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HOW DOES GIVING AUTONOMY AND IMPLEMENTING A COACHING APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE INFLUENCE TEACHING AND LEARNING OUTCOMES AND TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF QA?

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Introduction

Quality assurance has always been an integral part of school operations, serving as a mechanism for maintaining standards and driving improvement. However, it is often perceived by teachers as a process that prioritises evaluation over meaningful growth, leading to apprehension and disengagement. This study seeks to reframe quality assurance as a collaborative and empowering practice, one that fosters teacher autonomy, encourages reflective dialogue, and promotes a purposeful approach to quality assurance for all stakeholders. By integrating coaching within quality assurance cycles, this research explores how schools can transform perceptions of oversight into opportunities for agency, engagement and continuous learning, ultimately cultivating a more positive and impactful experience for all stakeholders.

This study is conducted at Deira International School, where coaching is already embedded as a professional growth and reflection tool. The school has created a coaching culture, actively fostering a learning environment where educators engage in meaningful dialogue and self reflection. Through this lens, this study explores the impact of coaching as part of quality assurance cycles on teachers perceptions and teaching and learning outcomes. This research aims to contribute to ongoing conversations surrounding sustainable and impactful quality assurance models.

Literature Review

Educational leaders play a pivotal role in shaping quality assurance processes. Rarasati et al (2023) highlights the significance of leaders in facilitating new systems, identifying that leaders should inspire and support teachers rather than exert control. This shift from managerial oversight to empowerment cultivates a professional culture of continuous improvement. Similarly, Arcia et al. (2011) recognises that quality assurance models respecting teacher autonomy enhance accountability and investment, fostering more effective educational outcomes.

A growing body of research supports teacher autonomy as a catalyst for innovation and pedagogical growth. Bergmark (2020) found that allowing teachers to identify areas of improvement based on their own experiences expanded their reflective practices, fostering a deeper understanding of their pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, teachers who plan their own improvement exhibit higher levels of curiosity, learning engagement, and experimentation, reinforcing the intrinsic motivation necessary for professional development.

While autonomy is essential, structured quality assurance measures must coexist to provide necessary guidance and prevent stagnation. Nehrbass et al. (2022) highlights the delicate balance between freedom and accountability, arguing that quality assurance frameworks should provide support without stifling creativity.

Coaching methodologies offer a structured yet empowering approach to professional growth. Davis (2022) supports the idea that giving teachers ownership of identifying their next steps fosters creativity and innovation, enabling collaborative problem-solving beyond prescribed best practices. Coaching, therefore, serves as a bridge between autonomy and structured improvement, ensuring teachers feel supported while maintaining agency in their growth journey.

Methods

All leaders conducting quality assurance received targeted coaching training, equipping them with the necessary skills to facilitate constructive and meaningful discussions. To support the quality assurance process, questions were developed for each area of focus for the learning walks. At the start of the academic year, the questions were shared with staff, fostering a sense of transparency. Learning walks were conducted based on these criteria. Following each learning walk, a reflective coaching conversation was held, where in coachees analysed their teaching approaches against the quality assurance questions, identifying both areas of strength and opportunities for further development. A follow-up visit was conducted a few weeks later, reinforcing the cyclical nature of the process. The subsequent coaching conversation centered exclusively on the identified area for improvement, thereby cultivating a cycle of professional learning and targeted growth.

This study used a mix method approach to collecting data, with a questionnaire that was completed by 40 members of staff and the analysis of quality assurance data based on 60 members of staff. The questionnaire utilised scaled score and Net Promoter Score methodologies to gather the teachers views on the adapted approach to quality assurance (see **Figure 5**). These questionnaires were completed by a diverse group of educators, including class teachers, specialist teachers, inclusion teachers, and middle leaders, ensuring varied perspectives were captured. The quality assurance analysis measured the percentage of improvement of a teaching and learning focus area within the cycle, this was compared to the previous year where a different approach to quality assurance was implemented. The collected data was systematically analysed to measure the impact of the quality assurance approach, providing insight into the effectiveness of coaching as a tool to support quality assurance.

Results

The results indicate positive feedback from teachers regarding the use of coaching to support quality assurance (**Figure 1**), with many identifying that the process enhances their autonomy and contributes to the improvement of their teaching practice (**Figure 2**). Coaching conversations have facilitated critical reflection, enabling teachers to refine their teaching strategies and engage in continuous professional growth (**Figure 3**). While the majority of teachers have reported a shift in their perception of quality assurance (**Figure 4**), there remains inconsistency in the application of coaching within the quality assurance process. Notably, those who have not yet received coaching as part of their quality assurance experience responded less positively in the questionnaire, highlighting the need for broader implementation to ensure equitable impact. Initial analysis suggests a positive trend in quality assurance data, including increased embedding of highly effective teaching strategies; however, the current dataset remains insufficient to establish definitive conclusions (see **Table 1**). Continued assessment and a more comprehensive dataset will be essential in further substantiating the impact of coaching as a tool to support quality assurance.

Figure 1
Percentage of teachers receiving coaching to support quality assurance process.

Figure 2
Scaled score analysis of the effectiveness of coaching as a support to quality assurance in giving more autonomy.

Figure 3
Scaled score analysis of the effectiveness of coaching as a support to quality assurance in further developing their practice.

Figure 4
Whether Teachers perceptions of quality assurance have changed.

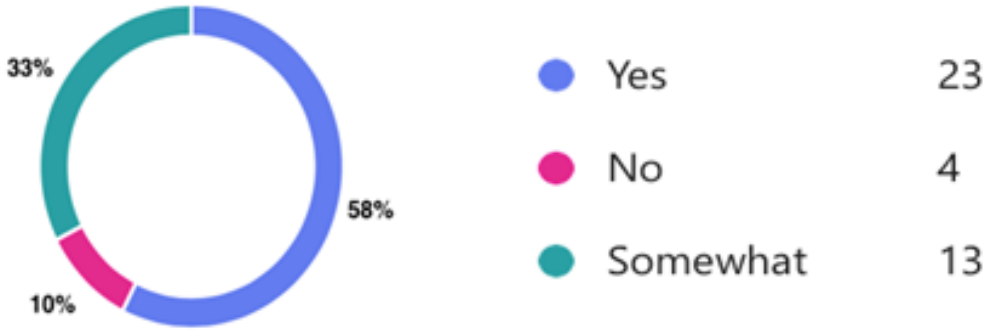

Figure 5
Net promotor score for the adapted approach to quality assurance.

Table 1
Increase in teaching and learning data for learning walk focus areas across 2 years.

	2023 – 2024	2024 - 2025
Effective Questioning	No data	20%
Challenge personalisation Timely Intervention	5%	No data
Model Excellence	3%	No data

Conclusion

The literature suggests the relationship between quality assurance, teacher autonomy, and coaching presents a transformative approach to educational development. Leaders must prioritise support over control, enabling teachers to take ownership of their improvement processes. Frameworks must uphold structured support mechanisms that foster accountability while nurturing creativity and continuous reflection to ensure that autonomy does not lead to stagnation but instead fuels meaningful, progressive change within teaching and learning.

The findings of this study support Bergmark's (2020) and Davis's (2022) perspective on the positive role of coaching in enhancing teacher autonomy and shaping perceptions of quality assurance. Teachers reported that the approach facilitated reflective practice and contributed to professional growth, reinforcing its impact on teaching effectiveness. However, while initial trends suggest a favorable shift in teaching and learning outcomes, additional data would be required to align the results with the conclusions of Arcia (2011) and Rarasati (2023). Furthermore, the study's scope was limited to learning walks as a quality assurance measure, leaving room for further exploration of its broader impact. A key challenge remains the inconsistency in coaching styles, which can affect the uniformity of implementation and outcomes. Future research should consider a more extensive dataset and an expanded range of quality assurance measures to establish a clearer link between coaching and sustained improvements in teaching and learning.

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