



# Exploring educators' lived experiences of innovative practices in implementing the quality management system: A case study of a selected secondary school in Chris Hani West district, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of educators on the implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) in one selected secondary school in the Chris Hani West District, South Africa. There is a persistent gap between the intended objectives of the QMS and its actual implementation at the school level. The QMS, guided by the Collective Agreement No. 2 of 2020, was designed to assess educators' performance, enhance professional development, and improve overall school effectiveness. A qualitative research approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews to collect data from the school principal and secretary. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the findings. The results indicate that the QMS is often perceived as a compliance-driven exercise, with limited focus on developmental outcomes. The key challenges identified include inadequate training, poor communication, and a lack of collaborative practices among educators. However, the study also reveals innovative practices such as peer coaching, reflective planning, and informal mentoring that some educators have adopted to improve their professional practice within the QMS framework. The findings are interpreted through the lenses of Transformational Leadership Theory and Reflective Practice Theory, which emphasize leadership influence, continuous learning, and self-reflection. The study recommends establishing support structures such as QMS committees, regular professional development sessions, and increased stakeholder advocacy to foster a more meaningful and collaborative implementation of the QMS. These findings contribute to the discourse on educator performance appraisal and professional growth within South African school contexts.

**Keywords:** Quality Management Systems, Lived Experiences, Innovative Practices, Professional Development, Educator Performance.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the South African education system has increasingly emphasized accountability and performance-based management as part of broader educational reforms. Among these reforms is the Quality Management System (QMS), introduced under Collective Agreement No. 2 of 2020, which aims to assess the individual performance of educators to improve overall school effectiveness and learning outcomes. The QMS is positioned as both a developmental and accountability tool designed to support professional growth while ensuring quality teaching and learning practices. However, despite its

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intentions, the actual implementation of the QMS in schools often diverges from its theoretical framework, with many educators perceiving it as a bureaucratic exercise focused more on compliance than on meaningful professional development. This divergence signals a critical gap in understanding how educators engage and innovate within the QMS framework in practice. While previous literature, such as Tachie and Mancotywa, underscores the potential of QMS in enhancing instructional strategies, and scholars like Makhurare highlight the importance of coaching and reflective practice in professional growth, little is known about how these ideals manifest in everyday school environments—particularly in under-researched contexts like the Chris Hani West District of South Africa.<sup>1</sup> There is a need to explore the lived experiences of educators and school leaders to better understand the factors that allow or constrain effective QMS implementation. Therefore, this study was designed to explore how educators understand, implement, and innovate within the QMS framework at a selected secondary school in the Chris Hani West District. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study relied on semi-structured interviews with the school principal and the school secretary to uncover nuanced insights into the implementation process, professional development practices, and associated challenges.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviews relevant literature on the QMS within the South African educational context, with a focus on its implementation, developmental intent, and associated challenges. The literature draws on both national policy documents and scholarly perspectives to establish the theoretical and practical underpinnings of QMS. The aim is to contextualize the study within existing research and identify conceptual gaps the current investigation seeks to address.

### The Purpose and Policy Framework of the Quality Management System

The QMS, as outlined in Collective Agreement No. 2 of 2020, was introduced as part of South Africa's ongoing efforts to improve educational accountability and teacher performance. It is designed to assess the individual performance of educators with the broader objective of enhancing school effectiveness and learning outcomes. Ideally, the QMS process includes a structured cycle that begins with the development of a Personal Growth Plan (PGP), followed by peer appraisals, classroom observations, scoring, and feedback. However, research indicates a disconnect between the policy intent and actual implementation. The QMS often becomes a compliance exercise rather than a developmental tool, with educators filling out forms perfunctorily to meet administrative requirements.<sup>2</sup> This misalignment compromises the developmental impact that the QMS is meant to have and raises questions about its effectiveness in improving instructional practices.

### QMS as a Tool for Professional Development

Scholars argue that when implemented correctly, the QMS can significantly enhance professional development. Tachie and Mancotywa emphasize that QMS processes are critical to support educators to overcome instructional challenges, develop pedagogical strategies, and ultimately improve learner performance.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that QMS should be seen not only as an evaluative mechanism but as an integrated component of continuous teacher development. Makhurare supports this developmental perspective, highlighting the value of coaching and reflective dialogue as key processes in professional growth.<sup>4</sup> Through these practices, educators are encouraged to engage in self-assessment, receive constructive feedback, and set personal and professional goals to improve their teaching practices. Similarly, Hansen and Simonson present a multifaceted model of professional development that includes mentoring, collaborative planning, and the sharing of instructional strategies.<sup>5</sup> These strategies foster a

<sup>1</sup> S. A., Tachie and M. Mancotywa, "Teacher Appraisal and Development in South African Schools: Opportunities and Challenges," *Journal of Education and Practice* 12 (2021): 66–73; T. Makhurare, "Coaching and Mentoring for Professional Development in Education," *South African Journal of Education* 37, no. 3 (2017): 1–10.

<sup>2</sup> M. R. Sekgale, *Implementation Challenges of the Quality Management System in South African Schools* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Tachie and Mancotywa, "Teacher Appraisal and Development in South African Schools: Opportunities and Challenges."

<sup>4</sup> Makhurare, "Coaching and Mentoring for Professional Development in Education."

<sup>5</sup> C. C. Hansen and M. Simonson, "Professional Development for Educators: Enhancing Teaching and Learning," *TechTrends* 54, no. 6 (2010): 35–36.

culture of peer learning, knowledge exchange, and shared accountability, which are vital for sustained improvement in teaching quality.

### **Peer Coaching and Collaborative Practices**

The literature strongly supports the use of peer coaching as a practical and effective approach to professional development. According to Murat, peer coaching involves reciprocal classroom observations, post-observation discussions, and collaborative reflection on teaching practices.<sup>6</sup> This model creates opportunities for educators to learn from one another in a non-threatening and supportive environment. Zain et al. further reinforce the benefits of mentoring and coaching, noting that such interventions are particularly effective in high-performing schools, where instructional supervision is integrated with continuous learning and teacher support.<sup>7</sup> The value of these practices lies in their ability to align individual performance development plans with larger institutional goals of quality education and learner achievement.

### **Performance Integrity and School Culture**

The effectiveness of QMS is also influenced by the school culture and institutional ethos in which it is implemented. Maile argues that schools that foster a culture of continuous learning, professional trust, and openness to innovation are better equipped to implement QMS meaningfully.<sup>8</sup> A supportive school environment encourages educators to engage honestly with evaluation processes and to view feedback as a tool for growth rather than a punitive measure. Key to this culture is performance integrity, which ensures that evaluations are conducted transparently and ethically, with the primary aim of improving teaching and learning. When QMS is implemented in this manner, it contributes to the long-term development of both educators and the institution.

### **Challenges in QMS Implementation**

Despite its potential, several barriers hinder the effective implementation of QMS. Studies report that many educators lack adequate training on QMS processes, leading to superficial engagement and limited developmental value.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, predetermined forms and evaluation dates often reduce the process to a rigid bureaucratic exercise, leaving little room for genuine reflection or improvement. Other challenges include poor communication, limited collaboration, and a lack of coordinated planning among educators and school leaders. These systemic weaknesses result in inconsistencies in appraisal procedures and undermine the credibility of QMS outcomes. Additionally, self-assessments are sometimes manipulated for financial gain, further eroding the integrity of the system.

### **Strategies for Strengthening QMS Implementation**

To address these issues, the literature proposes various intervention strategies. The formation of dedicated QMS implementation committees is recommended to oversee planning, monitoring, and feedback processes.<sup>10</sup> Such committees can ensure that procedures are followed consistently and that evaluations are documented through tools such as meeting minutes and observation reports. Capacity-building initiatives are also critical. Training educators and school leaders on the conceptual underpinnings of QMS, emphasizing its developmental purpose rather than its administrative function can foster greater buy-in and engagement. Advocacy efforts should aim to shift the perception of QMS from a compliance-driven tool to a collaborative, growth-oriented framework that supports school improvement.

The literature reviewed in this chapter underscores the dual potential of the Quality Management System as both an evaluative and developmental mechanism. Although its policy framework advocates for enhancing educator performance through structured assessments, its practical implementation often falls short of this ideal. Key enabling factors include effective peer coaching, collaborative planning, and

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<sup>6</sup> M. Murat, "Peer Coaching: An Effective Tool for Professional Development," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2010): 2500–2504.

<sup>7</sup> Z. M., Zain et al., "Mentorship and Coaching: Enhancing School Leadership and Supervision," *International Journal of Educational Management* 35, no. 5 (2021): 912–26.

<sup>8</sup> S. Maile, *Education Management and Leadership: A South African Perspective* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Sekgale, *Implementation Challenges of the Quality Management System in South African Schools*.

<sup>10</sup> Zain et al., "Mentorship and Coaching: Enhancing School Leadership and Supervision."

a culture of continuous learning. Conversely, inadequate training, poor communication, and a focus on compliance undermine its impact. The present study seeks to contribute to this discourse by exploring how QMS is experienced and applied in practice, offering insights that may inform more effective and contextually grounded implementation strategies.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

This study is based on Transformational Leadership (Bass and Avolio) and Schön's Reflective Practice theories, which provide insights into educator development, leadership, and innovation in professional practices.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring, motivating, and fostering professional growth among team members. In the context of QMS implementation, school leaders are expected to play a pivotal role in setting a vision, fostering collaboration, and encouraging innovation among educators.<sup>11</sup> Transformational leaders focus on developing staff capacity through individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence, all of which align with the goals of the QMS in promoting educator growth and accountability. The principal's leadership approach significantly influences how QMS is interpreted and implemented by staff. If leadership is transformational, it is more likely to encourage innovative practices, shared goals, and collective ownership of QMS processes.

### **Reflective Practice Theory**

Donald Schön's Reflective Practice Theory posits that professionals improve their practices through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.<sup>12</sup> This theory supports the idea that educators must critically examine their teaching methods, feedback received, and experiences during evaluations to foster growth and development. Within the QMS context, educators are expected to reflect on their personal growth plans, lesson delivery, and feedback from peers or appraisers. This reflective process is vital for the QMS to fulfill its developmental purpose. Together, these theories support a conceptual understanding of how leadership, innovation, and professional reflection intersect in the implementation of QMS, providing a comprehensive lens for analyzing the lived experiences of educators.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study outlines the methodology used to explore the lived experiences of educators on the implementation of innovative practices in the QMS in one selected secondary school in the Chris Hani West District of South Africa.

### **Research Paradigm**

The interpretivist paradigm was selected to facilitate interaction with participants and to interpret how they derive meaning from their experiences. This study followed a qualitative research methodology, which is appropriate for investigating non-numerical data and interpreting human behavior, beliefs, and experiences. This approach was used to explore the lived experiences of educators with QMS implementation, providing deep, contextual insights.

### **Design**

The study employed a phenomenological design that seeks to explore and describe the lived experiences of participants. Phenomenology was deemed suitable because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of how educators perceive and respond to the QMS in their professional practice. The design allowed the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews to gain insight into educators' perspectives on QMS innovations.

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Leithwood and Doris Jantzi, "A Review of Transformational School Leadership Research 1996–2005," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 4, no. 3 (2005): 177–99.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Schon (Schön), *Learning, Reflection and Change*, Accessed April, vol. 11, 1983.

## **Population and Sampling**

The study population comprised educators involved in the implementation of QMS in one selected secondary school in the Chris Hani West District. The target population included educators directly involved in QMS processes, specifically, the principal (QMS chairperson), the secretary of the QMS committee and an educator appraisee.

## **Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used to select participants with firsthand knowledge of the QMS implementation. The study focused on a single secondary school, identified for its active QMS processes. Two participants, the principal and the secretary, were selected based on their direct involvement and relevant roles in the QMS implementation.

## **Data collection instrument**

### **Individual Interviews**

Data were primarily collected through semi-structured individual interviews, which facilitated open, in-depth conversations with participants. This format allowed the researcher to gain deep insights into the roles, experiences, and perceptions of the participants about QMS.

## **Document Analysis**

The study also used document analysis as a supplementary data collection method. The QMS committee's minutes and educator performance evaluation score forms were reviewed to corroborate interview data and provide context. This method helped validate participant responses and enriched the reliability of the study.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data.<sup>13</sup> Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach: familiarization with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the report. The data from interviews was transcribed, categorized, and organized based on recurring ideas related to QMS implementation. This method allowed nuanced interpretations and thematic development in alignment with the objectives of the study.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Insert all the ethical considerations that you undertook before embarking on your research.

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

The generated data were analyzed, and the following themes and sub-themes emerged. These are discussed in subsequent sections.

### **Theme 1: The Purpose of QMS**

To examine the concept of a QMS in relation to the daily responsibilities of teachers, the purpose of QMS was assessed, with a focus on its potential impact on professional growth and development. The participants responded as follows:

P2:

It is to develop and uplift the knowledge and skills of educators. Appraiser, appraisee and a peer sit together before the class visit in the form of a meeting. They go to the class, and the appraiser awards marks to the appraisee on the presentation made by the appraisee in the classroom.

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<sup>13</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

P1:

QMS is a Quality Management System designed to help educators produce or deliver quality education to pupils. Its procedures and processes are that the educators are observed in classes to deliver a lesson and be given points following a certain criterion.

P2:

The secretary is responsible for ensuring that meetings are effectively organized and minuted and maintaining effective records, as this in turn leads to the organizations of quality policy and quality objectives, which promotes teacher development of organizational and planning skills.

### **Sub-theme 1 Procedures and Processes**

The QMS is underpinned by a set of structured procedures and processes designed to promote professional growth, accountability, and continuous improvement among educators. One of the foundational components of this process is the Personal Growth Plan (PGP), which serves as a diagnostic tool to identify the strengths and developmental needs of educators. The PGP is typically developed by the appraisee in collaboration with a peer or appraiser and is submitted to the QMS panel for review. This collaborative analysis enables the panel to identify areas of improvement and design targeted interventions that support both individual and institutional development. The procedural flow of QMS also requires that educators engage in classroom-based evaluation, which includes several key stages: pre-observation discussions, actual lesson observation, and post-observation reflection and feedback. These stages are essential in ensuring that the evaluation process is not merely judgmental but also formative and supportive. This structured process was clearly described by one participant (P1), who stated:

The teacher should be prepared in class, having a lesson plan, teaching aids in place, a peer, and the evaluation. There must also be a pre-discussion and a post-discussion before and after the class visit. A teacher is also expected to rate herself/himself and do a self-appraisal.

This statement reflects a practical understanding of the intended QMS cycle. The teacher is expected to demonstrate preparedness through lesson planning and resource utilization, which are then evaluated by a peer in a structured observation session. Pre-evaluation discussions provide an opportunity to set expectations and contextualize the lesson, while post-evaluation discussions allow for critical reflection and the provision of constructive feedback. Additionally, the emphasis on self-appraisal reinforces the reflective component of the QMS, encouraging educators to take ownership of their professional development.

However, despite the clarity of these procedures on paper, the findings of the broader study suggest that the implementation of these processes is inconsistent. In many cases, steps such as peer review, meaningful dialogue, and reflective feedback are rushed or overlooked, reducing the QMS process to a tick-box exercise rather than a developmental tool.

To address the challenges identified in QMS implementation, a multi-pronged strategy is needed. This includes:

- Training educators and school leaders to understand and apply the QMS effectively
- Improving coordination and communication around QMS activities
- Creating meaningful incentives, both financial and non-financial, to encourage active participation
- Recognizing and celebrating excellence, while providing targeted support for underperformance
- Institutionalizing QMS procedures through dedicated committees and structured timelines

By embracing these strategies, schools can move beyond compliance and unlock the QMS's full potential as a developmental and transformative tool for teaching and learning improvement.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study presents a discussion of the findings derived from the study. Data were collected from a single secondary school in the Chris Hani West District, with the school principal and secretary serving as the

primary participants. A qualitative research design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument. The findings discussed in this study are based on the data collected through this approach. The study revealed that the QMS is not being implemented for its intended purpose of performance evaluation. According to the Collective Agreement Number 2 of 2020, QMS was specifically developed for educators to assess individual performance in pursuit of optimal school performance.

Ideally, the process should begin with a meeting between the appraisee and the peer appraiser before classroom observation, following the completion of a personal growth plan. The appraiser then evaluates the appraisee's classroom presentation and assigns scores accordingly. However, this practice diverges from the intent highlighted by Tachie and Mancotywa, who emphasize that the QMS should support educators in enhancing their teaching practices and resolving pedagogical challenges.<sup>14</sup>

The findings indicate that, although the QMS is designed to enhance teaching quality through structured procedures and assessments, it often functions more as a tool for awarding scores than for professional development. This duality is aligned with the framework of QMS (2020), which underscores the importance of assessing educators' openness to constructive feedback and their capacity for self-improvement. Makhurare also emphasizes the role of coaching in professional development, particularly through peer-to-peer dialogue that provides educators with objective feedback, encourages self-reflection, and fosters goal setting for professional growth.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Hansen and Simonson argue that professional development comprises multiple strategies, including coaching, mentoring, collaborative planning, and the exchange of effective teaching methods.<sup>16</sup> Murat supports this view, stating that peer coaching involves reciprocal classroom visits and feedback-sharing between educators to improve instructional practice.<sup>17</sup>

Further findings highlight the importance of quality, performance, and integrity in evaluating educators' effectiveness. These elements must be aligned with educators' duties and responsibilities to promote continuous improvement within schools. Maile stresses that a school culture rooted in continuous learning, trust, and openness to innovation is essential for institutional development.<sup>18</sup> This perspective is reinforced by Zain et al., who find that mentorship and coaching programs significantly enhance the efficacy of instructional supervision, particularly in high-performing schools.<sup>19</sup> However, the study also identified several barriers to effective QMS implementation. These include poor communication, lack of coordination and cooperation among educators, and the reliance on pre-designed forms with predetermined evaluation dates that are not thoroughly assessed. Sekgale notes that many educators lack adequate training in QMS processes and thus complete the forms merely to comply with administrative requirements, rather than engaging meaningfully in the evaluation process.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the integrity and accuracy of QMS outcomes remain compromised, especially when self-assessments are used to secure financial incentives. To address these challenges, the findings suggest that intervention strategies such as forming QMS implementation committees are crucial. These committees should focus on structured planning, proper documentation (e.g., minutes), regular monitoring and evaluation, and the provision of constructive feedback. The QMS should not be perceived as punitive or solely as a mechanism for salary progression. Instead, advocacy is needed to promote understanding and buy-in from all stakeholders, including educators, principals, and educational administrators. These stakeholders should be trained in the conceptual foundations of QMS to clarify its objectives, performance management expectations, and developmental evaluation aims. This approach aligns with Zain et al., who assert that linking performance development plans, coaching, mentoring, and school improvement is essential for fostering effective teaching and learning practices that lead to improved learner outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Tachie and Mancotywa, "Teacher Appraisal and Development in South African Schools: Opportunities and Challenges."

<sup>15</sup> Makhurare, "Coaching and Mentoring for Professional Development in Education."

<sup>16</sup> Hansen and Simonson, "Professional Development for Educators: Enhancing Teaching and Learning."

<sup>17</sup> Murat, "Peer Coaching: An Effective Tool for Professional Development."

<sup>18</sup> Maile, *Education Management and Leadership: A South African Perspective*.

<sup>19</sup> Zain et al., "Mentorship and Coaching: Enhancing School Leadership and Supervision."

<sup>20</sup> Sekgale, *Implementation Challenges of the Quality Management System in South African Schools*.

<sup>21</sup> Zain et al., "Mentorship and Coaching: Enhancing School Leadership and Supervision."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed to improve the implementation and outcomes of the QMS:

- Reorientation of the purpose of QMS from a score-based administrative exercise to a genuine tool for professional development.
- The emphasis of developmental value through coaching, feedback, and self-improvement will restore the integrity and purpose of the system.
- Continuous professional development workshops are highly recommended for educators, school leaders, and QMS assessors on the correct processes and goals of QMS are highly recommended.
- Formation of dedicated QMS committees within schools to coordinate, monitor, and support the implementation process.
- Institutionalization of peer coaching and mentoring as part of QMS implementation, involving reciprocal classroom visits and collaborative planning.
- Implementation of robust monitoring systems that go beyond documentation to include qualitative assessments, reflective feedback, and ongoing dialogue between appraisers and appraisees. This will reduce superficial compliance and foster a culture of accountability and improvement, aligned with the intended developmental goals of QMS.
- School leadership should cultivate a school culture that encourages open dialogue, trust, and innovation in teaching practices by integrating QMS performance appraisals with individual and school-wide improvement plans to ensure coherence and alignment.
- This can be achieved by developing clear communication strategies that explain the purpose, expectations, and benefits of QMS to all stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

This study draws on transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio) and Schön's reflective practice theory to frame a deeper understanding of the implementation and lived experiences surrounding the QMS in a selected secondary school in the Chris Hani West District. Together, these theories offer a robust conceptual foundation to examine how leadership and reflective practice drive innovation and professional growth in educational settings. Transformational leadership theory underscores the importance of visionary and supportive leadership in cultivating an environment where educators are motivated to grow professionally, collaborate meaningfully, and engage with QMS processes not as a bureaucratic obligation, but as an opportunity for improvement. Therefore, the school principal's leadership style plays a critical role in shaping staff perceptions and engagement with QMS. When leadership is transformational, it promotes a shared sense of purpose, fosters innovation, and encourages educators to take ownership of their development. Schön's Reflective Practice Theory complements this by emphasizing the essential role of critical reflection in professional learning. In the context of QMS, reflective practice enables educators to internalize feedback, analyze their instructional methods, and revise their strategies based on real classroom experiences. This process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action is pivotal for QMS to serve its intended purpose of fostering continuous improvement and instructional excellence. In synthesis, these theoretical lenses affirm that effective QMS implementation is not merely a matter of policy adherence but relies heavily on the interplay between transformational leadership and reflective professionalism. When school leadership inspires and supports educators, and when educators actively reflect on their practice, the QMS can transcend its administrative function and become a transformative tool for educational quality and innovation.

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Owen Madalambana is currently serving as a Senior Lecturer at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa. His research interest centred on Education Leadership and Management. As an emerging scholar, he has successfully published some papers in DHET-accredited platforms, that is, journals and conference proceedings. Engaging in research supervision has been proven by successfully graduating postgraduate students for both Honours and Master’s Programs, and currently supervising Honours, Master’s and Doctoral students.