provide personal effects to the students. Students also forego many other economic opportunities while schooling. Despite all the investments, public and private, it is still evident that education outcome was very low in Taita Taveta County. Amidst this weak performance, there is a Directorate whose mandate is to ensure Standards and Quality of Education. It is therefore justified to study the role of Education Quality Assurance and Standards Council in the wake of dismal performance in National examination.

### **1.2 Objective of the Study**

This study was aimed to establish the role of Education Quality Assurance and Standards with respect to overseeing curriculum implementation and delivery in Taita Taveta County. The study investigated successes and constraints experienced by officers charged with ensuring Standards and Quality of education.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

What is the role of Education Quality Assurance and Standards with respect to overseeing curriculum implementation and delivery in Taita Taveta County?

- i. What are the achievements of Education Quality Assurance and Standards council in its oversight role in curriculum implementation and delivery?
- ii. What challenges do Education Quality Assurance and Standards council encounter in its oversight role in curriculum implementation and delivery?

## **2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study was located in Taita Taveta County which was purposively selected out of the 47 counties in Kenya because it was the County of interest for the researcher who was carrying out Action Research with a view of establish the role of Education Quality Assurance and Standards with respect to overseeing curriculum implementation and delivery in Taita Taveta County. The preferred research design was Action Research because it allows for researcher to conduct in-depth study at work place with a view of finding solution to identified challenges, (Stringer Ernest, 2013). The study targeted a total population of 91, which comprised of 88 principals of secondary schools, and 3 ESQAC Officers. Purposive sampling was used to select the three ESQAC Officers, while, stratified sampling was used to select 40 principals of secondary schools in Taita Taveta County. The county had four ESQAC Officers where three were based at

the sub-counties and one at the county level. The researcher selected the three officers at the sub-counties for this study in order to get balanced information that would be representative. Data was collected using Focus Group Discussion Schedules for ESQAC Officers and Questionnaires for Principals of Secondary Schools. The instruments captured data on achievements and constraints experienced by ESQAC Officers while carrying out their oversight role on curriculum implementation and delivery. The researcher engaged the ESQAC Officers during data collection exercise. Questionnaires were supplied to principals to provide responses before collection by the researcher. Data analysis was performed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Whereas Quantitative was done by tallying the raw scores then presenting in tables, bar graphs and pie charts, Qualitative description was used to qualify each presentation. Information collected through focus group discussion was presented by description and explanation during discussion.

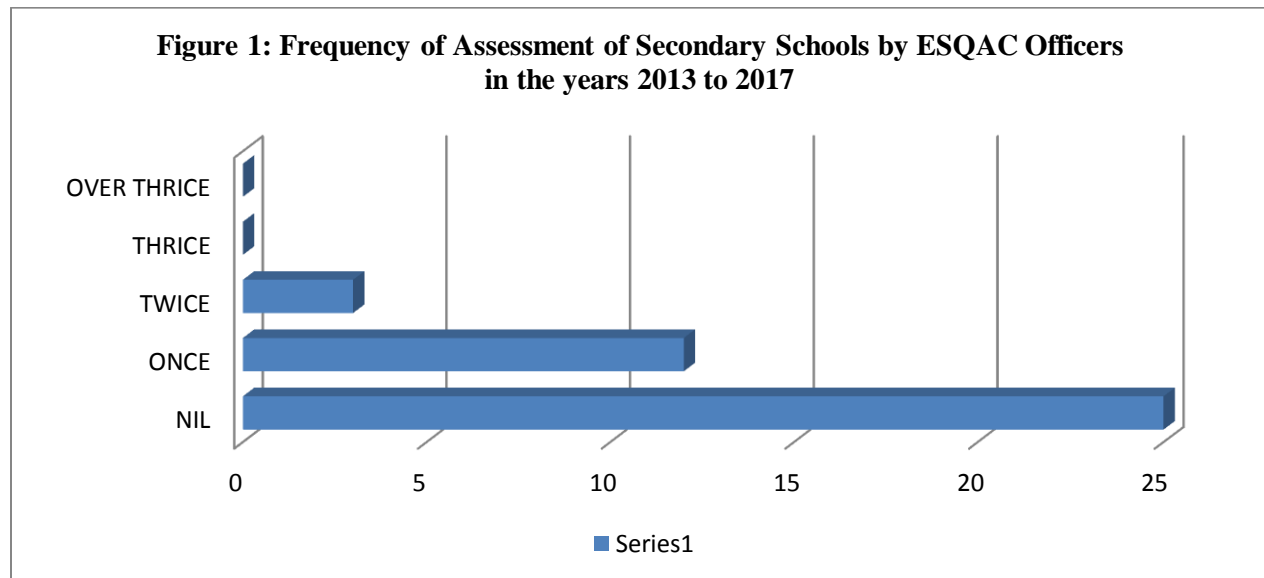
### **3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The researcher administered questionnaires to 40 principals of secondary schools on the effectiveness of ESQAC officers in the performance of oversight role in implementation of the curriculum and delivery. Descriptive statistics enabled the researcher to explain a distribution of measurements and summarize data as recommended in Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

The researcher had a discussion with three ESQAC Officers in charge of Education quality Assurance at the sub-county level. Their views were presented qualitatively under each major theme during discussion of findings. For the purpose of the discussion in this study, ESQAC officers appear under pseudo names. The first one was presented as Mr. Opela, the second one as Mr. Versatile and the third one Mr. Gratitude.

#### **3.1 Frequency of Assessment of Secondary Schools by ESQAC Officers**

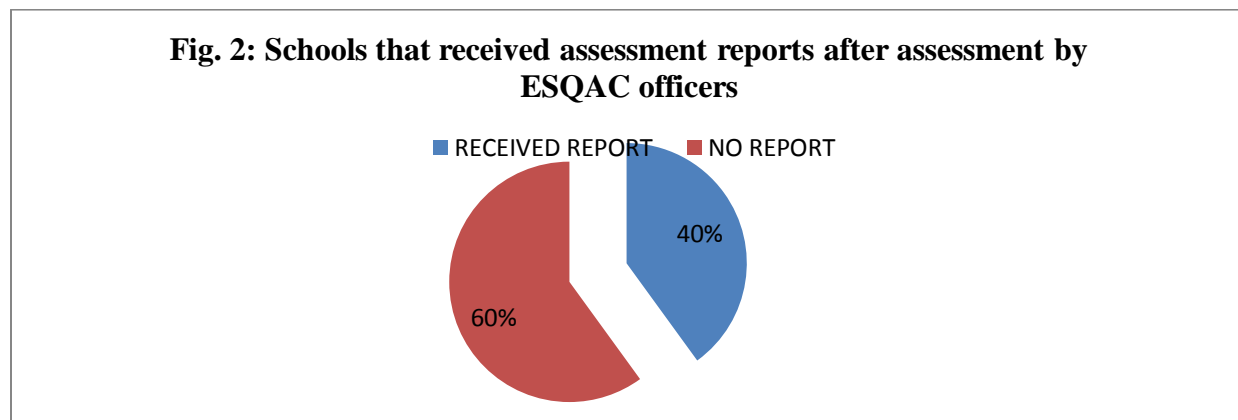
The principals were asked the number of times ESQAC Officers visited their schools during the period of 2013 to 2017. Their responses are presented in figure 1 below.



Findings show that most schools 25 (62.5%) were not assessed in the period between 2013 and 2017. 30% and 7.5% were assessed once and twice respectively. None of the schools were assessed thrice and more.

### 3.2 Schools that Received Assessment Reports after Assessment by ESQAC Officers

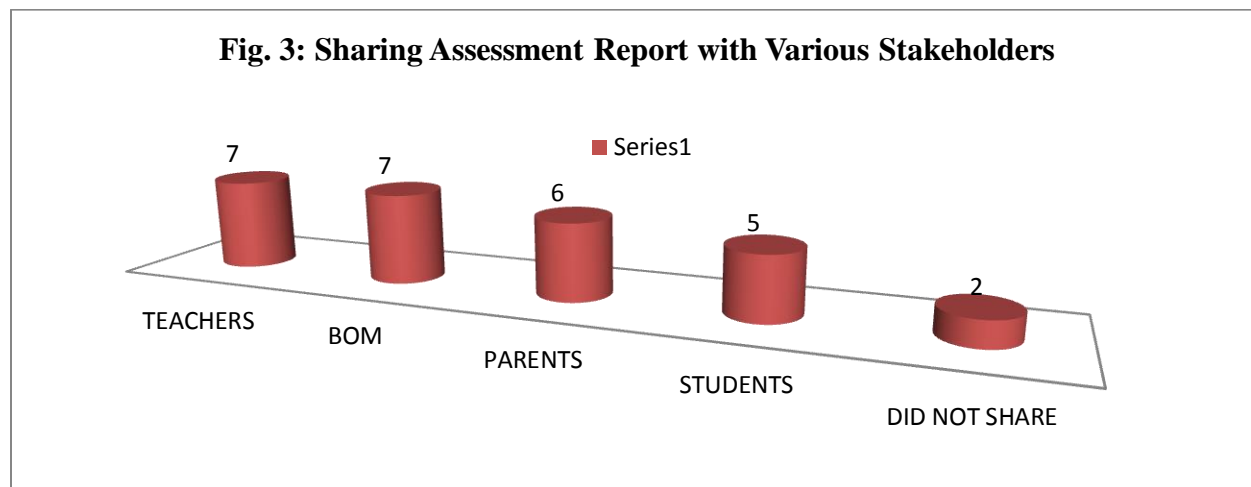
Principals of the fifteen (15) secondary schools that had been assessed between 2013 and 2017 were asked whether they received assessment reports and responded as presented in figure 2 below.



It was found that 40% of the schools assessed received report while 60% did not receive.

### 3.3 Sharing Assessment Report with Various Stakeholders

Principals of the schools that received reports were asked whether they shared the assessment reports with teachers, parents, Board of management and students. Their responses are presented in figure 3 below.



Findings reveal that 53.3% of principals who got the report did not share it with any stakeholder. 46.6% of the principals indicated that they shared the report with the teachers and BOM. 40% of the principals showed that assessment report was shared with parents while 33.3% shared it with students. 20% of schools did not share it at all.

### 3.4 Functions of ESQAC Officers that are critical in curriculum implementation and delivery

The principals were asked to rate various curriculum oversight activities carried out by ESQAC Officers to promote curriculum implementation in a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 is lowest and 4 highest. Their responses are presented in table 1 below.

**Table 1: oversight activities that is critical to ESQAC Officers in Curriculum implementation**

Oversight Activities	1 - Low	2 - High	3 - Higher	4 - Highest
Assessment of the qualification of a teacher to implement the curriculum	0	8	12	20
Assessing teacher's preparedness to deliver the curriculum	0	14	10	16
Assessment of teacher's actual delivery of the curriculum	2	6	12	20
Giving feedback to teachers after assessment	1	1	16	22

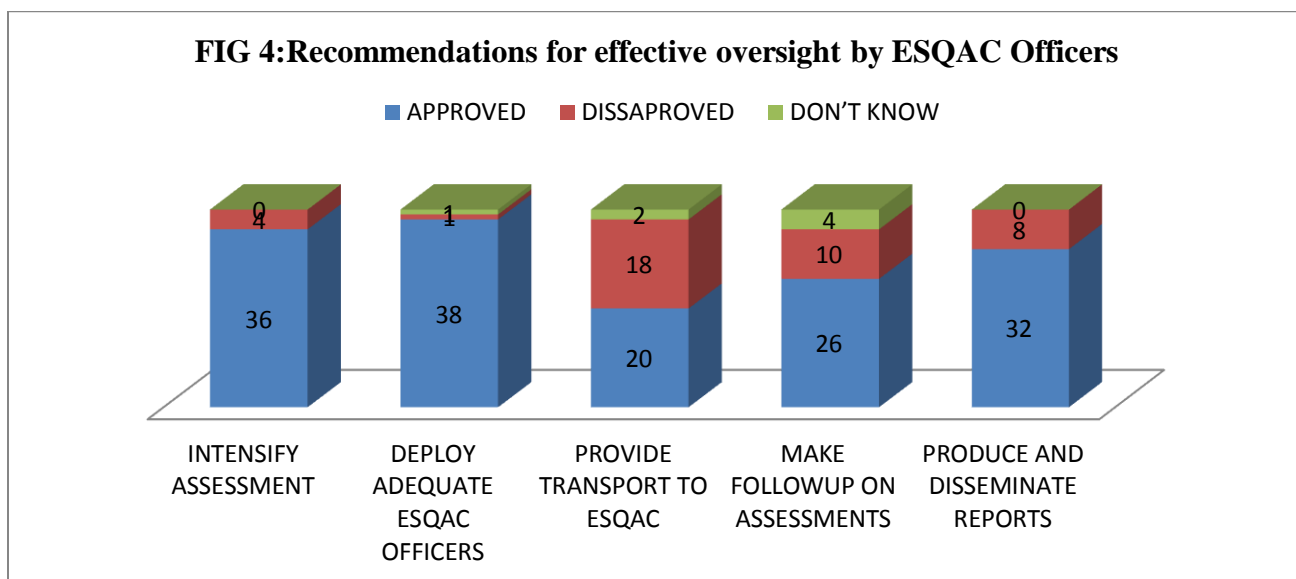
Most principals appreciated the oversight role of ESQAC officers. 55% of the principals rated the function of giving feedback to teachers after assessment highest. This was the best rating. Other highly regarded activities as rated by the principals were; assessment of the qualification of teachers to implement the curriculum (rated Highest by 50%) and assessment of teachers'



actual delivery of the curriculum at (rated Highest by 50%). By and large, principals appreciated the oversight function carried out by ESQAC Officers as rating ranged between Higher and Highest.

### 3.5 Recommendations for effective oversight by ESQAC Officers in the implementation and delivery of the curriculum

When asked to recommend how best to make ESQAC Officers to be effective in their work, principals, responded as shown in figure 5 below.



Majority of the principals recommended that, adequate ESQAC officers should be deployed in the county – approved by 95% of the principals, assessment of schools should be intensified and done regularly - approved by 90% of the principals and there should be timely production and dissemination of assessment reports - approved by 80% of the principals. Other significant recommendations were that follow-up on assessment be done - approved by 65% of the principals and transport should be provided to ESQAC officers - approved by 50% of the principals.

## 4.0 DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Frequency of Assessment of Secondary Schools by ESQAC Officers

Mr. Opela, ESQAC Officer for one of the Sub-Countries in Taita Taveta stated that, frequent assessment of schools impacts positively in the implementation and delivery of the curriculum. Apart from putting the teachers on toes to work, ESQAC officers offer pedagogical support to teachers. Teachers therefore are assisted to improve in their teaching skills and also ensure that syllabus is fully covered in good time. Mr. Versatile, ESQAC Officer for a second Sub-County held that, assessment should be extended to all schools within a span of two years. He said that this would assist teachers across the sub-county and by extension the whole County. It is



unfortunate that in Taita Taveta County, assessment of secondary schools by ESQAC Officers was very minimal as found in figure 1 above. 62.5% of the principals interviewed indicated that schools had not been assessed for the five year period between 2013 and 2017. A study carried out in Vihiga District in Western Kenya on “Factors determining the performance of educational quality assurance and standards officers in Kenya” found that low performance of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) was due to inadequate resources and poor scheme of service,( Amunga, Maube Isaiah, 2008). It is therefore imperative that frequency of school visits by ESQAC officers is increased. This should be aimed to cover all schools within a short duration of one year.

#### **4.2 Schools that Received Assessment Reports after Assessment by ESQAC Officers**

This study found that of all the schools assessed by ESQAC Officers, only 40% received assessment reports. The report is a reflection of how a school is as at the time of assessment. It points out areas of strength as well as sections for improvement. The assessed institution is required to implement recommendations in the report in order for the school to realize improvement in performance. It is therefore unfortunate if the schools do not eventually get the report.

When ESQAC Officers were engaged to explain reasons why reports were not given back to assessed schools, they had various explanations; Mr. Opela stated that there were instances where principals of some schools would receive reports but due to fear of backlash from stakeholders, they would keep the report away from school. He also pointed out that production of report required resources which at times were inadequate especially when assessment involved many schools within a span of time. That the reports may be in soft copy in the computer without resources to do hard copies for schools. Mr. Versatile cited shortage of personnel in ESQAC office as another reason for delayed or none production of reports. He said that there were no typists who were assigned to perform typing work under the stewardship of ESQAC officers. That the one typist used by the Sub County Director was required to do all the work for other officers hence overburdening. He also indicated that there were instances where shipment of the report to school was a challenge. This was particularly true with Assessments done by ESQAC Officers from Head Quarter in Nairobi. A study carried out in Baringo District in Baringo County on “Contributions of quality assurance and standards to curriculum implementation in primary schools” recommended that there was need to address the issue of insufficient materials and rare visits by QASOs by employing more Officers and support staff, (Chepkuto, Keino William, 2012). A report is evidence that Assessment was done and it is a feedback to the school and to the teachers concerning work, hence no reports no assessment done.

#### **4.3 Sharing Assessment Report with Various Stakeholders**

Chepkuto, Keino William (2012) recommended sensitization of community members for increased participation in matters affecting curriculum implementation, through organized workshops. The school community consists of parents, Board of Management, students, and teachers. Other stakeholders include, political and religious leaders, Non-Governmental

Organization and government agencies surrounding the school. These groups of people in one way or the other have interest in the school and more often wish to know what goes on in their school. Findings of this study revealed that 20 % of principals who got the report did not share it with any stakeholder. 46 .6% of the principals indicated that they shared the report with the teachers and BOM. The results further indicated that 40% of the principals showed that assessment report was shared with parents while 33.3% shared it with students.

During discussion with Mr. Opela on relevance of sharing the report with stake holders, he averred that, ESQAC schools Assessment Report captures contribution of most stakeholders in curriculum implementation in the assessed school. That it reveals whether teachers are professional in their work, extent of syllabus coverage, pedagogy, and availability or otherwise of learning resources, conduciveness of learning environment and learners' behavior during the learning process. That the report reveals whether Teachers Service Commission has deployed adequate teachers in a school, and whether the Ministry of Education is effective in its supervisory role in the school. Mr. Gratitude, an ESQAC Officer for the third sub-county, held that the report captures parental contribution towards learning including payment of school fees and provision of personal effects to their children, their role in shaping personality and character of students and their role in provision of infrastructure in the school. That the role of the Board of Management is also assessed; the support it gives to school administration, programs they put in place and support that promotes curriculum implementation and their relationship with the other stake holders in the school. Contributions of other members of the school community are assessed. Mr. Versatile added that the report reveals whether religious leaders participate and impact in spiritual nourishment of the students, political leadership and Ministry of education support school with learning resources. That the work of none-teaching staff is also captured in the report. Whether they are effective or not and how performance of their work affects implementation of the curriculum.

It is because of this kind of feedback that reflects contributions of various stakeholders in education in the school that makes sharing of the report a vital section in the process of school standards and quality assessment. It amounts to nothing if the feedback is not shared with the stakeholders.

#### **4.4 Functions of ESQAC Officers that are critical in curriculum implementation and delivery**

Mosigisi, Teresa Erica (2012), in her research found that QASO roles were found to be important in improving the quality standards and hence improved academic performance in public schools in Kasarani District. Chepkuto K. William (2012) put it even more explicitly; that QASOs benefitted teachers in development of work plans, lesson plans and records of work, maintaining quality instruction, improving actual instruction and developing instructional materials.

This study corroborates the above findings; By and large, principals appreciated the oversight function carried out by ESQAC Officers as rating ranged between Higher and Highest. ESQAC Officers' assessment of the qualification of teachers to implement the curriculum (rated Highest by 50%) and assessment of teachers' actual delivery of the curriculum (rated Highest by 50%).

Mr. Versatile indicated that oversight role by ESQAC Officers goes beyond assessing teacher qualification, teacher professional preparation and teachers' actual lesson delivery. That also assessed are relevance of learning resources employed during the learning process, learner participation and evaluation of the achievement of the lesson. Mr. Gratitude showed that relationship between the teacher and the learners plays a critical role in lesson delivery. That a more friendly teacher achieves better outcome than a harsh teacher. Mr. Opela while agreeing with the position taken by both Mr. Versatile and Mr. Gratitude added that learning outcome is also dependent of physical learning environment. That the classroom should be learner friendly in terms of space available, aeration of the classroom, light in the room and furniture must be user friendly for maximum achievement.

#### **4.5 Recommendations for Effective Oversight by ESQAC Officers in the Implementation and Delivery of the Curriculum**

Majority of the principals in this study recommended that, adequate ESQAC officers should be deployed in Taita Taveta county (approved by 95% of the principals), assessment of schools should be intensified and done regularly (approved by 90% of the principals) and there should be timely production and dissemination of assessment reports (approved by 80% of the principals). Other significant recommendations were that follow-up on assessment be done (approved by 65% of the principals) and transport should be provided to ESQAC officers (approved by 50% of the principals).

Chepkuto, K. W. (2012) recommended that there was need to address the issue of Insufficient materials and rare visits by QASOs by employing more Officers, that the government should employ other officers to oversee the work of QASOs, the officers should regularly monitor schools to find out whether curriculum activities were being implemented as planned and whether they were producing desired results, that the ministry of Education through directorate of Quality Assurance and standards should establish a vetting system for those being in-serviced to ascertain their creativeness.

On the question of what should be done to improve the oversight role of ESQAC Officers, Mr. Opela was blunt; the Ministry of Education should breathe life to the law that established ESQAC by adhering to its provisions. ESQAC is established in article 64 of the Basic Education Act 2013 and given mandate by Legal Notice No. 11, 2014 but the leadership of the Ministry has taken a long time to operationalize it. He was of the opinion that implementation of the act would create opportunity for adequate funding for ESQAC operations. ESQAC would also partner with other well-wishers in mobilization of resources to the good of quality education. Mr. Gratitude and Mr. Versatile vouched for a more vibrant ESQAC with adequate personnel who are motivated to perform their oversight role effectively.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals that oversight role of ESQAC Officers in curriculum implementation is significant and highly appreciated by the respondents. It influences effective delivery of the curriculum on time. However, the study found factors that slow down their effectiveness that

include; limited assessment opportunities by ESQAC Officers in schools, low rate of report production and dissemination to consumers and actors and high tendency of failure to act on recommendations in the report. The study further observed that there are many factors that inhibit ESQAC Officers from offering the much needed oversight; inadequate funding, shortage of personnel, limited material resources, immobility, inadequate capacity building of personnel, limited support staff.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Cabinet Secretary and the Principal Secretary (State Department of Early Childhood and Basic Education) in the Ministry of Education should operationalize ESQAC in article 64 of the Basic Education Act 2013 and given mandate by Legal Notice No. 11, 2014. This would enable parliament and other financing agencies to provide funds that would support ESQAC programs from National level to Taita Taveta County level. The Ministry of Education should through its training agencies introduce training package for those joining ESQAC as Officers and also to provide in-service training for existing Officers. Such kind of courses would enhance Officers capacity to deliver effectively in their mandate and would professionalize ESQAC. It would in turn benefit secondary schools in Taita Taveta County. The Ministry of Education should introduce an interactive forum for stakeholders at different levels of governance to discuss and agree on how to continually improve quality of education. ESQAC should oversee such dialogue on matters touching on quality of education. Sharing of the quality assessment report with key stakeholders at the school level should be made a priority by the lead assessor convening a meeting in consultation with the head teacher.

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