

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2026.09.08>

How to cite: Teane, F., & van Niekerk, J. (2026). Final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers' preparedness for quality management system implementation: A qualitative study across three South African teacher education institutions. *Futurity Education*, 6(3), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2026.09.08>

Final-Year Foundation Phase Pre-service Teachers' Preparedness for Quality Management System Implementation: A Qualitative Study Across Three South African Teacher Education Institutions

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Received: May 7, 2026 | **Accepted:** August 12, 2026 | **Available online:** August 31, 2026

Abstract: South Africa's Quality Management System (QMS) assigns newly qualified teachers substantial appraisal, accountability and professional-development responsibilities from the outset of their careers, yet research has examined QMS implementation almost exclusively among practising teachers, school managers and district officials. How pre-service teachers are prepared for these responsibilities during initial teacher education remains underexplored. Guided by Baldwin and Ford's (1988) Transfer of Training Model, this qualitative study explored how final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers were prepared for QMS implementation through their teacher education programmes. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the study employed purposive sampling and methodological triangulation across three teacher education institutions in Gauteng and North West: focus-group discussions with 59 participants, follow-up semi-structured interviews with a 14-participant subsample, and analysis of the

IQMS (2003) and QMS (2020) policy agreements. Data were analysed thematically across three dimensions. The findings showed that formal QMS preparation was largely introductory and theoretical, offering superficial coursework exposure rather than developmental learning; that practical understanding developed mainly during teaching practice; and that mentor teachers and placement-school contexts strongly shaped these opportunities, producing considerable variation in preparedness among graduates of comparable programmes. The study recommends stronger integration of QMS training within teacher education curricula and closer university-school partnerships to ensure that newly qualified teachers are consistently prepared for policy implementation.

Keywords: Foundation Phase Education, Teacher Education Programmes, pre-service teachers, Quality Management System (QMS), teacher preparedness, teaching practice, mentoring.

Introduction

Research Problem

The South African Quality Management System (QMS) requires teachers to participate in appraisal, accountability, continuous professional development (CPD) and better overall quality in teaching and learning. Newly qualified teachers are expected to undertake these responsibilities from the beginning of their careers; however, existing South African research has mainly examined QMS implementation from the perspectives of practising teachers, school leaders and district officials. Not much is known about whether pre-service teachers are adequately prepared to implement the QMS before entering the profession. Investigating this issue is therefore necessary, as insufficient preparation may prevent newly qualified teachers from implementing the system effectively.

Research Focus

This study focuses on the preparation of final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers for QMS implementation. Improving this preparation may help develop teachers who are better equipped to fulfil their professional responsibilities. In the longer term, stronger preparation may support professional growth, teacher accountability, school improvement and the quality of teaching and learning in South African schools.

The study also contributes to research on teacher education, policy implementation and the transfer of learning from tertiary education to professional practice. Although the QMS and its predecessor, the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), have been examined in South African schools, existing research has primarily focused on practising teachers, school management teams and district officials. The preparation of final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers remains underexplored, particularly regarding the formal training they receive, the practical experience they acquire during teaching practice and the influence of mentor teachers and placement-school contexts on their preparedness.

By examining these areas across three South African teacher education institutions, the study provides insight into how pre-service teachers are prepared for QMS implementation. It highlights the predominantly theoretical nature of formal preparation, the inconsistent opportunities for practical QMS learning during teaching practice and the significant influence of mentor teachers on students' learning opportunities.

Research Aim and Research Questions

Research Aim

The aim of the study was to explore how prepared final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers are to implement the Quality Management System (QMS), with particular attention to the formal training and practical experience acquired during their teacher education programmes.

Research Questions

The main research question was:

How prepared are final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers to implement the Quality Management System?

The following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What formal training do final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers receive regarding QMS implementation?
2. What practical experience of QMS implementation do they acquire during teaching practice?
3. How do mentor teachers and school contexts influence their preparedness to implement the QMS?

Literature Review

Conceptualising pre-service teacher preparedness for QMS implementation

Teacher education programmes play an important role in preparing future teachers for classroom practice. Preparedness extends beyond subject knowledge, classroom instruction and academic achievement (Boyd et al., 2020). Pre-service teachers must also develop pedagogical and classroom-management skills and understand the broader professional responsibilities associated with teaching (Almazroa & Alotaibi, 2023). Modern teachers are further expected to interpret education policies, participate in CPD and accountability processes and demonstrate professional competence across different areas of practice (Fairman, Smith, Pullen & Lebel, 2023).

In the South African context, this broader understanding of preparedness is particularly relevant, as the QMS requires school-based educators to participate in appraisal, professional development, accountability and school-improvement processes (ELRC, 2020). Newly qualified teachers entering the profession are expected to assume these responsibilities. Their preparedness therefore depends partly on whether teacher education programmes enable them to connect policy knowledge with its practical application in schools (Phillips & Condy, 2023).

Formal preparation for QMS implementation in Teacher Education Programmes

Formal preparation within teacher education programmes must create meaningful opportunities for pre-service teachers to translate theoretical knowledge into professional practice (Fantinelli, Cortini, Di Fiore, Iervese & Galanti, 2024). Phillips and Condy (2023) argue that without these opportunities, students may lack the confidence necessary before entering the profession. Preparation would require that pre-service teachers understand the rationale that underpins the QMS, the role of the teacher in its developmental and accountability processes and the procedures involved in teacher appraisal and CPD.

Although some aspects of QMS are addressed in teacher education programmes, limited attention has been given to how QMS-specific responsibilities are incorporated in daily practice and curriculum delivery.

Therefore, students may be familiar with broad QMS principles, such as accountability, reflection and CPD, without understanding how these principles are formally applied through the QMS. This distinction is important because general professional preparation does not necessarily provide the procedural knowledge required to implement a specific policy.

Practical experience of QMS implementation during teaching practicals

Teaching practicals enable student teachers to apply their theoretical knowledge in authentic professional settings (Fantinelli *et al.*, 2024). During these placements, students are exposed to classroom environments where they can observe mentor teachers, engage with school policy, develop their competencies and shape their own professional identity (Toh, Koh, Lua, Wong, Quah, Panda, Ho, Lim, Ong, Chua & Ng, 2022), which significantly shapes graduates' perceptions of the profession, rather than tertiary coursework alone.

However, the quality of these experiences differs because school contexts vary in culture, leadership practices, available resources and approaches to mentoring (Hou, Chen & Yu, 2023). The variability means that two students completing similar teacher education programmes may have different experiences, resulting in different levels of preparedness.

Research has consistently demonstrated that active participation in school activities strengthens the transfer of theory to practice (Bastian, Kaiser, Meyer, Schwarz & König, 2022; Hou *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, student teachers who remain passive observers often have limited opportunities to develop practical competence expected of novice teachers (Boyd *et al.*, 2020).

The influence of mentor teachers and school contexts on QMS preparedness

Effective mentor teachers do considerably more than supervise and instruct. As Sydnor *et al.* (2023) stipulate, mentoring has been recognised as one of the most influential factors influencing the professional development of pre-service teachers, since a good mentor teacher models effective classroom practice, provides constructive feedback and creates opportunities for participation in activities that extend beyond the classroom and lesson preparation.

Through collaboration, reflection, observation and professional dialogue, pre-service teachers develop a unique understanding of the complexities of teaching that cannot be taught through theoretical instruction alone, supporting the notion that a good mentor teacher builds professional confidence through ongoing guidance.

Nevertheless, mentoring experiences remain inconsistent across schools. Studies show that some mentor teachers actively involve student teachers in duties and responsibilities, while others limit participation to lesson delivery and routine administrative tasks (Sydnor *et al.*, 2023). These inconsistencies have significant implications for preparing graduates to engage in quality assurance systems when entering the teaching profession.

School contexts furthermore influence student teachers' learning opportunities. Because schools differ in leadership practices, resource availability and mentoring approaches (Hou *et al.*, 2023), QMS implementation will also vary across schools. As a result, pre-service teacher training and preparedness will depend partly on the schools and mentor teachers to which they are assigned rather than on a consistent programme of formal preparation.

The research gap

Relatively little research has examined pre-service teachers acquiring practical experience in QMS implementation before entering the profession. South African studies have explored perspectives of practising teachers, school management and departmental officials (Kalane & Rambuda, 2022); however, the voices of final-year pre-service teachers remain largely absent from the literature.

The gap is particularly evident in Foundation Phase Education. Understanding how these students experience QMS preparation during their tertiary studies is therefore essential in strengthening teacher education programmes and ensuring that graduates enter the classroom with the competence required to successfully implement the QMS.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Baldwin and Ford's (1988) Transfer of Training Model. The model explains how knowledge and skills developed through training are transferred to practice (Almohammadi & Panatik, 2020; Rahayu & Paerah, 2022). The model distinguishes between training inputs, training outcomes and the transfer of learning (Mdhlalose, 2022). Training inputs refer to the conditions that shape learning and include trainee characteristics, training design and the work environment. These conditions influence the extent to which knowledge and skills are acquired and retained. The model provides a useful framework for examining the relationship between formal preparation and the practical demands encountered in professional settings (Rahman, 2022).

Basic assumptions and principles

The first principle concerns trainee characteristics. These include an individual's prior knowledge, abilities, motivation, confidence, perseverance and willingness to apply what has been learned (Kyere, 2024; Rahayu & Paerah, 2022; Zulkifly, 2022). Pre-service teachers may respond differently to similar learning opportunities since they enter teacher education programmes and teaching practice with different levels of understanding and experience.

The second principle is training design, which refers to the content and delivery of training. According to Alshaali, Ab Hamid and Al-Ansi (2022), effective training should provide opportunities for practice, constructive feedback, appropriate learning materials and clear connections between theoretical content and its practical application. If training remains abstract or provides few opportunities for application, students may remain insufficiently prepared.

The third principle encompasses the work environment where the acquired knowledge and skills are applied. Transfer is more likely to occur when the environment provides opportunities to practise, access to resources, constructive feedback and support from supervisors, mentors and colleagues (Al-Mottahar & Pangil, 2021; Almohammadi & Panatik, 2020). Effective transfer does not depend only on the individual or the quality of the training programme. Students who complete similar teacher education programmes may develop different levels of preparedness when their opportunities for practical application and workplace support differ.

Relevance of the model to the study

Baldwin and Ford's (1988) model provided a framework for examining how formal QMS training translated into practice. The training design represented the preparation provided by tertiary institutions, while trainee characteristics reflected students' prior knowledge, motivation and engagement. Teaching practice represented the work environment in which mentor support, school contexts and opportunities

for participation could strengthen or restrict learning transfer. The model therefore helped explain why theoretical exposure alone did not necessarily result in practical preparedness for QMS implementation.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Participants

The population for this study consisted of final-year Foundation Phase Education students studying towards an education degree at three tertiary institutions. The accessible population comprised 276 final-year Foundation Phase Education students enrolled across three teacher education institutions in Gauteng and North West, South Africa. From this sampling frame, 59 students were purposively selected to participate in the study. The institutional figures refer to the distribution of these 59 participants: 21 participants were from Institution A, 18 from Institution B and 20 from Institution C. They do not represent the total number of eligible students at each institution.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed characteristics relevant to the study's focus (Obilor, 2023). To be eligible, students had to be in the final year of a Foundation Phase Education degree and have completed teaching practice. All 59 participants took part in focus-group discussions, while 14 were subsequently selected from this group for follow-up semi-structured individual interviews. The interviews therefore involved a subsample of the 59 participants and did not increase the final sample size.

Instrument and Procedure

To enhance the credibility and depth of research findings, multiple qualitative data collection methods were employed. The primary data collection method, focus group discussions, encouraged interaction and enabled participants to collectively share and reflect on their knowledge and experience about the QMS during their studies. To explore participants' experiences in greater depth and complement the focus groups, semi-structured one-on-one interviews gave focus group participants the opportunity to discuss personal experiences they may have been reluctant to share in a group. Furthermore, document analysis provided an additional source of evidence. This enabled the researcher to examine the policy documents underpinning QMS implementation, namely the Education Labour Relations Council Collective Agreement No. 8 of 2003 (IQMS) and the Education Labour Relations Council Collective Agreement No. 2 of 2020 (QMS). Using multiple data collection methods facilitated methodological triangulation and provided for a more comprehensive understanding of participants' preparation for QMS implementation (Vivek, 2023).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which involves identifying, analysing, and reporting recurring patterns or themes within the dataset (Oosthuizen, 2024:34). To manage and interpret the data, the researcher followed the structured steps of thematic analysis, including familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report (Bingham, 2023:2; Monaro, Gullick & West, 2022:1043). Each transcript was coded to capture recurring phrases, expressions, or views related to students' readiness for QMS implementation. Supporting documents, such as the IQMS and QMS policy texts, were analysed using content-analysis procedures aligned with Tesch's coding principles, including open, axial, and selective coding. Codes from both interview and document data were grouped into categories and broader themes that reflected shared experiences and perceptions among participants. Although the broader study addressed five research questions, this article reports findings specifically related to participants' formal QMS preparation, practical experience, mentor support and overall preparedness for QMS implementation.

The IQMS and QMS agreements were analysed by identifying provisions relating to educator appraisal, professional development, accountability and preparation for implementation.

Results

Formal QMS preparation within Teacher Education Programmes

Formal QMS preparation was considered limited. Participants recalled hearing about the QMS during lectures or encountering brief references to it in their coursework. They believed the exposure was superficial and did not adequately prepare them for implementation in schools. Participants explained, *"Yes, it is in our textbook, but not in depth. It's like a paragraph"* (FG1, Site A). Similarly, another participant reflected: *"It was mentioned in lectures. It was mentioned in practicals. But not in depth"* (FG6, Site C). Other participants reported receiving no formal QMS training. These accounts suggest that participants questioned the extent to which teacher education programmes had prepared them for QMS implementation, rather than questioning the value of the QMS itself.

Although theoretical awareness developed to some extent, participants repeatedly distinguished between understanding how to implement it and knowing about the QMS. One participant reported, *"So, I think it is best if we are introduced to it prior than when we get to know about it at work"* (Interview 9, Site B). This reflected participants' concern about entering the profession without adequate preparation. Participants did not want to encounter the QMS for the first time as novice teachers; instead, they believed meaningful preparation must occur before entering the profession.

The findings showed that exposure to the QMS within teacher education programmes remained largely introductory rather than developmental. Consequently, participants were insufficiently prepared for the professional responsibilities they would assume after graduation.

Practical QMS experience acquired during teaching practicals

Participants described teaching practicals as the environment in which they began developing an understanding of the QMS. They explained that their understanding developed through observing experienced teachers and occasionally participating in QMS-related activities rather than through coursework. Some participants described positive experiences. A participant described how a mentor teacher intentionally involved her in professional activities: *"she was showing me on how to do this and now everything according to her, the way that she was doing everything, like it seems like she was enjoying it"* (FG5, Site C). Similarly, another participant recalled, *"the only time I felt included, it was when the other teacher asked me to do a recording sheet. That's when I started to learn something new. I started to learn how to record marks"* (FG3, Site B). The same participant immediately added, *"other than that, you're just in the corner cutting and marking"* (FG3, Site B). This contrast illustrated the inconsistency in student involvement during teaching practicals and that limited involvement restricted learning to observation alone.

Many participants stated that they only became aware of the QMS when observing their mentor teachers completing QMS documentation or discussing appraisal requirements. One participant reflected, *"Nobody showed me. I only heard about it because I heard the principal telling the teacher that they need to submit their QMS file"* (Interview 9, Site B). Another explained, *"No one has ever come to me and actually introduced the QMS or spoken about it with me during practicals"* (FG6, Site C).

This demonstrates that although teaching practicals provided opportunities to encounter the QMS, exposure was often incidental and not intentionally planned as part of professional learning.

Influence of mentor teachers and school contexts on QMS preparedness

Mentor teachers played a pivotal role in shaping participants' understanding of the QMS. While coursework provided limited theoretical exposure, mentor teachers determined whether pre-service teachers gained meaningful insight into the QMS in practice. Some mentor teachers intentionally introduced them to QMS processes and encouraged their involvement in professional activities. This enabled participants to move beyond theoretical knowledge and observe how the QMS is implemented within schools. One participant explained, *"since my mentor teacher from first year was an HOD, I was going into class visits with her sometimes, so I saw how she was manoeuvring around the QMS evaluations"* (Interview 11, Site C). Mentor teachers created opportunities to observe professional practice directly, allowing participants to connect policy expectations with everyday teaching responsibilities and better understand how the documents were implemented.

However, positive experiences were not representative of all participants' experiences. Some described limited guidance and exclusion from QMS-related activities and although many observed teachers completing QMS documentation, they were seldom invited to participate in these processes. One participant remarked, *"Nobody showed me what a QMS file is and what it contains. So, I only heard about it in person"* (Interview 2, Site A). Another stated, *"No, they didn't show me how it works. They did not speak about it. Sometimes I would see some document written QMS, but I wouldn't take a look at it"* (Interview 7, Site A). Participants found themselves observing QMS-related activities from a distance, rather than actively engaging with them.

Several participants expressed disappointment that mentor teachers did not always recognise student teachers as future professionals who would soon be responsible for implementing the QMS. One participant explained, *"During practicals, the teachers did the QMS themselves. They didn't talk us through the QMS"* (FG2, Site A). Another reflected, *"As student teachers, we were not involved in them, were not briefed about them"* (Interview 10, Site C).

This indicated that participants were largely dependent on the initiative of the individual mentor teacher, rather than on a structured explanation of the QMS within teacher education programmes.

Interestingly, participants' observations extended beyond procedural learning. While some participants described mentor teachers who approached the policy positively, others witnessed negative interactions that appeared to influence their own perceptions of the policy. One participant recalled, *"It was a negative experience for my mentor teacher because the HOD was very rude"* (FG5, Site C).

The contrast in experiences suggests that mentor teachers also modelled attitudes toward professional accountability. Where mentors intentionally explained procedures, modelled positive professional practice and involved student teachers in QMS-related activities, final-year Foundation Phase Education students reported greater understanding of the policy.

Document analysis of the IQMS and QMS agreements

Document analysis showed that the IQMS and QMS agreements outline detailed appraisal, professional development and accountability responsibilities for practising school-based educators (ELRC, 2003; ELRC, 2020). However, neither agreement provides specific guidance on how pre-service teachers should be prepared for these responsibilities during initial teacher education or teaching practicals. This supports participants' accounts that preparation for QMS implementation was not systematically incorporated into their teacher education programmes and was often dependent on exposure during school placement.

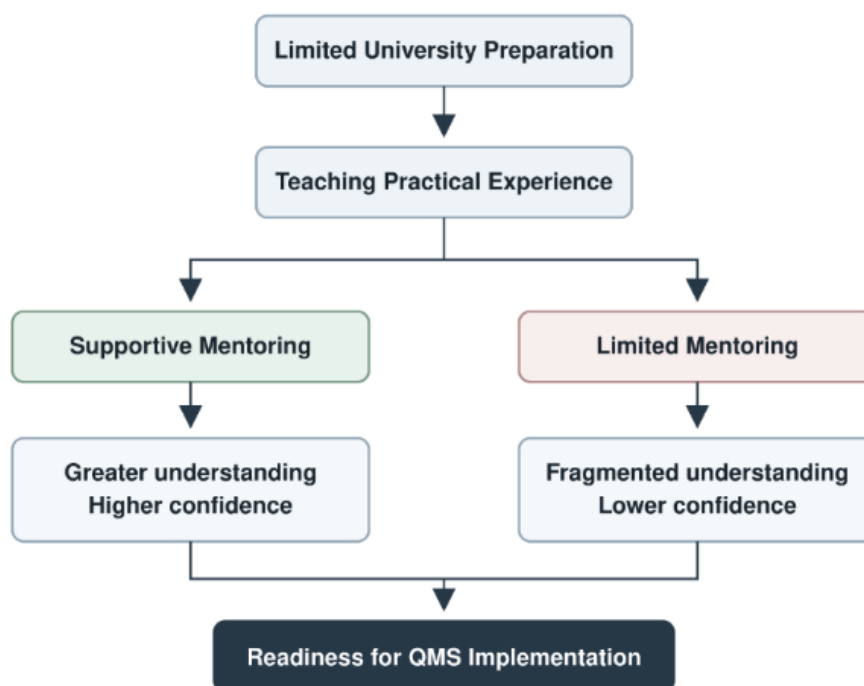
Overall preparedness for QMS implementation

Overall, participants' preparedness for QMS implementation was uneven and insufficiently developed. Although they demonstrated some awareness of the QMS and recognised its professional importance, they generally lacked the procedural knowledge and meaningful practical experience required to implement it. Their preparedness depended considerably on the formal instruction, teaching-practice opportunities, mentor support and school contexts to which they were exposed.

Participants nevertheless regarded QMS preparation as an integral component of becoming a professional teacher. As one participant explained, *"I definitely do think it should be part of our training because it's something that we are going to use in the future"* (Interview 8, Site B). The findings therefore showed that participants were not consistently prepared for QMS implementation and that their readiness reflected differences in the theoretical and practical learning opportunities available across the three institutions and placement schools.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model Illustrating the Factors Influencing Pre-service Teachers' QMS Preparedness



Note. Developed by the authors from the study findings.

Table

Participant profile

Campus	Focus Group Discussion	Course/Department	Qualification	Gender	Total
		Foundation Phase Education students		Female Male	

Site A	Focus Group:		Final year			
	1	11		10	01	21
	2	10		08	02	
Site B	Focus Group		Final year			
	1	12		12	00	18
	2	06		06	00	
Site C	Focus Group		Final year			
	1	11		11	00	20
	2	09		9	00	
Total		59		56	03	59

Discussion

Final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers' preparedness for QMS implementation was shaped by three interconnected factors: formal preparation within teacher education programmes, practical exposure during teaching practicals and the support available within placement schools.

Formal preparation for QMS implementation

Formal QMS preparation was either absent or limited to brief theoretical references during final-year Foundation Phase students' studies. This supports research showing that teacher preparedness goes beyond subject knowledge or pedagogical competence and includes an understanding of policy-related responsibilities (Boyd *et al.*, 2020:216). Newly qualified teachers may possess the knowledge but remain uncertain about the wider accountability processes that form part of professional practice. Participants' distinction between knowing about the QMS and knowing how to implement it is important. Introducing students to the broad purpose of a policy does not necessarily provide them with the procedural knowledge required for implementation. Therefore, teacher education programmes must create opportunities for students to connect formal learning with practice (Phillips & Condry, 2023).

The document analysis supported these findings. Although the IQMS and QMS agreements clearly outline the appraisal, professional development and accountability responsibilities of practising school-based educators, neither document specifies how pre-service teachers should be prepared for these responsibilities during initial teacher education or teaching practicals (ELRC, 2003; ELRC, 2020). This absence of guidance may contribute to the limited and inconsistent QMS preparation reported by participants across the three institutions.

Practical learning during teaching practicals

Findings revealed that teaching practicals were the primary setting in which they encountered QMS-related responsibilities because some participants observed or participated in administrative tasks, observed appraisal activities and engaged in informal discussions with teachers. This supports the view that school placements provide an important bridge between theoretical learning and professional practice (Bastian *et al.*, 2022:205; Hou *et al.*, 2023:90). However, teaching practicals alone did not guarantee meaningful QMS learning, as many participants remained passive observers or were assigned routine tasks unrelated to QMS implementation. The literature similarly indicates that pre-service teachers benefit most when they are actively involved in school activities rather than restricted to observation (Hou *et al.*, 2023:90; Morrison *et al.*, 2023:306). Limited participation therefore explains why some participants had encountered QMS documents but remained uncertain about how the system operated.

Influence of mentor teachers and school contexts

A significant finding concerned the influence of mentor teachers and school contexts on participants' preparedness. Where mentor teachers modelled positive engagement with the QMS, explained its procedures and involved pre-service teachers in QMS-related activities, participants developed greater understanding and confidence. Conversely, exclusion from these processes and negative attitudes towards QMS administration contributed to uncertainty about future professional responsibilities.

These findings support research showing that mentor teachers influence pre-service teachers' professional learning by modelling practice, providing guidance and creating opportunities for meaningful participation (Hou *et al.*, 2023; Sydnor *et al.*, 2023). They also align with Mathura's (2024) finding that school-level experiences shape how the QMS is understood and implemented. Differences in mentoring and placement-school contexts therefore contributed significantly to the uneven preparedness reported by participants.

Overall QMS preparedness

Overall, participants' preparedness for QMS implementation was uneven and insufficiently developed. Although they demonstrated some awareness of the QMS and recognised its professional importance, they generally lacked the procedural knowledge and meaningful practical experience required for its implementation. Their preparedness depended considerably on the formal instruction, teaching-practice opportunities and mentor support they received. Participants nevertheless regarded QMS preparation as an integral component of becoming a professional teacher. They believed earlier exposure and structured practical opportunities would help them understand the QMS as part of their professional responsibilities rather than merely a policy requirement.

Viewed through Baldwin and Ford's (1988) Transfer of Training Model, limited formal preparation restricted the knowledge available for transfer, while differences in mentor support and school contexts influenced opportunities to apply that knowledge. Participants' uneven preparedness therefore reflected differences in training design and the school environments in which learning transfer was expected to occur.

Figure 1 illustrates how these factors shaped participants' preparedness. Limited preparation within teacher education programmes increased the importance of teaching-practice experiences. Supportive mentoring contributed to greater understanding and confidence, whereas limited mentoring resulted in fragmented understanding and lower confidence. The figure therefore demonstrates why participants completing similar teacher education programmes developed different levels of preparedness for QMS implementation.

Implications

The QMS should be explicitly integrated into Foundation Phase teacher education programmes, and preparation should extend beyond brief theoretical introductions and provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with QMS documents, appraisal procedures, reflective practice, evidence collection and CPD planning. Purposeful inclusion of these responsibilities during teaching practicals would help students connect policy knowledge with the professional expectations they will encounter after graduation.

Closer collaboration between tertiary institutions and placement schools is also required. Mentor teachers should receive clear guidance regarding their role in introducing pre-service teachers to QMS-related responsibilities and creating meaningful opportunities for participation. Stronger partnerships

between institutions, schools and mentor teachers would promote greater consistency across placements and reduce students' dependence on incidental exposure to the QMS.

Conclusions

This study concludes that final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers were unevenly prepared to implement the QMS. Although participants had some theoretical awareness of the system, many lacked the practical knowledge required to participate confidently in its processes. Their preparedness was shaped largely by the quality of their teaching-practice experiences and the guidance provided by mentor teachers. The study therefore highlights the need for a more deliberate and consistent approach to QMS preparation across teacher education institutions and placement schools.

To strengthen pre-service teachers' readiness for QMS implementation, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrate the QMS explicitly into Foundation Phase teacher education curricula.
2. Provide practical and simulation-based QMS training before teaching practice.
3. Include clear QMS-related learning outcomes in teaching-practice requirements.
4. Develop structured guidelines to help mentor teachers support QMS preparation.
5. Prepare pre-service teachers for both the developmental and accountability dimensions of the QMS.
6. Provide relevant professional development for mentor teachers and university supervisors.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should build on this study's findings by examining QMS preparedness across a wider range of teacher education contexts and using methodological approaches that capture both participants' experiences and measurable changes in competence. First, longitudinal studies could follow pre-service teachers from their final year of study into their first years of teaching. Such research could determine whether the limited procedural knowledge identified in this study persists after graduation, how newly qualified teachers adapt to QMS requirements, and which forms of induction or mentoring support successful implementation.

Second, comparative research involving more South African teacher education institutions would be valuable. Such studies could compare curricula, teaching-practice requirements and institutional approaches to QMS preparation across universities and colleges, thereby identifying effective practices and areas requiring greater alignment. Comparative research across Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases could also establish whether QMS preparedness differs according to phase and professional responsibilities.

Third, intervention-based research should investigate the effectiveness of structured QMS preparation. For example, future studies could evaluate simulation-based training, case studies, QMS documentation exercises and reflective activities before teaching practice. Pre- and post-intervention measures could determine whether these approaches improve pre-service teachers' procedural knowledge, confidence and ability to transfer learning into school contexts.

Further research should also examine mentor teachers' preparedness to support QMS learning. Investigating mentors' knowledge, attitudes and mentoring practices could clarify how schools can provide more consistent learning opportunities. Finally, research should explore the perspectives of university supervisors, school management teams and education officials to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional conditions required for effective QMS preparation and implementation.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None

Funding

The student received a bursary from the institution.

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