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Teachers' voices and quality education in the basic education discourse in South Africa

Abstract

The absence of a shared understanding of quality education for South African schools prompted this study to apply the capability approach of Amartya Sen to investigate the productive qualities of teachers. The study outlines the significance of integrating teachers' perspectives into discussions surrounding quality education in South Africa. More emphasis is directed towards the necessity of understanding quality education through the lens of teachers' experiences and perceptions. A case study design was used and teachers in two Cape Town schools were selected to illustrate the case. The study conducted in-depth individual and focus group interviews with primary and high school teachers to explore their views on quality education and its implications for capability enhancement. Utilizing the capability approach as a framework, the research underscores the voices of teachers and the pivotal role of teachers in shaping educational practices and policies. The study revealed that limitations put on teachers' voices rendered the understanding of quality education a bureaucratic discourse instead of a transformational idea and suppresses evaluative reasoning and the pursuit of interconnected teaching and learning freedoms in schools.

Keywords: Basic schooling, capability approach, quality education, teachers' voice

1. Introduction and background

Quality education is a multifaceted concept that has garnered significant attention globally, with varying interpretations and implications depending on context. In South Africa, as in many other countries, debates surrounding the definition and attainment of quality education are complex and nuanced. For example, many scholars suggest that quality education is a difficult and complex concept to understand and define (Harvey, 2004; Mhlanga, *et al.*, 2013; Spaul, 2013a). However, Munje and Maarman (2008) claim that "what constitutes quality education is misunderstood, misinterpreted, oversimplified, overshadowed by the gains of access, improperly diagnosed or simply generalised because complex challenges in varying school contexts are often not considered seriously." The past decade has seen



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a renewed importance in the understanding of quality education in the schooling sector in South Africa (Abdool Hay, 2018; Munje & Maarman, 2018; Spaul, 2013a; Modisaotsile, 2012). Quality education in South Africa remains a topical, controversial, and contested territory (Munje & Maarman, 2018:109) where currently the quality and the relevance of the education system are under scrutiny.

The 21st century has seen global advocacy for teachers' views in educational settings when quality education is framed. Scholars such as Leu (2005:20) claim that in the past, "in many countries, both less developed and industrialised, teachers were treated as semi-skilled workers unable to make responsible decisions about their practice." In addition, Lumpe, Haney and Czerniak (1998) argue that policymakers tend to ignore teachers' beliefs whereas teacher beliefs are critical because teachers are the executors of the curriculum and determine what is taking place in the classroom. Nunall (2012) claims that teachers are mostly regarded as recipients of educational changes.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of incorporating teachers' voices into discussions of quality education (Gillett-Swan & Baroutsis, 2023; Good, 2019; McKenzie Artis, 2022). However, much of the existing literature reflects perspectives from countries such as the USA and Asia, with limited emphasis on South African contexts. (Anderson & Boyle, 2019; Aud *et al.*, 2012; Kemristekdikti, 2018; Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020; Tikly & Barrett, 2011; Wilk, 2017). This gap is notable given the unique challenges and opportunities facing the South African education system. In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education has outlined ambitious goals for providing quality education to all learners. Thus, the researcher was prompted to interrogate the assumptions that are being made about teachers' understanding of quality education and in particular teacher's voice and involvement in the different levels of education.

The absence of a clear and universally accepted definition of quality education poses challenges for educators tasked with implementing educational policies and practices. Without a shared understanding of what quality education entails, efforts to improve educational outcomes may fall short of their intended impact. The study advocates for inclusion in defining and achieving quality education in South Africa by foregrounding the importance of teachers' voices. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of quality education and promote the active involvement of teachers in educational reform efforts.

2. Literature review

2.1 Defining quality education

The literature reviewed for the study highlighted the multifaceted nature of quality education, showing the diversity of definitions and interpretations by different scholars. Researchers, including Spaul (2013a) and Sayed and Ahmed (2011), acknowledged that defining quality education is complex, with different stakeholders attributing varied meanings to the concept.

On the other hand, Spaul (2013b) notes the difficulty in defining 'quality' within education, with diverse criteria emphasised by different groups, ranging from unquantifiable outcomes like political participation to measurable cognitive skills such as numeracy and literacy. It is therefore worthy to note that, quality can encompass both inputs and outputs of education, incorporating changes in the educational environment and observable gains in learners'

knowledge, skills, and values. Multiple definitions for quality education were established by Adams (1993), emphasising much on individual values and interpretations. Quality, grounded in values, cultures, and traditions, varies across nations, provinces, communities, schools, parents, and individuals. The lack of a universally agreed-upon definition may lead to confusion and hinder the goal of achieving quality education for all.

2.2 Global perspectives on quality education

Globally quality education is being advocated as a fundamental human right and a critical component for sustainable development. UNESCO (2013) emphasised that quality education should promote equitable access to learning opportunities, fostering critical thinking and innovation. In addition, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasises the need for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all (UN, 2015). However, disparities persist, with marginalised groups facing barriers such as poverty, gender inequality, and inadequate resources (OECD, 2018). Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving governments, NGOs, and communities to ensure that education systems are resilient, inclusive, and adaptable to the needs of all learners (World Bank, 2017).

According to the World Bank (2008), quality education can be viewed as ensuring that learners learn, whereas Stephens (2003) stresses that quality is centred on learning outcomes, school improvement, and teacher-defined quality. The global perspective on quality education highlights the various interpretations of quality education and the absence of a universal understanding but foregrounds a common goal and activity to improve lives through developing skills and capability to work and contribute to society as pointed out by (UNESCO, 2000). Teachers' perspectives can enrich the discussion on global trends in quality education by offering comparative insights into educational systems and practices.

2.3 Teachers' perceptions of quality education

Teachers' perceptions are integral to the quality of education in schools, positioning them as key drivers of change (Miller & Elman, 2013). Their unique perspectives shape the educational landscape, influencing efforts to enhance quality (Erasmus, 2012). Perceptions, as defined by Smith (2016), encompass individuals' worldviews, dictating their reactions and actions. In the context of education, teachers' perceptions guide their behaviour, impacting both educators and students. Teachers' diverse views on quality education, as identified by De Klerk, Palmer, and van Wyk (2012), play a crucial role in determining the strategies they employ to improve educational standards.

Understanding the nuanced nature of quality education through the teacher's voice is important, as it provides firsthand insights into the classroom dynamics and learning outcomes. While scholars like Spaul (2013) and Sayed and Ahmed (2011) offer theoretical perspectives, teachers' experiences offer practical wisdom on what works in education. Their input underscores the importance of considering context-specific factors in defining quality education, as teachers often adapt pedagogical approaches to suit the needs of their students and communities. By incorporating teachers' voices into the discourse, the invaluable contributions of frontline educators in shaping educational practices and policies will be evident.

2.4 Teachers' crucial role in quality education

Esau and Maarman (2019) underscore the pivotal role of teachers as architects of societal development and change. The 21st century advocates for teachers' influence on quality education, with UNESCO emphasizing their impact on learning outcomes. The UNESCO report identifies five critical areas for teacher quality: professional development, learner performance, Quality Management System (QMS), teaching styles, and technology integration. Teachers' influence on education quality is palpable through various lenses (UNESCO, 2013). The IQMS, despite criticisms, serves as a metric for teacher quality evaluation. Professional development, exemplified by workshops and in-service training, is vital for enhancing teaching skills (Ramey & Ramey, 2007; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2009).

The evolving role of teachers in the 21st century involves adapting to modern technologies, changing relationships, and utilising resources effectively. Grasha's (1994) research highlights distinct teacher roles, including expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator, and delegator. Shattuck's (2009) study demonstrates insights into these roles which reveals the diverse approaches teachers adopt, influencing student development. The teacher's leadership role is thus instrumental in implementing educational programmes and fostering the adoption of technology. Teachers with effective leadership qualities significantly impact education quality (Fernández & López, 2023). Attitudes toward innovation, creativity, and technology further contribute to the improvement of education quality (Oyebade & Kampala, 2008).

2.5 Education quality as a social justice imperative

Quality education intersection with social justice, and disparities persist in South Africa. Socio-economic status impacts universal quality education, with historical trends aligning with apartheid-era patterns (Maarman, 2009). Quality education is viewed as a dual force, either perpetuating oppression and poverty or liberating individuals, aligning with Sen's capability approach (Leonardo, 2004b; Sen, 1992). The intersection of quality education and social justice remains a global challenge, with Leonardo (2004a) asserting that true quality involves understanding social oppression and inequality. In South Africa, Maarman's (2009) findings emphasise the impact of socio-economic status and learner background on achieving universal quality education, particularly for Black children. Spaul (2013) highlights the persistence of educational disparities, positioning most Black children in the underclass of South African society. Ramrathan (2021) underscores the stark contrasts in school infrastructure based on socio-economic backgrounds, perpetuating inequalities. Maarman (2021) notes that racial groups continue to align with apartheid-era education trends, impeding efforts to equalise and sophisticate the schooling system.

The perspectives collectively affirm that quality education is inseparable from societal structures and plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals. Education's purpose, according to Leu's (2005) synthesis, is to holistically develop learners, influencing their post-school quality of life. Quality education serves as a dual force, either perpetuating oppression and poverty or liberating individuals to lead fulfilling lives, aligning with Sen's (1992) Capability Approach.

3. Theoretical framework

This study draws on the capability approach as its theoretical framework. In the educational context, the capability approach is very much a developing area in theory and practice as several education researchers only turned to the approach in the last few years. The capability approach provides a valuable lens through which to examine the intersection of teacher voice and quality education in this study.

The capability approach is a central constituent of the writings of Amartya Sen and is underpinned by the following constructs: capabilities, functioning, conversion, freedoms and unfreedoms (Sen, 1992). The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen, asserts that people should be afforded the freedom to achieve well-being and develop their capabilities, that is, "their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value" (Robeyns, 2011).

The capability approach was used as the lens to question the range of real educational choices that have been available to teachers to add their views on education matters; and whether they had the genuine capability to achieve a valued educational functioning that is direct input and clear understanding of imperatives that underpin a quality education. Probing the voices of teachers in the quality education discourse enabled the researcher to unpack the nexus of the capability sets of teachers and the modalities of quality education. Teachers' perceptions were analysed in relation to the capability sets to provide a deeper understanding of quality education and the capability approach.

Sen (1992) states that Capability sets are sets of criteria used to assess and determine what a person or an institution can do or be. These capability sets include *freedoms and unfreedoms, interpersonal and inter-social variations, personal diversities, systemic contrasts between groups, the relationship between primary goods and well-being, spatial inequalities, and particular needs, interests and desires at a particular time, individual variations (abilities, predispositions, physical differences etc., individually Valued Objectives and Group Valued Objectives* (Sen, 1992:27-28). Capability sets refer to the variations entrenched within the capability approach that were used in this study to explore teacher perceptions of quality education and the experiences of teachers considering the contextual factors towards quality education.

For this study, the researcher chose the capability sets relevant to the findings and context of the study because of the value and flexibility that the capability approach allow researchers to choose their own Capability sets based on the individual spaces, goals, and circumstances of a particular subject of study as stated by Hoffman (2017). The capability sets are as follows: Personal diversities; Individual variations; Relationship between primary goods and well-being/freedoms; Spatial inequalities; Interpersonal and intersocial variations and Freedoms and unfreedoms. Each capability set is presented in line with the relevant themes that emerged from the data analyses.

4. Methodology

The research is based on a qualitative research approach since the researcher wanted to explore teachers' perceptions of quality education. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Leavy, 2017). A case study design was used and teachers in two Cape Town schools were selected to illustrate the

case. Creswell (2007) posits that a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an event, an activity, a process, or individuals) based on extensive data generation. The value of a case study is that it presents a relationship between the case study and the in-depth analysis of a single or smaller number of units since a case study focuses on the interaction between factors and events (Hancock, 1998:6).

4.1 Research sample and population

Sample refers to the population and variables that have been selected in the process of answering the research question. It is a smaller selection of subjects that represent the larger population and from which the researcher collected information (Oliveira & Ferreira, 2011:37). The research participants included teachers from grades 1 to 12 from primary school and high school. A total of 28 participants participated in the study including 14 teachers from the primary school and 14 teachers from the high school.

4.2 Data collection and research instruments

Methods of data collection are based on appropriateness for the task and a combination of appropriate data collection devices (Creswell, 1994:12) was used to answer the research question. The following data collection tools were used individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis to answer the main research question and address the research aims.

4.3 Data analysis and reporting

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. For this research, the data was carefully and thoroughly read and then transcribed and analysed. The researcher looked for patterns in the data and placed them into different categories and five themes emerged that are presented and reported on. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5. Ethical considerations

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), researchers who plan to do social scientific research need to be aware of the general agreements among researchers about what is proper and improper in the conduct of a scientific enquiry. Thus, my research was guided by the following ethical principles: (1) privacy; (2) anonymity; (3) confidentiality; (Neuman, 1997:452); (4) truthfulness; (5) and voluntary participation (6). I intend to protect all respondents' privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality always.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university since this study emanated from a doctoral research study. Permission was obtained from the WCED, the SGB, the school principal and teachers. All participants were fully informed about the research study, and they were allowed to withdraw at any time without consequence. For confidentiality purposes, pseudonyms were used for teachers, and they were referred to by codes, namely PTI and PTF for primary school teachers and HTI and HTF for high school teachers.

6. Findings

The data collected through focus group interviews and individual interviews provided valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of quality education in relation to the capability approach and the capability sets. Capability sets are sets of criteria used to assess and determine what a person or an institution can do or be. This is done in accordance with the five themes that emerged from the data to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between quality education and the capability approach. The participants' views and perceptions, were grouped into the following five themes:

- **Theme 1:** Teachers' Perceptions of Quality Education
- **Theme 2:** Teacher Involvement towards Quality
- **Theme 3:** Factors Influencing Teachers' Capabilities to Deliver Quality Education
- **Theme 4:** Teacher Wellbeing Influencing Quality Education.
- **Theme 5:** Teacher freedoms towards quality education

6.1 Teacher 'perceptions of quality education via Capability set': Personal diversity

Teachers held diverse views on quality education. According to Sen (1992), *Personal Diversities* acknowledge that all human beings are diverse and differ not only in external characteristics but also in personal characteristics which will also determine their capabilities. The study revealed that teachers indeed differ in terms of their external characteristics as well as personal (internal) characteristics. Teachers' external characteristics were collected and analysed from the biographical data provided in this study and include Gender; Years of teaching experience (including rank); Teaching qualification; and Grades and phase teachers are teaching (primary school or high school).

The findings highlighted that each teacher irrespective of their years of experience had different views about quality education. Teachers' qualification ranges from BEd degree, PGCE and master's degree in education. The data collected about the grades and phase included all grades from Grades 1 to 12. The data however revealed that some teachers are teaching a grade and subjects that they are not qualified to teach, and this may directly or indirectly impact the quality of education from a capabilities perspective of what choices are available to teachers for employment opportunities and vacant post if they are accepting a position that they are not fully qualified or competent in but needs the job to secure an income. On the other hand, schools and (principals) might be desperate to fill a vacant post where learners are left too long without teaching taking place.

The data findings also highlighted different personal (internal) characteristics of teachers which influenced their perception of quality education. As such, teachers' perceptions were influenced by personal concepts as well as the views of their parents and the broader community, teachers' socio-economic background and schooling and teacher's different contexts of employment. Quality was associated with reliability, efficacy, and the potential to significantly impact outcomes. Importantly, the data highlighted the contextual nature of quality education in South Africa, acknowledging its contested terrain.

Sen's (1992) central argument is that there are possibilities of variations in outcome even if equal resources are provided and the seriousness of barriers and constraints to achievements is ignored. This study highlights the visible variations of the perception of quality education

from teachers that can lead to variations in achievement of functionings in this case the goal of quality education if these variations are going to be ignored. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the above-mentioned personal diversities of teachers including both external and internal (personal) characteristics towards quality education. The capability approach affords opportunity through its theory of conversions (Sen, 2001), the freedom of teachers to express their views about quality education and including teachers' voices towards quality education is crucial to influence the conversion process through embracing teachers' unique personal diversity and characteristics. The personal diversities of teachers gathered through the data collection points out significantly that the understanding of quality education of teachers is multidimensional because of the nature of teachers' diversities and should be embraced, understood, and included rather than ignored to achieve the desired goal of quality education for all learners in South Africa.

6.2 Teacher involvement towards quality education via the capability to set spatial inequalities

The study revealed that teachers' involvement towards quality education is limited to the classroom and is silenced in the actioning of quality education in the other levels of the education sector. In Sen's (1992) view **spatial inequalities** highlight that some spaces are traditionally associated with claims of 'equality' in political, social, or economic philosophy. Furthermore, it emphasises that we live in different natural environments - some more hostile than others. The societies and the communities to which we belong offer quite different opportunities as to what we can or cannot do (Sen, 1992). Teachers expressed a collective desire for contextualised, learner-centred, and holistic education. They advocated for tailored approaches considering cultural backgrounds and addressing challenges such as resource limitations. Quality education, according to teachers, should be meaningful, and enduring, and equip learners with practical, lasting skills. They emphasised a curriculum promoting independent thinking and problem-solving, moving beyond rote instruction.

Teacher involvement at provincial level was highlighted as one-way including lacking opportunities for teachers to voice opinions or review decisions. Union representatives were criticised for not effectively understanding or representing teachers' day-to-day challenges. Teachers expressed an ardent desire for meaningful involvement in policy drafting, citing their first-hand experience in dealing with school challenges. However, spatial inequalities in education remain a significant challenge. Students in disadvantaged areas often lack access to quality education, creating a disparity in capability sets between them and their more privileged counterparts.

Sen (1992) advocates that an underprivileged person (deprived learners of access to education or teachers adding their voice in education) will get less from the same amount of primary goods or resources than those that are more privileged. Teachers must work to address these inequalities by providing equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or location. This includes working with school districts and local authorities to improve access to resources and opportunities for students in disadvantaged areas. capability approach is applicable because it introduces the crucial role differences in spaces and other existing dynamics within individual institutions impacting development or achievement (Munjje & Maarman, 2016).

Teachers are not just implementers of directives, but they also contribute to the creation and implementation of educational policies and curricula. To address this perception, policy-makers should recognise the importance of incorporating teachers into decision-making

processes, encouraging their involvement in quality education policies. Teachers should have a more significant say in defining policies, curricula, and quality education frameworks. By actively involving teachers, educational reform can take shape and quality education can become an achievable reality. The capability approach focuses on variables such as spatial inequalities freedoms and unfreedoms, the conversion process, capabilities, and obstacles or limitations to achieve is relevant in the field of education, especially in the context of quality education and adding teachers' voices.

6.3 Contextual factors influencing teachers' capabilities to deliver quality education via the capability set the relationship between primary goods and well-being/freedoms

The finding revealed critical contextual factors influencing South African teachers' abilities to provide quality education. Sen (1992) states the relationship between primary goods (including income) on the one hand and well-being, on the other hand, may vary because of personal diversities in the possibility of converting primary goods (including income) into achievements of well-being and success.

Disparities in school resources, management challenges, and administrative burdens were identified as hindrances. Overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, and the flawed quintile system posed challenges. Dysfunctional management, violence in communities, and limited parental involvement affected the learning environment. Socio-economic factors, cultural diversity, and language barriers posed challenges for learners. The pushover system and developmental variations in students added complexity. The capability approach emphasises the importance of the relationship between primary goods and well-being, In the context of teacher capabilities to deliver quality education, it highlights the need for resources that cater to the unique needs of learners and school contexts to ensure the overall well-being of students.

Safety concerns, lack of trust, and limited involvement in decision-making processes were highlighted. Administrative tasks, unrealistic expectations, and insufficient support from the Department of Basic Education contributed to frustration. The inflexible curriculum, lack of relevance to South African contexts, and imposed training negatively affected teachers' work-life balance. Despite challenges, some teachers recognised after-school training as opportunities for professional growth. Addressing these concerns is crucial for creating an environment that supports teachers, values their contributions, and fosters professional development.

6.4 Teacher well-being influencing quality education via capability set interpersonal and inter-social variations

The findings of this study revealed that teacher well-being emerged as a crucial component influencing the quality of education, with calls for competitive salaries, adequate planning time, and resources. Understanding teacher well-being via **interpersonal & inter-social variations**- in capability approach points out that the personal and social characteristics of different persons, which differ greatly, can lead to substantial interpersonal variations in the conversion of resources and primary goods into achievements (Sen, 1992).

Challenges like overcrowded classrooms and insufficient textbooks impacted education quality. Addressing resource challenges and supporting teacher well-being were deemed pivotal for fostering quality education in South African schools.

Participants expressed concerns about micromanagement, stress, and lack of support, impacting teachers' mental well-being. Issues such as bullying, threats, and poor compensation contributed to a negative work environment. Teacher micromanagement may lead to reduced autonomy, high levels of stress, and decreased motivation, leading to burnout and a negative impact on the quality of education. It should further be noted that teachers must be happy and motivated to make a positive difference in learners' lives. New and experienced teachers alike reported a lack of support, with new teachers facing challenges in adapting to the profession. The study highlighted the impact of multiple roles imposed on teachers, contributing to overburdening and overworking. Participants emphasised the need for schools to prioritise creating a supportive environment.

6.5 Teacher freedoms towards quality education via capability sets freedom and unfreedoms

Freedoms of Teachers in schools towards quality education emerged as significant. The capability approach emphasises the importance of freedoms and unfreedoms (Sen, 2001) in education as key parameters for ensuring quality education. Freedoms in terms of the capability approach are those opportunities or choices that a person/institution has that influence his/her ability to achieve certain objectives. Conversely, unfreedoms are those circumstances that hinder such abilities and efforts to achieve and may vary from person to person, as well as between spaces (Munje & Maarman, 2016).

Participants expressed concerns about the lack of freedom to innovate or try new things in classrooms. They felt dictated by school management, creating a culture of fear, and inhibiting their ability to express opinions or ask questions. Communication issues and limited involvement in decision-making processes further contributed to dissatisfaction.

In addition, some participants drew attention to the push-over system, where teachers feel compelled to pass learners who may not be academically ready for the next grade level. The lack of teacher input in decision-making processes, especially those affecting their work, is emphasised. This leads to the teachers being frustrated at being blamed for poor results and underappreciated for their work under challenging conditions.

Teachers also lamented on the restriction to teaching to the middle, hindering attention to struggling or advanced learners. The frustration arises from the lack of freedom to try different teaching strategies and the expectation to adhere strictly to the curriculum. Teachers expressed a desire for trust and involvement in decisions that impact the quality of education.

Sen (1992) is of the opinion that inequality in people's opportunities cannot with any accuracy be determined by the amount of income or resources at their disposal because what we can do and cannot do, and what we can or cannot achieve is not determined solely by income or resources; physical and social characteristics contribute to constructing present and evolving identities. Since people hold different capabilities, different individual efforts are required as individuals to attain certain levels of achievement.

7. Recommendations

In the absence of a shared understanding of quality education, a framework was developed to foreground teachers' voices towards quality education in schools. Understanding the concept of quality education in the South African schooling sector necessitates the teacher's voice to guide the way we think about quality education. The framework encapsulates teacher's voices

about quality education extracted from the data. Teachers identified seven fundamentals of quality education as a starting point to conceptualise quality education. The following seven fundamentals were highlighted:

- Contextual factors and learning environment;
- Meaningful and lasting education;
- Flexibility and adaptability;
- Teacher involvement;
- Teacher well-being;
- Ethical and relevant education; and
- Freedoms of teachers.

Each fundamental provides constructs in the framework to guide the understanding and actioning to enhance teachers' pursuit of quality education.

Making a deliberate decision to have a more collaborative approach with teachers instead of a top-down approach towards quality education broadens the horizons of teachers' voices and the nature of teachers' involvement in the quality education discourse to improve policy and quality. To achieve this, the development of a subject and grade community of practice (COP) is proposed as a third leg to provide an opportunity for teacher involvement and include teachers' voices. Communities of practice is defined by Wenger (2011) as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do or learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Subject and Grade Community of Practice (S&G COP) Intervention for Teacher Involvement to enhance quality education and Quality Assurance

Purpose of Subject & Grade COP	The functions of the subject/grade COP include the following 7 areas	Guidelines for the COP to enhance quality education	Role players
Provide ongoing support, guidance, feedback, and mentoring to subject/ or grade COP to enhance the pursuit of quality education through teachers' voices.	Quality assurance Lesson Planning and Preparation Teaching approaches/ strategies Classroom management Resources Assessment Moderation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality education • Prioritize ethical behaviour. • Quality education ensures continuous support and guidance from teachers. • Quality education demands respect for oneself and the other including the teacher's personal time. • Quality education means having compassion. • Quality education means having the freedom to be. • Quality education involves accountability. • Quality education enhances the opportunity for collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School management team • Subject and grade teachers • Subject advisors

The subject/ grade COP provides teachers(members) the opportunity to interact by sharing ideas and providing guidance, feedback, and support to one another to enhance quality education for the learners and schools in the cluster. Thus, the subject/ grade COP is the nexus for teachers' pursuit to enhance quality education.

8. Conclusion

Different definitions and interpretations of quality education from teachers were revealed. Teacher's voices echoed underscored since teacher involvement is limited to the classroom. Despite the critical role teachers play in ensuring the success of a comprehensive educational system, the study has shown that they are often perceived as passive recipients of everything concerning education and quality education. This perception undermines teachers' agency and responsibility for their role in developing quality education. Existing 'unfreedoms' of teachers imposed by the lack of teachers' voice hinder teachers' abilities to achieve and to make certain choices that are limited in terms of teacher involvement in the different spaces of education that will act as an enabler as active participants in everything concerning education to enhance their capabilities towards quality education (Sen, 1999). The study revealed that limitations put on teachers' voices rendered the understanding of quality education a bureaucratic discourse instead of a transformational idea that suppresses evaluative reasoning and the pursuit of interconnected teaching and learning freedoms in schools.

Teachers' involvement is silenced in the actioning of quality education at the other levels of the education sector. Teachers' participation in reviews, analysis of practice in the field of education, workshops, staff meetings, and task teams is critical as these are mechanisms for teachers' educational voices to find expression and contribute towards quality education.

A range of factors were identified and highlighted that posed unfreedoms to teachers' enhancements of capabilities towards quality education. The lack of freedoms of teachers to make choices that will enhance their capabilities to achieve well-being for both the learners and teachers towards quality education is highlighted. This study shows that teachers face various challenges that hinder their well-being and their ability to deliver quality education. These challenges include teacher micromanagement in schools, lack of support for professional development, and inadequate resources. Teacher micromanagement can lead to reduced autonomy, high levels of stress, and decreased motivation, leading to burnout and a negative impact on the quality of education. Nussbaum (2003:67) suggests that in the field of education, one can shift the focus of what people can do and be and their capabilities rather than their mental states or the assets they have at their disposal. Moreover, limited professional development opportunities can lead to a lack of knowledge, skills, and confidence, affecting teachers' ability to provide effective instruction and support to students.

The capability approach provides the perfect lens and basis to understand quality education better through the teacher's voice. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to value the critical role teachers play in ensuring the success of a comprehensive educational system. Bearing this in mind, the researcher hopes to eliminate some of the above-mentioned unfreedoms imposed on teachers to pursue quality education. It should expand the opportunities and freedoms to achieve the desired goal of quality education.

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