



Enhancing English language teaching in Tanzanian secondary schools: systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review investigates the interplay between teachers, Internal School Quality Assurance (ISQA) teams, and school management in enhancing English language teaching standards in Tanzanian secondary schools. Drawing on 80 empirical studies published between 2000 and 2023, the review synthesizes findings to examine collaborative practices, challenges, and strategies for quality improvement. The findings reveal that teachers' innovative pedagogical approaches, ISQA teams' evaluative and feedback mechanisms, and management's strategic resource allocation are central to fostering effective English instruction. Quantitative evidence highlights the critical role of professional development and modern teaching tools in improving learning outcomes, while qualitative insights underscore the importance of stakeholder collaboration and trust. Barriers such as inadequate resources, limited training, and fragmented communication are identified as persistent challenges. This review concludes with actionable recommendations for strengthening stakeholder collaboration, resource investment, and professional capacity-building to address these systemic issues. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on improving education quality in resource-limited settings and offer practical insights for policymakers and educators.

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INTRODUCTION

English language teaching (ELT) plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic and professional trajectories of students in Tanzania. As the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education, English proficiency is critical for academic success, global competitiveness, and national development (Mkumbo, 2016). However, the quality of English teaching in Tanzanian schools faces systemic challenges, including insufficient teacher training, resource shortages, and limited collaboration among key stakeholders. This underscores the need for coordinated efforts among teachers, ISQA teams, and school management to sustain and enhance teaching standards.

Teachers serve as the primary agents of instructional delivery and pedagogical innovation. Their capacity to implement student-centered approaches, leverage digital tools, and foster

linguistic competence significantly impacts learning outcomes (Murphy et al., 2023). However, research indicates that many Tanzanian teachers struggle with outdated methods and lack access to ongoing professional development (Ngugi et al., 2021). This limits their ability to adapt to evolving student needs and curricular demands, particularly in resource-constrained environments. ISQA teams provide essential oversight by evaluating instructional practices, offering feedback, and ensuring alignment with educational standards. These teams act as intermediaries, bridging the gap between teachers and policymakers to foster accountability and continuous improvement (Jones et al., 2021). Yet, the effectiveness of ISQA teams is often constrained by limited subject-specific expertise and inconsistent evaluation frameworks (Kundu, 2022). Addressing these gaps is critical for maximizing their potential to drive pedagogical excellence.

School management plays an equally vital role in creating enabling environments for quality teaching. Effective school leaders allocate resources, facilitate professional learning opportunities, and foster collaborative cultures among staff. Studies show that schools with proactive leadership are better positioned to sustain high teaching standards despite systemic challenges (Aziz et al., 2021). However, in many Tanzanian schools, resource allocation is inequitable, and management practices often fail to prioritize collaboration and innovation (Makupa, 2018).

Despite the interdependence of these stakeholders, research on their collaborative dynamics remains fragmented. This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical evidence to understand the roles, challenges, and contributions of teachers, ISQA teams, and school management in improving English language teaching. By integrating diverse perspectives and identifying actionable strategies, this review aims to inform education policy and practice in Tanzania and similar low-resource settings.

Literature review

This review is grounded in Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Interaction Theory, which emphasizes that learning is inherently social and occurs within structured environments (Vygotsky, 1978). The "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) highlights the importance of guided interactions between learners and knowledgeable others, such as teachers, peers, and institutional systems. In English teaching, teachers provide the primary scaffolding through instructional methods and feedback, while ISQA teams and school management offer secondary scaffolding by creating supportive environments and facilitating professional growth.

The socio-cultural lens aligns with quality assurance practices, where collaboration among stakeholders fosters shared accountability and continuous improvement. Effective ELT requires coordinated efforts to align teaching strategies, evaluation criteria, and institutional goals. By framing stakeholder contributions as interdependent, this theory underscores the need for systemic reforms to optimize the impact of collaborative practices.

Empirical evidence underscores the critical roles these stakeholders play in fostering high-quality instruction, each contributing unique but interdependent elements to the education system. Teachers remain at the forefront of delivering quality English instruction, directly influencing students' engagement and academic success. Various studies like Mkumbo (2016) and Salleh and Ismail (2020) highlighted that student-centered methodologies, such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based approaches, and discussion-driven activities, significantly enhance students' language acquisition and critical thinking skills. Murphy et al. (2023) found that classrooms adopting these interactive approaches not only achieved better test scores but also fostered greater confidence among students in their linguistic abilities. Additionally, the integration of digital tools into teaching has emerged as a transformative element. Aziz et al. (2021) demonstrated that teachers who utilized multimedia tools and virtual learning platforms achieved markedly improved student outcomes compared to those relying on traditional lecture-based methods. Digital platforms enable students to interact with diverse resources, explore language in context, and collaborate with peers, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Despite these benefits, the potential of such innovations remains underutilized in Tanzanian schools. Many teachers face challenges related to insufficient access to modern resources and inadequate training, which hinders their ability to adopt and adapt these strategies effectively (Ngugi et al., 2021). Addressing these gaps requires a systemic approach to resource allocation and professional development to equip teachers with the tools and knowledge necessary for implementing contemporary teaching practices.

ISQA teams play an equally vital role in driving accountability and fostering continuous improvement within the education system. Their function includes systematically evaluating instructional practices, ensuring alignment with curriculum standards, and providing constructive feedback to teachers. Schools with active ISQA teams often demonstrate higher teaching quality and better learning outcomes. Jones et al. (2021) reported that consistent evaluations and actionable recommendations from ISQA teams led to measurable improvements in classroom practices.

However, the efficacy of ISQA evaluations is often limited by the lack of subject-specific expertise among team members. Generic feedback fails to address the nuanced challenges of teaching English, particularly in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts (Kundu, 2022). This shortfall underscores the need for targeted capacity-building programs aimed at equipping ISQA teams with specialized knowledge and skills. Training initiatives should emphasize language pedagogy, effective feedback techniques, and strategies for supporting teachers in resource-constrained settings. By aligning ISQA evaluations more closely with pedagogical goals, these teams can better support teachers in refining their methods and enhancing student outcomes.

School management serves as the backbone of institutional support, ensuring the structural and strategic conditions necessary for high-quality English teaching. Proactive leadership within schools is essential for fostering collaboration among teachers, ISQA teams, and external stakeholders. Ng and Johnson (2020) highlight that schools with strong leadership structures are better positioned to allocate resources equitably, implement professional development programs, and adapt to systemic challenges. Effective school management also plays a crucial role in aligning institutional policies with national education standards, sustaining quality assurance efforts over time. For example, school principals who prioritize teacher training and resource development are more likely to create environments conducive to innovative teaching practices. However, systemic inequities in resource distribution often undermine these efforts, particularly in rural and underfunded schools. Makupa (2018) observed that rural schools frequently lack access to basic teaching materials and infrastructure, further exacerbating disparities in teaching quality. These inequities require strategic interventions at both policy and institutional levels to ensure that all schools, regardless of location, have the resources and support needed to deliver high-quality English instruction.

The empirical insights from this review underscore the critical contributions of teachers, ISQA teams, and school management to English language education. However, systemic barriers,

including resource constraints, uneven training opportunities, and fragmented collaboration, limit the effectiveness of these efforts. Addressing these challenges demands a coordinated approach that leverages the unique strengths of each stakeholder group while fostering synergies to sustain and enhance teaching standards in Tanzanian secondary schools. Through targeted investments in professional development, capacity-building for ISQA teams, and equitable resource distribution, the education system can better support teachers in delivering impactful and transformative English instruction.

■ RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This systematic literature review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor. The literature search included academic databases such as ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as "English teaching quality," "Internal School Quality Assurance," and "school management in Tanzania" were used in combination with Boolean operators to refine the search. Inclusion criteria focused on empirical studies published between 2000 and 2023, examining the roles of teachers, ISQA teams, and school management in English language education. Excluded studies were non-empirical, unrelated to secondary education, or unavailable in English. The final dataset comprised 80 peer-reviewed articles from diverse geographical and institutional contexts. Quantitative findings were synthesized through meta-analytic techniques, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns. Key themes included stakeholder collaboration, resource allocation, and professional development challenges. Ethical considerations included accurate representation of data and acknowledgment of intellectual property.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Collaborative practices and the improvement of teaching quality

Collaboration among teachers, ISQA teams, and school management emerged as a pivotal factor in

enhancing English language teaching. [Gabriel and Elisa \(2017\)](#) highlight that collaborative lesson planning, peer reviews, and feedback mechanisms empower teachers to refine their pedagogical strategies. Teachers who engaged in structured collaboration with ISQA teams reported significant improvements in lesson delivery and classroom engagement. These findings resonate with Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, which emphasizes that meaningful interactions within a supportive environment facilitate cognitive and professional development.

Empirical evidence further underscores the importance of aligned goals and communication channels among stakeholders. Studies by [Jones et al. \(2021\)](#) revealed that schools fostering strong relationships between ISQA teams and teachers achieved better learning outcomes due to the consistent application of quality assurance standards. However, barriers such as fragmented communication and limited trust between evaluators and educators often undermine the potential of these collaborations. For instance, [Kundu \(2022\)](#) found that ISQA teams' lack of subject-specific expertise sometimes led to generic feedback, which teachers found unhelpful for addressing specific challenges in English pedagogy.

A critical aspect of collaboration lies in its capacity to bridge gaps between policy and practice. ISQA teams serve as intermediaries, translating national standards into actionable classroom strategies. This role aligns with Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding, where external guidance supports individuals in achieving tasks beyond their independent capabilities. However, the effectiveness of this scaffolding depends on the evaluators' ability to contextualize feedback within the unique challenges of English teaching in resource-constrained schools. Global literature supports these findings, emphasizing that collaborative approaches enhance both teacher confidence and instructional quality. [Murphy et al. \(2023\)](#) documented similar outcomes in South Africa, where participatory quality assurance systems improved teacher retention and student performance. These parallels suggest that strengthening collaboration and building trust among stakeholders are critical for achieving sustainable improvements in English language teaching.

Professional development as a catalyst for teacher empowerment

Professional development emerged as a cornerstone for improving English language teaching. Teachers who participated in structured training programs reported higher confidence in adopting innovative practices, such as student-centered learning and digital integration ([Aziz et al., 2021](#)). These findings align with Vygotsky's emphasis on mediated learning, where external resources and training enable educators to expand their pedagogical repertoire. Quantitative studies consistently highlight the positive correlation between professional development and student outcomes. For example, a meta-analysis by [Ng and Johnson \(2020\)](#) found that teachers who attended at least two annual training workshops demonstrated a 23% improvement in classroom effectiveness, as measured by student engagement and exam performance. In Tanzanian schools, professional development often focuses on generic teaching strategies rather than subject-specific needs. This mismatch undermines the potential impact of training programs, particularly in English, where language-specific techniques are essential.

Qualitative insights provide further depth, illustrating the transformative potential of well-designed training initiatives. Teachers in rural schools reported that exposure to modern teaching tools, such as multimedia platforms and online resources, significantly enhanced their ability to deliver interactive lessons. However, resource constraints and inequitable access to training opportunities remain persistent barriers.

[Makupa \(2018\)](#) observed that teachers in urban schools were four times more likely to access professional development programs than their rural counterparts, exacerbating disparities in teaching quality. Empirical evidence from global contexts reinforces these findings. For instance, [Jones et al. \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that targeted professional development in the UK improved teachers' ability to address diverse learning needs, fostering inclusive classrooms. These insights underscore the need for context-specific training that addresses both the pedagogical and systemic challenges faced by Tanzanian English teachers.

Resource allocation and structural barriers

Resource availability is a critical determinant of teaching quality, yet it remains one of the most significant challenges in Tanzanian secondary schools. Teachers frequently cited inadequate teaching materials, such as textbooks, multimedia tools, and language labs, as barriers to effective English instruction. [Ng and Johnson \(2020\)](#) observed that schools with sufficient resources were 45% more likely to achieve higher student outcomes, highlighting the direct impact of resource allocation on teaching effectiveness.

The theoretical lens of Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory underscores the importance of environmental factors in shaping learning experiences. A well-resourced classroom provides the scaffolding necessary for both teachers and students to achieve higher levels of engagement and comprehension. However, systemic inequities in resource distribution disproportionately affect rural schools, limiting their ability to implement modern teaching strategies. For instance, [Makupa \(2018\)](#) found that only 12% of rural schools in Tanzania had functional language labs, compared to 67% in urban areas.

Global literature corroborates these findings, demonstrating that resource investment is essential for improving teaching quality. [Aziz et al. \(2021\)](#) reported that integrating multimedia tools into English teaching significantly enhanced student motivation and comprehension in Indonesia. Similarly, [Murphy et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasized that access to digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled teachers to sustain interactive lessons despite disruptions. These examples highlight the urgent need for targeted resource investments to bridge the equity gap in Tanzanian schools.

Structural barriers further compound resource challenges. Large class sizes, inconsistent funding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies often hinder the effective utilization of available resources. Teachers in underfunded schools reported difficulty managing classrooms of 60 or more students, limiting their ability to provide individualized support. Addressing these barriers requires systemic reforms that prioritize equitable funding, capacity-building, and infrastructure development.

Role of school management in strategic leadership

School management plays a pivotal role in shaping the enabling environment for effective English teaching. Proactive leadership fosters collaboration, allocates resources strategically, and aligns institutional goals with national education standards. [Ng and Johnson \(2020\)](#) emphasize that schools with strong leadership are better equipped to navigate systemic challenges and sustain quality teaching practices.

Empirical evidence highlights the multifaceted contributions of school management to English language education. [Gabriel and Elisa \(2017\)](#) found that schools with inclusive leadership practices achieved better teaching outcomes due to higher teacher motivation and engagement. Principals who facilitated regular dialogue between teachers and ISQA teams enhanced trust and accountability, creating a culture of continuous improvement.

However, systemic challenges often limit the effectiveness of school management. Resource constraints, communication gaps, and competing priorities undermine efforts to sustain quality assurance initiatives. [Makupa \(2018\)](#) observed that many school leaders in Tanzania lacked formal training in educational management, reducing their capacity to implement strategic reforms. Addressing these gaps requires targeted leadership development programs that equip principals with the skills needed to foster collaboration and innovation.

Global perspectives offer valuable lessons for enhancing school management practices. For example, [Murphy et al. \(2023\)](#) highlighted the success of distributed leadership models in South African schools, where shared decision-making empowered teachers and ISQA teams to take collective responsibility for quality assurance. These findings underscore the importance of fostering inclusive leadership structures in Tanzanian schools to drive sustainable improvements in English teaching.

■ CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review underscores the interconnected roles of teachers, Internal School Quality Assurance (ISQA) teams, and school

management in fostering high standards in English language teaching in Tanzanian secondary schools. Teachers remain central to this process, bringing innovative pedagogical practices and direct engagement with students. However, their efforts are strengthened through the scaffolding provided by ISQA teams and the enabling environments created by school management. Collaborative practices, actionable feedback, and professional development are pivotal in refining teaching strategies and fostering student success. These efforts, however, face challenges such as resource shortages, limited training opportunities, and fragmented communication among stakeholders.

The study highlights the transformative impact of structured collaboration between teachers and ISQA teams, which can provide the necessary support for pedagogical excellence. Regular feedback, when specific and relevant, equips teachers with insights that drive continuous improvement. However, the effectiveness of this collaboration is often hindered by gaps in ISQA teams' subject-specific expertise, which underscores the need for tailored training programs. Equally, the role of professional development cannot be overstated. Empowering teachers with the tools and techniques required to adapt to evolving educational demands not only enhances their confidence but also ensures improved learning outcomes. Yet, inequitable access to such training remains a persistent barrier, particularly in rural schools.

Resource allocation emerges as a critical determinant of teaching quality. The disparity in resource availability across schools limits teachers' ability to adopt modern instructional methods and impedes student learning experiences. Addressing these inequities through increased funding and strategic resource distribution is essential for leveling the playing field. The study also underscores the importance of leadership within school management. Proactive and inclusive leadership fosters collaboration, aligns institutional priorities with teaching objectives, and creates an environment conducive to innovation. However, challenges such as limited leadership training and systemic inefficiencies reduce the effectiveness of management practices in many Tanzanian schools.

To address these challenges, the study recommends a multi-faceted approach. Strengthening collaboration among teachers, ISQA teams, and school management is critical, with structured feedback mechanisms and regular planning sessions fostering trust and accountability. Targeted professional development programs should focus on subject-specific needs, digital literacy, and student-centered methodologies while ensuring equitable access across regions. Addressing resource disparities requires increased investment in teaching materials and infrastructure, alongside policy frameworks that guarantee equitable distribution. Leadership capacity-building programs should empower school principals with the skills to drive strategic improvements, supported by distributed leadership models that enhance decision-making and accountability.

Engaging the broader community, including parents, local businesses, and NGOs, is also essential in sustaining quality education. Community involvement can supplement resource gaps, provide mentorship opportunities, and ensure that educational reforms are contextually relevant. Ultimately, improving English language teaching in Tanzanian secondary schools necessitates systemic reforms that align stakeholder contributions, enhance professional capacity, and address systemic inequities. These measures are vital for creating a resilient education system that not only improves learning outcomes but also prepares students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global environment.

■ DECLARATIONS

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Data availability

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' contribution

Josephine provided the essential resources for this research, while Prof. Osaki and Dr. Mwila reviewed the content and offered technical expertise

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Consent to publish

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests in this research and publication.

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