

# Overcoming quality management systems challenges in public secondary schools: Examination of the transformational leadership theory

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## Abstract

The study aimed to develop a strategic framework for improving the effectiveness of Quality Management System (QMS) in public secondary schools, by exploring its importance, identifying challenges and proposing strategic interventions. Framed through the lens of Burn's (1978) Transformational Leadership (TL) theory, twelve (12) participants were purposively selected to partake in the study. Through the case study design and a qualitative approach, a telephone semi-structured interview was used to gather data. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was employed to arrange emerging themes and subthemes. The findings of the study reveal that there are discrepancies in the effectiveness of QMS across the selected public secondary schools. Lack of training, time constraints, attitude towards the system, lack of school resources, and lack of systems control and management were all identified challenges. The study strongly recommends policymakers within the Department of Education deliberately incorporate the principles of the TL theory to guide the future streamlining and repositioning of QMS. Moreover, policy makers, district officials, and circuit managers should prioritize on training SMTs and educators regularly, focusing on TL development, educator empowerment, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of QMS effectiveness. However, the study was limited to relatively small sample size to represent the findings of the entire public secondary schools in the district. Guided by this limitation, further research is recommended. Another limitation was the technical challenges experienced during semi-structured interviews, including consistent network connectivity issues, which may have compromised the quality of responses from some participants.

**Keywords:** *public school system, school management team, strategic framework, quality education*

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## 1. Introduction

The implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) has posed several challenges, which have unfortunately crippled its effectiveness in South African public secondary schools. The QMS, whose purpose is essentially broadened by the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC, 2020), aims to evaluate the level of performance of school-based educators. As maintained by Mamabolo et al. (2022), the system is designed to assess educators' performance so that the overall performance of a school is maintained at an acceptable level. Its effectiveness relies heavily on the capacity of the principal to carry out management and leadership roles. A dynamic principal serves as a spearhead who controls and manages the quality operations of the school to achieve successful performance standards (Lukhele & Lebeloane, 2024).

However, since the inception of QMS in 2021, there has been a persistent challenge in implementing the system optimally in secondary schools. Since the adoption of QMS, no major improvement has been identified in South African schools in terms of efficiency and accountability (Sambumbu, 2023). This suggests that there have been limited improvements in efficiency, quality service delivery, and accountability in public secondary schools. Prior to undertaking this study, the researchers piloted the implementation of QMS and engaged in discussions with a few educators and members of the School Management Teams (SMTs). They revealed that factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of the QMS include, among other things, the reluctance of SMTs and educators to engage with the system's processes, time constraints, and discrepancies in the training of newly appointed educators. These assertions not only informed the study's problem statement but also established the need to carry out a study based on the following objectives:

1. To explore the importance of QMS in public secondary schools
2. To identify challenges affecting the effectiveness of QMS in public secondary schools
3. To develop a framework for improving the effectiveness of QMS in public secondary schools

The study ultimately aimed to uncover the root causes behind the discrepancies in QMS effectiveness. Many schools adopt quality models without clear evidence of their impact (Kavutai, 2018), which makes it necessary to explore frameworks such as Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory to strengthen QMS in public secondary schools. This

approach is significant because it addresses unresolved issues in QMS implementation and provides practical insights for policymakers at both national and provincial levels. By considering participants' perceptions and applying decisive measures, the Department of Education can enhance system performance. Africano et al. (2019) further emphasize that adopting QMS effectively is a strategic decision that maximizes opportunities while minimizing negative outcomes. The study is also justified by the limited literature on QMS ineffectiveness in schools, making its findings and recommendations valuable for bridging existing gaps and ensuring improved educational quality.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. The Importance of QMS in Public Secondary Schools***

The QMS came into effect through the streamlining and rebranding of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). It is a performance management system for school-based educators, designed to evaluate individual performance levels in order to achieve high levels of overall school performance (ELRC, 2020). It serves as a quality assurance tool aimed at creating suitable conditions that enhance the commitment and professional development of school-based educators in South African public schools (Girmanová et al., 2022). Moreover, the QMS functions as an appraisal and assessment tool designed to help educators identify their shortcomings, engage in personal development, and improve the culture of teaching and learning (Makoelle et al., 2023).

Globally, countries adopt their own mechanisms to measure education quality. In Qatar, Total Quality Management (TQM) supports teachers through training, seminars, and workshops, thereby strengthening skills and motivating high performance during evaluations (Al-Saffar & Obeidat, 2020). By contrast, in Spain's Basque Country, QMS emphasizes teacher involvement, enabling educators to acquire new skills, improve teaching practices, and ensure effective implementation (Díez et al., 2020). In Nigeria, QMS enhances teacher effectiveness by addressing behavioural issues, promoting learner engagement, and establishing clear assessment strategies, particularly in secondary schools in Lagos State (Kadir, 2019; Ademola et al., 2021). In Tanzania, secondary schools in Ifakara Town Council perceive TQM as a mechanism that enhances classroom teaching, continuous teacher

development, teamwork, and leadership for quality educational outcomes (Kakingo & Lekule, 2021).

In South Africa, school principals play a central role in the implementation of QMS. In the Western Cape, they oversee teacher evaluation, training, and professional learning to ensure quality school performance (Steyn, 2019). Similarly, in Gauteng, QMS equips principals and members of SMTs with the skills, values, and attitudes necessary to navigate a dynamic educational environment (Naidoo, 2019).

## ***2.2. Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of QMS in Public Secondary Schools***

According to Tachie and Mancotywa (2021), although school principals were part of the team structure responsible for implementing QMS in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, some did not effectively drive the process, which resulted to difficulties in managing QMS processes. Furthermore, Jiyane (2020) reveals that tensions between SMTs and educators undermine the quality of professional development in teaching and learning. In South Africa, principals often perceive QMS as an added burden, with challenges including tight deadlines for Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), frequent assessments, extra classes, meetings, and extensive administrative paperwork. Some leaders lack adequate knowledge of QMS, while educators criticize their exclusion from planning processes, arguing that their involvement should begin at the design stage to better support professional growth (Simelane & Mutambara, 2022; Magagula, 2022).

In Ghana's Central Region, QMS faces challenges due to weak supervision, poor monitoring, and teacher resistance to change (Asano et al., 2021). In Lesotho, the Performance Contracting Policy (PCP), which serves as a substitute for QMS, is constrained by financial limitations that hinder its effective implementation (Mefi, 2020). In Spain, QMS is characterized by inflexibility, inconsistent evaluations, and regional disparities, which contribute to poor teaching quality, increased dropout rates, and limited academic progression (Gomendio, 2021). In Mongolia, rural schools are affected by inadequate infrastructure, limited teaching materials, and insufficient training opportunities, while teachers face excessive workloads and frequent curriculum reforms, all of which undermine the quality of education (Khurelbaatar, 2020).

### ***2.3. Strategies for Improving the Effectiveness of QMS in Public Secondary Schools***

Despite inconsistencies in the implementation of QMS across Limpopo Province, Nkadimene (2020) recommends that the Department of Basic Education should uniformly conduct annual reviews to assess the system's effectiveness. Although district officials need to remain well-informed about school transformational models (Muedi et al., 2021), principals should be the first to receive comprehensive training in QMS before educators are trained (Bolberth, 2021). This approach would motivate principals and enhance their confidence in leading educators to shape the school vision and achieve the aspirations of the quality model. In Limpopo's Warmbad Circuit, annual supervisor training and quarterly accountability sessions are considered vital for the effectiveness of QMS. Workshops should focus on building supervisors' competencies before they guide educators, while accountability mechanisms ensure the integrity of the system (Mamabolo et al., 2022; Bessong & Ogina, 2022; Tshivhula, 2023).

In Namibia, rural schools emphasize the need for improved facilities, including libraries and laboratories, as well as financial incentives for educators (Shikalepo, 2020). In the Oshana region, training for teachers and principals, along with motivation, promotion, and involvement in decision-making, is regarded as crucial (Kayumbu, 2020). While Kayumbu (2020) recommends promotions over monetary rewards, Nghixulifwa (2021) argues that financial incentives are more effective in motivating teachers. In Ghana, recommended strategies include refresher courses, curriculum reform, and teacher motivation. Partnerships among the government, the Ministry of Education, and the National Teaching Council are encouraged to establish review committees, while aptitude tests and rigorous institutional training are necessary to ensure teacher competence (Mensah et al., 2020; Annan, 2020).

Indonesia highlights the importance of infrastructure, skilled personnel, and strong leadership in implementing TQM (Khurniawan et al., 2020). Teamwork is also emphasized as a key driver of empowerment and effective quality management (Asnawan, 2021). In Poland, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is central to QMS. Developing digital competence through tutorials, webinars, and quality ICT programs enhances teachers' ability to adapt to evolving quality demands and supports their professional growth (Marchlik et al., 2021; Tomczyk & Walker, 2021; Syzopinski & Bachnik, 2022).

#### ***2.4. Theoretical Framework***

The study employed Burns' (1978) theory of transformational leadership (TL). Hiebert et al. (2023) explain that TL is a context-specific theory that focuses on addressing particular research questions. Accordingly, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Why is QMS important in public secondary schools?
2. What challenges affect the effectiveness of QMS in public secondary schools?
3. What strategic framework can be developed to improve the effectiveness of QMS in public secondary schools?

The use of TL theory was justified, as linking it to the research questions was expected to assist in generating relevant insights into the research phenomenon. Wahab and Naseer ud din (2024) note that transformational leaders who are goal-driven in the implementation of QMS cultivate a supportive, inclusive, and empowering environment for their followers. In addition, Hussein et al. (2022) argue that varying levels of commitment significantly influence an organization's quality performance. Consequently, when employees increase their commitment to QMS, there is a greater likelihood of improved work performance. According to Yulius (2022), employees' commitment to the implementation of quality education is characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the school's values and goals. Hence, to develop a robust argument based on the study's findings, the following elements of TL theory were contextualized:

*Idealized influence.* In the context of QMS, idealized influence requires SMT members to act as role models who inspire trust and respect among educators. By embodying the school's vision and mission, they encourage teachers to adopt, implement, and evaluate QMS with confidence (Reza, 2019; Singh, 2019; Prestiadi et al., 2020).

*Inspirational motivation.* This dimension enables SMTs to articulate a compelling vision and set challenging yet achievable goals. Their optimism and enthusiasm motivate educators to perform their duties independently and with commitment, rather than through coercion (Qalati et al., 2022; Bakker et al., 2023).

*Intellectual stimulation.* This aspect empowers educators to think creatively and critically when addressing obstacles in QMS implementation. Leaders who challenge assumptions and promote innovative problem-solving enhance teachers' capacity to manage quality-related issues effectively (Islam et al., 2020; Mbindyo et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2021).

*Individual consideration.* Finally, individual consideration emphasizes empathy, active listening, and recognition of each educator's unique needs. By valuing teachers as individuals and supporting their professional growth, leaders strengthen professional performance and align managerial strategies with QMS goals (Mbindyo et al., 2021; Ahmed & Al Amiri, 2022; Bakker et al., 2023).

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1. Research Design***

The case study design was employed for this qualitative study. Since case studies are qualitative in nature, they intend to provide an in-depth description of a small number of cases (Mouton, 2022). Case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon deeply and within its real-life context (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). They also allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of selected cases for enquiry (Mutongoza, 2021). In this study, the case studied was the implementation of QMS in selected public secondary schools. By examining these schools' QMS implementation, the study explored the application (or lack thereof) of TL theory principles and their impact on addressing QMS challenges. Thus, the study aimed to develop a strategic framework for improving the effectiveness of the QMS in public secondary schools by exploring its importance, identifying challenges, and proposing strategic interventions.

#### ***3.2. Research Site and Sample***

The study was conducted in the uMkhanyakude District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This research site, located in a deep rural area, attracted interest due to concerns that quality education often falters in such settings (Shongwe & Mutambara, 2023), potentially undermining QMS effectiveness.

The non-probability sampling method was purposefully adopted to address the research aim. Specifically, non-probability purposive sampling was employed, as it is less complicated, cost-effective, and feasible for qualitative research (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021). A total of twelve (12) participants were selected for the study, comprising two (2) circuit managers, three (3) principals, one (1) deputy principal, three (3) departmental heads, and three (3) PL1 educators. Participants were required to be qualified individuals with a minimum of three years' experience in the teaching profession and had direct involvement in the QMS oversight. The

selection of participants is further justified by the ELRC (2020), which indicates that the functionality of QMS rests primarily on members of the SMT, consisting of the principal and, where applicable, the deputy principal and departmental heads. Furthermore, educators and circuit managers are also involved in the successful implementation of QMS.

The biographical data of the participants are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Biographical data of participants*

Code	Gender	Age	Qualification level	Teaching years	Position held
Participant A	Female	31	BEd	6	Educator
Participant B	Female	27	BEd	5	Educator
Participant C	Male	29	BEd	6	Educator
Participant D	Female	33	PGCE	7	Departmental head
Participant E	Male	36	BEd	9	Departmental head
Participant F	Female	42	BEd	16	Departmental head
Participant G	Male	51	BEd Hons	24	Deputy principal
Participant H	Male	40	PGCE	14	Principal
Participant I	Female	46	BEd	16	Principal
Participant J	Male	37	BEd	8	Principal
Participant K	Male	53	BEd Hons	26	Circuit manager
Participant L	Male	49	BEd Hons	21	Circuit manager

**Legend:** BEd-Bachelor of education; BEd Hons-Bachelor of education Honours; PGCE-Postgraduate Certificate in Education

The study acknowledges that the sample size may appear too small to represent the findings of the research site. However, Lukhele et al. (2025) argue that a small sample in which most individuals share similar attributes is likely to generalise the findings within the selected site. Therefore, all selected participants shared the common characteristic of having over three years of teaching experience. Furthermore, the small sample was considered beneficial in minimising practical budget constraints. Additionally, selecting a specific group of participants was believed to yield detailed insights without repetitive themes.

### ***3.3. Instrumentation and Data Collection Process***

Semi-structured telephone interviews and document analysis were used to gather data. The telephone interviews, as the primary source of data collection, were scheduled to last

approximately 20–30 minutes. This method was appropriate because Lukhele and Lebeloane (2024) assert that telephone interviews allow flexibility between the interviewer and the interviewee, enabling the process to take place conveniently at any time and in any location.

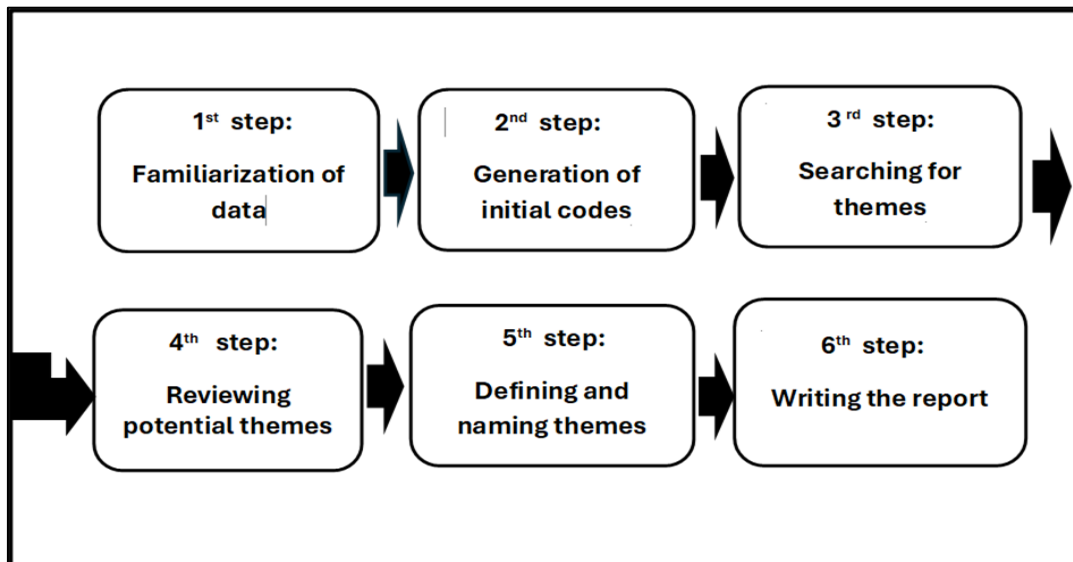
While participants were allowed to express themselves in their preferred language (isiZulu), their responses were transcribed using an Android audio recording application and translated into English. To ensure translation quality, one bilingual researcher translated from isiZulu to English, while another documented the responses. Recordings were stored securely in a USB and kept safe for potential cross-checking, thereby ensuring accuracy and data integrity. Document analysis served as a secondary source to support the telephone interviews.

### 3.4. Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic data analysis, which includes identifying, organising, and reporting themes, was used in this study. Figure 1 illustrates Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic data analysis.

**Figure 1**

*Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic data analysis*



*Source:* Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2022)

*Familiarisation with the data.* Firstly, the researchers became familiar with the data. This is a crucial step that involves transcription, immersion, and taking notes on initial ideas

(Humble & Mozelius, 2022). In this process, researchers identify the types of themes that might emerge from the data (Dawadi, 2020).

*Generation of initial codes.* The second step involves the generation of initial codes. The researchers organised the data in a meaningful way through the collation of codes and data extracts (Finlay, 2021).

*Searching for themes.* In this third step, the researchers collated codes into preliminary themes (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). This was done to ensure that data conveying similar ideas were reviewed and combined into a single theme or sub-theme for clarity (Mmusi-Phetoe et al., 2025). While the researchers remained objective in analysing the original responses of the participants, they coded the same data independently, then compared and deliberated on emerging themes to ensure validity and reduce bias. The researchers also set aside their own thoughts and experiences to minimise bias related to the research topic.

*Reviewing potential themes.* In the fourth step, the researchers reviewed the themes. Themes were checked and linked in relation to the codes (Humble & Mozelius, 2022), and those not central to the research objectives were discarded.

*Defining and naming themes.* In the fifth step, the researchers refined, developed, and wrote a clear and informative analysis of each theme to present a coherent narrative (Finlay, 2021).

*Writing the report.* The writing phase is the sixth and final step, during which the researchers produced a comprehensive report based on the evidence from the findings, aligned with the research objectives.

### **3.5. Research Ethics**

Since the study involved human participants, the researchers adhered to research ethics to avoid potential harm. Taquette and Souza (2022) assert that compliance with research ethics implies that conducting research involving human participants requires their protection, as data collection methods such as interviews may pose risks. Therefore, prior to interacting with the participants, the researchers applied for ethical clearance from the University of South Africa and were granted a certificate (Reference number: 8223) to proceed with data collection.

Consent forms were also provided to the participants, stipulating that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any cost. The actual names of the participants were not disclosed in this study to protect their identities.

Consequently, participants were assigned codes, which were used during the analysis and interpretation of the results.

## 4. Results

Participants' quotes were included to support their assertions and to link them to the research objectives. The TL theory is further connected to the participants' responses, as explicitly presented in the discussion section. Subsequently, the themes and sub-themes that emerged and are linked to the study's objectives are as follows: The importance of QMS; Challenges affecting the effectiveness of QMS; and Strategies to improve the effectiveness of QMS.

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

Participants were probed to express their views on the importance of QMS in public secondary schools. Their responses sufficiently revealed their understanding of QMS and underscored the need for this system in schools. Table 2 provides a summary of the sub-themes.

**Table 2**

*Summary of results*

Sub-theme	Code	Participant's quote
Promoting professional development	C	"It develops the careers of teachers" [Participant C]
	D	"It motivates us to further our studies" [Participant D]
	J	"...and the profession of teachers is developed..." [Participant J]
Gaining confidence in subject knowledge	B	"We are able to be confident in class..." [Participant B]
	F	"Teachers improve their knowledge about the subject they teach" [Participant F]
Improvement of school performance	H	"...and the school results are informed by the effectiveness of QMS" [Participant H]
	I	"...School performance can improve" [Participant I]
	L	"...strategies to improve the academic performance of a school are developed" [Participant L]
Enhancing planning and accountability	A	"It prepares us teachers to plan prior going to class" [Participant A]
	L	"Educators will be equipped with proper planning and SMTs are able to account on all developing activities" [Participant L]

**Promoting professional development.** Some participants mentioned that QMS promotes professional development. Participant C stated:

*“Well, I think QMS has many benefits in public secondary schools. It develops the careers of teachers”.*

When probed as to how the careers of educators are developed, she continued:

*“When educators teach in the classroom, they can see a need to study further to boost their knowledge through evaluated weaknesses in the subject”.*

**Gaining confidence in subject knowledge.** Two participants emphasised that QMS helps them gain confidence during the teaching and learning process. Participant B expressed:

*“To give a summary of your question I can say- we are able to be confident in class because QMS requires us to research information so that we update the existing content in the textbooks”.*

**Improvement of school performance.** School principals (Participants H and I) commented that, besides QMS having many benefits, its primary purpose in schools is to improve overall performance. Their sentiments were as follows:

*“Yes, there is no doubt that QMS comes with benefits. Even though there are several things that are good about eeeh.... QMS but I think the gist is ensuring that school functionality is well taken care of. So, teachers do their work and the school results are informed by the effectiveness of QMS.” (Participant H)*

**Enhancing planning and accountability.** Some participants also indicated that QMS enables them to plan their lessons timeously and be accountable for their roles. Participant A asserts:

*“It prepares us teachers to plan prior going to class.” (Participant A)*

The participants expressed diverse views regarding the importance of QMS in public secondary schools. Professional development and the improvement of school performance were key reasons highlighted for implementing QMS in schools.

### ***Theme 2: Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of QMS***

Public secondary schools experienced various challenges affecting the effectiveness of QMS, which include lack of training, time constraints, attitudes towards the system, lack of school resources, and inadequate systems control and management. Participants' quotes were

included under each of the identified sub-themes. Table 3 provides a summary of the sub-themes.

**Table 3**

*Summary of results*

Sub-theme	Code	Participant's quote
Lack of training	A	"There is no training taking place..." [Participant A]
	C	"...and we just know it from theory; we had no practical training sessions" [Participant C]
	G	"Teachers and even SMTs are not well trained about QMS" [Participant G]
Time constraints	D	"...and we encounter the challenge of making time to evaluate teachers..." [Participant D]
	E	"Time is always problematic to implement it properly" [Participant E]
Attitude towards the system	G	"...and besides, some teachers develop a strange attitude about QMS..." [Participant G]
Lack of school resources	H	"...as we speak, there are no papers to print the instruments, there is no money" [Participant H]
	J	"We face lack of resources such as functional printers, adequate LTSM, papers, the list is endless..." [Participant J]
Lack of systems control and management	B	"I think the lack of monitoring by the SMT is a challenge..." [Participant B]
	K	"...The major challenge is lack of control and proper management by the responsible people" [Participant K]

**Lack of training.** Participants cautioned that a lack of training on QMS is a major concern in most public secondary schools. Although SMT members are expected to be at the forefront of ensuring the effectiveness of QMS, participants revealed that some are not adequately trained. Participant A expressed:

*"There is no training take place and this is a concern for everyone in my school because we just sign documents that we don't understand. I think we need to be guided by the SMT but I see a shortfall of skills."*

**Time constraints.** Two participants indicated that QMS requires a significant amount of time, which often results in it not being implemented effectively. For instance, a departmental head reported that limited time restricts her ability to properly evaluate educators, leading her to sign appraisal instruments merely for compliance. She expressed:

*"QMS comes with problems. There is a lot and we encounter the challenge of making time to evaluate teachers. I honestly end up signing the appraisal instruments for compliance and I know that is not the right thing. But what can I do when there is pressure and no time to do it in a right way." (Participant D)*

***Attitude towards the system.*** One participant (a departmental head) revealed that some educators have a negative attitude towards QMS. He stated:

*“You know, it is difficult when there is no collaboration. I believe that working as a team can solve challenges. But you find that we can’t work together and besides, some teachers develop a strange attitude about QMS and you find that you feel demotivated because even DHs resist its effectiveness.” (Participant G)*

***Lack of school resources.*** The lack of school resources also contributed to the ineffectiveness of QMS. This is supported by Participants H and J, who raised concerns that limited finances, insufficient paper for printing, and inadequate Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) hinder the effective implementation of QMS. Participant H stated:

*“It is really hard to work in this department because as a principal you need to always compromise to make sure that the school operates and as we speak, there are no papers to print the instruments, there is no money.”*

***Lack of systems control and management.*** An educator (Participant B) and a circuit manager (Participant K) agreed that a key challenge affecting the effectiveness of QMS is the lack of systems control and management, particularly in relation to monitoring by the SMT. The circuit manager expressed his frustration as follows:

*“It is a concern sometimes to find that when we do school visits, there are no systems in place, let alone the implementation of QMS. I must say there is a challenge in schools. The major challenge is lack of control and proper management by the responsible people. I mean principals, deputy principals and HODs (departmental heads) they don’t do their work properly, but we try supporting them.” (Participant K)*

Most participants were vocal in expressing their views on the challenges affecting the effectiveness of QMS. Although most of the identified challenges were managerial in nature, some were beyond the control of the schools. For instance, delays in fund disbursement or insufficient funding allocations were at the discretion of the Provincial Department of Education.

### ***Theme 3: Strategies for Improving the Effectiveness of QMS***

This section presents the participants’ suggestions to improve QMS implementation.

**Table 4***Summary of results*

<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Participant's quote</b>
Strategic planning	B	<i>"I think we need proper planning in advance"</i> [Participant B]
	C	<i>"We must be strategic with planning..."</i> [Participant C]
	L	<i>"It can be effective when SMTs do a timeous planning involving scheduling all activities of the QMS..."</i> [Participant L]
Motivation	G	<i>"Teachers who have a negative attitude should be motivated..."</i> [Participant G]
Early allocation of school funds	E	<i>"Obvious, timeous deposit of school funds can facilitate the process"</i> [Participant E]
	H	<i>"If the government can do away with the trenches financial system, we can see the effectiveness of QMS"</i> [Participant H]
Training sessions	A	<i>"We need more training to know much about QMS"</i> [Participant A]
	D	<i>"More workshops to train both teachers and SMT members can do..."</i> [Participant D]
	I	<i>"If we can have regular training sessions about QMS..."</i> [Participant I]
Strengthening control and management measures	J	<i>"There is no doubt that the SMT needs to strengthen its role of managing the system..."</i> [Participant J]
	K	<i>"Principals as custodians of QMS implementation must improve their control and management measures"</i> [Participant K]

**Strategic planning.** Participants proposed that the effectiveness of QMS could be improved through strategic planning of all school activities. This includes the timely planning of all QMS-related activities. Below are the proposals of Participants B and C:

*"I think we need proper planning in advance."* (Participant B)

On the other hand, a departmental head reiterated what Participant B proposed.

*"It can be effective when SMTs do a timeous planning involving scheduling all activities of the QMS. It is true that it should take place every term, but you find that there is more commitment from our side. So, I think we should make QMS a priority when doing our year plans."*

**Motivation.** A deputy principal (Participant G) identified motivation as a fundamental strategy for improving the effectiveness of QMS. This proposal stems from the observation that some educators are reluctant to participate in QMS activities. He stated:

*"Teachers who have a negative attitude should be motivated. My belief is that teachers can do much better if there are forms of motivation in place. I think we can see them having an interest to voluntarily participate in QMS."*

**Early allocation of school funds.** Two participants proposed that the government should review its policy regarding delays in the disbursement of school funds. Moreover, they

suggested that depositing funds in tranches does not effectively support school functionality. For example, Participant E opined:

*“Obvious, timeous deposit of school funds can facilitate the process.”*

**Training sessions.** A lack of QMS training was identified as a challenge to the effective implementation of QMS. Consequently, about three participants highlighted the need for training sessions on QMS. Participant D opined:

*“More workshops to train both teachers and SMT members can do. We can have more information on how QMS actually works.”*

**Strengthening control and management measures.** Participants J and K agreed that SMT members are the custodians of the successful implementation of QMS. Therefore, they proposed that the control and management roles of these members should be strengthened. A circuit manager (Participant K) suggested:

*“Principals as custodians of QMS implementation must improve their control and management measures”*

All participants proposed strategies they considered feasible for improving the effectiveness of QMS. These strategies were viewed as solutions to the existing challenges affecting QMS implementation in schools. It can be argued that most of the proposed strategies are largely centred on the responsibilities of SMT members. This underscores the need for SMTs to be supported by relevant stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of QMS.

## 5. Discussion

This study aims to develop a framework for improving the effectiveness of the QMS in public secondary schools. After presenting the results related to this theme, the TL theory, which serves as the theoretical framework, was integrated into the study’s findings. It is discussed alongside the guidelines outlined in the ELRC (2020) to construct a line of argument aligned with the study’s aim and its consistency with the results.

### 5.1. The Importance of QMS

Participants expressed diverse views regarding the importance of QMS. They asserted that QMS is necessary for promoting professional development, enhancing confidence and

subject knowledge, improving school performance, and strengthening planning and accountability. However, it should be emphasised that most participants perceived professional development and the improvement of school performance as the primary reasons for the existence of QMS. These are aligned with those outlined by the ELRC (2020). In support of the ELRC, Girmanová et al. (2022) assert that QMS aims to engage educators in continuous planning, promote professional growth, meet learner needs, and improve performance. Consequently, QMS enhances educators' professional competence and student learning outcomes (Al-Mamary, 2022; Bessong & Ogina, 2022; Shongwe & Mutambara, 2023). However, while QMS fosters the competence of both educators and learners (Qingya et al., 2023), Mullins (2024) contends that the system can add administrative burdens, with SMTs sometimes implementing it merely for compliance, thereby compromising mandated appraisal, educator development, and learner achievement.

Participants were able to think creatively and provide relevant reasons regarding the importance of QMS. This aligns with the intellectual stimulation component of TL theory, which asserts that followers (educators) are encouraged to generate unique and innovative responses (Mbindyo et al., 2021). On the other hand, the results also draw on the inspirational motivation component of TL theory, which emphasises that individuals within an organisation remain optimistic about achieving success without coercion (Bakker et al., 2023). Accordingly, some participants indicated that QMS motivates them to further their studies, thereby enhancing their professional development.

Since TL theory emphasises inspiring and empowering followers to achieve a shared vision, it plays a crucial role in enhancing QMS effectiveness. If its principles are effectively enacted during QMS implementation, SMT members can positively influence educators to perform their duties without coercion, thereby fostering a culture of autonomy and accountability and contributing to overall school improvement. Furthermore, TL can strengthen educators' commitment to improve their teaching and learning practices. Ahmed and Al Amiri (2022) emphasise that SMTs who demonstrate charismatic leadership can persuade educators to recognise the importance of QMS, particularly in relation to competence and accountability. Similarly, Ismaya et al. (2023) concur that transformational leaders who value quality systems have the potential to enhance teacher motivation and achieve organisational goals.

### ***5.2. Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of QMS***

It is imperative to acknowledge that significant challenges that hinder the effectiveness of QMS exist in schools. The study revealed that the effectiveness of QMS in public secondary schools is constrained by several factors, including a lack of training, time constraints, negative attitudes towards the system, inadequate resources, and weak systems control and management. Although the ELRC (2020) handbook provides clear guidelines on advocacy, training, planning, SMT work plans, and appraisal timelines, many schools fail to engage effectively with these frameworks. This reluctance contributes to resistance among educators, with some developing negative attitudes toward QMS, thereby undermining its intended purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Through the lens of TL theory, many of these challenges could have been minimised. Its four components, idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, are pivotal. As Reza (2019) notes, idealised influence positions leaders as role models; however, some principals fail to inspire educators to embrace and achieve school goals. Similarly, educators' reluctance reflects diminished motivation, highlighting the absence of inspirational motivation within the TL framework. Almonawer et al. (2023) argue that SMTs who are committed to improving quality education do so not only by focusing on instructional practices but also by promoting capacity building, staff commitment, and motivation.

Furthermore, the lack of systems control and management by SMTs leaves educators disempowered. Transformational leadership, particularly intellectual stimulation, could address this by encouraging problem-solving and innovation (Islam et al., 2020). Likewise, educators' negative attitudes toward QMS highlight the need for individualised consideration, where leaders listen empathetically, acknowledge concerns, and support professional growth (Mbindyo et al., 2021). These dimensions of transformational leadership empower followers, foster trust, and strengthen commitment to school improvement.

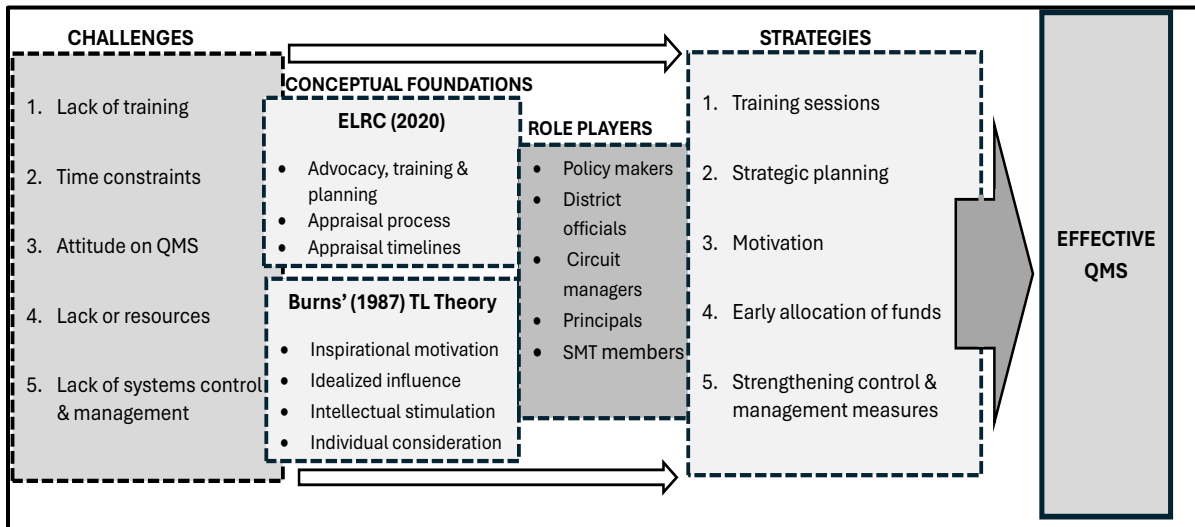
The challenges affecting QMS effectiveness reveal significant gaps in leadership support, necessitating the strengthening of TL theory principles for the future streamlining and repositioning of QMS. Through TL theory, school leaders can articulate a clear vision for QMS, encourage innovative thinking among staff members, and cultivate QMS values that foster educators' commitment and positive attitudes.

### 5.3. Strategies for Improving the Effectiveness of QMS

Participants highlighted several strategies to enhance the effectiveness of QMS in schools, including strategic planning, motivation, early allocation of funds, training sessions, and stronger control and management measures. The ELRC (2020) handbook reinforces these priorities by outlining advocacy, training, planning, appraisal processes, and appraisal timelines. Principals are expected to lead training sessions to ensure that educators understand QMS principles and procedures, while appraisal timelines require schools to conduct evaluations twice a year, with principals signing off to ensure compliance. These strategies align closely with participants' recommendations; however, their success also depends on timely access to resources. As Ngema et al. (2024) argue, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education must provide adequate funds promptly to support activities that drive school development and sustain the effectiveness of QMS.

**Figure 1**

*Strategic framework to improve the effectiveness of QMS*



*Source:* Researchers' own conceptualisation

Transformational leadership provides a strategic framework for strengthening QMS in public secondary schools, with each of its components reflected in participants' assertions. Inspirational motivation is essential for engaging educators who show limited interest in quality assurance, enabling SMTs to encourage participation without coercion. Idealised influence ensures that QMS goals are aligned with the school's vision and mission, requiring

SMTs to lead with integrity and authority. Intellectual stimulation empowers principals to challenge educators to think creatively and solve QMS-related problems, particularly when the school's vision is clearly articulated. Finally, individualised consideration, as emphasised by Ahmed and Al Amiri (2022), is evident in training and workshops, where educators are treated as unique individuals, their needs are accommodated, and their capacities are strengthened. These dimensions foster trust, innovation, and commitment, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of QMS and driving meaningful school improvement. While acknowledging that the suggested strategies for improvement align with TL principles, the role of leaders remains crucial in motivating, empowering, and providing resources.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study aimed to develop a strategic framework for improving the effectiveness of QMS in public secondary schools by exploring its importance, identifying challenges, and proposing strategic interventions. Guided by the study's major findings, it is important to emphasise that there are discrepancies in the effectiveness of QMS across the selected public secondary schools. Challenges identified by participants included a lack of training, time constraints, negative attitudes towards the system, insufficient school resources, and inadequate systems control and management.

Despite understanding the importance of QMS and its associated challenges, participants proposed several interventions to improve its effectiveness. Subsequently, the importance of transformational leadership (TL) in enhancing QMS cannot be underestimated. By embracing TL principles, schools can unlock the full potential of QMS, fostering a shared vision, a culture of continuous improvement, and collaboration among staff members. TL can encourage school leaders to be visionary, intellectually stimulate educators to be innovative and solve problems autonomously, and apply individualised consideration to address specific QMS-related challenges. As a result, QMS can become a catalyst for meaningful change, elevating teaching and learning and ultimately achieving sustainable academic improvement.

It is therefore recommended that, in minimising the challenges associated with QMS, policymakers within the Department of Education deliberately incorporate the principles of TL theory to guide the future streamlining and repositioning of QMS. Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that policymakers, district officials, and circuit managers prioritise regular training, coaching, and feedback for SMT members and educators, with a focus on TL

development, educator empowerment, and the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of QMS effectiveness.

It is important to note certain limitations of the study. The sample of 12 participants may be considered too small to represent all public secondary schools in the district. The sample size was determined based on practical constraints such as time and cost. Considering this limitation, further research is recommended, including methodological revisions such as increasing the sample size to minimise potential bias in the findings. Another limitation was the technical challenges experienced during semi-structured interviews, including inconsistent network connectivity, which may have affected the quality of responses from some participants.

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