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# SCHOOL EVALUATION AS A MEACHNISM FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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#### Abstract:

This paper is a contributing segment of a study under development that aims at examining the effectiveness of school quality assurance mechanisms/school inspection and their impact on school improvement through improved relationships between the evaluation bodies and entities being evaluated. A few existing models used in the region will be investigated with the purpose of comparing them against the practices that are applied throughout the public and private sector of education in Kosovo. The study will look into the relationship between schools as service providers and evaluation mechanisms focusing on public, private – national schools and international schools at the K-12 level, in Kosovo. A qualitative methodology will be employed and the methods used to gather data will include reviewing national laws on school monitoring and quality assurance, collecting data through interviews with inspectors as evaluators, school principals, teachers, students parents and members of the community as education stakeholders, the use of questionnaires, review of available literature and research supported by other relevant documentation regarding legal frameworks that provide policy and guidance on the evaluation practice. The end goal of the study is to gather suggestions on how can the relationship between the evaluation bodies and the school improve in order to positively affect the overall quality of education, and thus have a positive impact on school improvement in Kosovo.

Key words: improvement, inspection, school evaluation, mechanisms, relationships, policy, quality education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to analyze the role of the school evaluation mechanisms and their impact on school effectiveness in the schools in Kosovo in an effort to contribute to improvement of overall quality in education. Assuring quality in education is continuing to pose a great challenge therefore Ministry of Education Science and Technology has approved a number of strategies, bodies and instruments to monitor quality in education and is trying to ensure that these strategies are producing positive results. School inspection is one of the external mechanisms performed by the inspection officials mandated to ensure compliance of schools with rules and regulations approved by the Ministry in lieu of checking, monitoring supervising and offering professional support for schools in providing quality education. The study examines the practices of the process of school evaluation with a purpose of finding what elements or characteristics of inspection will make this process more functional having in mind better school performance and student attainment as an end goal.

#### **1.1 Background of the Story**

### 1.2. Political and educational policy autonomy 1970–1980

"Kosovo education system cannot be understood without reflecting back on its development in the last three decades" (Tahirsylaj, 2008). Since its inception in the 1970, it enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy that lasted to the beginning of 1980s, during which period the education gained a momentum, resulting in more schools and faculties being established in Kosovo and Albanian language was recognized as an official language (Gashi, 2014) The change in Constitution of 1974 grants the Province of Kosovo almost equal rights and powers with all other republics of Former Yugoslavia except the right to secession or independence from the federal unit of Yugoslavia. This climate set the foundation for the establishing of a progressive system of education. Programs, books and curricula were being modified to fit the new purpose of education that was striving to align itself with modern trends in Former Yugoslavia and the rest of the world. Prishtina as a capitol of Kosovo became a centre of social, and scientific gatherings promoting the Albanian identity and national values in which Albanians take a lot of pride (Sommers and Buckland, 2004). However, all this was happening under the watchful eye of the current system, and this seemingly broad autonomy was in fact very fragile and systematically monitored. Through Laws and decrees of the existing legislation, these developments were under surveillance at all times and constantly measured with different indicators of suitability to the system (Gashi 2004).

#### 1.3. Loss of autonomy

The period from 1980 to 1989 was characterized with a number of political events that led to further repercussions that interfered with the process of education. The expansion of the educational system and the developments in the political domain started to pose a 'threat' to the former regime of Yugoslavia and the situation escalated to the point where the schools and other institutions were seen as strongholds of the hostile activities and ideologies that were promoting the idea of secession and therefore had to be closed. In 1989 Kosovo lost its autonomy and the educational institutions experience another crisis that brings all the progress to question. In 1990 schools were closed to the Albanian teachers and students. All other administrative and legislative bodies involved in education were disbanded for the moment. (Gashi, 1997)

#### 1.4. Parallel System Saga

The vitality of education was recognized as one of the priorities for Kosovars in the decade from 1990 to 1999. From this period Kosovo functioned in total isolation and the parallel system was born- parallel meaning schools functioned as self reliant system. This was a very erroneous system that was referred to by the OECD report (2001) as the largest NGO- meaning that it only responded to a crisis situation... It was the time of struggle. The education activities were organized in private establishments that did not offer even the basic conditions for teaching and learning. There were not enough premises, teaching aids, or

learning materials and the class time was reduced to 30 minutes due to the circumstances. (Shatri 2010) This was the era of survival.

#### 1.5. Foreign intervention

In 1999 United Nations Mission in Kosovo took over the governing and administration of Kosovo and restoring education was seen as a priority.( Sommers & Buckland, 2004).

Interim Administration of United Nations, dismissed all the previous existing political and institutional structures. Many agencies flooded Kosovo in an attempt to reform the system with special focus on reforming education during which process the local capacities were sidelined. The agencies divided the responsibilities in rebuilding and reshaping the Kosovo Education system where UNICEF was in charge of curriculum, CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) was involved in Teacher training and development, World Bank was working in support of Education Management and Information systems, Finnish Support was addressing issues of inclusion of people with special needs. At the beginning of 2000 there was not much word and concern about the quality of education. Involvement and inclusion of every child in school was a bigger priority. Emphasis was not on quality or standards- rebuilding schools and bringing children back to school was the focus of the international community.

#### **1.6.** The aftermath of 2000 to present

A decade of isolation of the Kosovo education system from the current developments in modern trends of innovation and change that were happening in the rest of the world left Kosovo educators marginalized and unprepared for many challenges that the rest of the world was already familiar with.

In a communist system where everything was centralized the idea of initiative and innovation had to come from the top. In such a society people became too reliant on the center and experienced control as a normal way of living and doing things. The transitioning from a system that was directive towards one that is more democratic requires people to take ownership and to implement reform, and innovation from within is taking too long. The country is still living under cargo effect, (Koren, 2014), too reliant on donor support, external expertise. There is a lack of research that would provide a good foundation for the future action based on the findings dependent on Kosovo context. (Rama, 2010).

### 2. SCHOOL EVALUATION IN KOSOVO

The Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo was established by the end of 1950s. This Institution was in charge of monitoring the work of other educational bodies in compliance with the existing laws and provisions.( Gazetazyrtare e KSAK, nr.34/70, Prishtine, 1970) The tasks and responsibilities of this institution included: assuring quality in education, monitoring all levels of education, designing and modifying programs, making sure that teachers had relevant qualifications, making decisions about the number of schools needed to accommodate the number of students, conducting analysis of the education processes, providing recommendation for changes in the education system to fit the needs for new textbooks, teaching methodologies and techniques, and other relevant documentation pertaining to the well-functioning of education.

The institution was also active in providing teacher training in form of debates, discussion seminars, and study visits at a regional and federal level. A report dating from March 1986, describes the work of the inspection departments in all regions where about 30 inspectors were involved and 2 inspectors were working at a Provincial level.

They were conducting visits to schools at least once a year. Visits would be conducted in teams of one, two or three inspectors at a time depending on the size of the school. The functions and responsibilities were divided into administrative carried by the professionals in the field of law, and advisory roles where the inspectors were pedagogues or experienced teachers. The administrative types of inspectors dealt with class observations, talked to the teachers, students and looked into lesson plans and class activities. (Gazeta zyrtare e KSAK, nr.21/78, and 42/84)

Being that a lot of changes were happening in the meantime in the historical context of the 80s and 90s the role of the inspectors changed accordingly. Political tensions of the 80s increased the feeling of threat by control and this perception of inspection is still continuing to reflect negatively on the relationship between inspectors and teachers, administrators and teachers accordingly.

During the 90 the inspection experienced the same fate as all other educational and political bodies in Kosovo. The inspection followed in the steps of joining the parallel system. Even in those difficult conditions the inspectors continued to provide support and advice to the teachers due to the new curricula that was adopted ad they aided in the instituting change in textbooks and certain subjects that needed to be enriched with new content. The inspection visits were conducted as often as conditions allowed it, but this period was characterized with various discrepancies in the inspection processes. There was no talk of checking quality of teaching or conducting professional visits as inspectors themselves were not trained enough and often times they did not have the right qualifications for the job (Gashi 1997, Shatri 2010)

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION IN SCHOOL EVALUATION

School inspection or external evaluation is implemented in many countries around the world as a mechanism to govern the complex education systems) and its' structural components that comprise the system of quality (Baxter, 2014)

Kosovo has inherited a school evaluation system that is outdated in terms of functionality, structure and preparedness to meet and face the new demands for quality education, one problem being the understanding of the concept of quality itself. As stated by Sokoli (2017), 'the term quality lacks definition that is clear and can be referred to as property, or an outcome or even a process, thus it is very difficult to built a consensus on what constitutes it. Therefore a need for emergent new guidelines that describe guality in modern terms along with new understanding and interpretation of the term itself are crucial to the implementation of reform in education. In Kosovo the mandate and responsibilities of the Inspection Department are defined by the acts of law on inspection (2015/06/1) and administrative instructions approved by the Government and implemented by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology in Kosovo, as the highest body in charge of ensuring access to guality education for all people of Kosovo. The inspection department is an executive body that oversees the quality and effectiveness of education. It functions as a unit presided by the head inspector, comprised of a number of educational inspectors located in municipalities of seven regions. Within each unit there is a division of three sub-units where the duties and responsibilities are divided based on the area of inspection, therefore there is an administrative unit in charge of legal issues covered by inspection, pedagogical unit that works in support of staff, and teacher performance unit that is mandated to carry out a number of functions related to teachers, guality of teachers, teacher licensing, curriculum implementation methods and methodologies used in implementing curriculum and a number of other functions pertaining directly to the classroom level.

In terms of types of inspection the Inspectorate Department conducts three types of inspections pertaining to overall quality of the institutions that provide education for students. The first form is a general inspection that covers administrative rules and regulations checking the compliance of the schools with the relevant laws and legislation. The second type of inspection focuses on the pedagogical aspects that include teacher performance in the classroom, curriculum implementation and other components that contribute to the educational process at the classroom level. The third type of inspection is termed thematic inspection that is done for a purpose of addressing specific issues that might arise during the education process and need consideration. There is also another form of inspection that may be as a result of emergent occurrences arising for unpredicted reasons and may require immediate action.

General school inspections are usually conducted in cyclical intervals depending on school yearly planning where inspection conducts visits to measure and check the compliance of schools with the strategic planning done by the schools themselves. It is carried out once per year if conditions do not imply otherwise. During these visits inspectors talk to the school heads who have been notified about the visits five days ahead of the visit. The internal evaluation processes that the schools are conducting themselves form the basis and starting point for the measurement. Then they are compared against the goals and objectives set forth by the Ministry regulations (MEST, 2004/37).

Inspectors also conduct classroom observations and talk to teachers, students and other support staff. After the visits inspectors compile reports and share them with school administration and teachers to ensure that these reports represent a true picture and are a reflection of the actual situation in the schools. These reports are used to gather data, check compliance, make any recommendations for improvement, and often

incorporate measures that force schools to act in accordance with the requirements to address irregularities found in the process of evaluation (DeWolf & Janssen, 2007, Ehren, & Vischer 2006)

In Kosovo there is no publishing of reports from inspection. They become the property of the Inspection Department respectively the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo. They serve to inform the Ministry about how standards of quality education in schools are being maintained and identify any irregularities that have to be timely addressed.

## 4. QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

The study on school evaluation systems in Kosovo will explore the practices that are implemented by different countries in an effort to draw conclusions that can be utilized by the education in Kosovo, to improve the quality of education.

How this process is conducted in practice and how effective it is in having any impact on school improvement are questions that this study will aim to find an answer to. What is the relationship between the inspection bodies and schools including head teachers, teachers, students and support staff and how do they perceive the impact the inspection has on school improvement are questions for further review.

### 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Good education is key to everyone's future say Ehren and Vischer, (2006), and one of the mechanisms to promote and evaluate good education is a well functioning school inspection. Inspection is seen as a current trend in education utilized by the governments, and is conducted for the purpose of supervising the and monitoring the level of quality of education aiming at improving performance through (Lindgren et al 2010) making schools more accountable and responsible for the quality of education schools provide for the students (MacBeath, 1999)

School inspections appointed by the government deal with a number of areas of educational and organizational matters (Huber & Gordel 2006), therefore school inspections have to employ a number of criteria for evaluation that cover areas of responsibility of different bodies at school level as are school administration, teachers, students, parents, support staff and other community stakeholders and groups of interest connected to the school, and on the other hand be accountable to governments and provide input on policy making by checking what works and what doesn't at the school level. The measurements and criteria that school inspection and school inspectors use accordingly in their daily practices to evaluate schools, are a topic of debate in many countries and in Kosovo as well. They differ in their methods and models of school inspection thus relying on different indicators chosen to evaluate the effectiveness and the quality of schools. Traditionally inspection was seen as a controlling mechanism that induced fear and tress for teachers (Ozga 2009) and accountability pressure for head teachers and school management ( Altrichter&Kemethofer, 2015). Having in mind that schools are places that operate in different contexts, in terms of school intake, staffing, school buildings, social and cultural background of the children, it is unrealistic to expect that the same model will have a direct positive impact on the school improvement. According to Brimblecombe, Ormston& Shaw (1995) the way that the inspector behaves during the inspection can mediate the stress and the feeling of control. Gustafsson & Ehren(2011), contend that school inspection does not necessarily have a positive impact. It is through better communication and improved relationships while providing feedback and advise that can help schools recognize what kind of knowledge they lack in order to improve and apply better practices either in teaching, methodologies or activities and materials. (Dedering&Muller, 2011).

This study will examine the relationships between the inspection and teachers, inspection and head teachers, as well as inspection with other stakeholders in education, aiming to detect what are the context specific areas where inspection can contribute in the overall quality in education.

External evaluation is considered to have a positive impact on school quality education, and there is a growing trend for mechanisms that will ensure better quality in education. However considering that schools function in more levels, there should be a feeling and understanding of what aspects should improve, as well as what are the responsibilities of all segments in providing their contribution to improvement. Schools are places that operate within specific cultures, run by head teachers that have different perceptions about what constitutes quality, serving students of different backgrounds, employing teachers with different qualifications, materially not motivated to perform, operating in poor conditions or other obstacles either

related to policy or infrastructure(Brejc &Koren, 2014) In these cases where foreign models and policy borrowing happen, there is not enough readiness nor acceptability, and there is a lack of knowledge and preparation for the changes to take place at all levels (Koren & Shapiro, 2006).

Current trends in Kosovo are moving in two directions. Under the National Agency for Quality Assurance a project has been implemented in 6 schools throughout the Kosovo mainly at vocational schools where an approach towards self-evaluation and pressure for accountability is the method that is being piloted.

Another trend applied at public schools is the traditional external evaluation that is carried by the government is also continuing the old business. A few changes have been made to the approaches to make more supportive and a different relationship with the bodies that are inspected is being experimented. There are no conclusive results published at this point.

## 6. Research problem

The shift in education towards quality control started in the early 1980s, and since then has taken many directions. In Europe there is an array of models of inspection utilized to collect information about the quality of the school, check compliance to legislation and evaluate the quality of students work through observations, interviews and document analysis. Depending on a country that utilizes the inspection systems different terminology is sometimes used to describe different roles the inspection plays in the evaluation process (EPPI, 2014).

As described by (De Grauwe 2007)inspection or supervision often times has to play an array of roles depending on the situation and these roles may include control, evaluation, advise, assist, and support head teachers and teachers themselves, sometimes assume managerial roles, sometimes apply policing. Having in mind that inspectors have to work with a number of actors within the school and broader community involved in the evaluation process the relationships with the all the parties involved is paramount for the inspection to conduct a fair process, avoid bias and provide fair judgment during the evaluation process. The research into the issues of the relationship of the inspection bodies with the schools has proven that there are tensions between the two that in most cases result in a very negative perception of the evaluation process itself. This study will aim at exploring those relationships in the Kosovo context having in mind the specificities of the system which is still under construction.

# 7. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

Considering the fact that different countries employ different models of school inspection or supervision a body of research focuses on the elements that make school inspection a progressive tool in helping schools improve. The study conducted in Kosovo will try to pinpoint a few characteristics of school evaluation process that are in support of this claim putting the main emphasis on relationships between the school inspection and the schools evaluated as well as look into elements that will strengthen this relationship so all parties benefit from the process.

# 8. RESEACRH METHODOLOGY

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are going to be used. Considering that Inspection is a governance body it is governed by the laws put in place by the Government of Kosovo. These laws are subject to change as there are continuous projects piloting various approaches to the theme of Inspection, its role and responsibilities. Relevant documentation shall be critically viewed and compared against the practices in the field. Literature review of the articles, books and other publishing will require a thorough analysis. Face to face interviews will include participants from the inspection department, school leaders of schools in all six regions, teachers from the same schools, students per schools visited by the inspectors, and other stakeholders that can contribute to this research. Participants and selected schools will be chosen based on the evaluation rating from inspectors, in order to determine the factors that characterized a school as good or in need of improvement. Questionnaires will be used to solicit ideas and suggestions about what type of inspection or evaluation will be more preferable for teachers and head-teachers so as to gather suggestions from a wider audience. The findings will then be processed and will constitute basis for recommendations.

### 9. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Since Inspection and school evaluation are very sensitive topics and sometimes involve disclosure of sensitive and confidential material, it may be expected that inspectors, head-teachers or teachers will not be very cooperative in sharing their information and reports. In Kosovo the reports are not published and they remain subject for discussion between the teachers observed, head teachers and/or legal bodies in case of any breach of conduct occurs. Access to these reports may be another issue that can hinder the research process, as these reports are written based on personal judgment of inspectors who often times are not very thorough in their explanations or do not provide any feedback to the inspected institutions. There is a lack of supportive documentation that documents the continuity of the work of the Inspection Department.

#### **10. CONCLUSION**

School inspection is a mechanism instituted by the Government. The function is to monitor and supervise the compliance of the education providers with the laws and standards that provide quality education to students to prepare them to successfully meet the demands of the market economy. Kosovo has gone through many challenges in its effort to establish a qualitative educational system and has implemented a number of reforms in curriculum, teacher training and methodologies in hope that these reforms will set the foundation for improvement. In respect to quality teaching and education Kosovo is also investing a lot of effort in designing an evaluation system that is going to support the implementation of reforms and thus produce satisfactory results in education. In this effort it is drawing from the experiences of other countries where students have higher attainment rates. Through examining the current practices applied elsewhere in the region and compare them with practices in Kosovo the study will make a valuable contribution in the field of evaluation and school improvement through inspection.

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