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Strategic positioning of quality assurance and standards officers in Kenya's transition from the 8-4-4 system to competency-based education

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Abstract

Kenya's transition from the 8-4-4 system to Competency-Based Education (CBE) represents a significant transformation in educational philosophy, curriculum delivery and assessment, shifting emphasis from content coverage and examinations to competencies, learner-centred pedagogy, values and practical application of knowledge. This transition has important implications for educational quality assurance, particularly the roles and performance of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs). This paper examines their strategic positioning and repositioning in Kenya's CBE implementation. Guided by Systems Theory and Role Theory, it adopts a qualitative documentary review approach, drawing on legislation, policy documents, curriculum frameworks, national education plans, empirical studies and international literature published between 2013 and 2026. The review establishes that QASOs play a critical role in monitoring institutional standards, curriculum implementation, assessment and educational quality. However, their effectiveness is constrained by inadequate resources, uneven distribution of officers, capacity gaps, heavy workloads and emerging demands associated with competency-based assessment. The paper proposes a QASO Strategic Repositioning Model encompassing five interconnected roles: curriculum-quality coach, assessment-quality specialist, institutional quality-assurance mentor, data-informed school-improvement partner and policy-feedback agent. Comparative insights further demonstrate the importance of school self-evaluation, continuous professional development, evidence-informed decision-making and balanced accountability in strengthening quality assurance. The paper concludes that successful CBE implementation requires a fundamental

transformation of educational quality assurance, repositioning QASOs from predominantly compliance-oriented inspectors to proactive professional partners who support schools, strengthen institutional capacity and bridge curriculum policy with classroom practice. This transformation is essential for improving educational standards, accountability and the overall effectiveness of competency-based education in Kenya.

Key terms: Competency-Based Education; Competency-Based Curriculum; Quality Assurance and Standards Officers; curriculum implementation; educational quality assurance; Kenya; 8-4-4

1.0 Introduction

The Kenyan education system is currently going through a very important curriculum change after the country gained its independence. While moving from the 8-4-4 curriculum structure to competency-based education (CBE), the change involves more than just changes in curriculum documents or school structures; rather, it is about changing the whole concept of learning. While the focus was on acquisition and reproduction of predetermined knowledge, it is now about development and demonstration of competencies, values, attitudes, practical skills, and ability to use the knowledge in real situations. According to the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF), key competencies include communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, self-efficacy, and learning to learn (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2019).

As a result, this change brings another definition of the notion of educational quality. While in the traditional examination-dominated environment, quality is assessed based on such factors as coverage of the curriculum, compliance with rules, success of students at examinations, and existence of administration records, in the case of CBE, quality should be proved through the type of interaction in the classroom, engagement of learners, assessment that is authentic, differentiated, inclusive, and focuses on practical application, creativity, collaboration, and development of competencies. Therefore, mechanisms for ensuring quality and professionals themselves are supposed to adapt to the new curriculum.

It is important to note that the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers are especially significant in this context. Responsibilities of QASOs related to the issues of standards, implementation of the curriculum, assessment, quality of institutions, and monitoring are defined in the Basic Education Act, 2013. Moreover, Section 66 states that the officers are responsible for facilitation of compliance through collegial and collective work and have rights to enter institutions, inspect records, obtain information, and provide recommendations (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

The NESSP 2023-2027 further underscores this position through the provision of training of quality-assurance officers, the hiring of additional officers, review of NEQASF, and institutional-based quality assurance. The strategic plan seeks to skill 2,500 quality-assurance officers and hire 1,250 additional officers in the period covered by the plan (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2023). These provisions clearly reveal that the Government understands quality assurance to be a key element in transforming the education system.

Despite the strategic importance of quality assurance in the implementation of the new curriculum, the academic literature on CBC in Kenya has focused mostly on issues of teachers, school leadership, resources, parent involvement, and implementation challenges. Compared to the above factors, relatively little has been done in relation to positioning QASOs to effectively address the new curriculum. The lack of emphasis on repositioning QASOs in the new environment is quite interesting considering the fact that

QASOs are among the few professionals who observe multiple institutions, interpret national standards, assess implementation evidence, and report findings vertically and horizontally in the education system.

Therefore, it is proposed that, in addition to the move from 8-4-4 to CBC, there should be a change from compliance-based inspections to developmental, evidence-based, and curriculum-based quality assurance. The repositioning of QASOs is proposed as a strategic approach. Furthermore, the lessons Kenya can learn from quality assurance systems in England, Finland, Singapore, South Africa, and Rwanda are identified.

1.2. Problem Statement and Research Gap

The implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya has attracted considerable academic attention, with studies examining teacher preparedness, instructional supervision, educational leadership, communication, resource management, parental involvement, and learner competencies. Collectively, this research indicates that effective CBE implementation depends on teacher capacity, adequate learning resources, supportive leadership, effective supervision, and institutional readiness. However, these factors have rarely been examined in relation to the strategic role and operational effectiveness of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs), who are mandated to monitor educational standards, evaluate curriculum implementation, and promote institutional improvement.

The challenge is compounded by practical constraints that affect the capacity of QASOs to discharge their responsibilities effectively. High officer-to-school ratios, inadequate operational funding, limited access to reliable transport and vehicles, and insufficient logistical support can restrict the frequency, geographical coverage, and depth of quality-assurance visits. Where officers are responsible for monitoring numerous institutions across geographically dispersed areas, competing demands may force them to prioritize urgent administrative and compliance-related assignments over sustained classroom observation, professional guidance, and follow-up of institutional improvement plans. These constraints are particularly consequential under CBE, which requires continuous attention to learner-centred pedagogy, formative assessment, competency development, inclusion, and the availability and utilization of learning resources. In addition, strained or poorly coordinated working relationships between QASOs and their supervisory structures may complicate work planning, communication, professional autonomy, resource allocation, and the timely implementation of recommendations. Such workplace difficulties warrant systematic investigation rather than being assumed to affect all officers or administrative contexts uniformly. Consequently, the effectiveness of quality assurance cannot be understood solely through the statutory mandate of QASOs; it must also be examined in relation to the practical conditions under which they perform their duties.

A further gap is conceptual. The Kenyan quality-assurance discourse has tended to treat inspection and educational improvement as distinct, albeit related, functions. Yet the Basic Education Act, 2013, and the National Education Quality Assurance and Standards Framework (NEQASF) provide a basis for combining standards enforcement with collegial engagement and institutional improvement. Similarly, institutional-based quality assurance creates opportunities for schools to identify their own performance gaps and implement improvement measures with appropriate external guidance. However, an integrated framework explaining how QASOs can connect external evaluation, school self-evaluation, curriculum implementation support, assessment quality, data analytics, professional development, and policy feedback remains insufficiently developed. This conceptual limitation is particularly important where officers face operational constraints that may encourage a predominantly inspection-oriented approach at the expense of sustained developmental support.

The gap is also comparative. International quality-assurance systems demonstrate different balances between external inspection, institutional self-evaluation, professional assistance, and accountability.

England maintains a prominent external inspection function, while Finland places considerable emphasis on self-evaluation and external evaluation without a conventional system of routine school inspection. South Africa combines whole-school evaluation, school self-evaluation, and performance-management arrangements; Rwanda integrates inspection with mentoring, coaching, standards, and data systems; and Singapore has developed school self-evaluation and quality-management approaches. These experiences offer useful principles for Kenya, but their applicability depends on differences in institutional capacity, governance, resources, professional roles, and accountability arrangements. The challenge is therefore not simply to borrow international practices, but to identify approaches that are feasible within Kenya's statutory, administrative, and operational context.

The central research problem is consequently the absence of an integrated, context-sensitive framework for strategically repositioning QASOs to support CBE implementation while addressing the practical constraints that limit their effectiveness. Existing scholarship provides useful insights into curriculum implementation and educational quality, but insufficiently integrates the statutory responsibilities of QASOs, the operational realities of their work, the competencies required under CBE, and lessons from international quality-assurance systems. This leaves an important policy and practice question unresolved: how can QASOs move beyond predominantly compliance-oriented inspection towards a balanced approach that combines standards verification, professional support, evidence-informed institutional improvement, and policy feedback, despite high workloads, resource limitations, and possible supervisory or coordination difficulties? In response, this paper synthesizes Kenyan legislation, policy documents, empirical literature, and selected international approaches to propose a QASO Strategic Repositioning Model linking curriculum policy, institutional practice, quality-assurance processes, and learner outcomes. As a documentary and conceptual study, it seeks to provide a framework for policy development and professional practice that can subsequently be tested and refined through empirical investigation.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This research paper examines the strategic position of QASOs in Kenya's transition from the 8-4-4 system to CBE and proposes a professional and institutional model to reposition their functions to strengthen curriculum implementation and educational quality.

1.4. Research Questions

What is the current statutory, policy and professional position of QASOs within Kenya's CBE implementation architecture?

What challenges constrain QASOs in supporting effective implementation of CBE?

What strategic roles and competencies should QASOs develop in response to CBE?

What lessons can Kenya draw from selected international quality-assurance systems?

How can a strategic QASO repositioning model strengthen the relationship between curriculum policy, institutional practice and learner outcomes?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Systems Theory

The study is grounded primarily in General Systems Theory. Bertalanffy (1968) conceived of systems as interconnected components whose behaviour and outcomes hinge on the relationships among the parts. When applied to education, curriculum policy, teacher preparation, pedagogy, assessment, school

leadership, resources, learners and quality assurance constitute an interdependent system. Consequently, a reform in one component generates requirements for adaptation in the others. Systems Theory is especially fitting for CBE, given that the reform cannot be achieved through curriculum revision alone. Should curriculum objectives stress competencies while teacher preparation, assessment, learning resources and supervision continue to focus on the reproduction of content, structural misalignment arises. QASOs are able to function as a feedback subsystem by gathering evidence from institutions, interpreting patterns and conveying findings to schools, county structures and national policy actors. Their role is thus not simply regulatory; it is systemic, since they furnish feedback that allows the education system to detect implementation gaps and adapt.

2.2 Role Theory

Role Theory constitutes the second theoretical foundation. According to Biddle (1986), social roles are defined by the patterned expectations that are attached to positions within social systems. A professional role may shift when organizational expectations, tasks, authority, resources and stakeholder relationships undergo change. This has direct relevance for QASOs, since the conventional conception of the officer as an inspector who visits institutions, checks standards and writes reports does not adequately encompass the competencies demanded in a CBE environment. Within CBE, QASOs are required to interpret curriculum standards, comprehend competency-based assessment, analyze institutional evidence, facilitate professional dialogue and contribute to school improvement. Role Theory thus clarifies why repositioning cannot be accomplished merely by appending new duties to existing job descriptions. It necessitates a parallel transformation in professional identity, competencies, performance measures, training and organizational expectations.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proposes that strategic repositioning of QASOs is the principal explanatory construct influencing the quality of CBE implementation. The framework contains three broad elements: strategic repositioning, intervening conditions, and CBE implementation outcomes.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework for strategic repositioning of QASOs in CBE implementation.

The model assumes that QASO repositioning affects implementation through professional support, evidence use, quality feedback and institutional improvement. However, the relationship is moderated by staffing, funding, professional development, digital infrastructure, leadership and inter-agency coordination. The model also incorporates a feedback loop: evidence generated through quality assurance should inform subsequent curriculum implementation, professional learning and policy refinement.

2.4 Literature Review

2.4.1 Conceptualizing Competency-Based Education

Competency-Based Education focuses on shifting the educational paradigm towards the mastery of specific competencies. Gervais (2016) defines CBE by the clearly defined outcomes, appropriate learning experiences and an assessment of mastery demonstrated. Competency goes beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge; it focuses on how it can be applied practically in a specific context.

Kenya’s BECF has seven competency areas, learner-centred instruction, values education, talent development, formative assessment, and pathways that are aimed at addressing the different interests and abilities of students (KICD, 2019). The implication on quality assurance is that an institution might be

compliant with administrative requirements while still failing to provide sufficient opportunities for learners to build competencies. Quality assurance should be concerned with assessing the processes and evidence of learning in order to go beyond documentation.

2.4.2 QASOs and Curriculum Implementation in Kenya

The Basic Education Act provides the legal foundation for quality assurance. The QASO mandate includes facilitating compliance with standards, conducting quality reviews, examining records and obtaining information relating to teaching and management. The statutory requirement for a collegial and collective approach is especially relevant to CBE because curriculum implementation requires collaboration among teachers, school leaders, parents, learners, curriculum agencies, assessment agencies and quality-assurance structures (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The Ministry of Education has progressively strengthened this architecture through NEQASF, institutional-based quality assurance and digitization of quality-assurance processes. The current Ministry quality-assurance portal identifies the Handbook for Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, IBQA documentation and NEQASF as key instruments, while the 2023–2027 strategic plan provides for review of NEQASF, officer skills development, recruitment and training of educators in institutional-based quality assurance (MoE, 2023).

2.4.3 Empirical Kenyan Evidence

Kenyan empirical research consistently reveals implementation pressures. Mwangi (2025) surveyed 100 primary-school teachers who found that 60% had received CBC-specific training and that trained teachers were substantially more prepared to implement it. Inadequate instructional resources and workload were identified as major barriers.

Okeyo et al. (2024) examined instructional training and supervisory challenges among public primary schools in Kisii Central Sub-County. The study identified supervisor competence and training effectiveness as significant challenges and recommended continuous training, including ICT capacity. This finding is relevant to QASOs since it shows that supervision itself requires professional adaptation under CBE.

Maithya and Gikandi (2026) found that institutional communication practices were associated with CBC implementation in Matungulu Sub-County, while persistent problems included delayed curriculum coverage and low learner competencies in some areas. The study included Curriculum Support Officers, so it illustrates the importance of communication and professional support in implementation.

Twarary (2026) found resource-management challenges in Loitoktok Sub-County, with teachers reporting difficulty completing the syllabus and weak learner outcomes in some basic competencies. The study emphasised the importance of school leadership in mobilising resources.

Musuu and Njuguna (2026) examined school-parent collaboration in monitoring homework in public junior secondary schools in Yatta. Their findings suggest that implementation difficulties persist despite collaboration mechanisms, so there is a need for support at a system level rather than just at the school level.

Emmy and Thinguri (2026) similarly found that school-parent empowerment strategies were relevant to CBC implementation in Nyamache Sub-County but that schools did not consistently train parents in CBC expectations. This creates an opportunity for quality-assurance professionals to assist with whole-school and community understanding of curriculum reform.

Muengele et al. (2025), studying junior secondary teachers in Trans-Nzoia County, examined how teachers promote learner self-reliance through CBC. The study highlights the importance of pedagogies to develop learner independence, so there is a need for quality assurance to observe the nature of

learning rather than just curriculum coverage.

Recha et al. (2025) examined the contribution of competency-based agriculture curriculum to innovative agripreneurship among junior secondary learners. The study illustrates the wider intention of CBE to connect schooling with practical and productive competencies.

Sululu et al. (2023) provide particularly direct evidence concerning QASOs. Their study in Kwanza Sub-County found that QASOs contributed to staff development, educational materials, programme development, curriculum advice and feedback. The authors concluded that QASOs played a significant role in curriculum implementation but recommended increased resources, more frequent monitoring and stronger follow-up mechanisms.

Collectively, these studies show that CBC implementation is influenced by teacher preparation, supervision, resources, communication, parental engagement and practical learning. However, only a small proportion of the literature directly examines QASOs. This supports the research gap addressed by the present paper: the need to conceptualize QASOs as a strategic system-level bridge across these implementation dimensions.

Table 1. Synthesis of Selected Kenyan Empirical Studies

Study	Context / Design	Main issue	Key finding	Implication for QASOs
Sululu, Ochieng' & Kirwok (2023)	Kwanza; descriptive survey	QASO contribution	QASOs support staff development, materials, programmes, curriculum advice and feedback.	Strengthen developmental support and follow-up.
Okeyo, Areba & Obuba (2024)	Kisii Central; descriptive survey	Supervision and training	Supervisor competence and training effectiveness are challenges.	Build supervisory, ICT and coaching competencies.
Mwangi (2025)	100 primary teachers; survey	Teacher preparedness	60% reported CBC-specific training; training was associated with higher readiness.	Use QA evidence to target professional development.
Muengele, Nasongo & Injendi (2025)	Trans-Nzoia JSS; phenomenology	Learner self-reliance	CBC pedagogy can support learner independence and self-reliance.	Observe learner agency and authentic pedagogy.
Recha, Ndambuki & Kyule (2025)	Kenyan JSS; curriculum study	Agriculture/agripreneurship	Competency-based agriculture has potential to strengthen practical and entrepreneurial learning.	Evaluate practical application and pathway relevance.

Maithya & Gikandi (2026)	Matungulu; mixed methods	Communication	Institutional communication supports implementation, but coverage and competency gaps persist.	Strengthen feedback and school communication systems.
Twarary (2026)	Loitoktok; mixed methods	Resource management	Resource mobilisation and management remain important implementation constraints.	Integrate resource adequacy into quality reviews.
Musuu & Njuguna (2026)	Yatta JSS; mixed methods	Parent-school collaboration	Collaboration supports homework monitoring, but implementation challenges persist.	Use whole-school and community quality lenses.
Emmy & Thinguri (2026)	Nyamache; mixed methods	Parent empowerment	Parent empowerment is relevant, but schools inconsistently prepare parents for CBC.	Include stakeholder understanding in quality assurance.

2.3. Global Benchmarks in Educational Quality Assurance

International systems demonstrate that quality assurance can combine external accountability, internal evaluation, professional support and evidence use in different configurations. The purpose of comparison here is not to rank systems but to identify transferable principles relevant to Kenya.

2.4.4 England: External Inspection and Improvement Evidence

England's Ofsted model provides an interesting insight into the country's strong history of external inspections. The current Education Inspection Framework covers early years, schools and further education and outlines inspection principles, evaluation criteria and evidence gathering processes. Inspections are set to move away from a single overall effectiveness grade in the framework and instead place a greater focus on strengths and priorities for improvement from November 2025. Inspections are intended to provide assurance to government and the public while generating information for improvement (Ofsted, 2026).

The lesson for Kenya is not to replicate the English inspection regime but to improve the evidential and improvement aspects of external evaluations. QASOs can in turn identify institutional strengths, priorities for improvement and evidence that can inform targeted support.

2.4.5 Finland: Trust, Self-Evaluation and External Evaluation

Finland presents a different model of education. The Finnish National Agency for Education observes that there is no conventional school inspection system in Finland, education providers take responsibility for their own quality-management arrangements informed by national steering and external evaluation, and

the system emphasizes information, support and funding rather than continuous inspection. (Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI], 2026).

Finland model is particularly relevant to Kenya's institutional based quality-assurance agenda. The lesson is that external quality assurance can become more strategic when institutions develop strong internal evaluation capacity. So QASOs could therefore devote more effort to validating school self-evaluation and supporting improvement systems.

2.4.6 Singapore: Whole-School Quality Management

Singapore has developed school-quality management practices, such as the School Excellence Model, which were based on quality-management principles and encouraged schools to evaluate themselves according to specific criteria. This model is based on the notion that school quality should be managed systematically rather than inspected periodically. The principle that can be transferred to Kenya is institutional ownership of quality, with proof and systematic self-assessment.

2.4.7 South Africa: Whole-School Evaluation and Improvement Planning

South Africa integrates whole school evaluation alongside school self-evaluation and school improvement planning. The Department of Basic Education requires schools to adopt school self-evaluation practices and develop annually updated School Improvement Plans to address areas of concern. Its quality-assurance framework also includes performance-management processes for teachers (Department of Basic Education, 2026).

The lesson for Kenya is the need to embed evaluation in improvement planning. QASOs can enhance their effectiveness by ensuring that inspection findings are incorporated into institutional improvement plans which identify specific responsibilities, deadlines and evidence of follow-up.

2.4.8 Rwanda: Inspection, Mentoring, Coaching and Data

Rwanda is an appropriate regional benchmark because their National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA) integrates school inspection, standards, assessment, and accreditation. Their Basic Education and TVET Quality Assurance Department deals with inspection reports, mentoring, and coaching, quality-assurance data management, and builds inspector capacity. Their current strategic plan targets competencies, professional development, and continuous improvement in inspection and accreditation. Their Inspection and Accreditation Division has developed a digital solution called Ireme to support accreditation, inspection, self-assessment, and quality-audit functions.

The country's experience with integrated education inspections is an important lesson for Kenya. It shows that inspection and coaching functions do not need to be separated as long as the former supports the latter through appropriately designed procedures and reliable data.

Table 2. Comparative Lessons for Kenya

System	Dominant feature	Potential lesson for Kenya	Caution
England	External inspection and public assurance	Strengthen evidence-based external evaluation and clear improvement priorities.	Avoid reducing quality to inspection grades.
Finland	Provider responsibility and external evaluation	Strengthen school self-evaluation and trust-based improvement.	Kenya's accountability and resource context differs.

Singapore	Whole-school quality management	Build institutional ownership of quality and systematic self-assessment.	Requires mature school leadership and data systems.
South Africa	Whole-school evaluation + improvement planning	Link quality findings directly to school improvement plans.	Avoid excessive paperwork and compliance.
Rwanda	Inspection + mentoring/coaching + data	Integrate assurance, coaching and digital evidence systems.	Adapt rather than copy institutional structures.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research was designed using a qualitative documentary analytical method to identify the strategic re-positioning of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) in Kenya in transitioning from an 8-4-4 education system to Competency Based Education (CBE). This was due to the research questions being focused on statutory and policy roles of QASOs, challenges faced, necessary skills for QASOs in competency based education, how quality assurance systems in different countries have been successful and the creation of a strategic re-positioning model. The research involved using documentary analysis by examining and interpreting legislation, policy documents, literature and international reports to answer the research questions.

Qualitative content analysis was used throughout the research to analyze the chosen documents. By looking at the context of the documentation, its purpose and the underlying assumptions, the research was able to look at the differences between what is expected from QASOs from policy and legislation, the challenges faced as shown in empirical studies and how some international education systems are successfully implementing the practices. A documentary research was carried out which involved content analysis and therefore there was no survey, interview, observation of classrooms or new data collected from participants.

3.2 Sources of documents and search strategy

A variety of sources were identified by conducting searches across academic databases, peer-reviewed journals, academic repositories, government websites and relevant publications within the education sector. Documents were identified relating to Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, Educational Inspection, Quality Assurance, Competency-Based Education, Curriculum Supervision, School Improvement, Assessment and the global perspective of Educational Evaluation.

Keywords used included Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, Quality Assurance in the education system in Kenya, Competency Based Education, Competency Based Curriculum, Curriculum Implementation, Educational Inspection, Quality Assurance, School Self Evaluation, Educational Supervision, Quality Assurance Competences and Educational Inspection Globally. Equivalent keywords were used for the countries chosen globally including Educational Evaluation, External Inspection, Whole School Evaluation and Quality Management.

The search process involved three stages. Firstly, general searches were performed to identify any potentially relevant documents. Secondly, documents were selected based on their titles and abstracts/executive summaries/introduction to ensure they were relevant to the research questions. Finally, potential documents were explored in more detail to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. A

documentary evidence matrix was then created for the selected documents.

The searches focused on authoritative sources such as legislation within the education sector in Kenya, policy documents from the Ministry of Education, curriculum documents and relevant statutory/curriculum bodies. Empirical peer reviewed articles were used to provide evidence of curriculum implementation, teaching supervision, leadership and quality assurance. International policy documents and official publications were used to help provide context when comparing the selected quality assurance systems.

3.3 Document selection criteria

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted which focused on selecting documents which would provide reliable evidence to answer one or more of the research questions. This ensured that the sample would include the legislation and policy associated with QASOs, as well as providing evidence to inform the development of the repositioning model.

The inclusion criteria was:

1. Content: The document directly relates to one or more of the key themes within the study (QASOs, CBE, inspections, quality assurance, professional standards, school improvement or international quality assurance).
2. Credibility: Legal and policy documents are sourced from recognized governmental bodies, statutory bodies, curriculum bodies or international educational bodies. Empirical documents were prioritized if they had been published in peer reviewed journals or from a reputable body.
3. Country: Preference was given to sources from Kenya to understand the legal and policy framework within the country. International sources were also chosen to provide insight into external evaluation, self-evaluation, professional support, accountability, data and continuous improvement.
4. Evidence: The document contains specific information, data, policy, argument or examples which can be analyzed in relation to the research questions.
5. Availability: The document could be accessed in sufficient detail.
6. Recentness: Preference was given to recent sources to understand the current transition of CBE and quality assurance policy. Older legislation, policy and influential academic work was also included to provide an understanding of how the QASOs mandate has developed and the theories behind quality assurance in education.

Documents were excluded if they did not relate to the research questions, did not add any new substantial evidence to the existing documents, did not contain enough information or contained claims which could not be evaluated due to lack of clarity regarding where they came from. Some non-peer reviewed documents were also excluded. However, official legislation and policy was kept as it was directly relevant to the study.

3.4 Qualitative context analysis framework

The qualitative content analysis was undertaken using a deductive and inductive coding approach. The deductive coding was informed by the research questions and inductive allowed for new themes to be identified from the documentary evidence. There were 5 stages to the content analysis:

Stage 1: The documents were all read to get an overview of what they were about. Information such as who wrote/published the document, when it was published, who it was for, where it was set, and what it related to in terms of the research was noted. The legislation was analyzed to see what statutory

requirements there were and who had responsibility. The policy documents were analyzed to see what priorities the institution had, what they were committed to delivering and what actions they were going to take. The studies were analyzed to see what the context of the research was, how they researched, what they found and any limitations.

Stage 2: Relevant sections of the text were identified and coded. These included statutory requirements, curriculum monitoring, inspection and compliance, lack of resources, professional development, assessment literacy, self-evaluation, data driven decisions and international examples. The texts were coded to ensure that meaningful sections were highlighted rather than individual words. This meant that the statements could be understood in relation to the purpose and context of the documents.

Stage 3: The codes were organized into 5 main themes relating to the research questions. An additional theme relating to implications for the strategic repositioning model was included.

Stage 4: The evidence was compared between different sources and if relevant between countries internationally. This allowed for similarities, differences, gaps and conflicts to be identified. For example policy requirements were compared with the challenges faced in empirical studies. International examples were analyzed to see how they may be relevant to Kenya in terms of statutory requirements, institutional capability and what is needed for CBE. The international examples were viewed as providing transferable principles.

Stage 5: The themes were brought together to create overarching themes to explain why QASOs are currently in this position, what is limiting their effectiveness, what skills are required for CBE, learning from international systems and what should be included in the strategic repositioning model. The themes were also analyzed to understand how they relate to curriculum policy, institutional practice, accountability and professional support and learner outcomes.

Table 3 Qualitative Context Analysis Framework

Analytical domain	Indicative coding categories	Main analytical purpose
1. Statutory, policy and professional position	Legal mandate, assigned functions, institutional relationships, policy priorities, professional role	Establish the formal position of QASOs within Kenya's CBE implementation architecture
2. Implementation challenges	Staffing, funding, transport, workload, specialist skills, institutional readiness, data limitations	Identify constraints affecting QASOs' capacity to support CBE
3. Strategic roles and competencies	Curriculum support, assessment literacy, coaching, inclusion, digital competence, data analytics, policy feedback	Determine the capabilities and professional roles required for CBE-responsive quality assurance
4. International lessons	External inspection, school self-evaluation, developmental support, accountability, risk-based deployment, continuous improvement	Identify contextually relevant principles from selected international systems

5. Strategic repositioning model	Coordination, professional development, digital systems, follow-up, institutional improvement, learner outcomes	Integrate documentary findings into a coherent model connecting policy, institutional practice and outcomes

3.5 Trustworthiness and analytical rigour

In order to increase rigor, several factors have been included in the analysis. Firstly, triangulation was done by using different sources of data such as legislation, government policies, curriculum frameworks, peer reviewed studies and international reports. This allowed the author to separate the data into sections of what is required according to legislation, what was found through research and recommendations.

Secondly, the author used interpretation of the data to ensure that findings were not taken out of context. The legislative findings have been interpreted within their legal context and the findings were also viewed within the context of the population and setting they were researched within.

Finally, an audit trail was used to provide a record of sources. For each source I have listed the title, author/institution, date, type, research question it answered and why the author included it. A coding matrix was included to show how the author linked them to his initial codes and final themes. This provided transparency and allows the reader to see how the evidence from the documents led the author his conclusions.

Critical comparison was used to compare conflicting findings and different contexts within the institutions. When comparing the international findings the author considered differences in governance, professional capability, accountability and education systems which may impact on the generalizability of the findings. The proposed repositioning model has been created as a synthesis of the evidence from the documents. This needs to be practically tested by piloting and research to see if it will work.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This study used a variety of documentation sources including legislation, policy documents and published research. There were no human participants involved in this study and therefore ethical considerations focused on ensuring that sources were accurately represented, correctly referenced and that there was no misrepresentation. The study also ensured that it clearly identified whether the information provided was based on documented findings or my own interpretation.

4.0 The QASO Strategic Repositioning Model for CBE

Based on the literature and comparative evidence, this research paper proposed five mutually reinforcing strategic roles for QASOs. The model was intended as a professional repositioning framework rather than a replacement for the statutory mandate.

4.1 QASO as Curriculum-Quality Coach

The QASO should support teachers and school leaders to transform intentions in the curriculum into classroom practice. This might involve observing pedagogy, facilitating professional dialogue, identifying misconceptions about CBE and directing institutions towards appropriate professional-learning opportunities. Coaching should not replace the responsibilities of TSC, KICD or school leaders; rather it should provide quality-assurance feedback about the relationship between intended and enacted curriculum.

4.2 QASO as Assessment-Quality Specialist

CBE requires assessment of what learners can demonstrate. QASOs should therefore develop expertise in formative assessment, performance tasks, portfolios, rubrics, feedback and evidence of progression. Their role should complement, not duplicate, the mandate of the Kenya National Examinations Council. The focus should be on the quality of school-level assessment practices and their use in improving learning.

The risk-based deployment of QASOs should not be viewed as leading to a lack of quality assurance for high performing schools. While these schools may not need as much intervention as schools which have ongoing quality issues, they will still need to be checked periodically. A light touch validation process should also be applied to ensure they are maintaining, and improving upon, quality within the school. Schools with low risk factors should be monitored for areas of risk, such as learners' achievement levels dropping, CBE not being properly implemented, learners becoming less involved, staff not having proper CPD opportunities, governance becoming weaker and schools becoming complacent. QASOs should look at the school evaluation report alongside classroom observations, learner achievement, feedback and documentary evidence. If there are any early warning indicators then the amount of quality assurance should increase. This ensures that quality assurance can be used as a tool for development and accountability. High performing schools would be encouraged to develop new initiatives, critically evaluate, and improve continuously. This means that risk based deployment does not mean that schools are not accountable, but the level of accountability will change for each school.

4.3 QASO as Policy-Feedback Agent

Because QASOs interact with multiple schools and administrative levels, they occupy a strategic position for identifying policy implementation gaps. A structured feedback mechanism should aggregate recurring findings and communicate them to county and national decision-makers. This would make quality assurance an important source of policy learning rather than simply a mechanism for enforcement.

4.4 Professional Competencies Required for the Repositioned QASO

Strategic repositioning requires a corresponding competency framework. The contemporary QASO should demonstrate at least eight areas of competency: (1) curriculum interpretation; (2) competency-based pedagogy; (3) assessment literacy; (4) school leadership and governance; (5) data analytics and digital reporting; (6) coaching and facilitation; (7) research and evidence synthesis; and (8) ethics, communication and conflict-sensitive professional practice.

These competencies suggest a transition from short-term sensitization towards structured professional development. NESSP 2023–2027 provision for skills development of officers provides the appropriate policy platform for such a framework. Professional development could be organized through modular certification, peer learning, communities of practice, case-based learning and periodic competency assessment.

4.5 Proposed Operational Architecture

A repositioned quality-assurance system should operate through a continuous improvement cycle which could be captured as: prepare → diagnose → support → verify → learn → improve as illustrated in the diagram below.

The model also facilitates risk-based deployment. Institutions with persistent quality concerns could receive more frequent and intensive visits, while institutions with mature internal quality systems could

receive light-touch external validation. This approach would enable QASOs to utilize the limited human and financial resources more strategically.

The approach should also protect the regulatory function of quality assurance. Developmental quality assurance should not be seen as the removal of standards or accountability. Instead, the two functions should be sequenced appropriately: support where improvement is possible and proportionate enforcement where serious or persistent non-compliance threatens learner welfare or quality of education.

Flowchart schematic for the 6-stage operational cycle

4.6 Implications for Policy

First, the Ministry of Education should enunciate the changing role of Quality Assurance School Officers within the CBE quality-assurance system. The role should explicitly include developmental support, data use, school self-evaluation and curriculum-quality feedback alongside regulatory functions.

Second, NEQASF should continue to evolve from being an inspection instrument to a comprehensive quality-improvement framework, with indicators capturing learner engagement, competency development, formative assessment, inclusion, digital learning, leadership, institutional self-evaluation and evidence of improvement.

Third, institutional-based quality assurance should become an integral element of the national quality architecture, with every institution having an internal quality mechanism whose evidence can be subjected to external verification, enabling QASOs to focus on system assurance and capacity building as opposed to trying to perform all internal functions themselves.

Fourth, the Ministry should strengthen the digital quality-assurance ecosystem, with a coherent platform linking inspection findings, institutional self-evaluation, assessment evidence and improvement plans, enabling county and national officers to target systemic patterns and interventions.

Fifth, staffing and deployment must align with the scope of the mandate, with the NESSP's planned recruitment and skills development being treated not only as a numbers game but as a professional-capacity investment.

4.7 Implications for Practice

For QASOs, the findings imply a change in professional practice from checklist completion to evidence-rich professional dialogue. A high-quality visit should yield actionable feedback: what is working, what requires improvement, what evidence supports the judgement, what action is recommended, who should act, when follow-up should occur and what evidence will demonstrate improvement.

For school leaders, QASO engagement should be seen as part of a continuous improvement process, and schools should maintain evidence portfolios, conduct self-evaluations and use QASO feedback to strengthen school improvement plans.

For teacher professional development, QASO findings should feed into county and national training priorities. Recurring quality-assurance findings can pinpoint professional-learning needs more precisely than generic training programmes.

For education agencies, stronger collaboration is needed. KICD, KNEC, TSC, MoE quality-assurance structures and other agencies should clarify how evidence generated through quality assurance is translated into curriculum support, teacher development and assessment improvement.

4.8 Implications for Future Research

The present paper is conceptual and documentary, and future research should empirically verify the proposed QASO Strategic Repositioning Model. First, mixed-method studies should investigate QASO competencies, workload, deployment and professional development needs across counties. Second, longitudinal studies could explore whether developmental quality-assurance interventions result in measurable improvements in curriculum implementation and learner competencies. Third, comparative Kenyan studies could ascertain counties with differing staffing, resource and institutional-quality contexts. Fourth, research should explore how schools perceive the transition from inspection to developmental quality assurance. Finally, studies should investigate the validity and reliability of NEQASF indicators for assessing competency-based pedagogy and learner outcomes.

4.9 Limitations

The research paper was based on documentary evidence and published empirical studies rather than primary field data, and so the proposed model should be considered as a theoretical and policy-driven framework requiring further empirical evaluation. International comparisons are also necessarily selective and used to identify principles rather than draw direct comparisons between education systems.

A second limitation was that Kenya's CBE implementation is likely to change over time, and so the policy, assessment arrangements, institutional structures and professional responsibilities should be periodically reviewed as implementation proceeds and empirical evidence accumulates.

5.0 Conclusion

Kenya's shift from the 8-4-4 system to competency-based education (CBC) requires a reciprocal rethinking of education quality-assurance governance. As the evidence presented in this research paper shows, CBC implementation grapples with teachers' readiness, supervision, resources, communication, parents' involvement, leadership, and practicality which are all pertinent variables of concern to education quality-assurance agencies. It is safe to assume that Kenya's Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) have the potential to intervene in all these areas as their mandate covers all aspects of curriculum implementation, standards, assessments, monitoring, and evaluation in education.

However, their capacity to intervene is limited by their understanding of their role only in terms of inspecting and reporting on compliance with established norms. The proposed QASO strategic repositioning model acknowledges the five key areas in which QASOs need to intervene to add value in the new education ecosystem and sets out ideas for enhancing their practice in the future. It builds on their accountability while also advancing their developmental role in education quality assurance.

The main takeaway from this research is that curriculum reforms and quality-assurance policies need to be viewed as two sides of the same coin. If Kenya wants to make its schools into competency-based learning institutions, it must rethink the very philosophy that underpins the training, practice, and remuneration of its education quality-assurance personnel. By strategically repositioning QASOs to emphasize curriculum-quality coaching, assessment-quality support, institutional quality-assurance mentoring, data use for school improvement, feedback to education policymakers, and continuous development of education quality-assurance leadership, Kenya can be at the forefront of innovative and sustainable education reforms in the region.

6.0. Recommendations

The Ministry of Education (MoE) should develop and adopt a national Quality Assurance and Standards

Officer (QASO) competency framework aligned with Competency-Based Education (CBE). The framework should specify the competencies required in curriculum implementation, assessment literacy, instructional coaching, data analytics, institutional quality assurance, and evidence-informed policy feedback.

The MoE should review the National Education Quality Assurance and Standards Framework (NEQASF) to strengthen the assessment of learner-centred pedagogy, authentic competency development, formative assessment, inclusion, digital learning, and demonstrable institutional improvement. The revised framework should provide clear indicators and evidence requirements for evaluating the implementation of CBE.

Schools should be supported to conduct regular self-evaluations and develop evidence-based school improvement plans. QASOs should validate these processes externally, provide professional support, and conduct follow-up assessments to establish whether agreed improvement measures have been implemented and achieved the intended outcomes.

Strengthen continuous professional development for QASOs. The MoE should establish structured continuing professional development (CPD) programmes and specialist certification modules for QASOs. Priority areas should include CBE pedagogy, assessment literacy, data analytics, information and communication technology (ICT), educational leadership, special needs education (SNE), Senior School pathways, and risk-based quality assurance.

The MoE should establish or enhance integrated digital quality-assurance information systems to consolidate institutional data, monitor quality indicators, track emerging risks, and support evidence-based decision-making. Such systems should enable QASOs to prioritize institutions according to identified needs while ensuring that risk assessments are transparent, proportionate, and periodically reviewed.

Mechanisms should be established to ensure that QASO findings inform teacher professional development, curriculum implementation support, assessment practices, and institutional improvement planning. This linkage would help transform quality-assurance reports from compliance records into practical instruments for addressing identified weaknesses and improving

The MoE should progressively strengthen QASO staffing, professional capacity, transport, digital infrastructure, and operational funding in line with the quality-assurance priorities of the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2023–2027. Resource allocation should consider institutional risk profiles, geographical coverage, workload, and the demands associated with CBE implementation.

The MoE should develop a standardized framework for tracking the implementation of QASOs recommendations and assessing evidence of improvement. The framework should specify implementation timelines, responsible officers, measurable indicators, verification procedures, and escalation mechanisms for serious or persistent non-compliance. This would strengthen accountability while distinguishing completed administrative actions from demonstrable improvements in educational quality.

The MoE should institutionalize coordination mechanisms involving the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), Teachers Service Commission (TSC), QASOs, and other relevant education-sector stakeholders. These mechanisms should support timely information sharing, coordinated technical assistance, consistent interpretation of standards, and joint responses to challenges affecting curriculum implementation and learner achievement.

Before nationwide adoption, the proposed strategic repositioning model should be piloted in a representative sample of educational institutions. The evaluation should examine its feasibility,

implementation costs, effects on institutional improvement, contribution to CBE implementation, stakeholder experiences, and implications for learner outcomes. Findings should inform revisions to the model and guide decisions regarding its subsequent expansion.

7.0 Recommendations for further research

Effectiveness of risk-based quality assurance and standards assessment: Further research should examine the effectiveness of risk-based deployment of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers in identifying institutional weaknesses, improving learning outcomes and optimizing the use of inspection resources. Particular attention should be given to how risk-based approaches can maintain appropriate oversight of high-performing schools to prevent institutional complacency while ensuring that struggling schools receive more intensive support.

QASOs competencies and professional development requirements: Further research should identify the emerging professional competencies required by QASOs to effectively evaluate CBE implementation, including competency-based assessment, learner-centred pedagogy, digital learning, inclusive education, data analysis and instructional supervision. Such research could inform the development of a continuous professional development framework for QASOs.

Relationship between quality assurance and learner competency development: Further studies should investigate how QASOs assessment and feedback influence the actual development of core competencies, values, attitudes and practical skills among learners, rather than focusing primarily on institutional compliance and curriculum coverage.

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