

Strengthening School Inspection Systems to Improve Education Quality in Ethiopia

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Executive Summary

Education is a cornerstone of national economic and social development. For education to drive meaningful change, citizens must access quality education that fosters critical thinking and innovation. One of the key mechanisms to ensure educational quality is school inspection, which monitors teaching and learning processes, ensures accountability, and upholds standards. However, research shows that Ethiopia's education system faces persistent quality challenges, reflected in poor literacy, numeracy, and low national exam pass rates (MoE, 2022; World Bank, 2022). School inspection plays a vital role as both a monitoring and quality assurance tool (Jones & Tymms, 2014). This policy brief draws from the research "Elements of School Climate: Standards, Status, and Implications for Students' Academic Wellbeing in Secondary Schools." It critically examines the inspection system in Ethiopia, focusing on the Addis Ababa Education and Training Quality Regulation Authority (ETQRA) guidelines for accrediting and renewing licenses of secondary schools. It identifies gaps in the framework, including a focus on compliance over continuous improvement and limited attention to holistic quality dimensions. Drawing on national realities and international best practices, the brief proposes 15 actionable recommendations aimed at strengthening inspection through decentralization, stakeholder engagement, infrastructure, curriculum relevance, student well-being, multilingual instruction, and digital tools. Ultimately, it advocates for a forward-looking, inclusive, and student-centered inspection system that not only evaluates but guides schools toward lifelong learning and national development.

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015). Education is not only a fundamental human right, but also a catalyst for accelerating other SDGs, as it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills and behavioral maturity to drive economic development, reduce poverty, and improve health and well-being of nations (Cai & Wolff, 2022; Abera, 2023). Ensuring educational quality is therefore central to both national progress and global equity agendas.

Among the mechanisms employed to safeguard and improve educational quality, school inspection holds a unique position. School inspection is defined as the systematic external

evaluation of educational institutions; it is typically conducted by government authorities to monitor school performances and ensure compliance with national standards and policy goals (Jones & Tymms, 2014). The process often encompasses evaluations of teaching effectiveness, student learning outcomes, leadership and management, school infrastructure, and student welfare. According to Matete (2009), inspection serves as a regulatory tool that helps to align school practices with national priorities, enhance accountability, and improve workforce competitiveness.

In Ethiopia, nevertheless, the current school inspection system has not achieved its intended impact. Persistent issues such as students' low competency in foundational literacy and numeracy coupled with alarmingly low pass rates, below 5%, on the national secondary school leaving examination since 2022, point to systemic weaknesses in educational delivery and oversight (MoE, 2022). While inspection is intended to be a driver of quality assurance and improvement, its implementation in the Ethiopian context has been limited by overemphasis on compliance, lack of consistent follow-up, insufficient capacity of inspectors, and weak linkage to school improvement plans.

This policy brief focuses on the school inspection framework implemented by the Addis Ababa Education and Training Quality Regulation Authority (ETQRA), particularly for accrediting and renewing licenses of secondary education providers. Drawing on both national insights and international best practices from countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, Singapore, and Rwanda, this brief critically examines the current model and offers practical, evidence-based recommendations. These aim to shift the focus of inspection from mere compliance toward supporting holistic, student-centered, and equity-driven school development.

2. Policy problem

Research consistently highlights the vital role of school inspection in assuring and enhancing education quality (UNESCO IIEP, 2018). Effective inspections must comprehensively assess all aspects of the school environment and engage stakeholders

In Ethiopia, the quality of education remains a critical concern, particularly at the secondary level. Indicators such as low reading and math proficiency in primary schools and a secondary

school leaving exam pass rate below five percent for three consecutive years highlight the depth of these challenges (MoE, 2022–2024). Despite annual inspections carried out by the Education and Training Quality Regulation Authority (ETQRA) with the aim of improving school standards and fostering conducive learning environments, the anticipated improvements in educational outcomes have not materialized (MoE, 2022–2024; Tadesse, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

This gap raises fundamental questions about the effectiveness of the current school inspection framework and its capacity to drive meaningful changes. Specifically, the inspection guidelines used by ETQRA for accreditation and license renewal of secondary schools in Addis Ababa warrant critical examination, as existing studies suggest they may not comprehensively address essential quality indicators or offer actionable feedback for school improvement (Tadesse, 2021; UNESCO IIEP, 2018).

Moreover, there is a scarcity of rigorous, evidence-based studies assessing the performance and impact of the existing inspection and inspectorate systems (Tadesse, 2021; UNESCO IIEP, 2018). This policy brief, thus, aims to fill this gap by identifying weaknesses in the current framework and offering strategic recommendations informed by international best practices. It is also meant to suggest techniques used to enhance the inspection process and ultimately improve the quality of secondary education in Ethiopia.

3. Opportunities

A well-structured and contextually grounded school inspection policy presents significant opportunities for improving the quality of education in Ethiopia. When designed and implemented effectively, school inspections can foster accountability, enhance teaching-learning processes, ensure safe and inclusive school environments, strengthen school leadership, and ultimately improve student academic quality and achievement (Jones & Tymms, 2014; Matete, 2021).

Global and regional experiences offer valuable lessons for reforming Ethiopia's inspection system. For example, Finland's decentralized model empowers teachers, parents, and local governments to collaboratively design curricula and select teaching resources, ensuring that

education remains relevant to future skills and workforce demands (Lavonen, 2017). Additionally, Finland integrates school inspection with broader student welfare plans, leveraging partnerships with universities, libraries, and community institutions to address infrastructure gaps (Kettunen, 2024).

Scotland's approach emphasizes student well-being, strong teacher-student relationships, and meaningful community engagement, recognizing that emotionally supportive environments are essential for effective learning (Bass, 2018). Meanwhile, Ghana's four-tiered inspection system—comprising whole-school, performance-based, compliance, and investigative inspections—demonstrates how diversified inspection models can provide a comprehensive understanding of school performance.

India's focus on regular syllabus updates and the integration of assessment methods that promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills highlights the importance of aligning inspections with 21st-century competencies. Similarly, Wales aligns its inspections with the goals of lifelong learning by prioritizing student well-being, holistic skill development, and inclusive education (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

By drawing on these global models and tailoring them to the Ethiopian context, there is a clear opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of school inspections and its contribution to systemic improvements in education quality across the country.

4. Key Policy Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of Ethiopia's school inspection system and improve education quality, the following policy recommendations are proposed. Each recommendation includes a brief description along with potential benefits (pros) and considerations or limitations (cons).

No.	Policy Recommendation	Description	Pros	Cons
1	Decentralize School Governance	Encourage decision-making at the local level by involving teachers, parents, and community members in school leadership and curriculum decisions.	Promotes responsiveness to local needs and community ownership	Requires capacity-building and coordination to avoid inconsistencies
2	Engage Stakeholders in Curriculum Design	Involve various stakeholders—teachers, parents, employers, and community members—in need	Ensures curriculum relevance and cultural alignment	Coordination may delay processes

		assessment practices and in shaping a curriculum that reflects local relevance and market needs.		
3	Promote Student Welfare and Equity	Include student protection, inclusiveness, and equality as part of inspection criteria to create safe and supportive school environments.	Enhances engagement and learning outcomes	Requires resources and staff training
4	Strengthen Infrastructure and Resource Linkages	Foster partnerships between schools and institutions like universities, NGOs, and libraries to expand learning resources.	Improves access to materials and external expertise	Depends on availability and consistency of partnerships
5	Link Education to Real-World Applications	Introduce experiential learning practices such as hands-on projects and real-life problem solving into the curriculum.	Increases motivation and practical skills	Requires curriculum adjustments and new materials
6	Support Multilingual Education	Encourage instruction in both local and national languages to promote accessibility and inclusivity.	Enhances accessibility and inclusiveness	Requires additional materials and trained teachers
7	Implement Personal Learning Plans	Help students create individualized learning and career development plans with support from teachers and counselors.	Supports differentiated instruction and autonomy	Time-intensive for teachers and counselors
8	Institutionalize School Self-Evaluation	Mandate regular self-assessments and improvement reports as part of the school accountability system.	Promotes continuous improvement and reflection	Depends on schools' capacity for honest evaluation
9	Prioritize Student Well-being	Make emotional, social, and physical well-being of students a standard part of school evaluations.	Encourages supportive environments	Difficult to standardize and measure
10	Adopt a Multi-Tiered Inspection Model	Combine different inspection types (e.g., performance-based, compliance, whole-school) for a comprehensive evaluation system.	Enables comprehensive and flexible evaluations	Requires more personnel and resources
11	Monitor Core Subject Performance	Use achievement data in subjects like English, mathematics, and science to drive school improvement strategies.	Supports targeted interventions and accountability	May lead to overemphasis on testing
12	Enhance Assessment Standards	Revise assessments to focus on critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and problem-solving skills.	Promotes higher-order thinking and relevance	Demands training and exam redesign
13	Foster Lifelong Learning Values	Cultivate traits such as ambition, curiosity, and independent learning among students.	Builds independent and motivated learners	Hard to assess and undervalued in testing culture
14	Leverage Digital Tools for Progress Tracking	Utilize digital platforms to monitor student learning and ensure effective use of formative	Enables data-driven support and feedback	Requires infrastructure and digital literacy

		assessments.		
15	Address Social and Emotional Development	Integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into teaching and school inspection criteria.	Supports holistic development	Needs trained staff and tailored resources

5. Conclusion

Strengthening Ethiopia's school inspection system requires a strategic, inclusive and evidence-based approach. This policy brief has outlined practical recommendations grounded in both international best practices and the Ethiopian context. Emphasizing stakeholder engagement, equity, multilingualism, infrastructure development, and real-world learning will ensure that inspections do more than assess—they will inspire and guide lasting improvements. A more holistic, decentralized, and student-centered approach will elevate the quality of education, foster accountability, and empower schools to become agents of transformation. Moving forward, successful implementation will depend on committed leadership, collaborative partnerships, and continuous capacity building across the education system.

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