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# General Education Quality Assurance: The Extent of Quality Assurance Implementation from Inspection Approach in Ethiopia General Education

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this empirical study was to investigate the extent of quality assurance implementation from inspection approach and its contribution in quality enhancement and accountability. The study focused on areas of inspection policy frame work and strategies, the trend of external and internal inspection process at General education system. In the investigation qualitative approach used; the study conducted at Jimma Town in Oromiya regional state; in the study two schools purposely selected and 7 respondents have been participated in the study (one education office inspector; two, school principals; two, school department heads and two, teachers). Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data that obtained from Interviews; observation, and document analysis. The study result shows that, in Ethiopia general education context inspection is one of the mechanisms designed to evaluate schools' performance related to input, process, and output. Based on the inspection result schools and concerned bodies are expected to work on school education quality enhancement and students learning outcome improvement. However, the finding of this study indicates that, the inspection strategy designed at MOE did not practically implement as it designed and it has a shortage of linkage to the operational practice. The main reasons are: miss understanding of practitioners on the objective of inspection; the inspection standards lack clarity and have ambiguities to evaluate schools practically; the strategy lack focus to support school management, teacher engagement, pupils, and parents. Also, in practice the external inspection process did not link to school self-evaluation or internal inspection; no mechanism or strategy lay responsibility and accountability on concerned bodies to improve or find a solution on identified problem based on the inspection report. For the effective implementation of the inspection mechanism, the strategic direction that developed at the center should be linked to operational practice and procedures at the district education office and school level; also, the mechanism for holding to responsibility and accountability from the top to school management and all concerned bodies should be designed. The inspection manuals and standards should be revised to evaluate effectively the overall system and tangible things in the schools. The external inspection system also should be linked to the internal inspection mechanism to strengthen school self-assessment practice and to support school improvement plan implementation.

**Keywords:** Quality Assurance, Inspection, Self-assessment, School Improvement, Accountability, Quality Enhancement, Standards

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## 1. Introduction

In the past two decade Ethiopia government has been implementing general school improvement strategy which involves ESDP and GEQIP. These programs intended to improve the quality of general education system. Also, in 2012 MOE has designed quality assurance mechanism which includes teacher licensing, assessment and inspection to

evaluate the overall improvement of education quality and students learning outcome in general education system [26].

As recent research evidence shows that quality assurance mechanism particularly inspection system at general education is an important component to show the schools overall performance through providing data on current performance and help to identify areas of success as well as areas for system and school improvement [4, 37]. Also,

decision makers may refer to inspection result to ensure that schools are meeting standards set out in National quality assurance framework, this enable for effective distribution of resources and equitably; identify schools that are at risk and in need of additional support and to highlight and share good practice in stimulating and supporting school improvement [2, 15].

In most of countries quality improvement has become a top priority of policy makers and they rely on evaluation mechanism to monitor quality. Various studies have shown that one important determinant of the deterioration of the quality of schools precisely related to the weakening of evaluation mechanism including the professional supervision and support system. Also the challenge for school education systems is to development and sustains professional learning communities and cultures to support school development [12]. Therefore, quality assurance mechanism in general education system an important approach to evaluate the overall activities of schools and it enable to give correction for quality improvement.

The effective implementation of inspection system in Ethiopia general education can lay foundation to show the overall status of schools performance. The quantitative and qualitative data that generated through inspection also important to make decision related to accountability as well as to support ongoing development of schools and improve teaching and learning process. Furthermore, inspection plays a great role to support co-professional engagement and build trust among external and internal key actors to jointly working to solve school problems and to be a center to solution for quality improvement. Based on these conceptual ideas this study focused on quality assurance implementation at general education from inspection aspect.

The purpose of this empirical study was stated to investigate the extent of quality assurance implementation from inspection approach its contribution in quality enhancement and accountability. The study focused on areas of inspection policy frame work and strategies, the trend of external and internal inspection process at General education system.

To achieve the purpose of the study the following specific objectives were stated.

- 1) To describe the inspection policy frame work and strategies in general education quality assurance.
- 2) To examine the trend of quality assurance implementation related to external and internal inspection approach.
- 3) To explain the challenges that hinders to effective implementation of inspection approach in general education quality assurance.
- 4) To set perspective direction on inspection approach to quality assurance mechanism in General education system.

Based on these specific objectives the guiding questions were presented in study:

- 1) What is the intention of inspection policy frame work in Ethiopia general education is it related to quality enhancement and lay accountability?

- 2) What are the trends of quality assurance system related to external and internal inspection?
- 3) What are the constraint factors and challenges in the implementation of inspection system at general education?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Quality Assurance and Inspection in General Education*

The introduction of external evaluation in the form of school inspection by the national government is an old system of monitoring education quality in the world of the education system. The first school inspection originated from France under the Napoleons regime at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The idea was captured by other European countries and later was embraced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century [32]. For example in 1992 in England education system for the first time school inspection was introduced for a requirement that all state schools in England should be inspected regularly. The objective was for an effective system of quality control based on inspection for the evolving pattern of educational provision [32]. This indicates that the inspection process involves the measurement of the education system for accountability.

In the past three-decade quality improvement has become a top priority of policymakers in most of the countries and they rely on evaluation mechanisms to monitor quality because more pressure has been exerted on schools and school systems for greater accountability in improving the education outcome of all students all over the world [12]. A scholar argues that the educational institutions should have systematic mechanism to check the healthy function of their vision; mission and fitness for purpose [14, 17].

In most of countries education system quality assurance has been designed to evaluate the quality of education system. According to Vroeijenstijn (1995) [38] quality assurance is a systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement. Also, quality assurance can be described as systematic review of educational programs to ensure acceptable standard of education and infrastructures are being maintained [36]. Quality assurance concerned as those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures, which their existence and use, together with quality control activities ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced [9, 18].

Governments are increasingly concerned with assuring the quality of public services, including education. In the education system, the experience of developed country education indicates that schools are held accountable for helping all students to meet standards and for effective and efficient uses for a resource. For example, the European national quality assurance frameworks, systems focus on learning outcome (defined as 'statements of what a learner knows, understands and can do at the end of a learning process) this indicates learning outcomes are intended to ensure qualifications are transparent and to support

accountability [3, 11]. This shows that quality assurance is important for accountability as well as to support the ongoing development of schools and teaching and learning. Well-functioning quality assurance systems have mechanisms to support and balance vertical and horizontal, internal and external accountability. The ultimate aim of quality assurance in general education is to ensure that learners have the best learning opportunities and for school development as well as accountability for their service [1, 15].

## 2.2. *Inspection Mechanism in General Education*

Most of the education systems of countries have created quality assurance frameworks that integrate some combination of external and internal quality assurance mechanisms, which may include: Inspection, national students' assessments, school self-evaluation or self-assessment, teacher appraisal, and licensing [16]. Inspection services in the education systems are developed to control and promote the quality of education that is external to the schools and aims to improve the level of knowledge of their students, in addition to other objectives [29]. The inspection system involves the established professional body of inspectors that oversees, advises, and evaluates teaching and learning and administrative efforts, controlling schools and education services [3, 6].

A recent study indicates that inspection visits, as well as other inspection processes, appear to have direct, immediate, effects on the quality and responsiveness of schools' self-evaluation processes, and school effectiveness [33]. Furthermore, effective inspection visits provide real opportunities to affirm good practice and to provide practical advice to the individual teacher, to principals, and to broad of management with the ultimate aim of improving learning experiences and outcomes for pupils [19].

A theoretical model for effective school inspection proposed by Bagaya J. (2020) [3] indicates that for effective School inspection should involve three integrated activities: pre-inspection, inspection, and post inspection. The pre-inspection phase, which is the period preceding the actual inspection, involves agreement on what good teachings, conducting risk assessment, notification of schools, and developing rapport with the school staff and therefore has a significant bearing on the success or failure of the inspection. The second phase, the implementation of the plan or strategy, suggests the involvement of all key stakeholders in the inspection, and team meetings, and corporate judgments about the quality of education provided by the school. The third phase is the post-inspection with practices such as providing feedback to individual subject teachers and heads of the subject, a final team meeting to arrive at a corporate judgment about the school, and a briefing of senior managers and the governing bodies. Other presumed good practices include public reporting for accountability purposes, requiring schools to prepare written statements of action that they propose to take in response to the inspection report so as bring about improvement and following up on the implementation of agreed action.

## 2.3. *Characteristics of Inspection*

**Inspection Balancing Accountability and Improvement:** Accountability and improvement are important for ensuring the quality of processes as well as outcomes. Mechanisms that include a focus on accountability typically include some kind of initiative to focus school community attention on central performance standards and the need to help all students succeed. At the same time, a focus on improvement ensures that data are used to identify needs, adjust school strategies, and motivate improvements in instruction [15].

The balance of accountability and improvement is also relevant to internal quality assurance. At the school level, there is some evidence that strong teacher-to-teacher trust, a collective focus on improving instruction and learning, and teacher experience are associated with higher levels of student attainment [10]. In turn, teachers in more successful schools have stronger levels of trust, which indicates strong levels of internal control and accountability [28]. Internal quality assurance mechanisms are most effective when they support teacher collective work and are focused on improving instruction [30].

**Inspection Report for School Improvement:** Inspection reports provide judgments on the quality of provision in a school, affirm the aspects of practice that are working well and assist in confirming the school's judgments about its strengths and priorities for improvement. In this way, the result of the inspections can facilitate improvement and change in schools. Also, the recommendations in inspection reports provide important direction for the school community as it seeks to bring about ongoing school improvement [19]. Furthermore, the inspection reports serve as feedback to Policymakers and practitioners for their level of decision-making at the macro-level for policy decisions, and more detailed, micro-level for school-level decisions [11].

**Inspections Support Co-Professional Engagement and Build Trust:** In the quality assurance process, professional learning communities can play countless roles to make the best use of inspection report data for school and system development [15]. Inspections support co-professional engagement between teachers and the inspector. The inspectors' time during the inspection is given a chance to direct observation of teaching and learning at the classroom level to assess the quality of provision, affirming the work of teachers and pupils and supporting improvement [19]. In this process trust and respect between and among internal and external actors are fundamental for effective evaluation and school development increasingly; education systems distribute governance responsibilities across national, local, and school levels. Trust among key actors can also support the search for innovative solutions and exchange of ideas and initiate all concerned bodies to be a center to solution for school problems [5, 13].

**Inspections Support the Educational Leadership, Pupils, and Parents:** inspections aim to support the educational leadership role of the principal by providing the opportunity for professional dialogue with inspectors on matters of

particular interest to the school [34]. Inspections, except for incidental inspections, resulting in the issuing or publication of an inspection report. This report and, in the case of incidental inspections the oral feedback provided, can assist schools to identify strengths in educational provision and facilitate professional reflection on aspects requiring further development [15].

The Inspectorate acknowledges that learners and their parents are key stakeholders in the school community. Their participation in school inspections, where appropriate, is a necessary component of a valid, authentic school evaluation process. It enhances the quality of the evaluation and the recommendations for school improvement that emerge. Listening to the voices of pupils and parents, and their opinions on the performance and operation of schools is an important and integral part of the work of the Inspectorate in schools [8, 19].

#### ***2.4. Ethiopia General Education Quality and Quality Assurance***

Ethiopia has made significant progress in the last two decades, especially concerning the increase in education access in urban and rural areas. As MOE data 2020 indicated over 23,886,124 (M=12,699,142 F=11,186,982) students are attending education in 37,750 primary and 3,688 secondary school. The growth enrolment ratio reaches 95.3 and 38.9 for primary and secondary school respectively. The growth in education access plays a greater role in the country's development on human capital aspects. However, as a recent study indicated that In Ethiopia's general education system the education access increase dramatically however, the quality issue is in problem. The UNESCO (2017) [35] report implies that since it has made strenuous effort to include more children in schooling, developing countries did not give sufficient focus on quality and learning process this lead us to a global learning crisis. As MOE (2018) [23] identifying the common challenges hinder to give quality education at general education are related to the poor learning environment, qualified teacher, overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching materials and poor quality curriculum, poor teaching methodology and school management. As a result of these challenges, the education system is trouble by a high rate of dropout, and repetition, and low internal and external efficiency of the education system.

To reduce the challenges of education quality, in the last decade the ministry of education partners have prioritized education quality and subsequently, planned and implemented the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) since 2009. It was intended to achieve an improved quality of general education (Grade 1-12) through the country and improved learning conditions in schools and strengthening institutions at different levels of educational administration. Furthermore, this program involves the school improvement program; it focuses on improving the inputs, process, and output/ outcome in general education. Also, to support the implementation of SIP school grant fund included in GEQIP with support and cooperation of

international donors and World Bank [24]. Since the school grant fund introduced many schools have been benefited from the program to improve the teaching and learning process. However, even if these efforts have been made, the research finding predicted that Ethiopia's education system is in a state of crises [31].

To introduce a quality assurance system in Ethiopia General Education in 2012 MOE designed a General education quality assurance mechanism. The quality assurance program involves teachers licensing, inspection and examination. These three programs are implemented to measure the quality of education at a different level and it serves as a quality assurance mechanism in the general education system [25]. Since, this study focus on Inspection, in the empirical study, more emphasis is given to assess the enabling condition related to policy; strategy, and the actual practice of the inspection process at the school level in detail analyzed.

#### ***2.5. Ethiopia General Education Inspection Policy Framework and Strategy***

This study intended to investigate the implementation of an inspection system in the context of quality assurance and its contribution to education quality enhancement and school accountability. To legitimate, the inspection process policy framework and implementation strategy are key tools. Therefore, in the Ethiopia context the policy framework and inspection strategy manuals describe as follow:

The Ethiopia education policy 1994: 14 stated that the importance of the creation of a mechanism for overall periodic evaluation of the education system to maintaining the required standards [21]. In Ethiopia, context inspection is a process of independent external evaluation. It provides an objective assessment of how well schools are performing in teaching and the learning process; the quality of education that the schools provide as well as the outcomes that their students achieve [25]. The MOE (2013) [26] also stated that an inspection is a powerful tool for promoting improvement, by establishing the minimum levels of quality that all schools should achieve and by making schools accountable for their performance and progress.

The inspection strategy also supports the establishment of internal inspection unit at school level. The internal inspection at the school level can help their independent and objectives view of the school's performance and the school becomes better able to assess its work. The overall inspection process and its implementation guided by the General Education inspection guideline and school classification framework.

The objective of the inspection program is intended to improving the outcomes and ethics of students and to ensure that schools have achieved the required minimum performance standard it also involves the process of classifying schools into levels and identify model schools that serve as cluster resource centers for other schools. Besides, it has the objective to provide information about the implementation of the GEQIP program particularly the

school improvement program; to inform policymakers and educators. It also has the objective to hold responsible bodies to account for the performance and improvement of schools.

The inspection process focused on input, process, and output that determine the overall performance and effectiveness of schools. Further, these focus areas are categorized into five domains, four of the domains associated with SIP (learning and teaching; learning environment; school leadership; and community participation and the fifth domain focus on students learning outcomes and ethics. For each domain, minimum competency standards and indicators have sited. Generally, Ethiopia general education inspection emphasis on aspects of Input: school facilities, building, human and financial resources; Process: the school vision, mission, values and plans; learning and teaching; curriculum, assessment; monitoring and evaluation; a partnership of the school, parent and community and Outcome: the school and students outcomes, teachers and education leaders personal development and participation of parents and the local community. Based on these focus areas MOE (2013) [27] imposes schools should be inspected by external inspectors at least once in three years.

On the other side as described in the inspection framework each inspection area of focus or domain have measurement values: Input 25%, process 35%, and output 40%. Finally after inspection, based on the value of stated standards result or score schools are classified into four levels: Level 1 (the school is not achieving the standard score below 50%); level 2 (the school is improving but not achieving the standard, score 50%-69.9%); level 3 (the school is achieving the standard and is performing in line with the standard, score 70%-88.9%) and level 4 (the school is performing above the standard, score 90% -100%). Finally based on inspection result school classification the MOE (2013)[27] stated that schools that have met the standards are encouraged to improve their performance further and will be inspected again after three years to assess the progress that they have made. If a school has made the standards level 1 and level 2 it will be inspected again after one year. If a school has not made the required improvement, relevant bodies will hold to account. After the inspection, the supervisor works with the school to see that suggestions and ideas for improvement are implemented.

In ESDP V [22] strategic plan great emphasis was given to strengthen the organizational structure of inspection to reaching full capacity to inspect schools as sited standards. It strained the school inspection system independently to inspect all schools once and those schools that are not reaching the expected standards (level three) a second time, to monitor actions taken, and to understand school responses to the process. Also the inspection guidelines and standards to be revised and updated to ensure that they are measuring school performance.

Further, the strategic plan recommended that the inspection process should include feedback to school leaders and the community regarding the steps it can take to reach the next level. In addition, school leaders and community

groups, through the PTA, supported conducting self-inspections to identify strengths and weaknesses. In addition to school-level feedback, the inspection system seeks to understand system-wide strengths and weaknesses in school inputs, processes, and outcomes. Key stakeholders from the Woreda to the federal level – including policymakers in each region encouraged to use this information in their quality improvement efforts.

### 3. Methods

This empirical study employed the qualitative approach. According to Creswell [7], "qualitative data provides a more complete picture of noting trends and as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspective." Therefore, the researchers used this approach to investigate the extent of quality assurance implementation from inspection approach, and its contribution in quality enhancement and accountability in the general education system.

#### 3.1. Area of the Study

The area of the study was purposely selected to ensure the success of the study. In the selection process, the researchers have considered the accessibility and the possibility in terms of transport, and communication with the informants. The study was conducted at Jimma Town in the Oromiya regional state. The investigator found it was comfortable with this area because of it was easy to access and communicate with the informants in the official language (Afan Oromo). This simplified the whole research process.

#### 3.2. Sampling Procedures and Participants

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select the cases to be information-rich with respecting the purpose of the study. Before sampling the schools for the study, meetings were held with the education office inspection department head. The purpose of this meeting was to get guidance and insight into the choice of schools and participants in the study. Based on the discussion two schools were selected which have inspection trends, which means one school which inspected two times since the school inspection was started and the other school ones inspected and there are experienced principals and department head teachers in these schools.

Based on this, the samples of this study were 7 (one education office inspector (EOI); two, school principals (SP); two, school department heads (SDH) and two, teachers (ST). The informants selected in this study were well experienced, information-rich and accommodative. So that, the researcher believed they can fit for the study. In the study, to ensure confidentiality the investigator gave the samples pseudonyms to protect their identity and integrity as well as their schools.

#### 3.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedures

In this study, the investigators used interviews; observation, and document analysis. The interview questions

were designed to generate relevant data on the practice or trend and challenges of inspection strategy implementation at the school level.

Although, interviews were the primary source of data, document observations and reviews were used to supplement the interviews and to check the actual trend of inspection from recorded documents in the schools as well as a district education office. Also, to identify the intention of MOE on inspection strategy at the general education system, Inspection strategy manuals, school classification framework, and regional inspection checklist and related documents were reviewed to cross check the linkage of the central objective of inspection strategy at the operational level (School).

### 3.4. Data Analysis

In this study, the thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained in the interview; document observation, and reviews. The obtained data were identified; coded and categorized in themes. In the thematic analysis process, the results were compared across participants, across schools, and within schools and district education office and central (MOE) inspection strategies documents.

## 4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

### 4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

Jima Town education office organizes and leads a total of 28 government schools (5 high schools and 23 primary schools). The inspection structure is organized as one department and has a total of 4 inspectors. In the study 7 respondents have participated in the interview one education inspector, 2 principals, 2 department heads, and 2 teachers. The inspector (EOI) selected in the study has a total of 24 years of experience at different positions in the education sector (school principal 4 years, teaching 10 years, and education expertise 10 years) and since 2015 he has been on inspection department head and inspector position.

School (S1) is a primary school in Jimma town it has been giving service for more than 75 years, it inspected two times in 2016 and 2021 and its level was 2 in both inspections. The principal of this school (SP1) has a total of 12 years of work experience in principal and 8 years of teaching experience, also the department head teacher (SDH1) has 27 years of teaching and 8 years of department head experience and the teacher ST1 from this school have 24 years teaching experience.

On the other hand, school S2 is a secondary school in Jimma town, it started teaching and learning in 2019 as a preparatory school and in the new structure since 2020 it is a high school; it inspected once and its inspection level was 3. The principal of this school SP2 has a total of 32 years of working experience (in the woreda inspection team for 4 years, school principal 22 years, and as a teacher for 16 years). Also, the department head teachers SDH2 has 27

years of experience in teaching and the teacher of this school included in the study has 17 years of experience in high school teaching. From the above explanation, the researcher believes that the characteristics and experience of the respondents indicated that they have rich information to explaining the actual implementation and trend of the inspection process and its challenges.

### 4.2. Result/Finding

The description of the finding organized in five themes: the first concerned with the intention of policy framework and strategy on inspection implementation in general education; the second theme on the purpose and significance of inspection from implementers view; the third- the trends on training and awareness on inspection strategy manuals and standards; the fourth theme on the actual trend and process of external and internal inspection in Jimma town schools and finally the fifth theme- challenges on inspection implementation in general education. The analysis of the finding in this section is related to empirical study questions one, two, and three. The main guiding question for the study was focused on the intention of policy frame work and strategy on inspection in general education, the trends of inspection, and the constrain factors and challenges on inspection implementation in general education. The source of data noted from field and document observation and interviews with inspectors, school directors, department heads, and teachers. The analysis of the data is presented according to themes as follow:

#### 4.2.1. Theme One: The Intention of Policy Framework and Strategy on Inspection Implementation in General Education

To describe the intention on inspection implementation the researcher reviews the policy, inspection strategy manuals, and school classification framework, and ESDP V strategic areas on inspection the result shows that: In Ethiopia, MOE has taken the importance of school inspection as a quality assurance mechanism at the general education system. For the effective implementation of quality assurance at general education in policy framework, it legitimized and taking as the importance of the creation of a mechanism for overall periodic evaluation of the education system to maintaining the required standards.

In 2012 MOE designed the inspection strategy; implementation manual and school classification standards. The inspection strategy also supports self-assessment or internal inspection programs at the school level. The inspection process was taken as a tool for quality assurance in general education. In the past decade, the responsible structure was established at MOE and REB as inspection directorate and ZEO and Woreda education office as one department level organized in the education office. Also, the strategy imposes the establishment of internal inspection unit at school level. However, on practice at the study area internal inspection system did not organized at the school level.

The inspection process in the Ethiopian context focuses on Input, process, and output. It is also related to GQEP particularly the school improvement program. For each focus areas standards and indicators are stated in the inspection manual and the ESDP V, it also recommended that the improvement of inspection standards. On the other direction, the objective of Ethiopia's general education inspection process has a sense of classifying or leveling schools based on inspection results. Also, its objectives are for school qualities improvement and accountability of schools and concerning bodies. The inspection feedback enables the schools to improve their school level inspection by working on their weakness areas. Furthermore, the inspection strategy states that schools have the responsibility to conduct once in a year to evaluate strengths and weaknesses. This self-evaluation enables schools to improve their weaknesses and improve the quality of teaching learning.

#### **4.2.2. Theme Two: The Purpose and Significance of Inspection from Implementers View**

This theme explored inspectors, school principals, department heads and teachers view on the purpose and significance of inspection on school improvement, quality enhancement, and accountability. From respondents, it was recognized that they have different ideas on the purpose of inspection and its significance for school improvement. Inspectors believe that inspection has the purpose of maintaining the quality of education through measuring the input process and output; classifying or leveling schools; to give feedback on areas of strength and weakness. However, school principals and teachers believe that the inspection process is implemented to leveling schools and for the governmental purpose of controlling schools. Also, they perceive inspection as faultfinding activity.

...the inspection process does not related to school quality improvement because inspectors count the existing things in the school and finally they told the level of school so I think that inspection purpose is only for school leveling... (SD2). And also, another school director and department head explained that... this school was inspected two times but it is on the same level within seven years, so that it is difficult to accept as an inspection can have significance role to improve the quality of education (SD1). ...the inspectors visit our document then they go back so I do not have a sense for the contribution of inspection for quality improvement it may be for the satisfaction of the government to control the schools... (SDH2).

Furthermore, as stated in inspection manuals one of the objectives of inspection is to ensure that schools have achieved the required minimum performance standard and to hold responsible bodies to account for the performance and improvement of schools. However, at the school level and education sectors since the inspection started no one accountable and take responsibility to improve the quality of schools based on school inspection results. The office education inspector stated that:

...we give feedback to schools and education office

departments to work on areas of weakness which identified in inspection but nobody included in Annual plan and work on it...Some problems can be solved at the school level but directors have no interest to plan on school problems and to find a solution... Because the system practically, it did not enforce schools and concerned bodies to be accountable for their service based on inspection report... (EOI).

#### **4.2.3. Theme Three: The Trends on Training and Awareness on Inspection Strategy Manuals and Standards**

The training on inspection manual and strategy for the implementer and concerned body has a significant impact to develop consensus on the purpose; the significance of inspection and its process of implementation. However, the trend shows that: Region education bureau at the starting of the inspection program in 2013 education office inspectors was trained for 5 days on inspection strategy and manuals after that there was no continuous training, sometimes at the beginning of the academic year region education Bureau has given 2-3 day training on areas of how they manage inspection, leveling schools and report the inspection results; but this is not enough. The manuals and the standards and checklists were prepared at MOE and the region bureau directly translates to the regional working language and gives training. Education office inspectors did not have a chance to comment on the manuals, checklist, standards, process, or other issues.

... we have the interest to comment on checklist and standards because some standard and process of inspections are not clear to us, also it has difficult to implement according to our environment conditions but nobody gives a chance to participate on inspection material preparation, the documents come from MOE and at the region level, it translated into regional working language then directly we pushed to implement it... (EOI).

Moreover, schools principals and department heads did not have basic training on inspection strategy, manuals, and standards even the manuals didn't exist in the schools. The inspectors have an interest and plan yearly to give training for school principals and supervisors on inspection strategy and standards also to strengthen the internal inspection practice; however, there is a lack of integration, coordination, and follow-up from education office to region bureau.

... we have planned to give training for school supervisors and principals on inspection manuals and standards however, nobody supports us ... (EOI).

On the other hand, principals and inspectors explains that at the higher institution during on job training of EDPM or MA program they haven't taken courses that related to quality assurance mechanisms. For effective implementation of inspection as a quality assurance mechanism, if one course is integrated into the EDPM program for school leaders and education expertise, it more increases the effectiveness of the school inspection program for quality enhancement and improving students learning outcomes.

Practically, most of the concerned bodies did not have the same awareness about the inspection program, strategy, manuals, and standards. Moreover, the respondents explain that the inspection standards lack clarity and have ambiguities to evaluate schools practically because at the school level the inputs or the process do not exist it is the duty of Regional, MOE to facilitate it for example: Inclusive education facilities, building, teaching materials, teachers, lab technicians student textbooks and administration manuals and different guideline, etc. also, the mandate of schools, education office, Region and MOE not clearly stated in the strategy to respond on identified school problems on the inspection report.

...during inspection the inspectors ask the school, the materials and facilities that they should have to facilitate it but, nobody gives a response only they come to inspect schools without supporting schools. For example, the inspection standard requires the schools to have teachers standard 1:50 but in this school for 21 sections we have only one English teacher with degree holder but we need at least 6 teachers. on the other direction, they ask liberalist, record officers, lab technicians, etc. but we have no budget structure and mandate to recruit them and further, we have no mandate to construct schools as stated in the standard because it needs a huge budget ... (SP1).

Also, the inspection standards set requirements for schools to increase their revenue, budget, and other incomes; however, as respondents' explanation, the schools have no autonomy to allocate school budget and to collect money from society and subsidizing budget deficiency to improve some facilities as stated in inspection standard. The budget is allocated from central but the schools are required to increase their budget.

...The education office required us through inspection to increase the budget of school by community mobilization; however, they also restrict us by letter to collect any funds from student families and they fund schools only some stationaries and chock, we compensate all things by using school grant budget however, it can't cover all school issues (SP2).

The school inspection standard also required schools to prepare standardized examinations at CRC level; Curriculum review at school level and CPD program implementation but they have no guidelines or manuals to implement these programs. Moreover, the inspection standard required schools group structure that involves Government, political and social wings and 1 to 5 students and teacher grouping. However, schools have stopped in the past 3 years this grouping structure and most of the teachers are a discomfort to this structure.

... Most of the teachers are dislike the school grouping strategy they accepted as political interference and they assume it to control their freedom so that the grouping is only on paper not on practice even in these three years anybody didn't ask about this thing but the inspectors ask schools during evaluation... (ST2).

#### **4.2.4. Theme Four: The Actual Trend and Process of External and Internal Inspection in Jimma Town Schools**

Schools are expected to inspect once in three years. Form document observation and interview predict that at inspection department there is inspection plan and the schools those will be inspected in the academic year identified and included in the plan; team inspection 2-3 expertise participated in the inspection process, before inspection the schools are informed to be ready in 15 days for inspection. Then at the school level, a Short discussion was made with the director and SIP committee about the objective and the process of inspection. But teachers did not inform before the inspection about the inspection process.

... I have no any information about inspection I only see some worded expertise/ inspectors interring my class and asking me the lesson plan ... (ST2).

During the inspection: inspectors team members in detail evaluate the school input, process, and output based on school classification manual and sated standard, In the evaluation directors and SIP committees role is only to clarify and show the documents, They use observation, and document analysis, discussion with SIP committee to gather data and finally based on the observation and document they evaluate and leveling schools. However, the inspection process did not evaluate in details teachers and students even, PTA members did not participate in the process.

...They observe the teaching and learning process by taking samples but in detail, they did not evaluate the activities of teachers they only use the documents that the department shows for them (SDH2). Also, another department head explains that: ...Before inspection or during the inspection they do not discuss with teachers, students, or PTA members only they communicate with principal and SIP committees... (SDH1).

After inspection, the inspector's team discusses with SIP committees and gives feedback report on 2 to 3 page on strong and weak side and areas of school improvement. Then, after two weeks full report and level of schools informed as feedback to schools. If the inspected schools have any comments they can ask the inspector team in two weeks. Finally, the inspection result is compiled, organized and then the report passes to the regional education bureau. On the other direction, the inspection frame work states that the schools fall under level 1 and 2 after inspection should inspected again after a year to support and check improvements. However, on practice school that fall on level 2 was only two times inspected by external inspectors in the past 7 years.

The internal inspection trend of the study schools show that: Schools use self-assessment for Annual school plan evaluation and teacher appraisal. However, it did not support by plan at school or department level. The teacher appraisal process shows that, they use teaching and learning class observation in semester and teacher documents to evaluate teachers' performance. More than this activity, there is no continuous supportive evaluation system for teachers and

other school plans and activities such as TDP, SIP, students' assessment, clubs, etc. At the school level, there is a lack well-organized system of self-assessment and follows up from the district education office. Even, in one school totally there is no self-assessment system it was plugged before three years.

...There was an internal self-assessment before three years because the inspectors use the self-assessment result but now the office structure changed and gives the mandate to the SIP department... In practice, most of the schools have stopped internal inspection (EOI). Also, a school teacher supports inspector ideas on the practice of internal inspection... I haven't seen in these three years the self-assessment process in school... At the end of the year or semesters school committees enter into class and observe the teaching and learning process they ask daily and annual lesson plans for evaluation... (ST2).

The response of inspector, directors and teachers shows continuous professional activities of teachers and schools leaders are totally interrupted before three years ago. There is no module development and short term trainings system to assist professional development at school level. Also, there is no document that shows curriculum review activities at department level as well as at individual teacher level. Practically, teachers have been neglected curriculum review activities rather than teaching the text books that prepared at the center. There no mechanism of cross checking of the relevance and other related issues of the curriculum at school level. Furthermore, the directors and supervisors didn't incite teachers to participate in CPD and curriculum review, even the education officials did not ask to report on these issues only the schools requested during the inspection program.

...We have no training, manuals on CPD the program, and the district office did not ask in the report so that we have no following the CPD program but we believe this program helps to capacitate teachers... (SDH1). Also on curriculum review school teacher explains that... we have interest to evaluate student text books but we are overload period and nobody facilitate or initiate us to participate in curriculum review (ST1). Other teacher from high school explains that rarely do we evaluate students' texts book but only the department asks us to report, there is no integrated way of using the evaluation result. (ST2). Further, the department head explains that: The inspectors only ask the schools the data or the number of teachers those evaluate textbook; even they didn't ask the evaluation report or documents (SP2).

Generally, in Jimma Town, the inspection trend indicates that: From 2015 -2017 inspection report shows that all government schools ones inspected and the inspection result indicates out of 24 (primary and high schools): level 1=2 (8.3%) level 2=18 (92.7%), level 3 and 4 =0. In 2018-2021 second inspection result of 28 schools (primary and secondary) shows that: level 1=1 (3.2%), level 2=21 (75%), level 3=6 (21.4%) and level 4=0. Since the inspection started 8 (29%) schools change or improve their level. However, 19 (70.9%) of schools didn't record any change. This implies

that the current school inspection practice couldn't enforce the school's improvement it only identifies the school level.

#### **4.2.5. Theme Five: Challenges on Inspection Implementation in General Education**

The inspectors use the manuals and standards that were prepared in 2012 however, from experience more schools' conditions have been changed. The school self-assessment also has no strategy and implementation manual. Furthermore, the implementers didn't have enough training on the purpose, standards, and process of external and internal inspection.

The other challenges of inspection practice related to the autonomy of inspection structure. the inspection department organized under education office it have no full autonomy, therefore it do not have the mandate to implement accountability depend on inspection result, even it has a shortage of Budget and all activities that sated in inspection plan, implemented under the will of education office head. More of the time the inspectors pass on other works in the office.

... We have no mandate to enforce the concerned body to be accountable for his/her duty. For example from my experience in 6 years of inspection schools, those didn't improve their standards their directors still managing the schools, nobody asks them ... Moreover, this inspector explains that: ....We pass more of our time on other education works in an office which didn't related to inspection, so that in this condition it is difficult to give inspection service to schools based on Annual plan. Due to this, there are some schools their inspection schedules extended to the 2022 plan (EOI).

Also, after inspection no mechanism or strategy lays responsibility and accountability on concerned bodies to improve or find a solution to the identified problem in the inspection report. The challenges on implementing the Inspection feedback related to the attitude of school principals and supervisors, in the interview inspector and department heads indicates that directors and supervisors did not work to improve school weakness for all things they comply government and education office, if they link the inspection feedback in SIP plan to some extent it is possible to find solutions for some problems at school level by community participation. However, even the current school supervisor trend shows that Supervisors did not follow; guide and support schools depend on inspection feedback on these issues department heads explain as:

... the supervises comes to schools once in two weeks, then he asks report and goes back ... he didn't have a plan to improve the level of schools based on inspection feedback... (SDH1). Further, the other department head comments the director: ...Some problems can be solved at the school level but directors have no interest to plan on school problems and to find solution ... Because, the system practically did not enforce schools to be accountable for their service ... (SDH2).

On the other direction, Education office departments did

not include inspection feedback in their Annual plan to solve schools' problems. Also, there is no accountability system in the education office at department levels. Most of the school's problems related to training, teachers, community mobilization SIP and TDP program follow-up, budget issues, etc. could get a solution if all concerned bodies at the education office work on inspection feedback. On the other direction, the inspection feedback report didn't link with the SIP plan. Schools once in three years prepared a SIP plan then there is no continuous evaluation on the implementation of it. No integrated means of follow-up from the education office and supervisors after inspection. One director explains the current school trend as:

... I told the truth, we are following only the teaching and learning process and teachers and students daily attendance... We have no giving attention to other activities of schools such as SIP, TDP, self-assessment, etc... we evaluate at the end of semesters teachers but the evaluation didn't include SIP activities (SP1).

## 5. Discussion

In this section the findings basing on the themes that emerged concerning empirical study questions discussed. The discussion refers to literature reviews and draws reflections from the whole study.

The study revealed that in Ethiopia context inspection was designed in 2012 as one of quality assurance mechanism at General education system and inter to practice at the school level in 2015. To support the implementation of this program inspection manuals, school classification frameworks were prepared at the national level. This implies there is a need from the government to improve the quality of education through an evaluation mechanism to monitor quality in the general education system. The inspection structure organized from MOE to the district education office and the responsible persons and inspectors have been assigned. These actions enable the link of the quality assurance strategy designed at the central level to the ground, which means it facilitates the playing field for the effective implementation of inspection programs at the school level.

According to the Ethiopia Inspection strategy, the school inspection focuses on areas of input, process, and output or outcome. It is also related to GQEP particularly the school improvement program. For each focus area, standards and indicators were stated in the inspection manual. As recent research finding indicates that the focus areas in inspection manuals are the main parts of challenges in Ethiopia general education that hindermost of the schools to giving quality education. Therefore, the inspection area of focus may have a positive impact to identify the areas of strength and weakness of schools and giving direction for schools' quality improvement.

The Ethiopia general education inspection intended to evaluate schools based on stated standards and classifying or leveling schools based on inspection results. Also, its objectives are for school qualities improvement and

accountability of schools and concerning bodies. Therefore, based on the inspection framework it is possible to conclude that the Ethiopia General education inspection process has been intended for quality assurance mechanism with the objective of quality enhancement; accountability, and students learning outcome improvement.

However, the study identifies that there are different views from inspectors, school principals, and teachers on inspection strategy, purpose, and its significance for school improvement. Inspectors believe that inspection has the purpose of maintaining the quality of education through measuring the input, process, and output; classifying or leveling schools; to give feedback on areas of strength and weakness. But, school principals and teachers believe that the inspection strategy is implemented for identification of schools level and to government purpose of controlling schools. This implies that the inspection strategy that is designed at the national level, its objective miss understood at the ground level. Such miss understanding of the purpose of inspection leads teachers and school directors to have a negative attitude towards the whole system, since they related inspection for government purposes to control schools rather than quality improvement.

In the inspection manuals, one of the objectives of inspection is to ensure that schools have achieved the required minimum performance standard and to hold responsible bodies to account for the performance and improvement of schools. However, the study revealed that at the school level and education sectors, since the inspection started no one accountable and take responsibility to improve the quality of schools based on school inspection results. Accountability and improvement are important for ensuring the quality of processes as well as outcomes. The finding indicates that no mechanism or strategy in the inspection process enforces accountability and school improvement based on inspection results. The inspection result also schools neither used for reward nor accountability of schools. Even though inspection is strategic activity, in practice it became routine activity which cannot contribute for the improvement of schools and teaching learning. As scholars indicated the accountability mechanisms in inspection typically include some kind of initiative and responsibility to enable the school communities to give attention to central performance standards and increase the need to help all students to succeed [16].

The study detects that school principals and teachers have low awareness of inspection strategy, manuals, and standards. Also, the manuals and the standards and checklists were prepared at MOE and the region bureau directly translates to the regional working language and pushes the inspectors to implement it; education office inspectors did not have a chance to comment on the manuals, checklist, standards, process or other issues. Training is critical to creating clarities and improving the performance of inspectors and other concerned bodies for effective implementation of the inspection strategy. The study also identifies that the inspection standards lack clarity and have ambiguities to

evaluate schools practically. The inspectors use the manuals and standards that were prepared in 2012 however; more schools conditions have been changed since the inspection program was designed. In ESDP V strategic plan stated that school inspection standards and manuals will be improved to make the standards more effective to evaluate the schools however in practice there is no improvement on the standards.

The study identifies that school inspection standards also required schools to prepare standardized examinations at CRC level; Curriculum review at school level and CPD program implementation but they have no guidelines or manuals to implement these programs. In practice the schools did not perform these tasks, even in the past three years; teachers haven't participated in the CPD program. Also from the district education office nobody asks schools to plan and report on CPD; the preparation of standardizing test at CRC and curriculum reviews but schools are inspected on it, this indicates there is a gap that links inspection standards with school actual activities. This leads the inspector to evaluate works that do not exist in schools. Such activities can lead school teachers and directors to develop negative attitudes toward inspectors and the inspection process.

Concerning conducting self-assessment schools have the responsibility to conduct once in a year to evaluate strengths and weaknesses. This enables schools to improve their weaknesses and improve the quality of teaching learning. But the finding of the study indicates that schools are not conducting self-assessment based on SIP even though it is their responsibility. This activity is very important because it is a mirror to show their performance for self-development. Moreover, Schools prepared a SIP plan once in three years to get school grant funds, after that there is no continuous evolution of the implementation of this program in self-assessment. This shows that, schools are performing their activities in traditional way. They are not on the position of using innovative ideas of school improving program and other general education quality assurance package components.

Moreover, the finding of the study shows that at the school level, there is a lack well-organized system of self-assessment and follows up from the district education office. Even, the inspectors did not evaluate and direct schools to perform self-assessment. Scholars believe that internal self-assessment or quality assurance system balance the accountability and school improvement because it increases strong teacher to teacher interaction and trust; it leads them to focus on collective instructional improvement and students learning outcome and it also creates strong levels of internal control and accountability among school communities [29].

The study revealed that the trend of school inspection involves three integrated activities: pre-inspection, inspection, and post-inspection. At the inspection department, there is an inspection plan; inspection process involves team inspection of 2-3 inspectors assigned to inspect schools. Before the inspection, the schools are informed to be ready in 15 days for inspection. But teachers did not inform before the

inspection about the inspection process. During inspection inspectors team members in detail evaluate the school input, process, and output based on the school classification manual and sited standard by school visiting and document observation but the inspectors did not evaluate in details teachers and students performance; even PTA members did not participate in the process. After inspection the inspectors' team discusses with SIP committees and gives feedback, finally, the inspection result is compiled, organized and then the report passes to the regional education bureau.

The finding indicates that in the inspection process inspector has been participated and strongly communicated only with SIP committees and directors; however, the role of teachers' students and PTA members are not seen boldly. Scholars explain on literature, inspection process support co-professional engagement between teachers and the inspector. The inspectors' time during the inspection is given a chance to direct observation of teaching and learning at the classroom level to assess the quality of provision, affirming the work of teachers and pupils and supporting improvement [19]. Moreover, the participation of all concerned bodies in the inspection process can support the inspectors to exchange ideas and initiate them to be a center to solution for school problems.

The challenges of inspection practice related to the autonomy of the inspection structure. The inspection department organized under the education office has no full autonomy, more of the time the inspectors pass on other works in the office rather than inspection. Also after inspection, no mechanism or strategy lays responsibility and accountability on concerned bodies to improve or find a solution to the identified problem in the inspection report. For example, most schools' problems related to training, teachers, community mobilization, SIP, and TDP program follow up and budget issues are mostly expected response of district education office, however, there is no accountability system in the education office at department levels or at regional education bureau. The other challenges related to the attitude of principals and supervisors. They did not work to improve school weakness for all things they comply with government and education office; also in the study identified that supervisors did not follow, guide, and support schools depend on inspection feedback.

Finally, the study revealed that in Jima town from 2015-2021 government schools have been inspected two times. The inspection result indicates that from 27 government schools since the inspection program started only 8 (29%) schools change or improve their level however 19 (70.9%) of schools didn't record any change, they are on the same level that means blow expected standard in both inspection. The current (2021) school inspection results indicate that from a total of 28 government school (primary and high schools) schools those are on level 1=1 (3.2%), level 2=21 (75%), level 3=6 (21.4%), and level 4=0. This data indicates 22 (78%) of schools are under expected standards engaged in the teaching and learning process.

The current school inspection practice couldn't initiate the

schools' improvement and lay accountability it only identifies the school level. The finding showed that after school classification or leveling there is no well-organized mechanism or strategy that enforces all concerned bodies to work for school improvement; the inspection result shows most of the schools within 7-6 years of inspection are on the same status. Lee B. [20] describes that in the 21st-century education system the educational institutions and the individuals working with them should hold accountable for students' performance; school improvement, and the contribution to national priorities or performance targets. Well-functioning inspection systems have mechanisms to support and balance vertical and horizontal, internal and external accountability. The ultimate aim of inspection in general education is to ensure that learners have the best learning opportunities and for school development as well as accountability for their service [15].

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 6.1. Conclusion

The Ethiopia General education quality assurance has the intention to improving the quality education. Inspection is one of the mechanisms designed to evaluate schools' performance related to input, process, and outcome. Based on the inspection result schools and concerned bodies are expected to work on school education quality enhancement and students learning outcome improvement. However, the finding of this study indicates that the inspection strategy designed at MOE did not practically implement as it designed and it has a shortage of linkage to the operational practice. The main reasons are: miss understanding of practitioners on the objective of inspection they accepted it as government school controlling tools rather than quality improvement mechanism; the inspection standards lack clarity and have ambiguities to evaluate schools practically; Most of the inspection standards did not ally to school actual activities; the inspection approach highly centralized, once manuals and standards sited by MOE after that there are no mechanisms that check the effectiveness of the inspection process.

The inspection process at the school level is more focused on counting the existing things based on standards rather than evaluating the overall system of the school activities; the strategy lack focus to support school management, teacher engagement, pupils, and parents. Moreover, the inspection result schools neither used for reward nor accountability of schools. Even though, inspection is strategic activity, in practice it became routine activity which cannot contribute for the improvement of schools and teaching learning. Also, in practice the external inspection process did not link to school self-evaluation or internal inspection, due to this SIP and TDP programs are not continuously evaluated and it is not properly implemented to improve the quality of education. At the school level, there is also a lack of a well-organized system of self-assessment and follows up from

supervisors and the district education office.

The challenges of inspection practice also related to the autonomy of inspection structure, after inspection, no mechanism or strategy lay responsibility and accountability on concerned bodies to improve or find a solution on identified problem based on the inspection report. Also, schools that scored low level are not continuously inspected to improve performance of the schools. In the study area, 70.9% of schools didn't record any change after two rounds of inspection in 7 years, they are on the same level that means blow expected standard (level 1 and 2). Therefore, the current general education inspection mechanism is practically only used as a tool of classifying or identifying the level of schools, in practice it couldn't initiate the schools' improvement and lay accountability.

### 6.2. Recommendation

For the effective implementation of the inspection mechanism, the strategic direction that developed at the center should be linked to operational practice and procedures at the district education office and school level; also the mechanism for holding to responsibility and accountability from the top to school management and all concerned bodies should be designed. The inspection manuals and standards should be revised to evaluate effectively the overall system and tangible things in the schools. The external inspection system also should be linked to the internal inspection mechanism to strengthen school self-assessment practice and to support school improvement plan implementation.

The inspection trend at the school level should be improved and clearly stated the role of inspectors, before inspection; during the inspection, and after inspection; also the role of supervisors related to inspection should be clearly stated and it is important to link inspection in supervisor and school principal appraisal. The inspection mechanism should follow a participatory approach that includes teachers and parents; it should influence the school communities to take accountability to improve their schools. Also, the feedback mechanism should be improved and the role and responsibility of concerned bodies that means: MOE, REB, District education office and schools should be clearly stated how they interact on school problems that identified on inspection feedback report.

Ministry of Education and Region Education should prepare rules and regulation which enforces accountability or reward of schools after inspection is conducted. Moreover, REB, ZEO, and district education office should work hard on inspection feedback related to: shortage of budge, teachers'; infrastructure of schools and trainings to capacitate the school leadership and teachers.

The study also recommended further researches that investigate the perception of school principals and teachers on inspection; the impact of inspection mechanism on teaching and learning improvement and students learning outcome; the effectiveness of inspection approach for quality assurance and school improvement in Ethiopia education system context.

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