



ROLE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Introduction

Inclusive education refers to the principle of providing equitable and quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or backgrounds. It emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that accommodate the diverse needs of students. Quality assurance, on the other hand, encompasses systematic processes and measures to ensure that education meets predetermined standards and objectives. Integrating quality assurance in inclusive education is crucial for ensuring that inclusive practices are effectively implemented, monitored and improved.

In Zambia, like many other countries, there is a growing recognition of the importance of inclusive education, which aims to provide equal access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, special needs, or from marginalized backgrounds. However, ensuring that inclusive education is of high quality and effectively meets the needs of diverse learners requires a robust system of quality assurance. Quality assurance processes and systems play a crucial role in monitoring, evaluating, and continuously improving educational practices and services. They provide a framework for setting and maintaining standards, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring accountability in the delivery of inclusive education.

This chapter will explore the specific ways in which quality assurance supports the goals of inclusive education in Zambia. It will examine how quality assurance processes can address the

unique challenges and barriers to inclusion, such as discrimination, lack of resources, and insufficient teacher training. By implementing effective quality assurance mechanisms, educational institutions and policymakers can ensure that inclusive education is not merely a token effort but a comprehensive and sustainable approach that meets the educational needs and rights of all learners. The chapter will also highlight the importance of engaging stakeholders, including parents, communities, and learners themselves, in the quality assurance process to ensure that their voices and perspectives are valued and incorporated into decision-making. Overall, this chapter will provide valuable insights into the role of quality assurance in promoting and sustaining inclusive education in Zambia.

Conceptualising Quality Assurance and Inclusive Education

Quality assurance and inclusive education are two interconnected concepts that play a crucial role in ensuring equitable and effective educational opportunities for all learners. This section explores various concepts used in quality assurance and inclusive education, providing a comprehensive understanding of these terms and their application in educational settings.

1. **Quality Assurance:** Quality assurance in education refers to the systematic processes and measures employed to ensure that educational practices, programs, and services meet predetermined standards and objectives. It encompasses a range of activities, including planning, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement, aimed at enhancing the quality and effectiveness of education. Quality assurance in education is driven by the pursuit of excellence and the commitment to providing learners with high-quality educational experiences. It involves setting clear standards, establishing evaluation criteria, conducting regular assessments, and implementing strategies to address areas for improvement. Quality assurance mechanisms promote accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in educational systems to ensure that learners receive the best possible education.
2. **Inclusive Education:** Inclusive education is a philosophy and approach that advocates for the provision of equitable, accessible, and quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or backgrounds. It recognizes and values diversity and aims to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate the needs and differences of all students (Sikalumbi, 2019). Inclusive education emphasizes removing barriers to learning, promoting

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participation and belonging, and ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities to succeed. It involves adopting inclusive practices such as differentiated instruction, individualized support, and accessible learning materials. Inclusive education also recognizes the importance of collaboration among educators, families, and the broader community to create a supportive and inclusive educational ecosystem.

3. **Equity:** Equity is a fundamental principle in both quality assurance and inclusive education. It refers to the fair and just distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and support to ensure that every learner has the chance to succeed. Equity in education acknowledges the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and aims to address disparities and barriers that hinder their educational progress. It involves providing additional resources and support to learners who may face disadvantage or discrimination, such as students with disabilities, those from marginalized communities, or those with limited access to educational opportunities. Equity in quality assurance and inclusive education means ensuring that all learners have equal access to high-quality education and that their individual needs are met to facilitate their learning and development.
4. **Standards and Benchmarks:** Standards and benchmarks are essential components of quality assurance in inclusive education. They provide a framework for evaluating and assessing the quality and effectiveness of educational practices and help guide decision-making and improvement efforts. Standards are the desired expectations or levels of performance that educational systems, programs, or practices should meet. They define the minimum requirements and criteria that need to be fulfilled for quality assurance. Benchmarks, on the other hand, are specific indicators or reference points that help measure progress towards meeting the standards. They provide a means of comparing performance and identifying areas that require improvement. Standards and benchmarks in inclusive education consider factors such as accessibility, individualized support, inclusive pedagogy, and the promotion of social inclusion.
5. **Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement:** Collaboration and stakeholder engagement are crucial concepts in both quality assurance and inclusive education. Inclusive education requires the active involvement of various stakeholders, including educators, administrators, policymakers, families, and the community. Collaboration among these stakeholders fosters

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a shared understanding of inclusive education goals and ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. Stakeholder engagement promotes a sense of ownership, commitment, and accountability for the implementation of quality assurance measures and the promotion of inclusive education practices. It facilitates the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources, leading to more effective and sustainable inclusive educational systems. Collaboration and stakeholder engagement also contribute to the development of inclusive policies, the identification of barriers to inclusion, and the implementation of strategies to address them. By working together, stakeholders can create inclusive learning environments that meet the needs of all learners and promote their overall well-being and success.

6. **Differentiated Instruction:** Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching and learning that recognizes and accommodates the diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles of students. It involves adapting teaching methods, materials, and assessments to meet the individual needs of learners. In the context of quality assurance and inclusive education, differentiated instruction ensures that instructional practices are tailored to the specific strengths and challenges of each student, promoting meaningful and inclusive learning experiences.
7. **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Universal Design for Learning is a framework that guides the development of flexible instructional approaches and materials to meet the needs of all learners. UDL emphasizes providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to address the variability of learners. It aligns with the principles of inclusive education and supports quality assurance by promoting inclusive instructional design that caters to diverse learners' needs and ensures equitable access to learning opportunities.
8. **Individualized Education Plans (IEPs):** Individualized Education Plans are personalized plans developed for students with disabilities or special needs. IEPs outline the specific goals, accommodations, and support services required to meet the individual needs of these students. In the context of quality assurance and inclusive education, IEPs play a vital role in ensuring that students with disabilities receive the necessary support and accommodations to access and succeed in inclusive educational settings.

These concepts contribute to the understanding and implementation of quality assurance and inclusive education, supporting the creation of inclusive learning environments and ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities to thrive.

Importance of Quality Assurance in Inclusive Education Provision

Quality assurance plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and success of inclusive education provision. Here are some key points highlighting the importance of quality assurance in the context of inclusive education:

1. **Ensuring Equity and Access:** Quality assurance processes help ensure that all learners, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, or needs, have equal access to educational opportunities. By setting and monitoring standards, quality assurance mechanisms promote the removal of barriers to inclusion, such as discriminatory practices, physical inaccessibility, or limited resources. It helps create a level playing field, where every learner can participate and benefit from inclusive education.
2. **Promoting Effective Instruction and Support:** Quality assurance in inclusive education focuses on improving instructional practices and providing appropriate support to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. It emphasizes the professional development of teachers and the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies, curriculum adaptations, and individualized support mechanisms. Through quality assurance, educators are encouraged to utilize evidence-based practices and continuously improve their teaching methodologies to create inclusive and engaging learning environments (Sikalumbi, 2019).
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Quality assurance processes involve ongoing monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education provision. This allows for the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in the delivery of services. By collecting and analyzing data, quality assurance helps in making informed decisions to enhance the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education. It enables stakeholders to assess the impact of inclusive practices, identify gaps, and make necessary adjustments to achieve better outcomes for all learners.

4. **Accountability and Transparency:** Quality assurance promotes accountability and transparency in inclusive education. It establishes clear standards and benchmarks that educational institutions and stakeholders need to meet. By regularly assessing and reporting on the progress and quality of inclusive education provision, quality assurance mechanisms ensure that educational stakeholders are answerable for their actions and commitments. This fosters a culture of responsibility and continuous improvement in the pursuit of inclusive educational goals.
5. **Collaboration and Engagement:** Quality assurance in inclusive education encourages collaboration and engagement among various stakeholders. It recognizes the importance of involving parents, communities, learners, and other relevant actors in the decision-making processes related to inclusive education. By seeking their input, feedback, and active participation, quality assurance ensures that the voices and perspectives of those directly affected by inclusive education are considered, leading to more inclusive and responsive educational practices.

Thus, quality assurance ensures that inclusive education is not mere rhetoric but a reality that provides meaningful and high-quality educational opportunities for all learners.

Quality Principles and Standards of Inclusive Education

Quality principles and standards of inclusive education are crucial for ensuring that inclusive education practices are effective, equitable, and meet the diverse needs of learners. These principles and standards provide a framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating inclusive education programs and policies. In examining these principles and standards, it is important to consider global, regional (specifically Africa), and local perspectives.

From a global perspective, organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) have established principles and standards for inclusive education. UNESCO emphasizes principles such as non-discrimination, equal opportunities, and full participation of all learners in inclusive settings (UNESCO, 2009). The UNCRPD promotes the right to education for persons with disabilities and emphasizes access to inclusive education

systems (United Nations, 2006). These global perspectives emphasize the importance of inclusive education as a human right and provide guidance on promoting inclusive practices worldwide. From a regional perspective, such as Africa, there are initiatives and frameworks that highlight principles and standards specific to the African context. For example, the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) recognizes inclusive education as a key priority and emphasizes the need for quality education that addresses the diverse needs of learners (African Union, 2016). Additionally, the Incheon Strategy, adopted at the World Education Forum in 2015, provides a framework for inclusive and equitable education in Africa, highlighting the importance of removing barriers to education and ensuring quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015). These regional perspectives underscore the commitment of African countries to inclusive education and provide guidance for implementing inclusive practices within the African context.

At the local level, countries like Zambia develop their own policies and guidelines to promote inclusive education. For instance, the Zambian Ministry of General Education has developed the Education for All (EFA) National Action Plan, which includes goals and strategies for inclusive education (Ministry of General Education, 2013). These local perspectives reflect the unique challenges and opportunities within the country and provide specific guidance for implementing inclusive education practices in Zambia.

We therefore note that, quality principles and standards of inclusive education are informed by global, regional (Africa), and local perspectives. Global organizations like UNESCO and the UNCRPD provide overarching principles and standards for inclusive education. Regional initiatives and frameworks, such as CESA 16-25 and the Incheon Strategy, emphasize the importance of inclusive education within the African context. At the local level, countries like Zambia develop their own policies and guidelines to ensure quality inclusive education. By considering and incorporating these various perspectives, educational stakeholders can work together to promote inclusive education that is effective, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all learners.

Components of Quality Assurance in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their diverse needs and abilities. Quality assurance plays a crucial role in ensuring

that inclusive education is effective and meets the needs of all learners. This discussion will outline the key components of quality assurance in inclusive education, providing citations in APA format to support the information presented.

One essential component of quality assurance in inclusive education is the development and implementation of clear and comprehensive policies and guidelines. These policies should outline the principles, objectives, and strategies for inclusive education, as well as the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, and support staff. According to Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006), "the development of inclusive policies is a fundamental starting point for quality assurance in inclusive education" (p. 82). These policies should be aligned with national and international frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The provision of ongoing professional development and training for educators is a valuable component of quality assurance. Teachers need to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. The training should cover areas such as differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and positive behavior support. As noted by Artiles and Kozleski (2016), "continuous professional development is essential for educators to promote inclusive practices and improve student outcomes" (p. 321). This training should be evidence-based, incorporating research and best practices in inclusive education.

Effective assessment and evaluation practices are also crucial components of quality assurance in inclusive education. Assessment should be inclusive, meaning that it considers the diverse needs and abilities of all students. It should utilize a variety of assessment methods, including formative and summative assessments, to gather comprehensive information about students' progress and learning outcomes. According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), "assessments should be designed to provide information about what students can do and identify the support they need to succeed" (p. 72). Inclusive assessment practices should also involve students in the process, promoting their active participation and self-reflection.

Collaboration and partnerships between schools, families and community organizations are integral to quality assurance in inclusive education. Schools should actively involve parents and families in decision-making processes and ensure effective communication channels. This collaboration fosters a shared understanding of students' needs and strengths, promotes parental

engagement, and facilitates the implementation of appropriate support strategies. As highlighted by Farrell and Ainscow (2002), "partnerships between schools and families are crucial for successful inclusive education" (p. 128). Furthermore, collaboration with community organizations, such as disability support services or local advocacy groups, can provide additional resources and expertise to support inclusive practices.

One crucial quality assurance action is the establishment of a supportive and inclusive school culture. Inclusive education goes beyond physical inclusion; it requires creating an environment where all students feel valued, respected, and included. This can be achieved through the promotion of positive attitudes, acceptance of diversity, and fostering a sense of belonging among students. As noted by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), "a positive school culture that embraces diversity and promotes inclusive values is fundamental for quality inclusive education" (p. 212). Schools should actively address any forms of discrimination or bias and promote inclusive practices through awareness campaigns, professional development, and the involvement of students in creating an inclusive school climate.

Another important quality assurance action is the provision of appropriate and individualized support for students with diverse needs. Inclusive education recognizes that learners have different strengths, challenges, and learning styles. Therefore, it is crucial to provide personalized support to meet their individual requirements. This support may include specialized instructional strategies, assistive technologies, and accommodations or modifications to the curriculum. According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), "individualized support plans that address the unique needs of each student are essential for quality inclusive education" (p. 71). Regular monitoring and review of support plans can ensure that students' needs are being met and that adjustments are made as necessary.

Promoting collaborative and inclusive teaching practices is another vital quality assurance action. In an inclusive classroom, collaboration among teachers, support staff, and specialists is essential to meet the diverse needs of students effectively. This collaboration involves joint planning, co-teaching, and shared decision-making. By working together, educators can draw on each other's expertise and provide a more inclusive and comprehensive educational experience. As highlighted by Slee and Weiner (2018), "collaborative teaching practices facilitate the sharing of

knowledge and resources, which is crucial for delivering inclusive education" (p. 118). Professional learning communities and collaborative team meetings can serve as platforms for ongoing collaboration and reflection.

Monitoring and evaluation are critical quality assurance actions that ensure accountability and continuous improvement in inclusive education provision. Regular monitoring allows educational institutions to assess the effectiveness of their inclusive practices, identify areas for improvement, and make data-informed decisions. Evaluation processes may include collecting and analyzing student performance data, conducting classroom observations, and seeking feedback from students, parents, and staff. According to Ainscow et al. (2006), "systematic monitoring and evaluation processes are essential for quality assurance in inclusive education, enabling schools to track progress and make necessary adjustments" (p. 95). This information can guide professional development efforts, resource allocation, and policy development to enhance inclusive education provision.

Professional collaboration and learning communities: Quality assurance in inclusive education involves fostering a culture of professional collaboration and establishing learning communities within schools. This ensures that educators have opportunities to share knowledge, exchange best practices, and engage in ongoing professional learning. Collaborative activities, such as lesson study or peer mentoring, can enhance teachers' skills in addressing diverse student needs. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) posits that "professional collaboration and learning communities contribute to the continuous improvement of inclusive education practices" (p. 120). Thus, by engaging in collaborative reflection and learning, teachers can refine their instructional approaches and better support the diverse needs of students.

Parent and community engagement: Inclusive education quality assurance also emphasizes the active involvement of parents and the broader community in the educational process. Schools should establish mechanisms for meaningful engagement, such as regular communication channels, parent-teacher conferences, and involvement in decision-making processes. Including parents and community members in the planning and evaluation of inclusive education practices can provide valuable insights and promote a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Assertively, Farrell and Ainscow (2002) states that "meaningful parent and community engagement is essential for ensuring the quality of inclusive education provision" (p. 129). Schools

can also benefit from community partnerships that provide additional resources, expertise, and support for inclusive practices.

Accessible and inclusive learning environments: Quality assurance in inclusive education requires the creation of physically and socially accessible learning environments. Schools should ensure that their facilities are designed to accommodate the diverse needs of students, including accessibility features for students with mobility challenges and sensory supports for students with sensory impairments. Moreover, inclusive learning environments should promote a sense of belonging and acceptance for all students. This can be achieved through inclusive pedagogies, fostering positive relationships among students, and promoting peer support networks. As highlighted by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), "accessible and inclusive learning environments are crucial for quality inclusive education provision" (p. 74). Schools should regularly assess and improve their physical and social environments to ensure inclusivity.

Collaboration with external support services: Inclusive education provision often requires collaboration with external support services, such as special educators, therapists, and counselors. Quality assurance involves establishing effective partnerships with these services to ensure coordinated and comprehensive support for students with additional needs. This collaboration can involve regular communication, joint planning, and sharing of expertise. By working collaboratively with external support services, schools can access specialized knowledge and resources to better meet the needs of diverse learners. Artiles and Kozleski (2016) also indicates that, "collaboration with external support services is an important quality assurance action that enhances the inclusive education experience" (p. 325).

Therefore, it can be stated that quality assurance actions in inclusive education provision encompass various important aspects. These actions include establishing a supportive school culture, providing individualized support, promoting collaborative teaching practices, and implementing monitoring and evaluation processes. By implementing these quality assurance actions, educational institutions can ensure that inclusive education is effectively delivered, leading to improved outcomes for all students in diverse learning environments.

Benefits and Challenges of Integrating Quality Assurance in Inclusive Education

Integrating quality assurance in inclusive education brings numerous benefits, including improved educational outcomes, enhanced teacher practices, and increased accountability.

However, it also presents challenges such as resource constraints, cultural barriers, the need for comprehensive stakeholder collaboration, evaluation and assessment complexities, and the establishment of a culture of continuous improvement. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that involves adequate resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, professional development, and the development of inclusive assessment strategies. By navigating these challenges, the integration of quality assurance in inclusive education can contribute to the creation of inclusive learning environments that promote the holistic development and success of all students.

a) Benefits

1. **Improved Educational Outcomes:** Quality assurance mechanisms in inclusive education can lead to improved educational outcomes for all students. By setting clear standards and benchmarks, quality assurance helps ensure that inclusive educational practices are evidence-based and effective. It encourages the use of appropriate instructional strategies, individualized support, and assessment methods that cater to diverse learners' needs. As a result, students with disabilities or other special needs can access high-quality education, participate fully in the learning process, and achieve their full potential.
2. **Enhanced Teacher Practices:** Quality assurance initiatives provide opportunities for professional development and capacity-building among educators. Teachers are supported in developing inclusive teaching strategies, adapting curriculum materials, and implementing appropriate accommodations or modifications. Quality assurance frameworks also encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among teachers, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in inclusive education. By enhancing teacher practices, quality assurance contributes to the creation of inclusive classrooms that are conducive to learning for all students.
3. **Increased Accountability:** Integrating quality assurance in inclusive education promotes accountability at various levels, including schools, education systems, and policymakers. Quality assurance mechanisms establish clear guidelines and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive education practices. Regular monitoring and evaluation help identify areas for improvement and ensure that educational policies and practices align

with inclusive principles. This accountability fosters a culture of transparency, leading to greater investment and commitment to inclusive education from all stakeholders.

b) Challenges

1. **Resource Constraints:** Implementing quality assurance in inclusive education requires adequate resources, including funding, trained personnel, and appropriate infrastructure. Many education systems, particularly those in low-resource settings, struggle to allocate sufficient resources to support inclusive practices and establish quality assurance mechanisms. Limited resources can hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education policies and compromise the quality of support provided to students with diverse needs.
2. **Cultural Barriers:** Inclusive education often challenges cultural norms, beliefs, and attitudes towards disability and diversity. Quality assurance measures may face resistance or skepticism from stakeholders who are not fully convinced of the benefits of inclusive education. Cultural barriers can impede the implementation of inclusive practices and create challenges for quality assurance
3. **Comprehensive Stakeholder Collaboration:** Integrating quality assurance in inclusive education requires collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including educators, administrators, policymakers, parents, and community members. Ensuring the active involvement and participation of all stakeholders can be challenging, as it requires establishing effective communication channels, addressing diverse perspectives, and fostering a shared understanding of inclusive education goals. Lack of collaboration among stakeholders may hinder the successful implementation of quality assurance measures and impede progress towards inclusive education.
4. **Evaluation and Assessment:** Evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive education practices and assessing students' progress can be complex in the context of quality assurance. Traditional assessment methods may not adequately capture the diverse range of abilities and learning outcomes of students with disabilities or special needs. Developing inclusive assessment strategies that consider individual strengths and accommodate different learning styles is crucial. Additionally, ensuring that evaluation processes are fair, unbiased, and inclusive is a challenge that needs to be addressed within quality assurance frameworks.

5. **Continuous Improvement:** Quality assurance in inclusive education should be a dynamic and ongoing process focused on continuous improvement. This requires regular monitoring, feedback mechanisms, and data analysis to identify areas of strength and areas that need improvement. Implementing a culture of continuous improvement can be challenging, as it requires a shift in mindset and a commitment to reflection and adaptation. It also necessitates the availability of relevant data and evidence to inform decision-making and drive improvements in inclusive education practices.

Conclusion

This chapter critically examines the role of quality assurance in inclusive education provision in Zambia. It starts by providing a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts used in quality assurance and inclusive education, laying the foundation for a deeper exploration of the topic. The chapter then highlights the importance of quality assurance in ensuring equitable and effective educational opportunities for all learners, particularly in the context of inclusive education. It explores the principles and standards that guide inclusive education, emphasizing the need for accessibility, individualized support, and social inclusion. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the key components of quality assurance in inclusive education, including the establishment of standards, the development of assessment methods, the implementation of monitoring and evaluation processes, and the active engagement of stakeholders. Lastly, the chapter critically examines the benefits and challenges associated with integrating quality assurance and inclusion, shedding light on the potential positive outcomes such as improved educational outcomes, enhanced teacher practices, and increased accountability, while also addressing the challenges such as resource constraints, cultural barriers, and the need for comprehensive stakeholder collaboration. By addressing these objectives, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the role of quality assurance in promoting inclusive education provision in Zambia, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in the field.

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