

School Inspection: A Driver of School Improvement?

A comparative analysis of school quality assurance systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan

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Dublin City University

School of Policy and Practice

Author

Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi

**MA Evaluation, MA English Literature, M.Phil TESL, PG Cert., PG
Diploma TEFL, CIPSIE, B.Ed, B.A.**

Supervisors: Prof. Gerry McNamara, Prof. Martin Brown

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Smith'.

Signed

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
List of Abbreviations	vi
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Abstract.....	1
Chapter one: A framework for the four publications	2
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Introduction to my PhD Project.....	5
1.3 The four publications – scope and themes	6
1.4 Theoretical Framework.....	14
1.4.1 Factors influencing the development and growth of school inspection	15
1.4.2 School leaders’ perceptions and reactions	19
1.5 Conclusion	24
Chapter two: Literature Review	25
2.1 Genesis and Development of School Inspection.....	25
2.1.5 Role of Transnational Organisation in Promoting School Inspection	32
2.2 Understanding School Inspection – Mechanisms and Practices	34
2.2.1 What is school inspection?.....	34
2.2.2 School Inspection Procedures	36
2.2.3 Grading	42
2.2.4 Rewards and Sanctions	43
2.3 Models of School Inspection (types).....	44
2.3.1 Whole School Inspection (WSI)	45
2.3.3 Follow-through Inspection (progress monitoring)	46
2.3.4 Accreditation inspections.....	47
2.3.5 Readiness evaluation (of new schools).....	48
2.4 Approaches to School Inspections	48
2.5 Inspection – accountability, school improvement, governance or policing.....	51
2.6 Teachers and school leaders’ perspective on school inspection	54
Chapter three: Methodology	57
3.0 Introduction to Methodology and Research Design	57
3.1 My Philosophical Worldview	57
3.2 Selecting A Qualitative Research Design	61
3.3 Identity, Positionality and Reflexivity.....	62
3.4 Research Design.....	64
3.5 Data analysis.....	71

3.6 Issues of Trustworthiness.....	77
3.7 Ethical Issues.....	81
Chapter four: Publication One	85
Chapter five: Publication Two.....	117
Chapter six: Publication Three	152
Chapter seven: Publication Four	196
Chapter eight: Conclusion.....	235
8.1 Introduction	235
8.2 Overview of the four publications	236
8.3 Limitations of the analysis	238
8.4. Overall objectives of the research	239
8.4.1 Overall findings in relation to Objective one:	240
8.4.2 Overall findings in relation to Objective two:	241
8.4.3 Overall findings in relation to Objective three:.....	243
8.4.4 Overall findings in relation to Objective four:.....	244
8.4.5 Overall findings in relation to Objective five:.....	246
8.5 Implications for school inspection influence and impact	248
8.6 Concluding remarks and future directions	250
References	252
Appendix A: DCU REC approval letter.....	262
Appendix B: Interview questions – School leaders.....	263
Appendix C: Interview questions – School Inspectors	264
Appendix D: Plain language statement.....	266
Appendix E: Informed consent form.....	268
Appendix F: Declaration of Authorship Form 1	270
Appendix G: Declaration of Authorship Form 2	273
Appendix H: Declaration of Authorship Form 3	276

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
AEO	Assistant Education Officers
BAS	Board Assurance Statement and Self-audit Checklists
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DDEO	Deputy District Education Officers
DEI	Department of Education Inspectorate (Ireland)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DEO	District Education Officers
DES	Department of Education (Ireland)
DFID	Department for International Development
DMO	District Monitoring Officers
DSIB	Dubai School Inspection Bureau
EMA	Education Monitoring Authority
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
ERO	Education Review Office
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EU	European Union
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IDO	Innovative Development Organisation
IMU	Independent Monitoring Unit
JD	Job description
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KPEMA	KPK Education Monitoring Authority
LAOS	Looking at Our School
LND	Literacy and Numeracy Drive
MEA	Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants
NEP	National Education Policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office of Standards in Education
PESP	Punjab Education Sector Project
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPIU	Policy Planning and Implementation Unit
QA	Quality Assurance
QDA	Qualitative Document Analysis
QAED	Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SERP	Sindh Education Sector Reform Programme
SICI	Standing International Conference of Inspectorates
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SSE	School Self-evaluation
TA	Thematic Analysis
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WSE-MLL	Whole School Evaluation- Management Leadership and Learning

List of Tables

Table 1: Research Objectives	10
Table 2: Title and abstracts for Publications One, Two, Three and Four	11
Table 3: Deductive themes Publications Two, Three and Four.....	74
Table 4: Organisation of School Inspection - Similarities and Differences	110
Table 5: Interview questions and Conceptual labels for Cross-Case Analysis.....	129
Table 6: Distribution of Sampled School Leader Participants.....	169
Table 7: Level of Influence of Bases of Social Powers	188
Table 8: Comparison of SSE Practices in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan	227
Table 9: Overview of findings of Publications One, Two, Three and Four.....	236

List of Figures

Figure 1: School Inspection Growth, Practices and Impact-----	23
Figure 2: NVivo thematic analysis screenshot -----	75
Figure 3 NVivo thematic analysis screenshot -----	76

School Inspection: A Driver of School Improvement?

A comparative analysis of school quality assurance systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan

Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi

Abstract

School inspection has long played a crucial role in ensuring quality education. Initially established to maintain accountability, it now seeks to drive continuous school improvement. Despite its widespread adoption, the mechanisms by which inspections actually contribute to such improvements remain under-researched, presenting a critical gap addressed by this study. This research aims to investigate the evolution and characteristics of school inspection systems and their impact on school improvement. Specifically, it explores key factors, such as power dynamics, quality measures, and self-evaluation, that influence inspection outcomes. Additionally, it examines how national and international contexts shape inspection frameworks, as well as the role of inspection in informing education policy and practice.

A qualitative case study methodology was adopted, focusing on four distinct inspection systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. Data were collected through an extensive review of literature, analysis of official documents and websites, and semi-structured interviews with school leaders and inspectors. These four regions were selected to provide a broad comparative analysis of inspection systems across varying socio-political environments.

The results highlight significant variations in how school inspection systems evolved across jurisdictions. While all systems emphasise accountability, their approaches to fostering improvement differ, shaped by socio-political contexts. The study also found that transparency in inspections remains a challenge, with school leaders often questioning the reliability of feedback. However, positive perceptions of inspection processes encourage greater school improvement. Additionally, power dynamics—ranging from regulatory authority to collaborative engagement—play a pivotal role in determining inspection efficacy.

In conclusion, this study features the need to balance regulatory oversight with school autonomy and self-evaluation. Establishing systematic feedback mechanisms enables school leaders to share their insights, fostering continuous improvement of inspection processes. Future research should prioritise broader stakeholder perspectives, including teachers, students, and parents, while expanding comparative analyses across diverse socio-political contexts to identify global best practices.

Chapter one: A framework for the four publications

1.1 Introduction

School inspection has long been an established system of governance for educational services, tracing its origins to the late eighteenth century, when clergymen in Britain visited schools to evaluate the quality of teaching. The school inspection systems in several other parts of Europe such as Ireland, Austria, France, and the Netherlands emerged around the same time as the British system (Gray, 2019). With the advent of mass public education, the institution of school inspection expanded and gradually became a ‘vital cog in the machinery of governing schooling’ (Brown et al., 2016; Clarke, 2017, p.v). School inspections remain a pivotal quality assurance measure within the educational landscape, serving as comprehensive evaluations of a school's performance and adherence to educational standards set by inspectorates in collaboration with education authorities (Bokhove et al., 2023; Hofer et al., 2020).

These assessments are now typically conducted by independent inspectors or government-appointed bodies, aiming to ensure that schools provide quality education and maintain a safe and conducive learning environment for students. This practice encompasses various aspects of schools, including teaching quality, curriculum effectiveness, student welfare, and overall school management, according to Brown et al. (2018). The terminology may vary—being referred to as ‘school evaluation’ in Portugal and Switzerland, ‘education review’ in New Zealand, and ‘monitoring and evaluation’¹ in Pakistan. Similarly, the titles of the individuals involved in these processes also vary, such as ‘Evaluation Partners’ in New Zealand and ‘Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants,’ ‘District Education Officers,’ and ‘Assistant Education Officers’ in Pakistan and inspectors in Ireland and Dubai. For the sake of clarity, I will use the terms ‘school inspection’ and ‘school inspectors’ throughout my dissertation.

Despite these differences in nomenclature and procedures, the two primary functions attributed to school inspection are accountability and school improvement (Baxter, 2017;

¹ There is a wide range of titles for these roles in the four provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the titles from the largest province, Punjab.

Baxter & Hult, 2017; Brown et al., 2018). Accountability is directly achieved as school inspectors review school data and practices against established quality standards. However, the mechanisms through which school inspection fosters improvement remain a subject of ongoing research.

The ultimate responsibility of the inspection is to provide constructive feedback and recommendations to help schools enhance their educational practices and outcomes (Ehren et al., 2016). Following the inspection, a detailed report is typically generated, highlighting the findings, recommendations, and areas requiring attention. This report is intended to serve as a tool for school leaders, teachers, and stakeholders to guide their planning and implementation of improvement measures (Ehren et al., 2015).

Some theoretical models describe the inspection process and its effects. Landwehr (2011), through his model of the effectiveness of school inspection, demonstrates that inspections directly lead to school improvement. His model identifies four fundamental functions: gaining knowledge, ensuring accountability, enforcing standards, and promoting school development. It highlights the interrelationships among these functions; for instance, the empirical data collected during inspections provides insights into school performance and forms the basis for accountability regarding school quality. This new knowledge then catalyses actions aimed at development, while data on standards informs their effective enforcement. Consequently, the model portrays school inspection as a dynamic and integrative process, emphasising the interconnected nature of its functions and their cumulative impact on improvement.

Several studies on school inspection (e.g., Gustafsson et al., 2015; Ehren & Shackleton, 2016) highlight its indirect impact on school improvement. They contend that inspection mainly drives change by promoting specific developmental processes rather than using direct coercive methods. These processes include establishing clear expectations, standards, and norms by the inspectorate; providing feedback and guidance following inspections; and exerting pressure for improvement from key stakeholders. The impact of school inspections is not linear but occurs through complex and cyclical processes of change.

Another study, Ehren and Visscher's (2006) Framework of School Inspection Effects, elucidates how the impact of school inspections is mediated by the responses of schools to both the inspection process and the inspectors themselves. According to this framework, a school's

reaction is influenced by external factors such as the pressure to improve, the availability of resources and support, and the school's capacity for innovation and attitude towards change. The model connects affective and relational dimensions—such as the degree of reciprocity and trust in the relationship, communication style, nature of the feedback, and mechanisms for preventing undesirable behaviours of schools—to the resultant responses and effects of the inspection process.

These models provide comprehensive insights into the impact and potential contributions of school inspections on school development. However, they are primarily based on studies conducted in Western contexts, where school inspection systems share many similarities. According to Brown et al. (2018), a growing convergence in school evaluation approaches is observable across European inspection frontiers. Despite this convergence, national political contexts, education systems, and governing structures embed the inspection system into existing frameworks, resulting in variations in governance procedures, inspection methodologies, and mechanisms of impact (Ehren et al., 2015). Furthermore, several studies emphasise the significance of stakeholders' perceptions regarding inspection indicators (Zheng, 2020), the consequences of inspections (McClurg et al., 2024), and the acceptance of school inspectors' feedback (Piezunka, 2019; Quintelier et al., 2020). This crucial aspect of feedback acceptance is not explicitly addressed in existing frameworks. Nevertheless, these models provided a valuable foundation for developing the theoretical framework for my study.

This study employs a case study approach to draw insights from four distinct school inspection systems worldwide: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. These four quality assurance systems present unique trends and offer a range of practices. In Dubai, private schools undergo rigorous annual inspections, while public schools follow a different inspection framework. Ireland adopts a 'soft touch' approach to inspection, combining external monitoring with internal evaluation, without grading or ranking schools based on inspection results. In New Zealand, an evaluation partner collaborates with school leadership to facilitate self-evaluation, without team-based visits by external evaluators. Pakistan operates two parallel systems: one focused on monitoring physical and administrative aspects of schools, and the other on supervising teaching quality and learning outcomes. The study explores connections between various aspects of school inspection, such as functions, processes, characteristics, and effects, by examining the factors that influence the development and evolution of inspection practices. Additionally, it analyses the measures embedded within these systems to improve the efficacy

of inspections and enhance the competencies of school inspectors, thereby encouraging schools to improve educational quality and ultimately leading to better student learning outcomes.

This chapter begins by explaining the rationale behind the thesis. It then proceeds with a description of the four papers that form the central core of the research, outlining the specific study objectives addressed by each. Following this, the chapter introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the entire PhD project. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the key contributions of the study and an outline of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Introduction to my PhD Project

My PhD project delves into the realm of school inspection, employing a comparative analysis of four quality assurance systems across the globe: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. This research elucidates the dual facets of school inspection, namely accountability and development, by scrutinising four key aspects of quality assurance systems. Firstly, it examines the evolution and expansion of school inspection, identifying the catalysts driving its growth and their ramifications on inspection practices within these jurisdictions. Secondly, it investigates the mechanisms used by quality assurance systems to uphold the standards of school inspectors and inspection procedures, while also evaluating school leaders' perspectives on inspector effectiveness and their influence on improving school performance. Thirdly, it explores the bases of social powers held by school inspectors and how they influence the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of school leaders, aiming to drive lasting improvements in schools through their feedback. Lastly, it assesses the autonomy granted to school leaders within these quality assurance systems, allowing them to guide, manage, and ensure the quality of school practices that are tailored to the specific needs of their contexts.

The decision to pursue a PhD by publication format for the project stemmed from its practicality and utility. Publishing research papers throughout the process appeared to be a viable means to obtain external validation and promptly disseminate findings, especially considering the extended duration of part-time study. Engaging in a series of self-contained yet interconnected studies appealed to me for several reasons. Firstly, it offered a convenient method for organising extensive data into four distinct projects. Secondly, it provided a manageable and tangible framework for structuring the project into clearly delineated components. Moreover, this

approach allowed for the exploration of diverse aspects of the research topic while maintaining cohesion across the studies. Lastly, it facilitated continuous feedback from peers and experts in the field, enhancing the quality and rigour of the research.

The dissertation revolves around four key journal articles, serving as its cornerstone. These articles are conceptualised and framed by introductory, literature review, and methodology chapters, meticulously crafted to offer a comprehensive overview of the research project. These initial chapters not only provide contextual grounding but also furnish a robust framework for delineating the study's significance (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A pivotal concluding chapter synthesises the overarching findings gleaned from the four publications, weaving together their collective contributions to the field.

The introductory chapter unfolds in two distinct sections: firstly, it contextualises the four studies within the broader objectives of school inspection, elucidating their relevance within the larger discourse of educational quality assurance. Secondly, it elucidates the specific focus and overarching research objectives binding the four publications together. Each study is accompanied by a succinct synopsis, offering readers a glimpse into its individual contributions and methodological nuances.

Expanding on this framework, the introductory section strategically sets the stage for the ensuing exploration, laying a solid foundation for understanding the intricate interplay between the individual studies and the broader landscape of school inspection practices. This nuanced approach not only enhances the coherence of the dissertation but also invites readers to embark on a journey of discovery, guided by the intricate threads of scholarly inquiry woven throughout the manuscript.

1.3 The four publications – scope and themes

This PhD by publication comprises four distinct studies, each culminating in a paper that has undergone double-blind/single-blind peer review and has been published in four different high-ranking international journals. The first paper is published in *Supervision 21: Revista de Educación e Inspección*, a journal indexed in Dialnet and published by the Union of School Inspectors in Education. This journal is published quarterly in electronic format and is part of the Dialnet catalogue, registry, and archive. It adheres to the Open Archives Initiative Protocol

for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) and is also listed in prominent directories such as REBIUN, Google Scholar, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), OJS (Open Journal Systems), LATINDEX Directorio, and CROSSREF. According to Dialnet Metrics² for 2023, the journal is classified under *Psychology and Education* and has the following indicators: Impact: 0.01; Quartile: C4 and Position: 213/233.

The paper is available in both Spanish and English, enhancing its accessibility to a broader audience.

The second paper is published in *Frontiers in Education* (Q 2, High Index 40). *Frontiers in Education* is published by Frontiers Media S.A. and demonstrates a commendable standing in academic metrics. According to Scopus Journal Rankings (SJR, 2024), the journal ranks in the 62nd percentile (580/1,543) among education journals, with a CiteScore of 2.9, a Journal Citation Indicator Clarivate of 1.04, and an Impact Factor Clarivate of 1.9. Additionally, the Web of Science metrics for 2023 categorise the journal within the field of *Education & Educational Research*, placing it in the second quartile (Q2) with a JCI percentile of 71.51 and a rank of 217/760.

The third paper appears in the *Review of Education* (Q1, High Index 24). *Review of Education*, published by Wiley, is a well-regarded academic journal indexed in major databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. The journal is recognised for its stringent editorial and peer-review processes, employing a double-anonymised peer-review system to uphold impartiality and academic integrity.

In 2023, the journal achieved notable metrics that reflect its academic impact. According to Scopus Journal Rankings (SJR, 2024), it ranks in the 68th percentile (484th out of 1,543) among education journals, with a CiteScore of 3.3. Additionally, it holds a Journal Citation Indicator (JCI) of 0.05 and an Impact Factor of 2.7, as reported by Clarivate. Metrics from the Web of Science further feature its prominence; the journal is categorised within the 'Education & Educational Research' field, where it is ranked in the first quartile (Q1) with a JCI percentile of 85.7 and a rank of 109th out of 760 journals.

² <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/metricas/idr/revistas/27003>

These indicators highlight the journal's strong position within the field of education research.

The fourth paper is published in *Heliyon*, a highly regarded multidisciplinary journal recognised for its strong academic impact. As a Q1 journal with a high index score of 80, *Heliyon* ranks prominently in the 'Multidisciplinary Sciences' category. It demonstrates robust citation performance, reflected in a CiteScore of 4.5 according to Scopus, placing it 31st out of 171 journals and in the 82nd percentile. Similarly, its Journal Impact Factor for 2023, as reported by Clarivate Analytics, is 3.4, ranking 28th out of 134 journals within its field and achieving a percentile of 79.5%, solidifying its Q1 status. Additionally, the journal's Journal Citation Indicator for 2023 is 0.82, further highlighting its significance as a platform for high-quality, multidisciplinary research.

These journals are ranked in the top quartiles of the Scopus database or are regarded as prestigious within the fields of education and school inspection. These journals are well-established and highly cited, with H indices ranging from 24 to 80 according to the Scimago Journal Rankings for 2023.

For this thesis, the four publications are presented as the final accepted manuscript. The documents are formatted to align with the DCU thesis requirements, and pagination is consistent with the overall sequence of the thesis. While the abstracts for these publications are summarised in Table 2 of this chapter, they are also included in Chapters Four – Seven for clarity and ease of reference.

The primary aim of this dissertation is to explore the purposes and characteristics of school inspection across diverse contexts, including Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. This study seeks to enhance the effectiveness of school inspection systems, thereby improving the quality of education and promoting continuous school improvement. Five overarching research objectives guide this investigation:

- To investigate the development and characteristics of school inspection.
- To analyse national and international factors that have defined and shaped school inspection practices.

- To examine features of school inspection, such as power dynamics, authority, and internal quality assurance, that influence the efficacy of school inspectors and positively impact school leadership, thereby contributing to school improvement.
- To evaluate the role of school self-evaluation as a crucial component of school inspection, facilitating improvement in various educational systems, whether centralised or decentralised.
- To assess the role of school inspection within education systems and its contribution to education policy and practice.

These research objectives are systematically explored in the four publications included in this dissertation. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of these objectives, specifying the corresponding publications in which each objective is examined in detail.

Table 1: Research Objectives

Research Objectives	Publication One	Publication Two	Publication Three	Publication Four
Investigate the development and characteristics of school inspection.	✓			
Analyse national and international drivers that have defined and shaped school inspection practices.	✓	✓		
Explore features of school inspection—such as power dynamics, authority, and internal quality assurance—that affect the efficacy of school inspectors and influence school leadership, ultimately determining their contribution to school improvement.		✓	✓	
Evaluate the role of school self-evaluation as a crucial component of school inspection, facilitating improvement in various educational systems, whether centralised or decentralised.				✓
Examine the role of school inspection in the education systems and its contribution to education policy and practice.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 includes the abstracts for the publications in order to provide a brief overview of each article here.

Table 2: Title and abstracts for Publications One, Two, Three and Four

Title and abstract for Publication One
Gardezi, S., McNamara, G., Brown, M., & O' Hara, J. (2023a). Auge y convergencia de los sistemas de inspección escolares: Análisis comparativo de la inspección escolar en Dubái, Irlanda, Nueva Zelanda y Pakistán. <i>Supervisión 21: revista de educación e inspección</i>, (68), 16. https://doi.org/10.52149/sp21, https://usie.es/supervision21/index.php/Sp21/article/view/700 AUGE Y CONVERGENCIA DE LOS SISTEMAS DE INSPECCIÓN ESCOLARES ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO DE LA INSPECCIÓN ESCOLAR EN DUBÁI, IRLANDA, NUEVA ZELANDA Y PAKISTÁN The rise and convergence of regimes of school inspection: A comparative analysis of school inspection in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan Resumen: El crecimiento exponencial que ha sufrido la inspección escolar para el control y la evaluación de la calidad de la enseñanza durante las dos últimas décadas se ha visto favorecido en gran medida por varios factores económicos y sociopolíticos internacionales, en particular por las políticas de organizaciones transnacionales como la UNESCO y la OCDE. Sin embargo, es importante señalar que la influencia de estos factores internacionales está condicionada por la historia, las tradiciones, las políticas y, quizá, sobre todo, por los aspectos políticos de los países. Para ilustrar este punto, decidimos estudiar los sistemas de evaluación escolar de cuatro países: Dubái, Irlanda, Nueva Zelanda y Pakistán, y analizar los motores que han contribuido a su desarrollo. Para llevar a cabo esta investigación, hemos analizado la bibliografía, las páginas web oficiales y los documentos elaborados por los servicios de inspección de estos países. Concluimos que, si bien la influencia de los organismos transnacionales en el crecimiento de la inspección escolar en estos países es evidente, el contexto sociopolítico local también tiene, en nuestra opinión, una influencia significativa. Palabras clave: Inspección escolar, supervisión, evaluación, mejora escolar Abstract: The exponential growth of school inspection to monitor and evaluate the quality of education in the last two decades has been influenced by several global economic and socio-political drivers, particularly the policies of transnational organisations, such as UNESCO, the OECD, and the World Bank. It is important to note, however, that the influence of these international drivers is mediated by the histories, traditions, policies, and perhaps most of the politics of countries. To illustrate this point, we chose to study the school evaluation systems of four different countries, Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, and the drivers that contributed to their development. For the purpose of this research, we conducted an analysis of the literature, official websites, and documents produced by the

inspection of these countries. We conclude that while the influence of transnational agencies on the growth of school inspection in these countries is clear, the local socio-political context has, also, in our view, a significant influence.

Key Words: School inspection; monitoring; evaluation; school improvement

Title and abstract for Publication Two

Gardezi, S., McNamara, G., Brown, M., & O'Hara, J. (2023). School inspections: A rhetoric of quality or reality? *Frontiers in Education*, 8, Article 1204642.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1204642>

School inspections: a rhetoric of quality or reality?

Abstract: This study aims to explore the perspectives of school inspectors and leaders on the quality of school inspection in four countries with different inspection systems: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. The study also examines the general perceptions of school leaders and inspectors about the impact of quality assurance agencies on teaching and learning in these countries. Using semi-structured interviews of school leaders (n = 28) and inspectors (n = 14), the research found that school leaders' experiences and perceptions of school inspection and evaluation were varied in and across all four countries. While some expressed dissatisfaction with the inspectors and the process, others regarded it as a beneficial endeavour that instilled a sense of vigilance and attentiveness toward the quality standards and inspection criteria. School leaders' experiences and perceptions were mostly positive in Dubai and mixed in the cases of Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan. Furthermore, the study found a negative correlation between the perception of school leaders and inspectors regarding the quality of inspection practices and their perception of the impact of inspection. Thus, it is imperative to establish improved avenues of communication to facilitate heightened awareness among school leaders regarding the efficacy of inspectors' work and the comprehensive measures implemented by inspectorates to ensure the quality of their own practices. This initiative will foster enhanced trust between school leaders and inspectors, consequently amplifying the overall influence of school inspections.

KEYWORDS: school inspection, evaluation, quality assurance, quality education, school leaders, school inspectors, monitoring, supervision

Title and abstract for Publication Three

Gardezi, S., McNamara, G., Brown, M., & O'Hara, J. (2024). Exploring the Multifaceted Nature of School Inspectors' Power Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Four Quality Assurance Systems. *Review of Education*. 10.1002/rev3.70013

Exploring the Multifaceted Nature of School Inspectors' Power Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Four Quality Assurance Systems

Abstract: This research critically explores the role of school inspectors in driving improvements across diverse educational settings, focusing on the nuanced dynamics of their influence on school leaders' attitudes towards feedback. The study employs French and Raven's 'The Bases of Social Powers' framework to investigate the various forms of power

wielded by school inspectors. The examination encompasses inspection regimes with varied approaches, ranging from high-stakes to low-stakes, each conferring different degrees of authority on school inspectors. Conducted in four jurisdictions— Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan—each characterised by distinct school quality assurance systems, the research aims to provide readers, including academicians, policymakers, quality assurance personnel and school leaders, with examples of current practices and models. Through interviews with school leaders and inspectors, the findings reveal that leaders' perceptions of inspectors' powers influence both their attitudes towards inspectors and their responses to feedback. The six bases of power—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, expert and informational—as postulated in French and Raven's framework—are identified in the school leaders' responses and highlighted in the structural dynamics of the inspection systems under study, though at varying degrees. Notably, all forms of power hold value in influencing school leaders and driving changes in their practices. While the first three focus on regulating and evaluating school operations, the latter three foster change by inspiring and guiding school leaders. The findings underscore the need for a balanced integration of these power bases in school inspection systems, tailored to the unique contexts of every country. By shedding light on the interplay between power dynamics and school leaders' responsiveness to feedback, this research contributes valuable insights to inform the development and refinement of school inspection systems. The ultimate goal is to maximise the impact of inspections and enhance the efficacy of quality assurance systems in promoting positive change and improvement within diverse educational environments.

Keywords: monitoring, school evaluation, school inspectors' influence, school inspectors' power

Title and abstract for Publication Four

Gardezi, S. (2024). The development and status of self-evaluation as a component of school inspection and quality assurance: A comparison across four countries. *Heliyon* /, 10(20). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39321>

The development and status of self-evaluation as a component of school inspection and quality assurance: a comparison across four countries

Abstract:

Objective and rationale

The increasing prominence of school self-evaluation (SSE) as a pivotal element in global quality assurance practices is attributed to its cost-effectiveness, relevance to school contexts, empowerment of schools in managing and leading the school self-evaluation processes and holding them accountable for achievement standards. This paper aims to explore various approaches and SSE practices through the evolution and current status of school self-evaluation within the realms of school inspection and quality assurance in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan. The paper emphasises a comparative perspective to showcase SSE models from these countries as pioneering initiatives for quality assurance in educational improvement, especially for nations where SSE practices are still evolving.

Methods

This study employs literature review, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with school leaders (n = 32) to offer insights into current SSE practices in these four

countries through a comparative analysis. These methods were chosen in line with the specific aims and research questions of the paper which are to provide an overview from the research literature of the development and current status of SSE as an element of school evaluation in each country studied. To analyse, compare and contrast policy in the area in each case and to obtain, through interviews, rich deep data and findings on the attitude and opinions of key personnel in each country on SSE as a policy and practice.

Results

School self-evaluation (of varying types) is being built into each school evaluation system and becoming an integral part of inspection and quality assurance, and it is argued here, broadly moving along a similar spectrum in each case. However, for now, SSE practices are different in all four countries, usually due to the stage of development of the school inspection system and, above all, the overall structure of their respective educational landscapes— that is to say, whether it is a centralised, controlled and hierarchical education system or a decentralised and autonomous system.

Conclusion

The study suggests that it is possible to integrate school self-evaluation into a wide range of educational systems and philosophies, eventually leading to educational improvement in any country following the case study countries discussed as models.

Keywords: self-evaluation; school leaders; accountability; school improvement; school inspection.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks developed by Landwehr (2011), Ehren and Visscher (2006), and Gustafsson et al. (2015) have provided a foundation for constructing the theoretical framework of this study. These three frameworks collectively elucidate the impact and potential role of school inspection in fostering school improvement. Landwehr's framework on the effects and effectiveness of school inspection emphasises four key functions: acquiring knowledge, ensuring accountability, enforcing standards, and promoting school development. It highlights the interdependence of these dimensions, positing that they reinforce one another. This model inherently assumes that school inspections contribute positively to school improvement, with widespread acceptance of the criteria, feedback, and reports generated through the inspection process. In contrast, Ehren and Visscher's (2006) Framework of School Inspection considers the interplay between the inspection process, school characteristics, external influences, and support mechanisms, acknowledging both beneficial and adverse outcomes. Similarly, Gustafsson et al.'s (2015) framework outlines the key features of school inspection and

identifies three mechanisms—setting expectations, accepting feedback, and promoting self-evaluation and high improvement capacity—that are widely regarded as drivers of change.

While these frameworks offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of school inspection, they fall short of addressing the underlying factors that shape its characteristics and influence its acceptance by stakeholders. In particular, they neglect the pivotal role of school leaders' perceptions of inspectors and the inspection process, which significantly impacts the reception and utilisation of inspection feedback for school improvement. Building upon key aspects of these models, I have developed a tailored framework that aligns with the research objectives of this study and addresses these identified gaps by incorporating these critical dimensions. This approach broadens the conceptual understanding of the effects of school inspection and aspires to serve as a foundation for future research aimed at exploring the dynamics of school inspections and designing more effective inspection systems.

1.4.1 Factors influencing the development and growth of school inspection

An examination of the historical trajectory of school inspection, irrespective of geographic context, reveals significant transformations in its purpose, scope, and implementation. However, this evolution has not been consistent across different regions in terms of approach, methodology, and timing. Correspondingly, the fortunes of inspectorates have experienced fluctuations (Gray, 2019; McNamara & O'Hara, 2012). In various jurisdictions, school inspection has experienced phases of expansion, nominal existence, and resurgence, particularly within educational systems with long-standing traditions of such practices. These fluctuations in the prominence of school inspection can be attributed to several factors, which have significantly influenced common inspection procedures, including notification protocols, lesson observations, frequency of inspection visits, stakeholder engagement during onsite inspections, school data reviews, and reporting practices across most jurisdictions.

In Ireland, for instance, school inspection has experienced periods of both prominence and decline. The establishment of a centrally administered education system in the 1830s led to the creation of the school inspector role, responsible for both reporting on and supporting the quality of teaching. Following the formation of the independent Irish state in 1922, school inspectors, commonly referred to as 'cigire,' emerged as policy implementers. However, their

influence gradually diminished due to the rise of powerful teachers' unions and the increasing importance of annual state examinations as the primary criterion for assessing school performance (Brown et al., 2018). It was until the late 1990s and early 2000s that school inspection reappeared in full force on the education landscape in Ireland and beyond (Brown et al., 2018).

Research studies attribute the resurgence of school inspection to the acceptance of neo-liberal governance structures. These structures have led to the marketisation of education, providing greater autonomy over curriculum and teacher employment, while also promoting free school choice. In this context, consumer satisfaction is maximised by offering ample choices in the marketplace. Neo-liberalism holds a belief in the market's efficiency to naturally sort strong schools from weak ones through a process of elimination based on public choice (Baxter, 2017; Baxter & Hult, 2017; Brown et al., 2016; 2018). This belief has maintained the need for school inspectors as regulatory agents of public service while also positioning them as providers of information to public consumers in the education marketplace. In this scenario, the information and grading of schools serve as the 'goods' provided to parents and other stakeholders (Baxter & Hult, 2017).

Moreover, the economic crisis that began in Europe in 2008 highlighted the urgent need for countries to identify effective strategies for boosting economic productivity. Central to this effort is the education sector, which has consequently been subjected to increasingly stringent monitoring, regulatory, and evaluation measures. The initiative to restructure the workforce within schools and school inspectorates, both in Europe and globally, is viewed as part of the neo-liberal agenda aimed at enhancing education standards to improve economic performance (Baxter & Hult, 2017; Brown et al., 2016; 2018). This has resulted in increased political pressure on school inspection to take a far greater role in supporting schools to improve.

Influential international reports such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) have also been significant in bolstering school inspection efforts. Dashzeveg (2019) reports that in 2012, New Zealand experienced a 'PISA Shock', which led to an increase in teaching and administrative positions under the 'Investing in Educational Success' initiative, along with other policy changes. Thrupp (2014) criticises the

widespread influence of the OECD education programme on New Zealand's educational politics and policy, arguing that it overlooks the unique context of the country. Similarly, unexpectedly low PISA results in Ireland led to the mandatory incorporation of school self-evaluation, with a primary focus on literacy and numeracy for school improvement (Brown et al., 2016; 2018). In the case of Dubai, performance in PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS is a part of their National Agenda, and school inspectors give targets to schools related to the performance of their students on these evaluations.

The establishment of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI)³ has been an important factor that contributed to the rise and spread of school inspection services across Europe and other parts of the world (Brown et al., 2016). Since its inception, SICI has played a pivotal role in fostering international collaboration among inspectorates, thereby enhancing the quality and consistency of school inspections globally. By providing a platform for dialogue and exchange of best practices, SICI has enabled inspectorates from various countries to learn from one another, thereby improving the standards of education inspection. One of the key contributions of SICI is the organisation of conferences that bring together education inspectors, policymakers, and researchers from different regions. These conferences serve as a critical forum for discussing emerging trends, challenges, and innovations in the field of school inspection. Through these gatherings, SICI facilitates the dissemination of knowledge and promotes a shared understanding of effective inspection practices. The conferences also provide opportunities for networking, allowing participants to build professional relationships and establish collaborative initiatives that can enhance inspection processes in their respective countries. In addition to conferences, SICI offers professional development services aimed at improving the efficacy of school inspectors. These services include training programmes, workshops, and seminars designed to equip inspectors with the latest skills and knowledge required to conduct thorough and objective evaluations of educational institutions. By focusing on continuous professional development, SICI ensures that inspectors remain up-to-date with the evolving educational landscape and are well-prepared to address new challenges.

Malik and Rose (2015), in a comprehensive report that is part of a series of country reports prepared for the Oslo Summit about financing education in middle and lower-income countries, highlight the results-based approach of key donors. They note that donors are shifting from

³ <https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/>

general budgetary support to projects via NGOs and international private companies for delivery, with management by results. Donors such as the World Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have a long history of supporting countries in developing social sector plans to translate policy goals into implementable targets. These donors are helping governments improve their planning and reform implementation processes by building their capacities to link funding to results, monitor performance using information systems, and improve the accountability of local government officials. This shift in approach has required countries receiving funding to establish rigorous school inspections and monitoring mechanisms.

These factors have led to changes and adjustments in school inspection procedures. In some jurisdictions, short and focused school inspections have been introduced, such as in Ireland. The frequency of school inspection visits has increased, as seen in Pakistan, and the notification period for school inspections has been reduced, for example, in Dubai and Ireland.

One of the most significant factors is the socio-political context of a country. For example, in New Zealand, following the neoliberal approach of the left-wing Labour government, which aimed to make schools self-managing and operate as independent business units in accordance with the Picot Report of 1987 (Openshaw, 2014), a significant shift occurred in 1989 with the establishment of the Education Review Office (ERO). The ERO initiated educational reviews that focused on evaluating the quality of education and ensuring compliance with legal obligations, with a strong emphasis on self-review or school self-evaluation. As part of this process, school boards are required to conduct self-audits. Again, in 2021, a new system of external evaluation, the 'Evaluation for Improvement Approach,' was introduced in response to the recommendations of the Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce Report of 2018. This new system eliminated event-based school evaluations conducted by a group of review officers and instead assigned schools an evaluation partner—a former review officer—who monitors and supervises the self-review process and builds the evaluation capacity of school leaders (Goodrick, 2022). The acceptance of the Picot Report and the changes following the Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce Report indicate that left-wing politics significantly influence school evaluation policies and practices. Additionally, the UNESCO Pacific Strategy partly shapes New Zealand's policies regarding the education of Māori and Pasifika students.

Similarly, in Dubai, school inspections were introduced only sixteen years ago, with the first cycle of inspections launched during the 2008-2009 academic year (Dubai School Inspection Bureau [DSIB], 2008). These inspections focused exclusively on private schools, which constitute the majority of the educational landscape and student population in the city-state (KHDA, 2021; OECD, 2021). Private education in Dubai is a thriving industry and exemplifies market accountability, where parents, as primary consumers, influence school operations based on their preferences (Jaafar et al., 2022). Publicly available school inspection reports and subsequent school rankings foster competition among schools, incentivising them to align their services with parental expectations and thus enhance educational quality. To remain competitive, schools must adhere to the quality standards set by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the regulatory body for private schools. Despite the absence of direct or indirect public funding, these schools are held accountable and undergo annual inspections (Thacker and Cuadra, 2014).

1.4.2 School leaders' perceptions and reactions

My study posits that school leaders' perceptions of school inspectors and inspection practices significantly influence their responses to inspection findings, including feedback and reporting. These perceptions pertain to the perceived competence of school inspectors and the authority they wield. Quintelier et al. (2018) conducted research involving teachers, revealing that teachers are more likely to accept feedback when they perceive inspectors as credible and competent. Similarly, feedback that is positive and clear is more readily embraced. On the other hand, feedback is often rejected if inspectors are seen as poorly informed, arrogant, or disrespectful. The study also emphasises the crucial role of transparency and objectivity in the content and delivery of feedback by school inspectors. They argue that the characteristics of the feedback and the source providing it are key factors in the acceptance process.

Furthermore, the confidence of school leaders and teachers in the quality criteria used during inspections highlights the effectiveness of these standards in assessing educational quality, thereby enhancing their overall trust in the inspection process (Zheng, 2020). This theoretical framework thus highlights the importance of maintaining high standards in the practices, procedures, personnel, documentation, and tools of quality assurance agencies. It also acknowledges that school inspectors wield significant authority to have their feedback accepted

and acted upon, as Hofmann et al. (2017) contend that the perception of power stimulates cooperative behaviour. To explore how power relations operate in the context of school inspection, French and Raven's Framework of social power is utilised. The six bases of power—reward, coercion, legitimate, referent, expert, and informational—were examined. According to Raven and French (1959), these six bases of power are defined as follows:

1. Reward Power: The ability to grant rewards, benefits, or incentives to others to influence their behaviour.
2. Coercion Power: The capacity to punish or deliver negative consequences to others to influence their actions.
3. Legitimate Power: The formal authority granted to an individual by an organisation or societal structure, which allows them to make demands and expect compliance.
4. Referent Power: The influence a person has due to their charisma, likability, or the respect and admiration others have for them, leading others to want to identify with or follow them.
5. Expert Power: The power derived from possessing specialised knowledge, skills, or expertise that others value and depend upon.
6. Informational Power: The ability to control or access valuable information that is not readily available to others, allowing one to influence others' decisions and actions through the dissemination of that information.

Inspectorates possess the authority to sanction underperforming schools and reward those meeting established standards (Gustafsson et al., 2015). While Quintelier et al. (2018) assert that knowledgeable school inspectors can wield referent, expert, and informational power. School inspectors, as part of the inspectorate and as implementers of policy, inherently hold legitimate power (Baxter, 2017). Piezunka (2019) explores the contrasting power dynamics within the German educational system, where school representatives possess significant influence. High-level educational policymakers consider the perspectives of school

representatives when deciding on the continuation of school inspections. Consequently, school inspectors adjust their feedback methods, focusing less on judgments and more on observations, and grant school representatives greater input in setting expectations for schools.

Ehren et al. (2013) indicate that while rewards and sanctions can motivate schools to improve, they often result in short-term solutions rather than sustainable, long-term improvements. Conversely, referent, expert, and informational powers can effect cognitive changes that lead to behavioural modifications, playing a crucial role in fostering sustainable improvements in schools (Brown, 2013).

Self-evaluation is regarded as a critical component of the school accountability and improvement cycle (Gustafsson et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2019). According to O'Brien et al. (2022), it is a 'cyclical, collaborative, and evidence-based review process aimed at enhancing overall school performance and learner outcomes' (p. 1). The emphasis on self-evaluation within school inspection systems implies a significant level of trust in school leaders' ability to accurately and effectively assess their school's performance. This approach suggests that school leaders are considered competent and reliable in identifying their school's strengths and weaknesses and implementing improvement strategies.

When a system prioritises self-evaluation, it reflects an even higher level of trust in school leaders' capabilities. It demonstrates confidence that school leaders can conduct thorough assessments and are committed to using these evaluations to drive meaningful improvements. This trust is crucial as it fosters a sense of responsibility and ownership among school leaders, motivating them to strive for excellence and continuously enhance the quality of education provided (Baxter, 2017). In essence, greater reliance on self-evaluation signifies a belief in school leaders' abilities to lead their institutions toward better outcomes. This trust creates an environment where school leaders feel empowered to take initiative, innovate, and make decisions that benefit their students and staff, ultimately contributing to the overall advancement of the educational system (Brown et al., 2016).

Self-evaluation empowers schools to conduct context-embedded evaluations that are economical, sustainable, and improvement-oriented (Brady, 2016; Brown et al., 2021; Boyle et al., 2020). Even within the framework of school self-evaluation, inspectorates can maintain

control by randomly requiring schools to undertake evaluative tasks, such as analysing student achievement data to identify trends and make informed decisions, or by prescribing self-evaluation criteria aligned with inspection standards. For example, the Looking at Our School - Quality Framework for schools in Ireland advises school stakeholders not to use it as an audit checklist (Department of Education, 2022). The more freedom schools have to review their practices and identify areas for improvement, the more empowered they become, strengthening the trust between schools and school inspectors (Baxter, 2017).

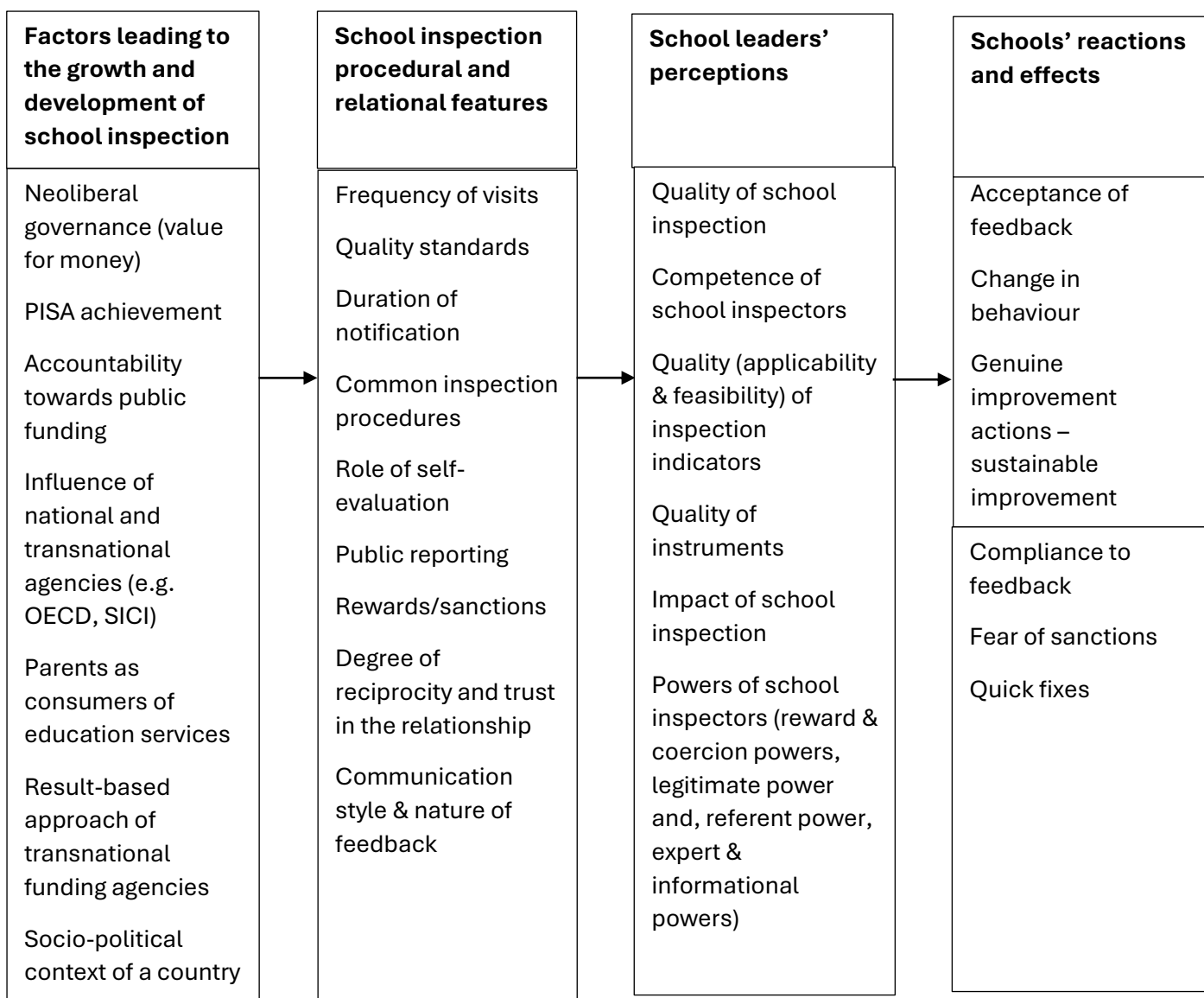


Figure 1 – School Inspection Growth, Practices and Impact

1.5 Conclusion

To conclude, for school inspections to achieve their foundational objectives of accountability and improvement, they must influence schools to take their reports and recommendations seriously and act upon them. My PhD study explores ways to enhance the impact of school inspections on school improvement and, ultimately, on better learning outcomes for students. This investigation focuses on four key aspects of school inspection systems: the factors that influenced the development and growth of school inspection, internal quality assurance mechanisms within these inspection systems, the power dynamics of school inspectors, and the development and role of school self-evaluation in sustaining improvement measures in schools. These aspects are examined in relation to various motivations that influence the interactions between school inspections and schools, including national and public interests, observable practices to ensure high-quality professional inspections, implicit influences of inspectors' professional conduct and communication, and the acceptance of schools' professional capability to lead their improvement efforts.

To this end, I have studied four distinct school inspection systems worldwide: Dubai, where private schools undergo rigorous annual inspections; Ireland's soft touch inspection approach that connects external monitoring with internal evaluation; New Zealand, where an evaluation partner collaborates with school leadership to facilitate self-evaluation; and Pakistan, which features parallel systems for monitoring tangible aspects of schools and supervising the quality of teaching and learning.

Chapter two reviews the literature on the genesis and growth of school inspection and general school inspection practices globally. Chapter three provides an overview of the methodological approaches and decisions made in designing and analysing the data from the four studies. This is followed by the publications themselves, presented in chronological and subject matter order. The final chapter explores the overall findings of the four publications and their implications for the impact of school inspection on school improvement in different education systems.

Chapter two: Literature Review

2.1 Genesis and Development of School Inspection

School inspection stands as one of the earliest public institutions, originating to oversee and supervise educational provision (Wilcox, 2000). In Europe, this service finds its roots in the early nineteenth century with the establishment of a comprehensive publicly funded system of elementary education in certain countries. Initially, clergymen were appointed as inspectors in many regimes, marking the influence of the church on education during this period (Gray, 2019). Their primary mandate was to inspect schools and ensure the judicious use of public funds.

Concurrently, school inspection was implemented in some countries that were former British colonies. For instance, in the British Indian sub-continent, school inspection became part of educational administration during the third decade of the 19th century (Brohi, 1991). In the absence of an external or formal system of school supervision, indigenous school systems operated without state control and direction. Following the establishment of the East India Company, the Governor-General in Council formed Committees of Public Instruction in several constituencies during the first and second quarters of the nineteenth century to assess the state of public instruction and provide recommendations for improvement (Sharp, 1920, p.53). After institutionalising state control of education in 1854, the office of Circle Inspectors was established, primarily tasked with overseeing all educational institutions run or aided by the government (Bansal, 2017). Their responsibilities included conducting examinations, offering advice to schoolteachers and administrators, and submitting reports to the provincial education departments.

In Rhodesia (now named Zimbabwe), a pivotal moment in educational governance occurred in 1899 with the passage of an Education Ordinance. This ordinance delineated categories of schools and established the role of a school inspector. According to this legislation, a school inspector was mandated to assess conditions at any school receiving a government grant or subsidy. Their duties encompassed monitoring students' progress, inspecting buildings, equipment, and furniture, evaluating the standard of teaching, and appraising the quality of instruction provided to students (Richards & Govere, 2003). Similar Education Ordinances were

enacted in other parts of colonial Africa, such as the Western African colonies of Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (now Ghana), and Lagos. The Education Ordinances of 1882 covered grant aids for school construction and teachers' salaries, establishing an Advisory Board on Education and an Inspectorate (Kaduna, 2019). Across all colonies, the primary role of school inspectors was to inform higher authorities about the standard of teaching and the appropriate use of public funding.

By the mid-nineteenth century, numerous European countries had instituted some form of school inspection. For instance, school inspection dates back to 1849 in Austria, 1839 in England and Wales, 1831 in Ireland, 1861 in Montenegro, 1802 in France, and 1801 in the Netherlands (SICI, 2023). In Australia, compulsory and secular education were established in all states during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and teachers were routinely 'inspected' by senior officers of the respective state Education Departments (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004). Common features across these inspection regimes, irrespective of the country's status as free or a colony, included monitoring individual teachers' performance, scrutinising the use of public funds, reporting to the central government, and inspectors functioning as officials external to the schools. Nevertheless, inspection signified bureaucratic control in both colonies and free European countries. In addition to its other facets, it symbolised compliance with education laws and reviewed the impact of public policies on the quality of education (Gray, 2019). School inspectors held esteemed positions, enjoying significant authority over schools.

The twentieth century witnessed the evolution and remarkable expansion of school inspection practices and mechanisms, with the roles and responsibilities of school inspectors experiencing fluctuations. New responsibilities, such as setting examinations, assessing students' work, and monitoring attendance, were added to inspectors' portfolios. They began advising teachers on teaching methodologies, while education systems recognised the need for standardised national examination systems to ensure the quality of education and facilitate performance comparisons among students (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012). The introduction of national examination systems marked a shift, relieving inspectors from the direct conduct of examinations and assessment tasks. Amateur clergy inspectors gradually phased out, making way for professionals with an educational background to replace them. The inspection focus transitioned from assessing individual teacher performance and evaluating students' notebooks

to a holistic approach involving the entire school, with inspectors assuming advisory roles to school management (Gray, 2019).

Globally, the acknowledgement of school inspection's significance in enhancing education quality led to the emergence and growth of inspection systems, particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Notable instances include the introduction of the basic education inspection system in China in 1977 (Zhou et al., 2018), the establishment of the Inspectorate of Education in Portugal in 1979 (Costa & Pires, 2011), and the formation of the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation in South Korea in 1998 (Kim et al., 2010). Similarly, New Zealand saw the commencement of the Education Review Office in 1989 (French, 2000), and Malaysia established the Inspectorate of Schools and Quality Assurance through the Education Act of 1996 (Kinjawan, 2020).

In the final decade of the twentieth century to the present day, school inspection practices have undergone substantial transformations. Towards the conclusion of the twentieth century, educators and school leaders openly conveyed their dissatisfaction with inspectors' feedback, citing stereotypical, prejudicial, and self-enhancing critiques. Teachers, supported by robust Teacher Unions, resisted teaching in the presence of inspectors (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012), leading to a widespread questioning of the credibility of school inspectors. The new public management policy, advocating increased autonomy for schools, further weakened the constraints of the rigid inspection system prevalent in the early twentieth century (Brown et al., 2016). This shift prompted a realisation that regulations imposed on schools through external inspections, akin to a straitjacket, impeded their efforts. Schools were to be granted autonomy to devise and implement their improvement policies.

The empowerment of schools necessitated taking charge of their improvement endeavours, establishing educational goals, implementing actions to achieve those goals, and subsequently evaluating the success of their practices. Augmented autonomy came with increased responsibility and heightened accountability for the execution of school improvement actions. The emphasis shifted towards enhancing the evaluation capacity of schools and their stakeholders, not only to support improvement measures but also to manage accountability requirements. Consequently, inspection regimes emerged wherein schools are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation of their performance and plan for improvement.

Macbeath's (2005) seminal work, 'School Must Speak for Themselves: The Case for School Self-evaluation,' presents a compelling argument for schools to scrutinise their performance and orchestrate their improvement. Conducting a project in collaboration with the National Union of Teachers in the UK in 1995, Macbeath offered a step-by-step practical guide to the school self-evaluation process, outlining the roles teachers, students, and parents can play in this iterative process. School leaders and teachers expressed greater approval of self-evaluation, attributing it to two overarching goals, as identified by Kyriakides and Campbell (2004): enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and improving the overall organisational quality.

The advanced quality of the organisation encompassed enhanced social relations among school stakeholders and a more favourable work environment and culture. Involving teachers in the self-evaluation process yields several inherent benefits, including increased participation in the school's decision-making beyond the classroom, the fostering of a collegial and collaborative environment in schools, and the promotion of improved reflective practices (Figueiredo et al., 2024; Nevo, 2001). Wroe and Halsall (2001) further endorse this idea, asserting that self-evaluation results in sustainable changes in schools because the school staff scrutinise their practices in alignment with the criteria established by inspectorates and the standards or benchmarks they set for themselves. This approach fosters a school culture where staff engages in critical reflection and investigates their own context, often leading to the adoption of new teaching methods and learning experiences (p.43). Context-embedded self-evaluation drives improvement activities that are more attuned to the specific needs of the school (Barry et al., 2023; Figueiredo et al., 2024).

Self-evaluation, as a bottom-up approach that allocates power and control to those tasked with effecting improvements (Barry et al., 2023; Chapman & Sammons, 2013), initially faced criticism for perceived deficiencies in rigour and quality (Vanhoof & Peter Van Petegem, 2007). Questions arose regarding the evaluation capacity of school leaders and teachers (O'Brien et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2022). Research studies also highlighted disparities among the actual quality of schools, their perceived quality, and the expected quality (Vanhoof & Peter Van Petegem, 2010). In response to these gaps, a novel model emerged that advocated for the coexistence and complementary nature of self-evaluation and external inspection (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012, Mutch, 2012).

Nevo (2001) elucidates the significance of the coexistence of external inspection and self-evaluation:

Although internal evaluation usually has the advantage of being more sensitive to the local context of schools and their unique characteristics, it might suffer from a narrow perspective on their overall qualities. External evaluation can also provide the school with information on national standards or benchmarks or comparative data from other schools (e.g., student achievement) that might help the school interpret its data and assess its quality (p. 98).

The context-embeddedness, sensitivity, and relevance to needs position self-evaluation as a complementary feature of school evaluation. Therefore, while external evaluation presents the broader picture of the school, self-evaluation delves into an in-depth analysis of school practices at the micro-level (Figueiredo et al., 2024; McNamara et al., 2022).

According to Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2007), the complementarity between external evaluation and school self-evaluation can be encapsulated as follows:

Each form of evaluation can be of service to the other... The most suitable relationship between internal and external evaluation is thus not a mere adding up of two separate aspects. Instead, thinking in terms of multiplication seems more appropriate. This means not only that these aspects can strengthen each other when combined, but also that if one is absent, the other loses value (p. 108).

Brown (2013) also asserts that the interconnectedness between school self-evaluation and external inspection helps mitigate the perceived shortcomings of each other and establishes a systematic flow of information resulting in more meaningful internal/external recommendations that will subsequently direct future strategic development planning initiatives within the school (p. 2-3).

Kyriakides and Campbell (2004) propose three ways in which external school inspection and self-evaluation can relate to each other. They may run in parallel, sequentially, or cooperatively as determined by the education system. In their parallel existence, schools conduct self-evaluation concurrently with external evaluation, comparing the outcomes of both reviews. This allows those questioning the quality of self-evaluation findings to compare results and use the external review findings for accountability while leveraging self-evaluation to enhance school effectiveness. In many school inspection regimes, self-evaluation is driven by external review

findings, conducted sequentially, and schools plan for improvement using the outcomes of external evaluation and inspection criteria, such as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB). When external and self-evaluation are carried out cooperatively, schools and inspectorates discuss the inspection process and self-evaluation, considering the viewpoints and interests of all stakeholders, resulting in mutually agreed-upon criteria. The Education Review Office in New Zealand organises the school review based on a cooperative approach, with schools and the inspectorate arriving at areas for improvement and areas of good practice through mutual consensus (Brown et al., 2016; OECD, 2013). McNamara et al. (2022) also advocate school self-evaluation and school inspection as cooperative procedures that can be carried out sequentially (self-evaluation before external inspection) and view self-evaluation as preparation for external inspections and a driver for collaborative internal school improvement efforts.

School inspection regimes swiftly acknowledged the shift in prevailing trends and adeptly adjusted to the changing landscape. Consequently, within many education systems, school inspection incorporated an advisory and supportive role into its repertoire. As a result, school inspectorates-initiated training programmes for enhancing school leaders' evaluation capacity and crafted resource materials and instruments to facilitate their self-evaluation endeavours, with the school inspection criteria serving as the primary resource. The 21st century witnessed revisions to school inspection frameworks, such as 'Looking at Our School 2016 and 2022,' 'How Good is Our School,' and 'Implementing Self Review in Early Childhood Services,' aligning school leaders' self-evaluation and school improvement efforts with the standards set in the quality frameworks.

With an escalating emphasis on SSE, the concept of more focused, risk-based, proportionate, and differentiated inspections emerged to replace cyclical whole-school inspections. Risk-based school inspections, as described by Ehren and Shackleton (2016), are intended to "increase the effectiveness of school inspections by identifying potentially low-performing schools and increasing inspection activities in these schools and less inspection activities in well-performing schools" (p. 300). These inspections entail a comprehensive mechanism involving the identification and assessment of risk levels, providing targeted, constructive, and clear feedback, overseeing school improvement plans, and subsequently re-inspecting the actions taken, thus regularly updating the risk level. Differentiated school inspections reject the one-size-fits-all approach of cyclical visitation; instead, schools are inspected considering their

context and self-evaluation findings. Another approach involves adjusting the frequency of school inspection visits based on the perceived needs of the school. Schools with more weaknesses than strengths undergo more frequent inspections than those with more strengths than weaknesses (Ehren & Shackleton, 2016). In school inspection terminology, low-performing schools have a shorter return cycle compared to high-performing schools, thereby 'transferring responsibility for improvement in standards and monitoring of performance away from centralised inspection and onto the schools' (Brown et al., 2017, p.93). These practices not only render school inspections cost-effective but also alleviate unnecessary pressure from external evaluation, allowing schools that provide a robust educational experience to students to maintain consistent educational success.

In essence, risk-based and differentiated school inspections embody forms of a responsive accountability approach, granting schools 'earned autonomy.' Blok et al. (2008) define earned autonomy as follows:

The self-evaluation results of the schools should be valid and reliable and provide information about indicators included in the inspection framework. If these requirements are met, schools will be confronted with fewer and less thorough inspection visits (p. 380).

Moreover, neoliberal political ideologies highlighted the limitations of external surveillance systems, including school inspection, and decentralisation drives in various countries championed the cause of school autonomy, thereby elevating accountability needs (Brown et al., 2016; McNamara et al. 2020).

... across Europe Inspectorates are developing new inspection methods and modalities that respond to increasing levels of decentralised governance. This decentralisation is characterised by a shift from central bureaucratic forms of governance to a dispersal of governing power over a wide variety of new networked organisations. Inspectorates play a central part within these new systems, acting as policy implementers that drive and facilitate the achievement of policy goals. They also function as a central element within national accountability mechanisms of individual countries (Baxter, 2017, p. 2).

School inspectors serve as the eyes and hands of the governance system, as argued by Brown et al. (2016):

Inspection is now a complex component of wider modern concepts of public sector management and governance, including quality, improvement, accountability, transparency, and cost-effectiveness (p. 2).

School inspection has evolved into a highly adaptable concept, capable of assuming various forms and serving diverse purposes (Donaldson, 2013, p. 8). Similarly, the scope of inspectors' roles has broadened. They now function as quality regulators and enforcers, policy implementers and assurers, policy shapers, mitigators of risk, catalysts, knowledge and policy brokers, capacity builders, partnership builders, agenda setters, preservers/creators of the space for innovation, school improvement partners, advisors, and quality framework facilitators (Baxter, 2017; Donaldson, 2013; O'Brian et al., 2018).

2.1.5 Role of Transnational Organisation in Promoting School Inspection

The transnational agencies, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the European Union, have emerged as staunch advocates of school autonomy, concurrently proposing stringent accountability measures led by schools themselves (McNamara et al., 2022; McNamara & O'Hara, 2008a). The Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2001 primarily concentrate on quality evaluation in school education, perceiving it as a means to ensure and enhance the quality of education. Member states, within their economic, social, and cultural context, are urged to establish a transparent quality evaluation system in school education to promote school self-evaluation (SSE) as a method for fostering learning and improving schools. Clarity regarding the purpose and conditions for self-evaluation is essential, alongside providing methodological support for SSE and an external perspective of the school. Simultaneously, the document emphasises the development of external evaluation. Whether it is school self-evaluation or external inspection, the focus should be on continuous improvement. Member states are further advised to promote and support, where appropriate, the involvement of school stakeholders, including teachers, pupils, management, parents, and experts, in both self-evaluation and external evaluation processes because school improvement is a shared responsibility, and each stakeholder has a role to play.

Similarly, the OECD, while emphasising the standardisation of teacher competencies, training, and student attainment, accords due importance to school evaluation.

School evaluation is increasingly considered as a potential lever of change that could assist with decision making, resource allocation and school improvement, especially as: further autonomy is given to individual schools... The effective monitoring and evaluation of schools are central to the continuous improvement of student learning: Schools need feedback on their performance to help them identify how to improve their practices, and schools should be accountable for their performance (OECD, 2013, p.384).

The OECD features three key approaches to school evaluation: school self-evaluation, external inspection, and the comparison of schools based on different performance measures, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which provides a comparative evaluation of education systems by measuring 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years in OECD member countries. The OECD expects that school evaluation should focus directly on the quality of teaching and learning and their relationship to student learning experiences and outcomes, rather than the relationship between policy, planning, and outcomes (OECD, 2013, p.446). According to Brown et al. (2016), PISA, as an international standard for benchmarking the performance of an education system in relation to others, has led to a wide range of interventions and reforms to achieve higher student performance outcomes, and strengthening the school inspection system is one of them.

The SICI, another transnational agency, has reinforced school inspection systems across Europe with its slogan 'Better Inspection, Better Learning.' SICI aims to support the improvement of inspectorates and the professional competences of inspectors, promote and support partnerships and cooperation between inspectorates, and actively participate in the international debate about evaluation and quality improvement in education (SICI, 2023). European inspection regimes within SICI have established a platform for exchanging information, experiences, methodological development, and tools, indicators, and benchmarks regarding the quality evaluation of schools. SICI organises conferences and training sessions annually for school inspectors and other stakeholders to build inspection capacity.

The World Bank stands as a prominent financier of global education projects, particularly in low and middle-income nations. Grants are extended to endorse result-based education initiatives, and recipient countries are required to assure the World Bank that their projects will enhance the overall standard of learning in their regions (Malik & Rose, 2015). In pursuit of the Millennium Development Goal, emphasising access to quality education for all, the World Bank urges beneficiaries to concentrate on enhancing internal efficiency, fortifying institutional capacity, increasing community involvement, advocating school autonomy, endorsing

decentralisation, and establishing school accountability systems. A fundamental objective across various education projects supported by the World Bank is the enhancement of the monitoring and evaluation system. For instance, projects implemented in Honduras, India, Mali, and Pakistan, aiming to promote primary education, concentrate on empowering local communities to autonomously manage their schools, granting increased community control to monitor and evaluate school performance (Nielsen, 2006). Education projects funded by the World Bank undergo impact evaluation, which assesses the policy impact of the Bank's educational initiatives. Jones (2007) contends that the World Bank has been a primary catalyst for significant changes in global education since its initiation of funding educational projects. The World Bank's lending policies in education strive to propagate Western ideals, positing education as a precursor to modernisation and asserting the interconnection between educational development and economic progress. Consequently, the World Bank has played a pivotal role in supporting the establishment and growth of school inspection systems to enhance the state of education in numerous countries.

2.2 Understanding School Inspection – Mechanisms and Practices

2.2.1 What is school inspection?

In general terms, school inspection constitutes an evaluative procedure wherein a team of proficient individuals possessing substantial knowledge in the realm of education assesses the quality of educational provision within schools. During their evaluation, they discern both commendable practices and areas necessitating scrutiny and improvement, evaluating the schools' adherence to policy mandates. Drawing from the evidence, they formulate quality judgements pertaining to teaching and learning, school leadership and management, and the overall school environment. Subsequently, recommendations are provided to school leaders, guiding them on how to sustain their strengths and enhance areas requiring improvement. The cumulative insights derived from school inspections over time are also taken into consideration for the formulation of education policies.

Gaertner et al. (2014) characterise school inspection as a

systematic, evaluative assessment of the conditions of work, working methods, and outcomes of individual schools. Inspections are based on standardised criteria for evaluating good instruction and good schools according to normative expectations determined by administrative bodies. These criteria are laid down in frameworks for school quality, encompassing quality criteria for the domains

of instruction, school culture, school leadership, school management, quality development, and so forth (p. 490).

Wilcox (2000) defines inspection as a

process of assessing the quality and/or performance of institutions, services, programmes, or projects by those (inspectors) who are not directly involved in them and who are usually specially appointed to fulfil these responsibilities. Inspection involves visits made by inspectors, individually or in teams, to observe the institutions, services, etc., concerned while they are actually functioning (i.e., in real time). The most common outcome of an inspection is a written report of the inspectors' findings (pp. 15-16).

Eddy-Spice et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive definition of school inspection that also encompasses the procedures followed in the process.

School inspections are external evaluations of schools, undertaken by officials outside the school with a mandate from a national/local authority. Regular visits to schools are an essential part of school inspections to collect information about the quality of the school, check compliance to legislation and/or evaluate the quality of students' work (e.g., through observations, interviews, and document analysis) (p. 16).

According to Quintelier (2017),

Inspectorates examine a school's compliance with legislative requirements, regulations, and duties and also provide information about the quality of teaching and the learning climate at the school. In relation to accountability, a school inspection leads to a judgement which may have punitive consequences or (financial) rewards for the school or its staff. In addition to this accountability perspective, growing evidence indicates that school inspections can be a key feature of school improvement as the identification of a school's strengths and weaknesses can be viewed as a lever for developing educational quality (p. 153).

In summary, inspection is a process centred on teaching and learning, concurrently ensuring regulatory compliance, all conducted by a specialised group of external officials. Inspection holds schools accountable for the resources, including human resources, they are provided, and the quality of services they offer. Simultaneously, school inspection supports school improvement endeavours.

2.2.2 School Inspection Procedures

As delineated in the preceding section, the evolution, development, and adaptation of school inspection systems have been contingent upon the specific needs of individual countries and the impact of transnational influences. While various models and approaches to school inspection have materialised over time, they often exhibit notable commonalities (Brown et al., 2018), depending upon the intended purpose of the inspection (De Grauwe, 2007). These shared features encompass the processes and procedures employed by school inspectorates.

The SICI website⁴ provides profiles of 38 inspectorates operating across Europe, revealing that, with minor deviations, these inspectorates adhere to a consistent set of activities and undertake similar tasks during school visits.

Inspectorates routinely formulate an inspection visit plan for the academic year, especially concerning comprehensive, periodic, or cyclic inspections termed scheduling. The procedures for school inspections commence shortly after the approval of the schedule and can be broadly categorised into three phases: the pre-inspection phase, the onsite phase, and the post-inspection phase.

2.2.2a Pre-inspection Phase

The pre-inspection phase constitutes the preparatory stage involving the issuance of notification to the school about the imminent inspection visit, unless it is categorised as an incidental⁵ inspection.

Scholarly opinions diverge on the matter of notifying schools about inspections, with a debate centred on whether inspections should be announced in advance. Wilcox (2000, p. 31) notes this dichotomy, where one perspective argues that providing advance notice to schools energises them to identify and address areas requiring improvement, instigates comprehensive preparation, and initiates the school improvement process that inspections aim to achieve. According to this view, preparations undertaken in anticipation of inspections contribute value to school practices, ultimately benefiting students. Conversely, unannounced visits may lead to significant disruption and confusion, impeding inspectors from observing the school under

⁴ <https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Members/Inspection-Profiles>

⁵ A short inspection visit meant to evaluate one aspect of education.

typical conditions (Wilcox, 2000). The duration of the notification period varies globally; for instance, in the UK, schools typically receive notice on the morning before the inspection begins (Ofsted, 2021). In Northern Ireland and the UAE, a standardised two-week notice period is provided for all inspections (Badri, 2014; Perry, 2013). In Flanders (Belgium) schools are informed six weeks before inspections (Penninckx et al., 2016), while in Korea, the notice period is 1-2 months before the onsite visit (Kim et al., 2010). However, Penninckx et al. (2014) highlight the absence of a comparative study evaluating the impact of the length of advance notification on schools, students' learning, and the quality of education provision across various inspection regimes.

The opposing faction advocates for surprise inspection visits, characterised by the absence of prior notification to the school under examination. Proponents of this approach assert that, under such circumstances, inspectors are more likely to witness schools in their authentic state, devoid of any embellishment aimed at creating a misleading impression. According to Ferguson et al. (2000), prolonged advance notification periods lead to unnecessary preparations for school inspections, diverting attention from school development and diminishing opportunities for the actual improvement intended through inspections. This perspective has prompted a gradual reduction in the notification period, especially concerning Ofsted, signifying a tacit acknowledgement that the pre-inspection period has not proven as effective a catalyst for school improvement as initially envisioned (Ferguson et al., 2000, p. 98). A shorter notice period is believed to maintain schools in a state of perpetual readiness, eliminating the need for ostentatious displays to impress inspectors (Perryman, 2010, p. 189). Numerous studies, such as those by Brunsden et al. (2006), Chapman (2001), Penninckx et al. (2016), and Perryman (2010), delve into the emotional stress and anxiety experienced by school leaders and teachers from the receipt of the notification until the first day of the school inspection. M. Penninckx et al. (2016) further endorse the idea that a lengthy notification period not only induces strong negative emotional effects but also allows for various strategic activities, like window dressing, to mislead inspectors (p. 478).

As schools engage in preparations for inspection, inspectors also ready themselves for the forthcoming onsite visit through a comprehensive examination of pertinent materials. This examination includes a review of previous inspection reports, student achievement data, the school's self-evaluation report (if such reports are customary in a given jurisdiction), the school improvement plan, the school's official website, various policies, and any other documentation

either explicitly requested from the school or accessible through the school's online platforms. In certain jurisdictions, additional insights are gleaned through parental questionnaire surveys (McNamara et al., 2020) conducted during the pre-inspection phase, providing valuable perspectives on the perceived quality of educational provision⁶. Inspectors systematically scope the impending inspection, drawing hypotheses about the quality of practices within the school based on a thorough analysis of the initial documentation and the standards outlined in the inspection framework. These hypotheses are subsequently validated through the systematic collection of evidence within the school premises, enabling inspectors to reach well-founded quality judgements. Noteworthy is the practice in some jurisdictions, such as Scotland, where inspectors extend invitations to school management teams to partake in the scoping and planning of inspection visits (Perry, 2013).

2.2.2b Onsite- Inspection Phase

The onsite inspection phase, particularly in the case of whole school inspections, extends for two to five days, contingent upon the size and complexity of the school. During onsite inspections, inspectors engage in a range of activities, including meetings with school leadership, students, parents, and, in the case of private schools, employer representatives and other stakeholders. Their responsibilities encompass observing lessons and other learning activities, attending staff meetings, and reviewing pupil files and relevant documents (van Bruggen, 2010). Inspectors are vested with the authority to access all areas within the school premises and examine any records or documents maintained therein. Across the thirty-eight member states of SICI and in various inspection frameworks, meetings with stakeholders, document reviews, and lesson observations consistently constitute the core components of the onsite inspection process.

In some inspectorates, approaches to lesson observation vary. While some inspectors provide individual teachers with feedback, others consolidate their observations to form a holistic judgement on the overall quality of teaching and learning within the school. One advantage of avoiding direct marking or grading of individual teachers is the reduction of anxiety, enabling teachers to maintain confidence while conducting their lessons in the presence of inspectors. The responsibility for providing constructive feedback and overseeing teachers' professional development is emphasised as belonging to school leaders. Inspectors, in turn, evaluate

⁶ DSIB Parent survey can be accessed at <https://touch.khda.gov.ae/s/8641CB6E427E49C18C3376561B8CACA3>

teaching standards at the school level and communicate these findings to school leadership (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012).

However, the absence of individual feedback can hinder teachers' capacity to improve their instructional quality. Teachers often express dissatisfaction with the lack of specific, actionable feedback in inspection reports, which leaves them ill-equipped to implement improvements (Quintelier et al., 2018). As a result, such reports may be perceived as insufficiently relevant to teachers seeking to enhance their practices.

At the conclusion of each onsite inspection day, the team engages in detailed deliberations to consolidate evidence gathered during the day. This process allows inspectors to synthesise findings, identify areas requiring further investigation, and agree on next steps. The lead inspector shares preliminary insights with school leaders, facilitating a dialogue to clarify ambiguities and enabling leaders to provide additional evidence if necessary (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012). Inspectors adopt a multidimensional approach, drawing on diverse data sources, including lesson observations, stakeholder feedback, student achievement trends, and evaluations by school leaders (McNamara et al., 2020).

The formulation of quality judgements is a complex process that demands significant professional expertise. Inspectors, often experienced school leaders or senior educators, rely on their professional judgment alongside established quality criteria to arrive at conclusions (Ferguson et al., 2000). Dederig and Sowada (2017) identify three methods for achieving team consensus during inspections:

1. **Evaluative-positioning method:** An inspector proposes a judgement supported by evidence, which is discussed and validated or refuted by the team.
2. **Evaluative-thought-experimental method:** Each member independently presents their evaluation, followed by a collective discussion of strengths and weaknesses to form a consensus.
3. **Descriptive-evaluative method:** The team begins by describing evidence objectively before collaboratively arriving at an evaluative judgement.

These methods may be combined during the inspection process, depending on team dynamics. Despite such structured processes, inspection teams sometimes face criticism for allowing personal values or subjective perceptions to influence their assessments (Alexander, 2013). To mitigate this, inspectorates employ explicit evaluation criteria, grade descriptors, and training programmes to ensure objectivity in judgement (Hislop, 2022; KHDA, 2018).

The onsite phase concludes with the presentation of preliminary findings or an emerging report to the school leadership. Inspectors discuss strengths and weaknesses, identifying areas for improvement in collaboration with the principal and senior leaders (Perry, 2013). The final inspection report highlights these findings alongside recommendations for improvement (Ehren et al., 2015). During the final meeting, the school management team is given the opportunity to contest any findings or judgements by providing additional evidence to support their position.

2.2.2c Post-inspection

After the verbal feedback, generally, inspectorates provide written reports about the school evaluation. However, the publication of the school inspection report and its availability to stakeholders and the public may vary in various inspectorates. In some jurisdictions, the report is published on the websites of the inspectorate and schools and is accessible to the public, for example, England, Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, France, Sweden, Ukraine and Romania. While in others it is at the discretion of the school management to decide if they want to publish it at all as, in Saxony (Germany), North Rhine- Westphalia (Germany), Hesse (Germany), and Lithuania. In some countries, inspection reports are not published at all, for instance, Slovakia, Malta and France (only thematic inspection reports are made public also, reports on institutions and teachers are not part of the public domain (SICI, 2023)).

The school inspection report usually comprises a brief context of the school, areas of good practices and areas that need improvement and recommendations for improvement. For the inspection recommendations to be accepted, it is essential that they are realistic and in consonance with the school context and resources (Schildkamp & Visscher, 2010). An audit list⁷ may also be annexed to the inspection report in inspection regimes where compliance to legal regulations, the curricula and educational standards is also a part of school inspection (as in New Zealand). In jurisdictions where school inspection is, based more firmly on legal compliance,

⁷ <https://ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/how-ero-reviews-schoolskura-english-medium/Te-Ara-Huarau/The-Board-Assurance-Statement-and-Self-Audit-Checklists>

such as Sweden, the inspection report mainly points out failures and successes in complying with Education Act, Ordinances and other regulations (Hult & Segerholm, 2014) and recommendations are made to assure compliance to the statutes where failing. Choi (2019) suggests

In any case, it is good for the school and the inspection to come to an agreement on the recommendations. This is related to the importance of creating a bond of trust between the inspectors, the principals and the teachers so that the latter two are receptive to the findings of the inspection (p.12).

This notion further reasserts the need for inspectors to be knowledgeable of schooling in general and of the schools that they inspect in particular to be able to make practical recommendations.

In most inspection systems, the first draft of the school inspection report is shared with the school for factual verification. If the school identifies any discrepancies in factual information, such as student enrolment numbers, teaching hours, dropout rates, or similar data, it is required to notify the corresponding inspector and provide supporting documentation to rectify the error (Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills, 2015). However, at this stage, no changes are made to the qualitative assessment or grading of the school. Once the factual verification process is complete, the draft report is finalised and distributed to the school management, relevant stakeholders, and governing authorities, in accordance with the country's inspection regulations. In certain inspection regimes, such as in Ireland, school management is required to submit a written response outlining their planned actions to address the recommendations for improvement included in the report (McCormack, 2020).

Individual school inspection reports frequently contribute to the inspectorate's annual report, which provides a broader analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the education system or existing policies.

The time required to complete the process—from presenting the inspection findings orally to the school management team to submitting the draft report for verification, and ultimately sharing the finalised report—ranges from two to six weeks. High-stakes inspections typically allow more time for factual verification to ensure accuracy (Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

Following the submission of the inspection report, some inspectorates, such as those in New Zealand, distribute feedback questionnaires to schools. These questionnaires invite schools to share their views on the inspection and reporting processes, the professionalism and conduct of inspectors, the perceived utility of the inspection for school improvement, and suggestions for enhancing the inspection system.

2.2.3 Grading

Many inspection regimes implement grading systems as part of their quality assessment processes, with grading serving as a summarised representation of the school inspection outcomes. Commonly used grading categories include terms such as ‘high,’ ‘sufficient,’ ‘requires improvement,’ and ‘low,’ or alternatively, ‘outstanding,’ ‘good,’ ‘requires improvement,’ and ‘inadequate.’ In some systems, descriptors like ‘very good,’ ‘good,’ ‘average,’ ‘less satisfactory,’ and ‘unsatisfactory’ are utilised. These grades are typically published alongside inspection reports and significantly influence the frequency of future inspections (Blok et al., 2008; Moreton et al., 2017). Schools awarded high grades such as ‘excellent,’ ‘very good,’ or ‘high’ are often subjected to fewer inspection visits.

Grading practices vary across inspection systems. In some countries, schools are assigned an overall grade using a four- to six-point scale, as seen in England, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, and Slovakia. In other jurisdictions, grades are assigned separately for each quality dimension outlined in the inspection framework, as is the case in Bavaria (Germany), Belgium (German-speaking areas and Flanders), Hesse and Hamburg (Germany), Lithuania, Malta, and Montenegro. Certain inspectorates, such as those in Norway, Saxony (Germany), and Sweden, opt not to assign grades or rankings. In countries like Switzerland and Ireland, evaluative statements are used instead of grades to convey key insights into various aspects of school quality. Additionally, in some regions, only private schools are graded, as in Denmark (SICI, 2023) and Dubai.

Grading is closely tied to school morale, with positive grades often enhancing the symbolic capital of schools and their leadership, while lower grades can result in a loss of prestige and a perceived ‘demotion’ of the school and its leadership (Moreton et al., 2017, p. 142).

The reliability and consistency of inspectors’ grading have occasionally been subject to criticism. To address concerns about subjectivity, measures such as clear evaluative descriptors,

comprehensive inspector training, and detailed grading guidelines are employed to enhance reliability and validity. Ehren and Pietsch (2016) highlight that robust systems guide various aspects of the inspection process, including lesson observations, interviews, document analyses, and the aggregation of scores. These systems ensure that individual lesson observation scores are systematically combined to form ratings for indicators and standards, culminating in an overall assessment of the school as providing 'insufficient,' 'sufficient,' or 'good' educational quality (p. 48).

To further ensure consistency, inspection teams regularly convene during the onsite phase to discuss and reach consensus on their findings. By the time emerging results are shared with the principal and school leaders, the inspection team is generally in complete agreement regarding the school's quality assessment (Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

2.2.4 Rewards and Sanctions

Inspection reports and grading systems often result in rewards for high-performing schools and sanctions for underperforming ones. In Albania and Slovakia, schools with positive inspection outcomes are recognised as model institutions, serving as examples of exemplary practices for other schools. Similarly, in Wales, schools that receive a 'good' or 'excellent' judgement for specific aspects of their work are invited to publish case studies showcasing their effective practices. In Northern Ireland, the School Improvement team sends letters of appreciation to schools achieving 'Outstanding' or 'Very Good' grades, although in many inspection systems, high grades or favourable inspection reports are considered rewards in themselves (SICI, 2023). In England, exceptional schools and National Leaders of Education may be awarded Academy status or designated as teaching schools, further enhancing their prestige and opportunities for professional collaboration (Jones & Tymms, 2014).

Conversely, unfavourable inspection reports can lead to significant repercussions, including heightened stress, reputational damage, and the potential 'naming and shaming' of weaker schools and teachers (McNamara & O'Hara, 2008b). In numerous inspectorates, low-performing schools face a wide range of sanctions, particularly if they fail to improve or meet the required standards despite receiving support from the inspectorate. Examples include monetary fines (Estonia), additional monitoring (Netherlands, England), dismissal of school heads (Montenegro, Estonia, Czech Republic), issuance of formal injunctions (Norway), withdrawal of funding (Czech

Republic and Norway), and, in the case of private schools, revocation of operating licenses (Estonia and Dubai).

The Swedish School Inspectorate is regarded as one of the stricter inspection regimes. As noted by Hult and Segerholm (2017), schools that fail to comply with legal standards may face severe consequences:

Fines can be imposed, or for independent schools, the license to operate may be withdrawn if the governing body organiser does not affect compliance and improvement according to the content of inspection reports (p. 124).

Based on these rewards and sanctions, Perry (2013) classifies school inspection approaches into two categories: low-stakes inspections, which emphasise advisory and supportive measures, and high-stakes inspections, which involve stricter consequences and accountability mechanisms.

2.3 Models of School Inspection (types)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating for Development Results*, defines inspection as:

A general examination of an organisational unit, issue, or practice to ascertain the extent it adheres to normative standards, good practices, or other criteria and to make recommendations for improvement or corrective action. It is often performed when there is a perceived risk of non-compliance (Menon et al., 2009, p. 9).

Building on this definition, various models of school inspection have been developed and implemented to evaluate entire schools, specific practices, or aspects of their operations. These models aim to assess the quality of educational practices and/or the risks associated with failing to meet prescribed standards. Commonly utilised types of school inspections include:

- **Whole School Inspection:** A comprehensive review of all aspects of the school's functioning.
- **Thematic Inspection:** Focused evaluations of specific themes, such as teaching quality, student outcomes, or leadership effectiveness.
- **Follow-Through Inspection:** Conducted to assess progress in addressing recommendations from previous inspections.

- **Accreditation Inspections:** Evaluations conducted to determine whether schools meet the criteria for formal accreditation.
- **Readiness Review (of New Schools):** Inspections to evaluate the preparedness of newly established schools to begin operations and meet requisite standards.

2.3.1 Whole School Inspection (WSI)

Whole School Inspection (WSI) is the most commonly utilised model of school inspection, designed to evaluate the quality of educational provision at individual schools within a state. This process is typically conducted at regular intervals, though the duration of an inspection cycle varies significantly across inspectorates. For instance, in some countries, the cycle is as short as one year, as seen in Dubai, while in others, such as Ukraine and Wallonia, it extends to ten years. In most jurisdictions, however, the cycle is completed within three to five years (e.g., Sweden: three years, Hamburg: four years, Belgium: five years).

WSI is employed to inspect all types of educational institutions, including Early Childhood Centres and homeschooling. It adheres to standard procedures outlined in earlier discussions. To improve efficiency, some countries have discontinued cyclical inspections in favour of more focused models that target specific aspects of school operations and are less time-intensive.

2.3.2 Thematic Inspection

Thematic inspections are increasingly becoming popular due to their targeted approach, concentrating on specific aspects of the curriculum, subjects, government initiatives, education policies and their implementation, or areas of concern within the educational system. This type of inspection is also referred to as incidental inspections, subject inspections, strategic inspections, or national evaluations of educational topics.

In thematic inspections, schools may or may not be given prior notice, as inspectors often prefer to observe schools under typical operating conditions without special preparation for their visit. Inspectors typically provide oral feedback to school leaders following the visit, and teachers may be involved in discussions if lessons are observed. However, schools generally do not receive a written report for this type of inspection. Instead, the cumulative findings contribute to annual or national reports, which analyse trends over time (Coolahan & Donovan, 2009).

These strategic inspections provide system-level insights into specific topics, inform policy decisions, and highlight exemplary practices (OECD, 2015). Their focus on improvement makes them more feasible and acceptable to staff. Examples of thematic inspections include evaluating the teaching of English as an Additional Language (Ireland), Māori or Pasifika student achievement (New Zealand), and language policy in schools (Flanders). Thematic inspections may be conducted independently or as part of broader school inspections (SICI, 2023).

2.3.3 Follow-through Inspection (progress monitoring)

As the name suggests, a follow-through inspection, also referred to as a follow-up inspection, is a form of monitoring designed to evaluate a school's progress in implementing recommendations from a previous inspection. This model is particularly relevant for schools identified as underperforming and is accompanied by a written report issued to the school. The scope of follow-through inspections is tailored to address areas of concern highlighted in prior evaluations, making them more context-specific and conducive to school improvement (Hislop, 2012).

In some jurisdictions, follow-through inspections not only assess the current state of the school but also evaluate whether the findings of the previous inspection were influenced by deliberate behaviour on the part of staff. Additionally, they review the extent to which recommendations have been implemented (Gray, 2014). Depending on the nature of the recommendations, inspectors may employ various methods, including document reviews, interviews, lesson observations, or a combination of these activities, to gather evidence on the school's progress (DES, 2021). These inspections also follow standard procedures associated with regular inspections, such as online surveys, interviews, document analyses, and classroom observations (Gray, 2014).

According to Claire et al. (2014), classroom observation is the most frequently used evaluation method in school inspections, including follow-up inspections. During the follow-through process, inspectors not only assess progress but may also identify additional issues requiring attention. These inspections are typically conducted by a small team over a short period, often lasting only one day. Depending on the jurisdiction, inspections may be announced or unannounced, as is the case in Malta and Estonia (Gray, 2014).

Following the inspection, the team provides oral feedback to the school management and issues a written report summarising their findings. The inclusion of follow-up inspections within external school evaluation frameworks enhances the impact of such evaluations. Evidence suggests that follow-up visits lead to measurable improvements, particularly in primary schools, which often show significant progress as a result. While school leaders acknowledge that the process can be demanding and potentially damaging to the school's reputation, they also recognise it as an opportunity for professional development and institutional improvement (Claire et al., 2014, p. 133).

2.3.4 Accreditation inspections

Accreditation inspections are conducted when private schools apply for educational licenses or accreditation to operate. These inspections involve evaluating the school premises, facilities, and holding meetings with staff to determine whether the school meets the licensing criteria or standards established by the Ministry of Education, government regulatory agencies, and, in some cases, school inspectorates. These standards are typically informed by the Education Acts and corresponding regulations, as well as input from professionals and the community. While licensing standards vary by country, their primary objective is to ensure that schools provide a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for students.

In addition to the evaluation of physical infrastructure, schools are assessed against criteria related to human resources and academic provisions. For example, teachers must possess the necessary qualifications and certifications from relevant authorities, and schools are required to have guidance counsellors, psychologists, and other essential staff. Furthermore, schools must demonstrate their capacity to operate for the proper length of the academic year and meet standards for curriculum alignment with national requirements. Schools must also maintain accurate records and share reports with authorities when required. In the case of Ofsted, pre-registration inspections and 'ready to open' meetings focus on financial and educational viability, community cohesion, and risk identification and mitigation (Johnson, n.d.).

Accreditation serves as a form of quality assurance, ensuring that schools meet the standards necessary to offer specific courses or levels of education. For instance, in Belgium (Flanders) and Romania, compliance with regulatory standards is required for accreditation (SICI, 2023). Accredited schools undergo re-inspections periodically to ensure the continued quality of their services, with a random selection of schools also subjected to unannounced visits each year.

Accredited schools are required to maintain the quality standards for which they were accredited, ensuring the integrity of their educational offerings over time.

2.3.5 Readiness evaluation (of new schools)

Readiness evaluations, also known as readiness reviews, are similar to licensing and accreditation inspections but are specifically conducted for newly opened schools, merged institutions, newly state-integrated schools, or public schools that have undergone a change in status. These evaluations are carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Education, with findings reported directly to the ministry regarding the school's readiness to commence operations.

Readiness evaluations typically involve several onsite visits by inspectors during the first academic session. These visits often begin before the school officially opens and conclude near the end of the first term once the school is operational. During these visits, inspectors engage with the school management team in frequent meetings to assess the institution's preparedness for initiating the teaching and learning process. This includes analysing action plans, reviewing policies, and discussing the school's knowledge of the local area and community context.

The primary objectives of readiness evaluations are to identify potential obstacles to the timely opening of the school, assess the effectiveness of plans and mitigation strategies to prevent delays, and evaluate whether the school is prepared to operate in compliance with established quality standards (Education Review Office, 2021).

Inspectors rely on quality standards outlined in the inspection framework and educational regulations to guide schools in achieving readiness. These standards provide clear expectations and actionable recommendations to ensure schools are equipped to deliver education in alignment with national requirements.

2.4 Approaches to School Inspections

The organisation of school inspections and their immediate consequences reveal the underlying approach employed by inspectorates. Common terms used to describe these approaches include *high-stakes*, *low-stakes*, and *risk-based* inspections. Simeonova et al. (2020) identify several factors that influence whether a school inspection approach is high-stakes or low-stakes.

These include governance arrangements, the statutory powers of the inspectorate (such as the authority to impose sanctions), the frequency and form of inspection visits, the emphasis on school self-evaluation and action planning, and the availability of support services for schools (p. 488). The manner in which these elements are utilised creates an ‘accountability pressure,’ which determines whether inspections are categorised as high-stakes or low-stakes (Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2015).

High-stakes inspections are characterised by punitive consequences, such as re-evaluations, financial penalties, dismissal of school leaders or teachers, or even the revocation of licenses (Choi, 2019). In contrast, low-stakes inspections adopt an advisory approach, offering actionable recommendations tailored to the school’s unique characteristics and context. This distinction highlights the varying degrees of accountability pressure associated with each approach.

Altrichter (2017) introduces the concepts of ‘hard governance’ and ‘soft governance’ to describe inspection approaches. Hard governance emphasises quality control through target setting and strict accountability measures, while soft governance focuses on promoting self-regulation by providing schools with meaningful information to support improvement efforts. Regardless of whether inspections are high-stakes or low-stakes, their ultimate goal is to enhance school quality and improve educational provision.

Choi (2019) provides an insightful observation that, in low-stakes inspections, improvement generally occurs post-inspection, as schools devise and implement improvement plans based on feedback received. Conversely, in high-stakes systems, changes in behaviour, practices, and performance often occur both before and after the inspection. Accountability pressure compels schools to align their operations with inspectorate expectations, driving both compliance with inspection standards and a positive response to feedback (Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2015). A comparative study of six European inspection systems by Altrichter and Kemethofer (2015) found that in high-stakes systems like England and Sweden, school leaders are more responsive to improvement recommendations and demonstrate greater attentiveness to both inspection processes and stakeholder expectations.

An important consideration in distinguishing high-stakes from low-stakes inspections is the influence of cultural and socio-political factors, particularly in the consequences of inspections and the demeanour of inspectors. For instance, in countries where inspectorates operate as

independent entities reporting directly to the parliament, such as in England, they tend to exercise greater authority, leveraging coercive and reward-based powers (referencing French and Raven's 1959 framework of social power). Conversely, in countries with strong teacher unions, such as Ireland, the powers of inspectorates are significantly limited (McNamara et al., 2022). In nations with a hierarchical governance history, such as Pakistan, inspectorates often occupy an intermediary role between the government and schools, granting them considerable legitimate authority.

A report by the Department for Education (*School Improvement Systems in High-Performing Countries*, 2019) highlights differences in inspection systems. For example, while most federal states in Germany employ inspection-led systems, they follow low-stakes approaches. Inspection results are typically not published, and the focus is placed on quality process criteria rather than outcomes (Greatbatch & Tate, 2019, p. 7). This highlights that low-stakes inspections prioritise the process of school improvement and the journey towards effectiveness rather than the end results (OECD, 2013).

High-frequency inspection visits are generally indicative of high-stakes systems (Simeonova et al., 2020). Conversely, many countries, including Ireland, England, New Zealand, and Estonia, employ risk-based or differentiated inspection approaches as rewards for high-performing schools. In risk-based models, inspection frequency is determined by the level of risk associated with a school's quality of teaching, governance, leadership, and management. Schools posing lower risks are inspected less frequently, with greater intervals between visits. Inspectorates conduct risk assessments using value-added and performance indicators, such as standardised test results, the time elapsed since the last inspection, school self-evaluation, and other documentation (Ehren & Shackleton, 2016; Perry, 2013). For instance, schools rated as 'outstanding' or 'excellent' are visited less frequently than those rated as 'inadequate' or 'below expectations.' While this approach incentivises schools to perform well, it also places considerable pressure on underperforming schools to meet inspection standards (Clarke & Baxter, 2014).

Risk-based inspection models are highly targeted, relying heavily on student achievement data and performance indicators, such as student and parent satisfaction, student-teacher ratios, teaching hours, disciplinary referrals, attendance rates, and graduation rates. Critics argue that this data-driven approach diminishes the value of professional judgment in inspections (Baxter

& Clarke, 2014; Baxter & Hult, 2017; Dederling & Sowada, 2017). However, some systems, such as Education Scotland, have incorporated school self-evaluation documentation and improvement plans into the risk assessment process to broaden its scope.

2.5 Inspection – accountability, school improvement, governance or policing

Regardless of the approach—high-stakes or low-stakes—school inspections are widely recognised as a core mechanism for improving individual schools and, by extension, the overall education system. Furthermore, international comparative evaluations, such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), have spurred substantial investment in education through targeted interventions aimed at enhancing student performance. In this context, school inspections have become an increasingly robust tool for assuring quality (Brown et al., 2016).

Simultaneously, theories of new public management, which advocate for decentralisation, deregulation, and increased autonomy for professional organisations, including schools, emphasise the necessity for heightened accountability to balance the greater autonomy afforded to schools (Baxter, 2017; Brown et al., 2016). Jones and Tymms (2016) argue that the publication of inspection reports has introduced market dynamics into the education system, where parents, as consumers, select schools based on inspection outcomes. Schools rated as ‘Outstanding’ or ‘Good’ often experience oversubscription and enjoy job security for their staff, while low-performing schools face the constant threat of closure and job loss.

The expanded scope of school inspections now encompasses multiple objectives, including accountability, compliance with national regulations, consumer guidance, value-for-money assessments, school improvement, and the shaping and implementation of government policies (Jones & Tymms, 2014; Baxter, 2017). Munoz-Chereau and Ehren (2021) highlight the dual-level focus of inspections, which serve as a bridge between policy and practice by addressing system-wide evaluations and the performance of individual institutions. Evidence from inspections plays a pivotal role in shaping policy agendas, thereby influencing practices at both school and local government levels (p. 10).

The dual purposes of school inspection—accountability and school improvement—can be delineated as follows: accountability focuses on compliance with standards, policy implementation, and cost analysis, whereas improvement emphasises enhancing processes, teaching conditions, and student outcomes (Baxter, 2017; Hofer et al., 2020). The balance between these aspects varies across countries. According to an OECD (2013) report, the accountability dimension relies on hard data, research-based knowledge, and static evaluations of schools at specific points in time. Conversely, the improvement dimension emphasises ongoing processes, empirical evaluations of changes, practitioner insights, and the dynamic evolution of schools over time (p. 384).

Research frequently identifies tension between these two aspects. Accountability mechanisms often require strict adherence to standards and serve as a control tool, whereas improvement-oriented inspections promote innovation, experimentation, and creative problem-solving. Notably, the two functions are interlinked: higher compliance with standards facilitates improvement, and robust improvement processes enable better implementation of prescribed standards (Gaertner et al., 2014). However, an overemphasis on either function can create disproportionate accountability pressure or undermine innovative efforts, necessitating a balanced approach to inspection policies.

Many inspection regimes adopt a nuanced methodology that prioritises both compliance and process quality. In addition to analysing hard data, such as dropout rates, attendance statistics, and student performance metrics, inspectors assess softer elements, including the quality of school processes, classroom interactions, school climate, improvement initiatives, and parental involvement (Baxter & Clarke, 2014; Dederling & Sowada, 2017).

A significant body of research over the past two decades (e.g., Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2015; Brown et al., 2016, 2018; Dederling & Müller, 2011; Ehren et al., 2013; Gaertner et al., 2014) has explored how school inspections drive improvement. Three prominent models—proposed by Gustafsson et al. (2015), Landwehr (2011, as cited in Gaertner et al., 2014), and Jones and Tymms (2014)—offer programmatic theories explaining this process.

Models by Ehren et al. (2013) and Jones and Tymms (2014) emphasise the importance of clearly defining quality expectations, providing constructive and actionable feedback, and effectively communicating inspection outcomes to stakeholders, such as parents, policymakers, and school

leaders. Feedback—both written and verbal—must be specific, relevant, and actionable to inspire improvement. Gustafsson et al. (2015) further identify intermediate mechanisms, such as enhancing schools' self-evaluation processes, which facilitate capacity building and improvement. Stakeholder pressure also plays a role in motivating schools to address development needs.

Ehren et al. (2016) encapsulate the school improvement process as follows: schools accept and act upon inspection feedback, align their practices with inspection standards, and build capacity among educators and stakeholders to sustain improvement efforts (p. 111).

Landwehr's model (2011) views inspections as instruments of both accountability and knowledge acquisition. The evaluative insights from inspections motivate schools to maintain strengths while addressing weaknesses, leading to continuous improvement. Simultaneously, accountability measures orient schools toward meeting regulatory standards, creating a synergistic relationship between compliance and development.

While most studies on inspection effects are cross-sectional, a few longitudinal studies provide deeper insights. For example, Shaw et al. (2003) analysed data from over 3,000 secondary schools inspected by Ofsted between 1992 and 1997. Their study found that inspections were associated with modest improvements in student achievement, particularly in girls' schools, selective schools, and grant-maintained schools—contexts where performance levels were already above average. In these settings, inspections appeared to contribute to marginal additional gains in academic outcomes. Comparable, albeit small, improvements were also observed in modern schools. In a broader longitudinal evaluation, Mathews and Sammons (2004) assessed Ofsted's systemic impact over a decade (1992–2002). They concluded that the cumulative body of evidence supports the view that Ofsted has functioned as a significant catalyst for educational improvement, especially in underperforming institutions. Their findings further highlighted marked enhancements in the quality of teaching and learning, educational standards, and leadership and management practices across the school system. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that multiple contextual factors—such as cohort variability, staff turnover, and changes in school leadership—can also substantially mediate both student outcomes and overall institutional progress over time.

A critical factor influencing the effectiveness of school inspections is the acceptance of feedback. Trust in the inspection process and inspectors themselves is paramount for feedback to be well-

received. Inspectors must establish credibility through expertise and a deep understanding of schooling contexts. Drawing from French and Raven's (1959) framework of social power, inspectors' 'expert power'⁸—based on superior knowledge and experience—can enhance their 'referent power,' enabling them to positively influence school leaders. This influence, grounded in trust, respect, and integrity, is essential for achieving meaningful and lasting improvements.

2.6 Teachers and school leaders' perspective on school inspection

Words such as 'inspection,' 'evaluation,' or 'supervision' inherently evoke anxiety and stress, regardless of whether the focus is on improvement or accountability, as they involve some degree of assessment, judgement, and performance reporting. Numerous studies (e.g., Behnke & Steins, 2016; Dederich & Müller, 2010; Ehren, 2016; Moreton et al., 2017; Quintelier et al., 2020; de Wolf & Janssens, 2007) have examined the impact of external evaluations on school leaders and teachers, often identifying unintended consequences or side effects. In systems where inspections involve grading, rewards, or sanctions, these side effects are intensified compared to low-stakes or advisory inspection regimes. Although school grading is typically the responsibility of school leaders and staff, external inspections—conducted by agencies such as school inspectors—can provoke anxiety, ambivalence, and even antipathy, particularly towards specific aspects of the inspection process (Moreton et al., 2017, p. 142).

De Wolf and Janssens (2007) categorise the side effects of school inspections into three broad areas: intended strategic behaviour, unintended strategic behaviour, and emotional impact.

- **Intended Strategic Behaviour:** This involves deliberate efforts by schools to project a favourable image and achieve positive inspection outcomes. The most common example is 'window dressing,' which refers to creating proactive and reactive arrangements designed solely to receive favourable evaluations from inspectors. Such practices can escalate into more concerning behaviours, including misrepresentation, fraud, deception, orchestration of peer review, and manipulating test pools (de Wolf & Janssens, 2007, p. 382).
- **Unintended Strategic Behaviour:** This includes disruptions to regular school activities in response to inspection notifications (Choi, 2019). Examples include 'teaching to the test,'

⁸ (a) expert power—relying on one's superior knowledge; and (b) referent power—based on target's identification with influencing agent (Raven, 1998, p. 308).

focusing on inspection-specific priorities, adopting short-term solutions, indicator fixation, and relying on safe, traditional practices. These behaviours often reflect over-preparation by school staff to present the school positively. Hopkin et al. (2016) argue that teachers may resort to pedagogical methods preferred by inspectors under pressure to perform well, potentially inhibiting trust, honest self-evaluation, and open discussion of challenges (p. 59).

- **Emotional Impact:** School inspections elicit strong emotional responses, with teachers and school leaders often experiencing anxiety, stress, and fear following notification of an inspection and during classroom observations. The role of school leadership is critical in shaping teachers' perceptions of the inspection process. Leaders who overemphasise the importance of inspections or create undue pressure on teachers may exacerbate anxiety, leading to suboptimal performance. Conversely, portraying inspectors as supportive mentors can ease tensions and foster better outcomes (Chapman, 2001; Penninckx et al., 2016; Perryman, 2010; Quintelier et al., 2020). Despite these initial anxieties, negative emotions tend to subside as inspections progress. However, unfavourable inspection outcomes can reignite feelings of stress, anger, and defensiveness (Gärtner et al., 2014). Schools receiving critical feedback often react defensively, attempting to justify their shortcomings or attribute them to external factors (Quesel et al., 2020). Positive inspection outcomes, on the other hand, result in relief, satisfaction, pride, and euphoria (Quintelier et al., 2020).

Quintelier et al. (2020) propose a framework in which emotional responses act as mediators between cognitive reactions to inspection feedback and its acceptance. Cognitive responses involve perceptions of inspectors' credibility, the fairness of feedback (distributive and procedural justice), and the feedback's features, such as clarity, relevance, and constructiveness. Chapman (2001) highlights the role of school context and culture in shaping teachers' acceptance of feedback. A school's shared assumptions, norms, and values influence teachers' responses to inspections. Teachers' confidence in their professional expertise may lead them to trust their judgment over external inspectors' recommendations, especially in high-performing schools. Conversely, teachers in low-performing schools often feel heightened scrutiny, increasing pressure to conform to inspection criteria.

Chapman's (2001) empirical research reveals that teachers' willingness to implement inspectors' recommendations is significantly influenced by the perceived trustworthiness and credibility of inspectors. Variations in the quality of feedback and inconsistencies in inspectors'

judgments, whether within or between inspection teams, can undermine this credibility. Behnke and Steins (2017) stress the importance of inspectors possessing appropriate qualifications, relevant experience, and training in inspection practices, particularly in delivering effective feedback.

School leaders' perceptions of inspection feedback are often aligned with those of teachers, influenced by their self-evaluation practices and professional competence. A wider discrepancy between school self-evaluations and inspection outcomes typically results in greater resistance to feedback. Behnke and Steins (2017) note that constructive, evidence-based feedback, presented professionally and with clear recommendations, is more likely to be accepted by school leaders. Inspectors' expertise and professionalism play a pivotal role in influencing both teachers and leaders, encouraging changes in practice and affirming the value of feedback. Kemethofer et al. (2017) observe that feedback acceptance is more likely in low-stakes systems, where accountability pressures are minimised, fostering a collaborative approach. High-stakes inspections, in contrast, create significant accountability pressure, often hindering schools' ability to process and act upon feedback effectively (p. 335).

In low-stakes inspection systems, inspectors adopt a supportive, collaborative approach, acting as coaches to school leaders and teachers. These systems emphasise evaluating schools' capacity to improve, rather than focusing solely on compliance. Without the fear of sanctions or punitive consequences, schools are more inclined to view inspection feedback as a valuable resource for long-term improvement (Kemethofer et al., 2017).

In contrast, high-stakes inspections often restrict schools' efforts to align strictly with inspection criteria, limiting innovation and creating a narrow focus on meeting prescribed standards. While high-stakes systems may drive compliance, they are less effective in fostering a culture of sustainable improvement. A balanced approach that combines elements of accountability and support is essential for maximising the positive impacts of inspections on schools.

Chapter three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction to Methodology and Research Design

My research aims to explore the strategies used to enhance the impact of school inspectors' feedback and, by extension, the role of school inspections in fostering school improvement, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for students. To achieve this objective, I have chosen a qualitative research design. This chapter delves into my philosophical worldview, outlining the broad epistemological and ontological orientations that guide the study. I also explain the rationale behind selecting a qualitative approach, and detail the methodological choices made both for the project as a whole and for each of the four publications, demonstrating how these choices align with the broader research paradigm.

Furthermore, I address my personal stance within the research, reflecting on reflexivity and its influence on the study. This includes a consideration of how my own background, perspectives, and potential biases may shape the research process and outcomes. Additionally, I provide comprehensive presentations of the data collection methods and analytical techniques employed in each study conducted as part of this project. In doing so, I address critical issues such as ethics and trustworthiness, ensuring a robust and transparent approach to the research process. Through this detailed exploration, the chapter highlights the coherence and integrity of the research design and its implementation, highlighting the alignment between philosophical foundations and methodological practices.

3.1 My Philosophical Worldview

A worldview or paradigm is 'a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p.7). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define worldview as 'an interpretive framework, a basic set of beliefs that guides action.' Nickerson (2022) combines both definitions and asserts, 'A paradigm is a set of ideas and beliefs which provide a framework or model which research can follow. A paradigm defines existing knowledge, the nature of the problem(s) to be investigated, appropriate methods of investigation, and the way data should be analysed and interpreted' (p.2). The research is

intricately entwined with foundational inquiries into ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology grapples with the essence of existence, questioning the nature of humanity and reality itself. Epistemology examines the dynamic between the seeker and the known, probing the very roots of knowledge. Methodology scrutinises the mechanisms through which one perceives and understands the world, particularly in the exploration of human behaviour. Within this interwoven tapestry lie the essential strands of epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises, shaping the very fabric of any research endeavours (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.22). Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate philosophical beliefs into a study as they provide valuable context for readers to understand the researcher's biases and the specific perspective being embraced (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Among the various worldviews, this research adopts an interpretive worldview, that asserts that reality is subjective and emphasises understanding phenomenon from the perspective of individuals (Nickerson, 2022). Hence, interpretivism allows for understanding the diverse perspectives of individuals, acknowledging the subjective nature of their experiences and interpretations. This study seeks to explore and understand the subjective experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of school leaders and inspectors in the context of school inspection. Interpretivism, as applied to educational research, emphasises the importance of understanding the meanings and interpretations that individuals attribute to their experiences. Specifically, in the case of my study, it focuses on the meanings that school leaders and school inspectors attribute to their experiences of school inspection and quality assurance. I sought to explore the subjective perspectives of these individuals to gain insights into school inspection policies and practices. Within this worldview, the influence of context on personal experiences is strongly acknowledged. Through my study, I aimed to explore and recognise how educational settings are shaped by various social, cultural, and historical factors, and seek to understand how these contextual elements influence individuals' interpretations and interactions within the environment in which they live and work.

Every individual respondent, be it a school leader or school inspectors, may perceive and interpret inspection evolution, growth, policies and practices in diverse ways, and my role as a researcher is to capture this diversity of perspectives rather than seeking a single objective truth. Interpretivism guides me to understand and value that there may be multiple, subjective realities within the educational context. Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) contend that adoption of

the interpretive paradigm leads to the generation of high-level validity in data as it is based on personal contributions with consideration of different variables.

Interpretivist researchers are reflexive about their own subjectivity and the role it plays in shaping research outcomes. They acknowledge that their own backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives may influence their interpretations of educational phenomena, and they strive for transparency and self-awareness in their research process. Additionally, interpretivist research often employs qualitative research methods such as interviews, observations, and case studies. These methods allow researchers to delve into the rich, nuanced understandings of educational phenomena, capturing the complexities that quantitative methods may overlook. There is a strong interconnectedness between interpretivism and qualitative methodology as a qualitative researcher seeks to understand the context and setting of the participants through visiting their context (historical and social perspective grounded in their culture) and gathering information personally. They interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and backgrounds (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p.9).

Furthermore, interpretivist educational research often emphasises the practical implications of its findings for educational practice. By understanding the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals within the educational setting, researchers aim to provide insights that can inform the development of more effective teaching strategies, curriculum designs, and educational policies.

In interpretivism, ontological and epistemological assumptions shape how researchers understand reality and acquire knowledge. Interpretive paradigm generally adopts an internalist-idealist/relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.193; Potrac et al., 2014).

3.1.1 Philosophical Assumptions

1. Ontological Assumptions: These pertain to the nature of reality and what exists. In interpretivism, the ontological assumption is typically constructivist/relativist. This means that reality is seen as socially constructed through human interactions and

interpretations. Rather than there being an objective reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered, reality is believed to be subjective and shaped by individual and collective interpretations. For example, the meaning of symbols, language, and social norms are constructed through human interactions and interpretations, and these constructions shape the general understanding of reality. This study aligns with an ontological stance that recognises multiple, subjective realities through the use of semi-structured interviews with mainly open-ended questions with school leaders and school inspectors for data collection. The ontological position of this study acknowledges the subjective nature of reality, positing that the experiences and perceptions of school leaders and inspectors shape their understanding of school inspection processes and policies.

2. Epistemological Assumptions: These concern how knowledge is acquired and what constitutes valid knowledge. In interpretivism, the epistemological assumption is usually 'subjective' and 'interpretive'. This means that knowledge is seen as subjective and context-dependent, and it is acquired through the interpretation of social phenomena rather than through objective observation. Interpretivists often emphasise the importance of understanding the meanings and perspectives of individuals and groups within a particular social context. They recognise that researchers bring their own biases and interpretations to the study, and therefore, they advocate for reflexivity and an awareness of the researcher's role in shaping knowledge. This research embraces a constructivist as well as interpretivist epistemology, recognising that knowledge about school inspection is socially constructed through the lived experiences and interpretations of school leaders and inspectors. The study values the participants' perspective and seeks to uncover the meaning they attribute to the policies and school inspection practices.

In summary, ontological assumptions in interpretivism suggest that reality is socially constructed, while epistemological assumptions emphasise that knowledge is subjective and context-dependent, acquired through the interpretation of social phenomena. These assumptions guide interpretivist researchers in their approach to studying and understanding the social world.

3.2 Selecting A Qualitative Research Design

Research studies are driven by the issues they aim to address and the specific research questions they seek to answer. The overarching methodological framework employed to tackle these issues and answer the research questions is termed the research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 4; Ellis & Levy, 2010). The selection of a research approach is influenced by the researchers' worldviews, encompassing their beliefs and philosophical assumptions. These worldviews act as a lens through which researchers perceive the world, shaping their decisions on methodological components, data collection, and analysis methods (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). Qualitative studies delve into understanding the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social phenomena or problems. They focus on how individuals articulate their experiences, construct their realities, and attribute significance to these experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to its ability to comprehensively explore complex phenomena, methodically describe them, and contribute to theoretical frameworks, qualitative research, I believe, is suitable to address my research questions (Merriam, 2002; Ellis & Levy, 2009). This study, as evidenced by the research questions introduced earlier, adopts an exploratory approach. Its primary objective is to gain a profound understanding and offer a detailed depiction of strategies to enhance the impact of school inspections on school improvement, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes for students. Hence, a qualitative research design is deemed the most suitable choice.

In a qualitative approach, various key characteristics are integrated to comprehend people's experiences. Here, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis. The research journey commences with underlying assumptions and the application of interpretive or theoretical frameworks. Throughout this process, questions and methodologies evolve organically, with data typically gathered in the participants' natural environments. Analytical procedures are characterised by an interplay of inductive and deductive reasoning, progressing from specific instances to broader themes, with the researcher's goal being to derive meaning from the collected data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The resultant report encapsulates participants' voices, reflects upon the researcher's reflexivity, offers a nuanced description and interpretation of the issue, and highlights its contribution to existing literature or advocates for change (Creswell, 2013, p.44).

These characteristics not just emphasise the interpretive nature of qualitative research, but also emphasise it being grounded in social constructivism as it stresses amplifying the voices of participants. The adoption of a qualitative approach aligns with the researcher's deeper ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs, placing qualitative research within various paradigms and interpretive frameworks, depending on individual perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19). Paradigms, as the fundamental set of beliefs and worldviews guiding the research design, become pivotal in determining the qualitative research's place within an interpretive paradigm. In this context, researchers seek to understand how individuals make sense of and interpret the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p.7; Merriam, 1998). The interpretive paradigm embraces a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, positing that reality is not external to the researcher and knowledge is constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others, thus being subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 193).

Perceiving reality as individually constructed implies the existence of multiple versions of reality, aligning with the notion that social realities are 'experienced, constructed, and interpreted in many ways' (Cunliffe, 2011, p.10). This perspective is reflected in the fluidity and unpredictability of individuals' social realities, as examined in this study, encompassing quality assurance practices, individual experiences, and policy interpretations.

3.3 Identity, Positionality and Reflexivity

Qualitative research design is characterised by its reflexive nature, permeating all stages of a project. This approach necessitates continuous adjustments in data collection and analysis, theory development and modification, the elaboration or refocusing of research questions, and the identification and management of validity threats, which typically occur simultaneously and interdependently. Researchers may need to revise any design decisions throughout the study in response to new insights or changes in other aspects of the design (Maxwell, 2009, p. 215). In this iterative process, three interconnected concepts—identity, positionality, and reflexivity—constantly influence the researcher's decisions. Identity is defined as the researcher's role and societal position, positionality as the researcher's stance relative to the research project and worldview, and reflexivity as critical self-reflection on one's identity (Wilson et al., 2022). Collectively, these elements form the personal stance of a researcher, which stems from their beliefs and worldview, reflecting

deeply held attitudes and priorities. The experience and training of a researcher significantly shape their positionality and reflexivity (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023).

According to Holmes (2020), positionality refers to the stance a researcher adopts within a specific research study, considering its social and political context as well as the researcher's worldview. It requires researchers to consciously examine their own identity, enabling readers to evaluate the impact of the researchers' personal characteristics and perspectives on the study population, the topic under investigation, and the research process (Wilson et al., 2022, p. 44)—the three key areas that define a researcher's positionality (Holmes, 2020). Through this reflexive practice, researchers can address potential biases, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Researchers are often perceived as either insiders or outsiders in relation to the research participants' community. However, Holmes (2020) contends that researchers can simultaneously embody both roles, as these terms are specific to the researcher and context. Chhabra (2020) introduces the term "in-between researcher" to describe this overlap of insider and outsider perspectives, situating any position along the insider-outsider continuum.

These concepts of positionality significantly influenced my approach to engaging with participants. Initially, I introduced myself as a PhD student, which, combined with my status as a middle-aged individual, naturally aroused their curiosity about my professional background. During our conversations and interviews, participants frequently inquired about my experience and training. Upon learning about my roles as a school leader and school inspector, and my familiarity with all four inspectorates, participants came to perceive me through these three identities. The participants felt at ease conversing with me, believing I could empathise with their perspectives due to our shared experiences. I found this dual identity advantageous: partially an insider because of my background as a school leader and inspector, and partially an outsider as a PhD student not currently involved in any inspection regimes or school education systems. This connection between interviewer and interviewee, or the researcher's positionality relative to the study participants, profoundly influences data collection (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As Wilson et al. (2022) suggest, prior knowledge can shape the researcher's perception. Participants may believe that the insider researcher shares their views due to common

professional experiences or may attempt to impress or agree with the researcher based on this perceived connection. I consciously avoided using any evaluative language or expressions, striving to maintain neutrality to encourage participants to express themselves candidly without being influenced by my presence. I remained acutely aware of my positionality, which involved a dual process: reflecting on my own identities and their potential impact on the research, and considering how participants perceived and constructed identities about me as a researcher, as suggested by Chin et al. (2022).

Reflexivity is defined as ‘the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of [a] researcher’s positionality, as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome’ (Berger, 2015, p. 220). It broadly encompasses an understanding of the knowledge-making enterprise, considering the subjective, institutional, social, and political processes involved in conducting research and producing knowledge (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). Reflexivity involves critical thinking that addresses issues of identity and positionality by explicitly stating and questioning the researcher’s assumptions. Researchers must reflect on their research methods and explain to the reader how they navigated the research processes to reach certain conclusions, aiming to produce a more trustworthy and honest account of the research (Chin et al., 2022).

Throughout the progression of my research, I engaged in continuous reflection, making necessary adjustments as the study evolved. For instance, during the data-gathering phase, if a participant from one of the jurisdictions under study mentioned a specific practice that had not been previously included in my interview questions, I proactively sought to incorporate this new information. Subsequently, I ensured that I obtained perspectives on this practice from other respondents interviewed later from the same country. This iterative process allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and ensured that the research remained responsive to emerging insights and contextual nuances.

3.4 Research Design

Research design means the manner in which research is conducted within a broad methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Within the qualitative approach, I employed case study as a method

of inquiry as it allows great flexibility in the choice of methods and provides a scope for in-depth analysis. Creswell and Creswell (2023) define it thus, 'Case study is a design of inquiry, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case...cases are bound by time and place or setting), and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures' (p.15). Mine is a cross-sectional study and the four school inspection (or evaluation) systems served as case studies, and the school leaders (principals, vice principals, headmistresses/headmasters) and school inspectors (or evaluation partners, supervision and monitoring staff) were the units of analysis. These multiple case studies were selected on the assumption that they may share some common characteristics or features, but also differ in some aspects. That would facilitate comparing and contrasting the cases, and identifying the similarities and differences among them, as well as studying the patterns and themes that emerge from the cross-case analysis (Stake, 2013). Within the case study research design, I employed three methods of data collection: literature review, document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

3.4.1 Methods for data collection

In the initial phase of my research plan, during consultations with my supervisor, we established the framework of my project and identified the aspects of the four inspection systems that I will investigate and write four papers on. Given the involvement of four different countries in the cross-case analysis and the impracticality of repeatedly engaging professionals, I devised a comprehensive yet concise data collection strategy that allows for a one-time engagement with professionals to gather data on all four aspects of the study and associated publications. For the first publication, I primarily relied on document analysis and reviews of official websites, with interviews with school leaders and inspectors guiding my document search. For the subsequent three publications, I employed a combination of data collection methods: literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

3.4.1a Document analysis and website review

Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) is a research method designed to rigorously analyse the content of written documents. It involves a systematic examination of documents that serve as primary data sources in a research inquiry. Before elaborating on QDA and its application in my

study, it is essential to define what constitutes a document and the significance of pre-existing documents in qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define a document as an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of resources, including written, visual, digital, and physical materials (p.162). The documentary sources I reviewed and analysed comprised website materials, departmental documents available online, and official documents referenced or provided by interviewees during interviews, which illuminated their departmental practices and procedures. The academic research around QDA stresses the importance of documents in both qualitative and quantitative research, as 'documents are written by people who are active participants in the process they describe.' This perception explains why documents are often regarded as primary sources representing 'facts' and why they are considered to reveal something real about the world in an unmediated or authentic manner (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 5). The materials and documents utilised by the researcher are most often generated independently of the research (Harvey, 2020; Morgan, 2022).

QDA encompasses a spectrum of functions, ranging from simple summarisation and description to in-depth content analysis. This often includes exploring the underlying motivation, intent, and purpose within specific historical or contemporary contexts and searching for latent meanings (Harvey, 2020; Morgan, 2022). Documents often reflect the factual aspects of the policy processes they describe, allowing researchers to uncover political interests, forces, and determinants behind policy developments (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 9). When QDA is conducted at a descriptive level, researchers focus on identifying explicit meanings in the data rather than interpreting latent meanings. In such studies, data extracts are used as illustrative examples rather than being analysed in depth (Morgan, 2022, p. 65). For instance, when document analysis serves a descriptive function, such as providing comparative information on legislation types in different countries, the task is to locate relevant documents and provide an accurate description of their content (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 8). This method facilitates not only impartial and consistent scrutiny of written policies and practices but also provides a framework for comparative information.

Along with official documents and publications, official websites constitute vital repositories of information on policy priorities, procedures, and services. These websites also offer extensive insights into policymaking, policy implementation, and public deliberation, making them reliable

sources of information. As platforms intended for a general audience, they provide comprehensive data on governmental affairs (Neumann et al., 2022).

Consequently, as the initial phase of my project development, which centres on investigating and comparing school inspection policies and practices across four jurisdictions—namely the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (Dubai), the Department of Education Inspectorate in Ireland, the Education Review Office (New Zealand), and the Departments of Education in the four provinces of Pakistan—a document analysis was undertaken to serve a descriptive function. I examined the official websites and documents of these systems to familiarise myself with their historical contexts, the factors contributing to their development and growth, and their current practices. This process not only deepened my understanding of these systems but also informed the creation of interview questions, prompts, and country-specific notes. These tools were designed to elicit comprehensive and detailed responses from the respondents.

However, Karppinen and Moe (2012) caution that since most documents inherently reflect the processes that produced them, it is crucial to consider the context and social environment of the document to fully comprehend its meaning and significance. During the interviews, the responses of the interviewees enabled me to develop a more nuanced and interpretive understanding of the information gathered from the documents. This involved relating the literal meanings to the contexts in which the documents were produced, thereby allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the text as a whole (Harvey, 2020).

3.4.1b Literature review

Prior to examining the official websites and documents of the school inspection regimes under study, I conducted a literature review to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This review aimed to identify common trends and patterns related to the theories, methods applied, and recurring themes within the literature. As Sheppard (2019) argues, the literature review served several purposes: it provided context and background for my research, identified gaps in previous studies, justified the necessity of my intended research, and assisted in constructing my theoretical framework. Snyder (2019) concurs, emphasising that a literature

review enables the researcher to map and assess the research area, thereby justifying the study's aims and research questions, and providing a robust theoretical framework or research background.

In all four publications, there is either a dedicated and substantial section on the literature, or literature is consistently referenced throughout the paper to compare or validate the study findings. Clear and consistent inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed during the literature searches. Following the guidance of Creswell and Creswell (2023), the literature used was predominantly published in English within the last ten years. However, older studies were occasionally cited due to their widespread reference or significant historical value. For instance, French's report, "Child the Heart of Matter," published in 2000, is frequently cited for its invaluable depiction of the socio-political factors contributing to the development of the Education Review Office and its practices in New Zealand. The search phrases varied according to the specific aims of each publication and are detailed in the methodology section of each paper. I primarily utilised two databases: Google Scholar and Scopus. The inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journals published within the last twenty years (2003-2023) and written in English. Consistent with the research questions, keywords derived from these questions were employed as search themes and combined using Boolean operators. For each publication, a distinct literature analysis matrix was developed based on the identified themes and the findings of the respective research studies.

3.4.1c Semi-structured interviews

The research interview, a crucial method in qualitative data collection, has been extensively utilised. Due to its wide application, a substantial body of literature exists on the methodologies, types, and best practices of conducting interviews (e.g., Dowling & Lloyd, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Patton emphasises the significance of interviews as,

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they attach to

what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things.

The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 2015, p. 426).

My project entails a comparative study of four school inspection systems, for which I intended to interview school leaders and inspectors from these countries. Fortuitously, I scheduled my project during the COVID-19 pandemic, with data collection commencing post-pandemic. This period saw educational professionals worldwide become proficient with Zoom, a widely used video conferencing tool, facilitating their comfort with being interviewed. The interviewees exhibited greater flexibility regarding the venue and timing of their interviews, with options to blur their backgrounds to maintain privacy. Participants engaged from various settings, such as their living rooms or offices, with some opting to blur their backgrounds while others did not. Consequently, the interviews were conducted in naturalistic surroundings, fostering a sense of naturalness and spontaneity, allowing participants to express their experiences and feelings openly and candidly. I accommodated their schedules, particularly for participants from New Zealand, due to significant time zone differences. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Boland et al. (2022), the primary advantages of video conferencing software include its cost-effectiveness and the elimination of geographical constraints for researchers when considering participants. Additionally, it is convenient, easy to use, accessible via phone, tablet, and computer, and time-efficient, as it obviates the need for travel for both researchers and participants (Boland et al., 2022; Gray et al., 2020; Oliffe et al., 2021).

The use of semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain high-quality data from respondents by employing a combination of open-ended and specific questions, utilising the 4Ps of questioning (pose, prompt, pause, probe) as needed. This format, where questions can be flexibly worded or a mix of structured and unstructured, strikes a balance between consistency and adaptability. It allows the interviewer to gather specific information through more structured sections while maintaining the flexibility to explore various topics in greater depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I followed a consistent list of topics in all the interviews, meaning the exact wording and order of the questions were not predetermined. This flexibility enabled me to respond dynamically to

the flow of the conversation, adjusting to the respondent's perspective and incorporating new ideas or themes that emerged. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest, this approach allows the researcher to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the subject matter, which is particularly useful in qualitative research aimed at exploring complex issues and diverse viewpoints. Additionally, this approach helps build rapport with respondents, allowing for a more natural and less rigid interaction. As a result, I was able to achieve rich and in-depth data.

The research methods literature (e.g., Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Turner & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022) emphasises several preliminary steps to be undertaken before conducting an interview. These steps include explaining the interview's purpose, outlining confidentiality terms, detailing the interview format, indicating the expected duration, and providing contact information for future queries. Additionally, it is crucial to invite any questions from the interviewees prior to commencing the interview.

In accordance with these guidelines, I prepared for the interviews by disseminating the Informed Consent Form and the Plain Language Statement to the interviewees via an introductory email. These documents encompassed essential information, such as an overview of the project, data usage and handling, confidentiality assurances, interview duration, and permission for audio recording. Moreover, respondents were afforded the flexibility to choose the interview's time and location, helping to mitigate potential distractions during the interview process. By adhering to these preparatory measures, I ensured a transparent and structured approach, fostering a conducive environment for effective data collection.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), obtaining valuable data from interviews necessitates asking well-crafted questions, a skill that improves with practice. Conducting pilot interviews is crucial for testing the planned questions. These preliminary interviews not only provide practice in interviewing but also identify questions that are confusing and need rephrasing, those that produce irrelevant data, and additional questions suggested by respondents that should be included. It is important to phrase questions in familiar language, using terms that resonate with the interviewee's perspective, as this enhances the quality of the data collected (p.118).

Following this guidance, the interview questions I developed were grounded in a comprehensive document analysis and literature review. Initially, these questions underwent scrutiny by my

supervisors, who possess extensive expertise in the domain of school inspections. Subsequently, the questions received approval from the Research Ethics Committee. To further refine the questions, I conducted two pilot interviews with school leaders and one with a school inspector. Based on their feedback, I revised the questions and subjected them to another round of review and approval by my supervisors. Additionally, I incorporated country-specific terminology pertinent to each school inspection regime, ensuring clarity for the respondents and eliminating the need for assumptions about the questions' intent.

Despite procedural similarities, the four school inspection systems are quite different. However, the same interview schedule worked in each country because it was designed around a common framework of educational quality and effectiveness, applicable across different systems. The core objectives of school inspections, such as evaluating teaching quality, student outcomes, and school management, are universally relevant, allowing the schedule to be adapted to each context. Additionally, while the interview schedule remained consistent, it was flexible enough to accommodate the specific contexts and nuances of each country's inspection system. I employed country-specific vocabulary and referred to special quality assurance procedures unique to each country. For example, in Ireland and Dubai, the term 'self-evaluation' is used, while in New Zealand, it is called 'self-review,' so I used 'self-review' in my questions when interviewing school leaders and evaluation partners from New Zealand. Responses collected from initial interviews were used to iteratively refine and adapt the schedule for subsequent interviews in different countries, ensuring continuous improvement and relevance. The use of a consistent interview schedule was intentional to facilitate comparative analysis across the four countries. Having a standardised approach helps identify both common trends and unique differences, contributing to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of school inspection systems.

3.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process that is both sequential and recursive, involving steps that must be taken simultaneously. Researchers must continuously review and refine themes in light of emerging patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). According to Nowell et al. (2017), the rigour and trustworthiness of a qualitative study are determined by the thoroughness of the data analysis and the clarity of the analytic process. They emphasise that a

detailed recording, systematising, and reporting of the analysis methods allow readers to assess the credibility of the process. Clarity regarding the assumptions guiding the process and the steps taken by the researcher is essential. Without this information, evaluating the trustworthiness of the research becomes challenging. Ultimately, the goal is to conduct a theoretically and methodologically sound thematic analysis that produces sensitive, insightful, rich, and trustworthy findings.

In my project, I employed semi-structured interviews to gather the perspectives of school leaders and inspectors on various topics related to the efficacy and effectiveness of school inspectors and inspections, utilising theoretical or deductive thematic analysis. During the process of reading and re-reading the datasets, inductive codes that emerged were also organised under overarching themes. This approach is valuable for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting both similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. Thematic analysis is also beneficial for summarising key features of data sets (Nowell et al., 2017).

Creswell and Creswell (2023) describe three types of coding: developing codes solely from the emerging information collected from participants, applying predetermined codes to the data, or employing a combination of both emerging and predetermined codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the importance of a meticulous and systematic approach when analysing qualitative data. They advocate for giving equal attention to every data item within the entire data set to ensure that no relevant information is overlooked. By doing so, researchers can identify interesting aspects within each data item that may form the basis of broader themes across the entire data set. This thorough and balanced approach ensures that the analysis is comprehensive and that the themes developed are truly representative of the data. It also helps in uncovering nuanced insights and patterns that might otherwise be missed, thereby enhancing the depth and rigour of the qualitative analysis. The levels of coding can vary depending on the topics under investigation and their relevance to the research objectives. In my project, I utilised hierarchical coding because it allowed for analysis at varying levels of specificity, with broad higher-order codes providing an overview and detailed lower-order codes enabling distinctions within and between cases. Furthermore, sections of text can be coded into multiple themes as applicable (Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic Analysis Publication One

In all four publications, the research questions served as the primary drivers and guides for the data analysis process. Initially, I conducted a thorough review of the relevant literature and official documents pertaining to various inspection regimes. This preliminary review allowed me to identify key deductive themes, which I subsequently refined with the guidance of my supervisor, an expert in the field of school inspection.

The first publication employed literature review and document analysis as its primary research methods. The research questions were instrumental in deriving the deductive and theoretical themes, which included:

1. Historical Context: Exploration of the legislative foundation, governance structures, and the evolution of inspection regimes over time.
2. Current Practices: Examination of the frequency of school inspections, the development and implementation of quality frameworks, types of inspections, pre-, during- and post-inspection tasks, and the internal mechanisms for quality assurance.
3. Inspection Processes: Analysis of notification durations before inspections, accessibility of inspection reports, and the level of emphasis on self-evaluation within the quality assurance system.
4. Driving Factors: Investigation into the factors driving the growth and development of school inspection systems in various countries.

Through the exploration of these themes, the publication offered a comprehensive overview of the historical and contemporary landscape of school inspection practices in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, elucidating significant developments and commonalities within these inspection regimes.

Thematic Analysis Publications Two, Three and Four

For publications two, three, and four, I initially developed deductive themes based on an extensive literature review and document analysis. Table 3 presents the deductive themes that guided the data analysis in each of these publications.

Table 3: Deductive themes Publication Two, Three & Four

Publication	Themes
Publication Two	Quality of school Inspectors, Quality of inspection practices, Quality of inspection documents & instruments, Impact of School Inspection
Publication Three	Rewards & Coercive powers, Legitimate power, Referent power, Expert & informational powers
Publication Four	Evolution of SSE, Current SSE Practice, School leaders' perceptions & support for SSE practices

I covered a diverse array of concepts in the interviews and so I first developed a conceptual framework to generate broad, higher-order codes for organising the data. These deductive codes constituted the primary themes, some of which corresponded directly to interview questions and were represented as parent codes in NVivo. Both NVivo and printed copies of the coded data within each theme were employed to further develop subthemes as necessary. These subthemes were generated inductively, without attempting to fit them into a preexisting coding framework and were often represented as child codes in NVivo (Nowell et al., 2017). The two user-friendly analytic frameworks for data analysis that I studied before commencing my analysis are provided by Braun and Clarke (2013) and Creswell and Creswell (2023). Both frameworks are quite similar concerning the steps involved in data analysis and final reporting, with slight variations in the naming of the steps. Following the completion of the interviews, I meticulously adhered to the data analysis steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013), which include:

1. Transcription: Converting audio recordings of interviews into written text.
2. Reading and Familiarisation: Immersing myself in the data by reading transcripts multiple times, noting items of potential interest.
3. Coding: Systematically coding the entire dataset.
4. Linking Codes with Themes: Identifying patterns and themes within the coded data.
5. Reviewing Themes: Creating a thematic map to organise provisional themes and subthemes, and exploring relationships between them.
6. Writing: Finalising the analysis and compiling the findings into a coherent narrative.

I conducted interviews sequentially, focusing on participants from one country at a time. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of each jurisdiction and the contextual experiences of respondents. The interval of approximately two to three months between the interviews from different countries provided sufficient time for meticulous transcription and

analysis, initially performed manually and subsequently using NVivo software. Although NVivo assisted in organising the data, most of the analysis was conducted manually.

Immediately after conducting each interview, I transcribed the audio recordings and meticulously read through the transcripts multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Guided by predetermined research questions for each publication, I developed an initial thematic table based on preliminary readings and first impressions of the transcripts. Each subsequent reading facilitated the refinement and reorganisation of the codes within each theme. Utilising NVivo, I systematically reviewed and consolidated the data pertinent to each theme. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, this phase involves examining the coded data extracts for each theme to assess whether they form a coherent pattern. The validity of individual themes was evaluated to ensure that they accurately represent the meanings present in the entire data set. During this process, deficiencies in the initial coding and themes may be identified, necessitating revisions (King, 2004). If a pertinent issue in the text is identified that is not covered by an existing code, a new code may be introduced. The selected themes are refined to be specific enough to be distinct yet broad enough to encompass a set of related ideas (Nowell et al., 2017). The NVivo coding framework screenshots illustrate the bases of social power across various interview transcript texts (Figures 2 and 3).

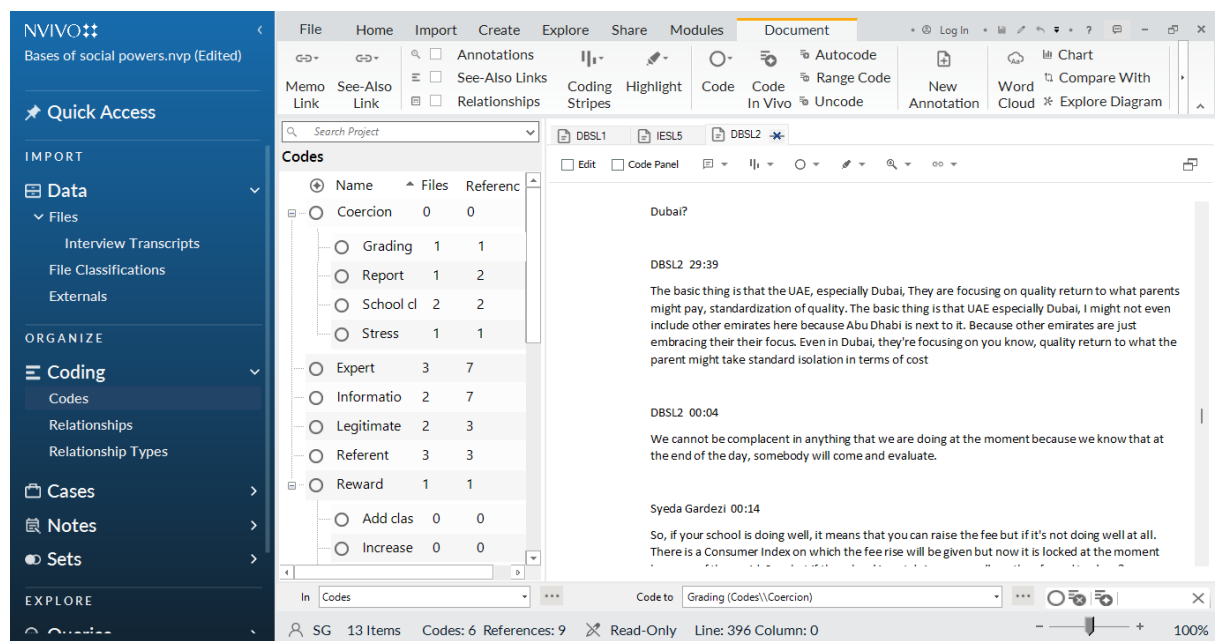


Figure 2: NVivo Thematic Analysis

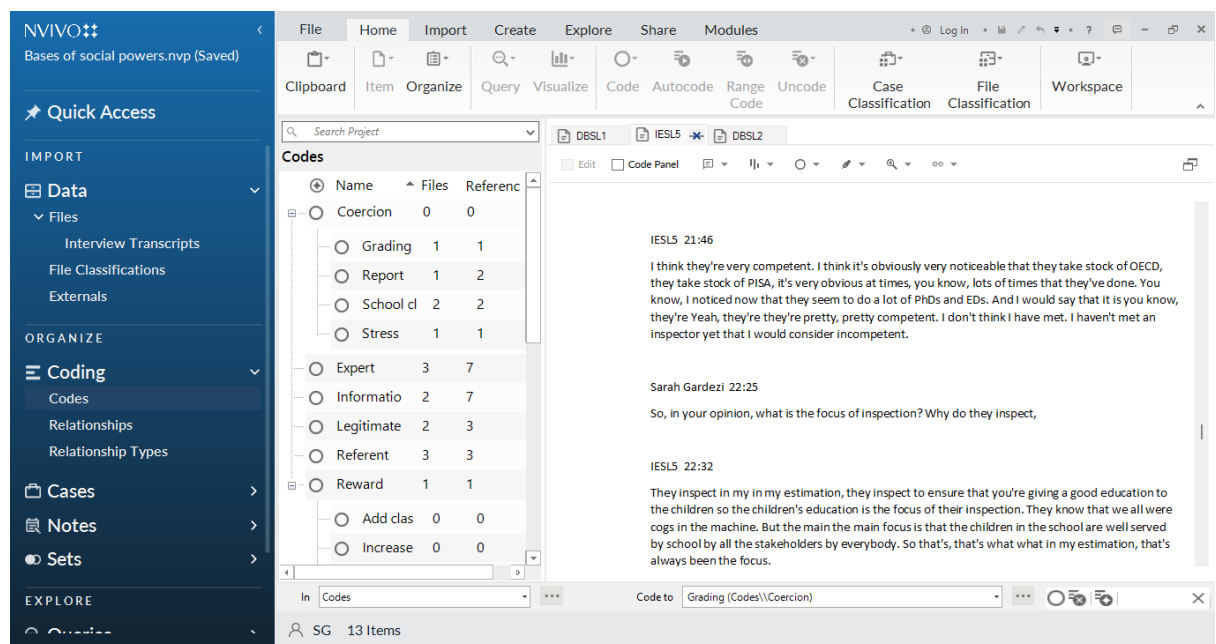


Figure 3: NVivo Thematic Analysis

Finally, I selected striking extract examples that effectively highlighted key insights from the data. Each was chosen to vividly represent the identified themes. I conducted an in-depth analysis of these extracts, critically evaluating how they illustrated broader patterns within the dataset. I then connected the findings to the original research questions, ensuring the analysis addressed the study's objectives. Additionally, I integrated these findings with existing literature to situate the new insights within the broader academic discourse. This thorough process resulted in a comprehensive scholarly report. To enhance the understanding of specific points of interpretation and to illustrate the prevalence of the themes identified, I carefully selected short quotes from the transcripts. These short quotes serve to highlight and substantiate particular themes and points of analysis succinctly. Additionally, to provide readers with a richer, more nuanced understanding of the original texts, I included more extensive passages of quotation. These longer excerpts allow readers to gain a deeper insight into the context and intricacies of the participants' perspectives, providing a vivid sense of the original material.

In embedding extracts of raw data within the analytic narrative, I aimed to weave a complex story of the data, which extends beyond mere description. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006), who emphasise the importance of integrating raw data excerpts to construct a compelling narrative that demonstrates the validity and merit of the analysis. By interspersing the narrative with these extracts, I was able to illustrate how the themes emerge from the data and to show the interconnectedness and depth of the

participants' experiences. This method helped to substantiate the analytic points being made and to engage the reader more fully with the data, thereby enhancing the overall credibility and impact of the analysis.

Furthermore, this narrative approach allowed for a dynamic presentation of the data, moving fluidly between the raw extracts and the interpretive commentary. This technique not only aids in demonstrating the prevalence and significance of the identified themes but also provides a clear and convincing argument for the conclusions drawn from the analysis. By grounding the analytic narrative in the participants' own words, the analysis becomes more transparent and accessible, allowing readers to appreciate the robustness of the findings and the rigour of the analytical process. The report documented the findings and provided a coherent narrative linking the data analysis to the research questions and theoretical framework, offering a robust examination of the subject and contributing valuable knowledge to the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3.6 Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential for ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. Researchers define trustworthiness in various manners, encompassing qualities such as authenticity and truthfulness within qualitative research outcomes (Cypress, 2017). Trustworthiness pertains to the level of trust or confidence readers place in the results (Stahl & King, 2020). Lincoln and Guba (1985), in their seminal work on naturalistic inquiry, posed a fundamental question regarding the rigour of qualitative research: 'How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?' (p. 290). They outline four overarching criteria in their framework for ensuring trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (2000) expand upon these standards of rigour, framing them as 'parallel criteria' aligned with validity and reliability criteria found in postpositivist quantitative methods (Morrow, 2005, p.251).

Building on Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 2000) framework for trustworthiness, these criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—form key principles of

trustworthiness in qualitative research. Credibility refers to the accuracy and believability of the findings, achieved through rigorous data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods. Transferability assesses the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or populations, enhancing the generalisability of the research. Dependability ensures consistency and stability in the research process, while confirmability addresses the objectivity and neutrality of the findings, minimising bias. By adhering to these principles, qualitative researchers can establish trustworthiness, thereby enhancing the credibility and impact of their research within the scholarly community.

Credibility in qualitative research is the cornerstone of validity and trustworthiness. It refers to the extent to which the findings accurately represent the phenomenon being studied and are believable to others. Achieving credibility involves employing rigorous methods throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Techniques such as triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement with the data can enhance credibility by providing multiple perspectives, ensuring data accuracy, and confirming the researcher's interpretations. Establishing credibility is vital for qualitative researchers to build confidence in their findings and contribute meaningful insights to the broader academic community (Amin et al., 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Yadav, 2022).

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied or generalised to other contexts, settings, or populations beyond the immediate study participants. Unlike quantitative research, where generalisability is often measured through statistical sampling techniques, transferability in qualitative research relies on rich, descriptive accounts that allow readers to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings to their own contexts. To enhance transferability, qualitative researchers often provide detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and data collection methods, as well as richly textured interpretations of the data. Additionally, researchers may engage in theoretical sampling, seeking out diverse perspectives and experiences to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. By attending to transferability, qualitative researchers can increase the potential for their findings to inform practice, policy, and further research across various contexts and settings (Amin et al., 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Stahl & King, 2020).

Dependability in qualitative research is fundamental for ensuring the reliability and consistency of the research process and findings. It encompasses establishing robust procedures and methods that can be consistently applied throughout the study. Dependability involves creating a clear and systematic plan for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring that these processes are conducted consistently over time and across different contexts. Researchers often employ techniques such as peer debriefing, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail to enhance dependability by verifying the accuracy and consistency of the research process. 'Thus, the process through which findings are derived should be explicit and repeatable as much as possible' (Morrow, 2005; p. 252). Qualitative researchers can contribute valuable insights to the field and strengthen the trustworthiness of their findings by giving priority to dependability (Amin et al., 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020).

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings are objective, unbiased, and grounded in the data rather than influenced by the researcher's personal perspectives or preferences. It involves maintaining transparency throughout the research process and documenting decisions made at each stage to ensure accountability and traceability. Researchers strive to minimise their own biases through reflexivity, acknowledging and critically reflecting on their assumptions, values, and potential influences on the research process and interpretations (Morrow, 2005). Techniques such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking are often employed to enhance confirmability by corroborating findings with multiple sources of evidence and perspectives. By prioritising confirmability, qualitative researchers can strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of their research findings, increasing their value and impact within the academic community.

Morrow (2005), however, cautions that these correspondences, should not be taken to mean that these parallel criteria accomplish exactly the same goals as their corresponding standards of rigour in quantitative research the paradigmatic differences are to be taken into account. Qualitative research leads to different kinds of knowledge claims than those resulting from the use of quantitative methods. Where former being idiographic and emic focuses on one or a very few individuals and finds categories of meaning from the individuals studied and latter is nomothetic and etic that employs standardised methods of obtaining knowledge from large

samples of individuals, using categories taken from existing theory and operationalised by the researcher (p.252).

Cypress (2017) argues that the credibility of a research study hinges on the robustness of its design and the appropriateness of its methods to address the questions (p.254). To ensure the trustworthiness of my project, I undertook several measures. To bolster credibility, I employed methodical triangulation, thoroughly examined the official websites and publications of the inspection systems under scrutiny to understand their policies and practices, and conducted a comprehensive literature review before initiating interviews. The interview questions were crafted based on this review and underwent scrutiny first by my supervisor, an expert in the field, and later by experts in each country. Finally, the Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved them along with my overall project.

I personally conducted all interviews and utilised a uniform set of questions to maintain consistency. Simultaneously, I endeavoured to confirm and validate every detail shared in previous interviews during subsequent ones. Additionally, I employed active listening techniques to obtain respondent validation of my comprehension while interviewing school leaders and inspectors from four countries, as post-interview transcript review was not feasible.

Likewise, the deductive codes for data analysis stemmed from the document and literature review and received formal approval from my supervisor. Similarly, the analysed interview transcripts underwent review, and the selected text samples for inclusion in the final papers were also endorsed by him. I aimed to achieve data saturation, supplementing interviews when necessary to ensure completeness. For example, I recognised in the context of my fourth paper (Self-evaluation) that I lacked confidence in having interviewed a sufficient number of school leaders in Pakistan to achieve data saturation. Following my supervisor's recommendation, I conducted interviews with an additional 10 school leaders.

Regarding transferability, Stahl and King (2020) align with Morrow (2005) in acknowledging that qualitative research, by its nature, does not aim for replicability. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers assert that patterns and descriptions from one context may have applicability elsewhere (p.27). Through ample and narrative-rich descriptions, this study emphasises contextual nuances, facilitating readers in grasping the context and applying findings to their

own settings. Transferability was further strengthened, as recommended by Cypress (2017), by employing purposive sampling and presenting comprehensive descriptions and robust data encompassing a wide range of information, particularly through detailed and accurate depictions of school inspection systems across the four countries.

Dependability and confirmability were enhanced by pursuing a PhD by publication and subjecting my research design and findings to peer review. As emphasised by Carcary (2020), maintaining an audit trail is crucial as it offers a transparent account of the steps undertaken throughout a research endeavour. This transparency is essential to enable others to independently assess the quality of the research. A detailed audit trail elucidates the research design and encompasses aspects such as data collection, analysis, reduction, and synthesis (Carcary, 2020, p.167). Throughout the PhD, each of the four studies meticulously documented raw data, field notes, coding, transcripts, and thematic maps. Additionally, in line with Novell et al. (2017), the utilisation of software like NVivo was employed across all four publications to bolster the credibility of the thematic analysis process by providing an electronic trail of the coding process. In Section 3.1 of this chapter, 'My Personal and Professional Stance,' I delve into how reflexivity, critical reflection, and my positionality within the project both contributed to and did not impede the overall trustworthiness of this endeavour.

3.7 Ethical Issues

In Ireland, as in many other nations such as Britain and the USA, research involving human participants is governed by four fundamental ethical principles, which are pivotal to the code of ethics for the Irish Psychological Society⁹ and endorsed by all higher education institutions in the country: respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity. The principle of respect mandates that participants be regarded as individuals of inherent value, with the autonomy to establish their own priorities, encompassing considerations of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. The principle of competence necessitates that researchers possess adequate qualifications to conduct research and continually maintain and enhance their professional skills and ethical awareness. The principle of responsibility pertains to the potential risks to participants and the safeguarding of their rights. Lastly, the principle of integrity involves upholding standards of honesty and accuracy, particularly concerning the misrepresentation of

⁹ <https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/Article/Code-of-Ethics-1>

data, plagiarism, and the authenticity of the researcher's voice. These principles are expected to guide every research activity that is undertaken.

Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2023) emphasise that addressing ethical issues is fundamental to good research, providing an extensive list of measures to consider at various stages: before initiating the study, during data collection and analysis, and in reporting, disseminating, and storing data. In my research, I meticulously adhered to the core principles of ethics, ensuring that ethical considerations were paramount at every stage of the design, data collection, and analysis. The DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC) rigorously reviewed my project design and the proposed handling of ethical issues and granted approval that encompassed all four studies. The REC also approved the plain language statements and informed consent forms before they were issued to participants. Furthermore, the interview questions were submitted to the REC for review, and approval was obtained. Participants were informed in advance of the researcher's identity and relevant background details through the plain language statement.

Ample time and opportunities were provided to all participants to ask questions and raise any issues with me both before and during the study. For Publications Two, Three, and Four, approval to interview Evaluation Partners and School Inspectors was obtained from the Education Review Office in New Zealand and the Dubai School Inspection Bureau. Several participants were recruited through higher education institutions where they were pursuing advanced degrees. No pressure was exerted on volunteers to participate, and participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time. All participants were professionals, well-established in their fields, and were treated with the utmost dignity and respect.

Participants were informed through the consent form that their interviews would be audio recorded, and before the start of each interview, their permission was reconfirmed in case they had changed their minds. I provided my email address to all participants, ensuring they could contact me with any questions or concerns or to withdraw from the study at any point. All participants were comfortable, supportive, and willing to facilitate my data collection.

Participants were assured of anonymity, with a strong commitment to confidentiality throughout the research process. Interview recordings were securely stored with encrypted, password-protected access and will be safely destroyed following Dublin City University (DCU) protocols after the PhD examination process. Data were thoroughly anonymised for publication to prevent any breaches of confidentiality. Care was taken to avoid any questions or directives that might cause offence, discrimination, or distress. Participants had full control over their responses and were informed they could skip any questions they were uncomfortable with. This approach fostered a respectful and supportive environment. The final published articles were also shared with interested school leaders and inspectors, ensuring transparency and fostering a collaborative relationship with the educational community. Throughout the research process, I maintained a high level of academic rigour, implementing robust procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and adhering to academic writing conventions, including proper citation and referencing. This ensured the production of reliable and credible research contributing meaningfully to the field.

Additionally, to minimise potential power imbalances and reduce biases during the interviews, I employed a structured approach. Standardised questions were used for all participants to ensure consistency and limit the influence of subjective biases. The inclusion of diverse participants, reflecting a balance in gender and varied perspectives, further mitigated the risks of individual biases. This approach aimed to create a mixed representation of views, ensuring that the diversity of the sample was adequately captured (Small & Calarco, 2022).

Efforts were made to address confirmation bias—the tendency to seek information that aligns with pre-existing beliefs or stereotypes (Lareau, 2021). Participants were encouraged to express their views openly without feeling constrained to validate anticipated outcomes. Although the likelihood of confirmation bias was reduced by interviewing senior professionals, I was mindful of using professional language to establish rapport and ensure they felt at ease conversing with someone knowledgeable about the subject matter.

Given the constraints of limited time and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I prioritised creating an open and unbiased environment to maximise the opportunity to gather authentic perspectives. I consciously avoided biases related to relatability, anchoring, cultural

norms, gender, or age by remaining reflexive and maintaining an open mind throughout the interviews.

Although power imbalances were unlikely given the seniority of the participants, I took proactive measures to address any potential issues. In alignment with the recommendations of Lareau (2021) and Small and Calarco (2022), the consent forms and Plain Language Statement shared prior to the interview outlined the study's purpose, my motivations, and plans for utilising the interview data. Interviews began with informal introductions, creating a warm and conversational atmosphere to reduce tension. I also provided a brief introduction to my professional background, including my roles as a school leader and inspector, to establish trust and relatability with participants. This shared professional context likely enhanced participants' willingness to share their perspectives authentically, as suggested by Demirci (2024).

To further mitigate any risks of microaggressions, I ensured the use of inclusive language, avoiding exclusionary comments and dismissive non-verbal cues. All interviews were conducted online at times and in virtual settings chosen by the participants, creating a neutral and non-intimidating environment. These strategies align with best practices outlined by Wollen et al. (2024), emphasising the importance of fostering trust and encouraging authentic participant engagement in qualitative research.

Chapter four: Publication One

The Rise and Convergence of Regimes of School Inspection ***A comparative analysis of school Inspection in Dubai, Ireland,*** ***New Zealand and Pakistan***

Abstract

The exponential growth of school inspection to monitor and evaluate the quality of education in the last two decades has been influenced by several global economic and socio-political drivers, particularly the policies of transnational organisations, such as UNESCO, the OECD, and the World Bank. It is important to note, however, that the influence of these international drivers is mediated by the histories, traditions, policies, and perhaps most of all the politics of countries. To illustrate this point, we chose to study the school evaluation systems of four different countries, Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, and the drivers that contributed to their development. For the purpose of this research, we conducted an analysis of the literature, official websites, and documents produced by the inspectorates of these countries. We conclude that while the influence of transnational agencies on the growth of school inspection in these countries is clear, the local socio-political context has, also, in our view, a significant influence.

Keywords: School inspection; monitoring; evaluation; school improvement

Introduction and Background

School inspections are among some of the oldest educational institutions and services that exist in most countries. It was developed to monitor and supervise educational provision (Wilcox, 2000) and its growth is concurrent with the emergence of mass public education systems across the globe. In Europe, this service dates back to the nineteenth century (Gray, 2019), as in some of the countries that had been British colonies. On the other hand, there are countries where school inspection has only recently been introduced, such as Dubai. Over the years, the role and mechanisms of school inspection have developed and changed (see, for example, Brown, 2013, Ehren et al. 2017). From being a checklist audit to review compliance with rules and supervise individual teacher's performance, school inspection is now a means and process to enforce and track policy implementation, scrutinise and regulate school leaders' and teachers' performance, evaluate the overall performance of schools, support recent educational theories and encourage and create a competitive ethos in education systems (Clark, 2017).

Baxter (2017) argues that inspectors' work is coloured and conditioned by their national policy contexts, and these national policy contexts are conditioned in response to international policy drivers (p. 14). Over the last two decades, global economic, social, and political drivers have had a significant impact on educational policy. For example, the 2008 economic crisis also brought with it the realisation that investing in the development of future citizens is essential to prevent similar situations in the future, and to monitor the quality of education, inspection is indispensable (Brown et al. 2016a).

Moreover, new management policies and the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s have resulted in more autonomy for schools concerning staff recruitment, curriculum design, and implementation and allocation of resources. Increased autonomy has created a perception of the need for greater accountability in schools, necessitating systems to monitor practices and enabling central governments to enforce effective quality standards across the system (Brown et al. 2016b). Consumerism and value-for-money attitudes in education have also increased the demand for school inspections. Close monitoring and supervision of schools are expected to achieve the anticipated results (outputs) at minimum cost (input). Comparative evaluations of education systems, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have led to a constant stream of interventions and reforms designed to achieve higher student performance outcomes. A decline in the PISA ranking is seen as a decline in education quality, leading to the belief that reinforced school inspections will improve the system (Brown et al., 2016a; Baxter, 2017).

Additionally, policies of influential organisations worldwide, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), directly or indirectly influence national education policies that consequently affect the development of inspection systems in countries worldwide. For example, a transnational project, Education for all (UNESCO), encompasses two Millennium Development Goals: Universal Primary Education for All and Gender Equality in Education and the Human Capital Project (The World Bank, 2022), involving almost every country. In return for funding such initiatives, transnational organisations increasingly insist on a result-based approach. Consequently, school inspection systems have evolved and become more 'robust' to ensure the delivery of the desired outcomes. As a result, various forms of inspections have been introduced in some countries, especially short and

focused inspections on one aspect of school improvement, such as thematic inspections in Ireland (Standing International Conference of Inspectorates [SICI], 2022). In other countries, such as Pakistan, the frequency of inspection visits has increased, and digital databases have been developed to monitor and track real-time data. Many jurisdictions have reduced inspection notification times (for example e.g. Dubai) and impose sanctions on low-performing schools or those who fail to comply but reward high-performing schools to create a competitive environment among schools (e.g. Dubai, Sweden) (Azzam, 2017; Baxter & Hult, 2017). In sharp contrast, in New Zealand, there is a shift from event-based external evaluation to an evaluation partnership between schools and the school evaluation agency.

Several comparative studies of various inspection regimes across Europe have been conducted, including van Bruggen's (2010) analysis of education inspectorates in Europe and Faubert's (2009) literature review on school inspection practices in OECD countries, demonstrating the development and status of school inspection in Europe. This paper, however, presents a unique study of a cross-continental comparison of four distinct school inspection systems—Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan—especially the manner in which inspection is organised. The study is based on a detailed review of the growth and evolution of inspection over the last twenty years (in the case of Dubai, a little over a decade), the context in which these systems grew, the factors that underpinned their growth and their overall efficacy as quality assurance and quality improvement agencies. These four countries were chosen because they exhibit quite different philosophies and approaches to inspection and have inspection systems over very different time scales; however, we would suggest that they share many of the features increasingly common across all inspection systems. These include concerns with educational standards, careful monitoring of schools and teachers, and increased use of data-based decision-making in education. The study was organised into three research questions:

- How has school inspection evolved over the past two decades in these countries?
What factors contribute to growth?
How does school inspection affect education in each case?

Through the analysis of these national case studies, an attempt has been made to present exemplars for other jurisdictions to follow or learn lessons from.

Methodology

Using the research questions as the focus of the search, the study outlined here applied literature review and document analysis as research methods. The criteria for the literature search included date range, language, and study type. The literature examined was selected almost entirely from the last 20 years, 2000 to 2022, except for original historical documents or official reports, which were essential to avoid gaps in the information. No distinction was made on where the literature originated from, as long as it was in English. The types of studies included: peer-reviewed articles, doctoral theses, government reports, departmental publications and reports of transnational organisations such as OECD, UNO and the World Bank.

Dewey and Drahota (2016) assert that a literature review involves identifying, selecting and critically appraising research in order to answer a clearly formulated research question. Therefore, as a first step, keyword searches were performed on the databases using various combinations of key terms according to the research questions: school inspection and/or evaluation, development/growth/rise bracketed, and combined with factors/elements/drivers. Once the first suite of relevant research articles was collected, as a next step, the snowballing technique was used, and the reference lists of the key articles were studied to locate the pertinent government reports and official publications that were not available in the education databases. In addition, the websites of relevant governments and transnational agencies were explored to procure official reports and information on measures undertaken in relation to school inspections in the four countries under study. Additionally, some reports and books were identified through expert polling.

After collecting the articles and other materials, we browsed the abstracts, tables of contents, and forewords to carefully screen and select the studies to be included in the review. Overall, 120 research articles, doctoral and master 'theses and books, 136 official documents, and 60 reports were reviewed and selected for the final analysis. We performed a literature review and document analysis using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The technique was employed first because it allows flexibility in the choice of methodology and the use of approach to identify themes and patterns within data. Second, it acknowledges the value of the researcher's subjective experience as the primary tool for making sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Our research approach was predominantly deductive and theoretical, and was driven by our interest in the area. Therefore, the research questions steered initial reading

and coding. The other steps included re-reading, collating codes to generate themes, and reviewing and refining earlier themes to determine their focus and scope.

Presentation and Analysis

In this section, we report each of the four cases individually, focusing on their historical context, evolution over time, and the driving factors behind their growth. Finally, the concluding section brings together the common themes, contrasts, and conclusions.

Dubai

Unlike Pakistan, Ireland, and New Zealand, where most of the children attend public (or public-funded) schools, in the Dubai city-state, nearly 90% of students go to private schools (OECD, 2021), and the private education sector accounts for 76% of the total number of schools (KHDA, 2021). The high percentage of expatriates in the city's population contributes to the fact that their children attend private schools, as public education by law is accessible only to nationals (Azzam, 2017). The number of Emirati students attending private schools has also consistently increased, despite their free access to public schooling (Elwick & McAleavy, 2015; Matsumoto, 2019). The growing trend of local Emirati families sending their children to private schools is due to the availability of international curricula, bilingual instruction, and high-quality education (Gallaher, 2019). Therefore, almost 60% of Emirati students living in Dubai are now attending private schools (OECD, 2021).

With a phenomenal ratio of students in private schools, the Executive Council of Dubai established the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in 2007 by Law No. (30) of 2006 as a public authority with legal, financial, and administrative independence. The KHDA has the remit of overseeing the quality and expansion of private education, and has the authority to inspect schools (AlKutich & Abukar, 2018). In 2007, the Executive Council Resolution No (38) of 2007, the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) was launched within the KHDA, which is responsible for setting quality standards for education services, monitoring schools in Dubai, and reporting on the quality of education (Thacker & Cuadra, 2014).

At the outset, the DSIB delegated the inspection of all public and private schools to evaluate the progress of students, curricula, quality of teaching, and the effectiveness of the school's management and leadership. After three years, with the re-establishment of the Dubai

Education Zone that operates under the ministry, the KHDA handed over the inspection of public schools to the Ministry of Education (KHDA, 2008; Ahmed, 2011). Since 2011, the DSIB has been responsible for inspecting only private schools. Thacker and Cuadra (2014) believe that institutionalising accountability measures for private schools without providing direct or indirect state funding or subsidisation is a 'unique and extreme' feature of the Dubai school inspection system (p.5). All school inspection reports are published on the KHDA website and are publicly available. Every year, KHDA publishes an annual report on the overall findings of school inspections.

The KHDA mandated that the DSIB inspection team would inspect all schools annually, beginning with the 2008-2009 academic year. School inspectors, since the commencement, have specialised areas based on their prior experience and qualification and are trained and allocated responsibilities accordingly (KHDA, 2018a). School inspection reports and key findings of the inspection have been widely published. While school self-evaluation (SSE) was recognised as crucial for schoolwork, the DSIB decided to gradually emphasise the importance of SSE until school leaders become familiar with the self-evaluation and school improvement process (DSIB, 2008). However, since 2011, SSE has become a crucial component of school inspections, and before onsite inspection, school leaders must prepare and send an electronic SSE report to the DSIB. Along with the handbook, schools are also provided with guidelines for self-evaluation to facilitate the process (KHDA, 2011).

The DSIB progressively enhanced its framework of quality indicators and amended the school inspection process in light of their inspection findings, stakeholders' feedback, and the UAE National Agenda. The quality indicator framework underwent annual revisions. In response to Education Vision 2022, the UAE Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the KHDA, the DSIB, and the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, developed a unified School Inspection Framework that has been used throughout the UAE for all school types from 2015 to 2016 (UAE School Inspection Framework, 2015-16). Revisions in previous frameworks typically involved adding or revising the indicators, renaming the quality dimensions, and defining key terms.

Other significant changes introduced by the DSIB include a reduction in the notice period and special review visits to schools categorised as 'Outstanding' and 'Very Good' during the previous

cycle of school inspection. Instead of three weeks, the notice period given to schools before inspection has been shortened to five working days with an understanding that frequent inspections have familiarised schools with inspection processes and SSE expectations, and they no longer need to prepare for inspectors' visits (KHDA, 2019). The review visits of the high-performing schools are meant to ensure that the quality of education provided in these schools does not decline over time. Moreover, DSIB inspectors conduct follow-through inspections of low-performing schools, carry out support visits and readiness reviews of newly established schools, and conduct training of school leaders (KHDA, 2010). The academic year 2014 – 2015 marked the initiation of inspections for all foundation and kindergarten programmes, as well as Arabic as a first language in Early Years Education (DSIB, 2014).

Every edition of the school inspection framework highlights priority areas and special inspection topics. During the initial three years, emphasis was placed on developing the quality of SSE and the education of students with special educational needs. From the academic year 2012 to 2013, the educational provision and outcomes of Emirati students became a priority. The inspectors were advised to include a separate section about this in the school inspection report (DSIB 2012). According to the recent framework of school inspection, priority areas include the National Agenda, moral education, UAE social studies, innovation, inclusion, and reading (KHDA, 2019). These regular revisions of the inspection procedures and expectations demonstrate the KHDA's responsiveness to inspection findings and the National Agenda. However, they also pose a challenge for schools to quickly implement changes and integrate them into their daily routines before the next inspection cycle. These frequent modifications also reflect KHDA's strict control of the private education landscape, where schools must comply with ever-increasing demands if they want to stay in the system.

DSIB school inspections are mainly guided and driven by the National Agenda and priorities. Like many others, the UAE Education System also seems to be strongly influenced by the OECD's comparative evaluations of education systems in the form of PISA and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Two of the eight objectives set to make the UAE one among the leading education systems of the world are to be among top 15 countries in TIMSS and among top 20 countries in PISA. In PISA 2018, Dubai private schools sustained their improvement and attained 19th rank in the domain league tables in 2018. As far as TIMSS scores are concerned, UAE private schools are ranked 10th in Mathematics Grade 4 (score 550), seventh in math grade 8 (score 553), eighth in Science Grade 4 (score 550), and fifth in Science Grade 8

(score 566) (TIMSS 2019 Report KHDA, 2021). Through rigorous inspection, Dubai private schools have been successful in achieving the goals set forth for education in Vision 2021 (PISA 2018 Report KHDA, 2021). School inspections in the UAE, according to El Saadi (2017), have contributed tremendously to developing a professional environment in schools and 66% of students now study in 'good' or 'better' schools (KHDA, 2018b).

Better inspection ratings are incentivised, and schools that achieve better ratings are allowed to increase their fees (World Bank 2014). In 2011, the KHDA announced that no school would be closed due to poor ratings. However, public shaming through school inspection reports and the inability to raise fees with increasing inflation rates hinder schools' efforts to hire better quality staff, purchase more equipment, and attract more students. Such schools are left with no option, but to close after several consecutive years of receiving unsatisfactory assessments (Rizvi, 2018). Azzam (2017) also argues that this approach has caused a wide achievement gap between 'rich' and 'poor' schools in an industry that is already highly stratified by pricing rather than creating a healthy competition among schools (p.115). In summary, all private schools are inspected every year using standardised inspection procedures. National Agenda Points are the main drivers of the development of school inspection, followed by international student evaluations (for example, PISA, TIMSS & PIRLS).

Ireland

In Ireland, school inspection emerged in 1832, soon after the establishment of the national primary school system (Brown et al., 2016; Coolahan & Donovan, 2009; McNamara et al., 2020). However, the inspectorate has only recently attained statutory status through the Education Act 1998 Section 13 (Coolahan & Donovan, 2009, p. 281), which was later revised in 2018. With this strong legislative footing, came the pilot of Whole School Inspection (1998). Brown et al. (2016c) consider it a landmark in the revival of school inspection in its true spirit and preparation of the inspectorate for its evolving role in school and system quality assurance. The next decade marked a period of remarkable development in school inspection. For instance, in 2000, a professional code of practice for evaluation and reporting was published, the following year, subject inspections were re-introduced in the post-primary schools and, since 2002, thematic evaluations have become a regular feature of the inspectorate. Early Year Education Inspections were quite recent in Ireland and were introduced in 2016.

To ensure consistency in the inspection practices across different inspection teams, the Chief Inspector and senior staff of the Department of Education (DES) negotiated with the Executive Committees of teachers' unions to decide the procedures. They also sought input from various stakeholders and educational experts to establish quality standards for schools (as outlined in *Looking at Our School* [LAOS]; DES, 2016a, 2016b) to ensure a common understanding of what constitutes quality within the school community. The release of performance standards, themes, and components of quality areas was anticipated to increase the transparency of the inspection process. The quality framework, accompanying resources, and DES circulars have also facilitated the evolution and adaptation of the framework over time in response to new research and inspection outcomes (McNamara et al., 2021). The *Looking at our school: an aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools* (LAOS) framework for primary and post-primary schools has been revised lately (DES, 2022a, 2022b) to be in line with educational reforms such as inclusion and child safeguarding.

With the development of an external evaluation system, there came a realisation that

... schools are complex institutions in which change can only come about through internal acceptance by staff and management of both the school's strengths and the need for action in those areas of activity where further development is desirable. (DES, 1999, p.49).

The DES and inspectorate when developing the quality framework for schools and the inspectorate also published LAOS as a guide to school self-evaluation (DES, 2003). However, for school self-evaluation to become an essential part of the school inspection process and come to the fore, it had to go through several phases (McNamara et al., 2021). As McNamara et al. (2021) elaborate, '... inspectors, at first, wisely avoided the requirement for schools to show that SSE was embedded in the school development planning process' (p.3). School Self Evaluation (SSE) was mentioned in the quality framework as an inherent component of the school inspection and improvement process; however, it was not a statutory requirement until 2012. The OECD PISA 2009 results played a decisive role in the Educational Policy landscape in Ireland, and school inspections were no exception (Brown et al., 2018; McNamara et al., 2020).

The emphasis on SSE achieved great dimensions when PISA scores declined (McNamara et al. 2022). As a result, in 2012, DES Circular Nos. 0040/2012 and 0039/2012 (DES, 2012a, 2012b) made SSE a mandatory practice for schools with a focus on literacy and numeracy. The

inspectorate provided schools with a complete set of guidelines (about process, purpose, timeline, and focus) and templates to be used. A website¹⁰ dedicated to SSE was also developed to enhance the evaluation capacity of school leaders. Due to the pandemic, the DES extended the second cycle of school self-evaluation to be completed in June 2021 to June 2022, and the third cycle for 2022-2026 has commenced in September 2022. The most recent Circular 0056/2022 clarifies the arrangements for SSE for the 2022-2026 school years (DES, 2022c). For the first time, schools are given autonomy in choosing the focus of the SSE. Nevertheless, through a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (now extended until 2025) and *The Digital Learning Framework (2017)*, schools are encouraged to promote well-being and the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning by inculcating them in their SSE and improvement planning (DES, 2017a, 2017b; DES, 2019). Some critics believe that schools are tasked with SSE requirements that are beyond their capabilities and capacity to conduct research.

The inspectorate conducts a wide range of external evaluations in schools and centres of education¹¹. In these education settings, the inspectorate may conduct Whole School Evaluation- Management Leadership and Learning¹² (WSE-MLL), Follow-through¹³ or Incidental Inspections¹⁴ (DES, 2022d, 2022e). School inspectors also conduct School Improvement Monitoring visits to schools that are identified as having significant weaknesses, especially in teaching and learning, to ensure that effective measures are taken to address these issues. In response to Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking schools) Education Policy 2017-2022 (DES, 2017c), inspectors visit Gaeltacht schools to ensure that students are receiving high-quality and relevant Irish-medium education (Hislop, 2022).

With a range of external evaluations, as expected, the inspectorate publishes various reports, including a triennial report by the chief inspector that provides an overview of the inspectorate's

¹⁰ www.schoolself-evaluation.ie

¹¹ Early-Years Education, Primary and Post-primary Schools inspections, Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections, Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs, Inspections of schools attached to Special Care Units, Children Detention Centres, Centres for Education Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling, Colleges offering Teagasc Courses, and Courses in Irish-language Colleges).

¹² WSE-MLL are team inspections that typically last three in-school days.

¹³ Follow-through inspections evaluate the progress a school has made in implementing recommendations made in an earlier inspection.

¹⁴ Incidental inspection refers to an unannounced visit to a school/centre by a member of the inspectorate for observing teaching and learning and/or monitoring focus area.

procedures, activities, and achievements during this time, along with the guidelines for the future. The report also includes an analysis and reflection on the quality of education provision in schools and other educational settings (Hislop, 2022, p.8). All inspection findings are reported, except for incidental inspections, and the reports are available on the DES website. School inspection reports were published on the department's website and made available to the general public in 2006 for the first time (Coolahan & Donovan, 2009). A good inspection report can serve as a marketing tool for schools. All inspection and thematic reports, including the Chief Inspector's Report, require approval by the Minister before they are published. It is also the statutory duty of the Chief Inspector to publish inspection reports (DES, 2022d).

As in Dubai, school inspectors in Ireland are sectoral specialists and their selection criteria vary according to the position they apply for. To become a school inspector in Ireland, all entrants are required to have achieved either a first or second-class honours degree. For post-primary level inspections, it is necessary for applicants to hold a degree in the relevant subject taught at the post-primary level. 'All inspectors are experienced teachers. Many inspectors have also worked as school principals, deputy principals, or advisors with school support services. Others have experience in curriculum design and the implementation of assessment practices, in school management and educational research' (Government of Ireland, 2022b).

Several Chief Inspectors' reports¹⁵ also highlight the achievements of the education system within a particular timeframe. According to a recent report (2016-2020), almost 81% of schools have made 'very good' and 'good' progress on the recommendations made by the inspectorate. Moreover, regarding the PISA results, after 2009, the average score of 15-year-olds in Ireland in all three strands (Reading, Mathematics and Science) was consistently higher than the OECD average score (McKeown et al., 2019). Although the school inspectorate in Ireland claims a high level of transparency in its procedures, there is a lack of clarity on how a sample of schools is identified for its annual inspection programme.

The Education system in Ireland is centrally mandated in several aspects, curriculum development, teachers' registration and professional development and standardised testing, to mention a few. In sharp contrast, the school inspection system has low stakes, with no rewards or sanctions for low- or high-performing schools. Many studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2016;

¹⁵ 2001-2004, 2004-2006, 2010 – 2012, 2013-2016, 2016-2020

McNamara & O'Hara, 2012) attribute this to strong teachers' unions in Ireland. Inspection procedures and the quality framework are developed after several deliberations especially with teachers' unions because they are 'in reality the only ones with negotiating cards to play' (Fleming 2016, p. 374). As a result, inspection in Ireland can be considered a low stakes accountability process (Brown et al., 2016). For instance, lesson observation is a common aspect of school inspections, but the inspection report provides an overall view of how teaching is organised in a school, rather focusing on the performance of individual teachers.

In summary, every year, a sample of public-funded schools is inspected. Schools undergo WSE-MLL as well as a range of short inspections. Sustaining PISA results and meeting the socio-political requirements of the education system appear to be the major drivers of school inspection. Finally, school inspection is seen as having a significant impact on the quality of education provided as highlighted in Ireland's PISA rankings.

New Zealand

In New Zealand, school inspection and the national education systems were established almost simultaneously in 1877 under the Education Act of 1877 (Rae, 1991). However, the Education Act of 1989 replaced the old inspectorate with the Education Review Office (ERO) with a mandate to evaluate all types of state-funded schools for the quality of education they provide and the effective use of public funds (Mutch, 2014). The ERO was established as an impartial evaluator responsible for evaluating and reporting on school performance (French, 2000). The ERO reviews all English, Pacific, and Māori medium state and state-integrated schools¹⁶. They also review private and independent schools, home schooling¹⁷ and centre-based, home-based and hospital-based early childhood services (ERO, 2021a). Additionally, ERO carries out readiness and cluster reviews¹⁸, contract¹⁹ and national evaluations.

During the first decade after its inception, the ERO underwent several phases and experimented with various types of reviews, such as inspection and trial reviews, audit assurance and effectiveness reviews, accountability/accountability reviews, and improvement/education reviews (French, 2000). In the early phases, the goal was to achieve consistency and

¹⁶ a former private school which has integrated into the state education system under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975.

¹⁷ review of the programmes for students exempted from enrolment at a registered school.

¹⁸ ERO reviews groups or areas with common features

¹⁹ ERO undertakes specific contracts with Crown agencies, such as the Ministry of Education.

transparency in the review processes and procedures, but a major shift occurred at the turn of the millennium with the advent of Education Reviews, when the focus of review became the quality of education provision (French, 2000; Mutch, 2014). Over the years, based on their review findings, the ERO realised that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective for education reviews because the performance of schools depends largely on their context and the capability of human resources. In 2013, differentiated review methodologies using a risk-based approach were implemented, resulting in more frequent evaluations in schools or early childhood centres that are known to be experiencing difficulties. The differentiated review approach has been criticised for not conducting regular evaluations in high-performing schools for four to five years, leading to a decline in the quality of education provision, particularly when there were changes in school leadership during that time (Haque et al., 2018). The school principals, according to Goodrick's report of 2022, criticised education reviews as rushed, superficial, narrow, and judgemental.

Since 2021, the ERO has shifted from event-based external reviews to supporting each school in a process of continuous improvement (evaluation cycle), known as the Evaluation for Improvement Approach. The ERO believes that this approach is highly differentiated and considers the context, culture, and needs of each school. Every school will have a dedicated evaluation partner who will work with them to strengthen their systems, plans, and practices through evaluation. Schools will be on a three-year evaluation cycle, and at the end of the evaluation cycle, an overall school improvement report will be published on the ERO website. This evaluation has a developmental focus, and adjustments can be made as and when needed (ERO 2022a). The ERO has successfully completed the pilot phase of this new approach and is now planning to extend it to all schools. They have developed tools such as the Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists to help schools in this collaborative process and to assure the ERO that the school meets its legal obligations with respect to board administration, curriculum, health, safety and welfare, personnel, finance, and asset management (ERO, 2022b).

The Education Act 1989 recognised Māori medium schools (Kura kaupapa Māori), and in the 1990s, the Ministry of Education supported the establishment of a new kura (Calman, 2012, Ministry of Education, 2020a). Since then, the ERO has been involved in reviewing the quality of Māori education based on the Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012 (Ministry of Education, 2009). The ERO is also committed to promoting the achievement and success of Pacific students,

as outlined in the *Pacific Strategy 2013–2017 and Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (ERO 2013; Ministry of Education 2020b). The ERO, as stated in the Pacific Strategy 2019-2022, uses targeted approaches such as Turnaround and Longitudinal reviews for providers with large Pacific learner populations who face ongoing challenges in providing high-quality education (ERO, 2019, p.4). The ERO has a comprehensive setup for reviewing Māori and Pacific education, including Māori evaluation frameworks and trained Education Review Officers who are proficient in Māori and/or other Polynesian languages.

Similarly, to develop context-embedded criteria for review, the quality criteria also underwent various stages from School Charter to Five Headings Review²⁰ (French, 2000). Finally, in 2003, the first framework of School Review Indicators was introduced. With the consultation of experts, school leaders and teachers, the framework of quality indicators underwent two iterations and was put into practice in 2010 and 2016. This framework was constructed around six quality domains²¹ that describe the practices and processes leading to school effectiveness and improvement, ultimately improving student outcomes (ERO, 2016). The outcome indicators, on the other hand, were drawn from *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* to assess the impact of school policies and actions (ERO, 2016). With the new approach in place, *A Framework of School Improvement* is also introduced, providing continua for both process and outcome indicators so that schools can determine their position on that continuum and set goals for the three-year evaluation cycle (ERO, 2022c). Currently, schools and evaluation partners use all these documents.

Self-review, also known as school self-evaluation in most education systems, is an integral part of the education review process. During the 1990s, the ERO developed systems and procedures to help schools become more self-managing and move towards self-review. Several training sessions were organised and resources were created to enhance the schools' capacity to collect robust data and perform relevant analyses. In early 2008, the ERO introduced a complementary school evaluation model in which self-review and external evaluation complement each other (Mutch, 2014). Schools are encouraged to participate in various types of self-review (strategic,

²⁰ Student Achievement, Learning and Teaching; Assessment and Evaluation; leadership and Management; and Community Participation

²¹ Stewardship, leadership for equity and excellence, educationally powerful connections and relationships, responsive curriculum, effective teaching and opportunity to learn, professional capability and collective capacity, and evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building for improvement and innovation.

regular, and emergent), focusing on their current status, and using data as a routine activity to track progress towards goals and determine the next steps (Earl, 2014, p. 12). The recent evaluation approach places even greater emphasis on self-review. The ERO reviewers work as *evaluation partners* with the schools, and through evaluation, they help the schools identify areas for improvement, set goals and targets, and take actions to improve over time (ERO, 2021a, p. 24).

The development of review officers as professional evaluators is a top priority of the office. Generally, review officers have a successful educational background and many years of experience in teaching and leadership (ERO 2021a). Since 1992, all reviewers have been deemed generic instead of sectoral specialists (French, 2000).

The Education and Training Act 2020 states that one of the ERO's powers is to *report* the findings of its reviews to the Minister of Education and the community regarding schools and services that do not provide high-quality learning (ERO 2021b). However, Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce (2018) review criticised the ERO school reports for being used for marketing purposes, instead of creating healthy competition among schools. Under the new approach, the school evaluation report will be published after three years and will 'include information about the school's improvement journey towards equity and excellence in outcomes for all learners, the school's focus for improvement, and what the school has achieved for learners' (ERO, 2022d).

For over three decades, the ERO has undergone numerous revisions and adaptations concerning its practices and procedures, as part of its development as a public office. There has been a shift in the focus of ERO's review of schools, moving from self-management and accountability to continuous improvement, equity, and educational excellence. According to the ERO's strategic plan 2020 – 2024, 20% of New Zealand schools are considered *strong*, and the majority are *well placed*, accounting for 95% of student enrolment. Only in 8% of schools, areas of concern outweigh areas of effective practice (ERO, 2020, p.11). Similarly, due to the Pacific Education Strategy, the Pasifika Learners' Participation Plan, and measures taken to enhance the educational achievement of Māori students, 80.6% of Māori and 83% of Pasifika 15- to 24-year-olds had at least a level 1 qualification or equivalent (e.g., the School Certificate), compared with 85.8% of 15- to 24-year-olds nationally, according to the 2018 Census (Stats NZ, 2020).

Openshaw (2014) argues that the development of the entire system of school evaluation can be attributed to the Labour Government of that time, which adopted many recommendations from the Picot Task Force of 1987. The task force was established to review the management structures of school education and published its findings in Tomorrow's Schools Report. The task force, following the neoliberal approach of the government, recommended self-managing schools operating as autonomous business units with regular performance evaluations by the Education Review Office. Māori and Pasifika reviews were introduced to fulfil the government's obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi. ERO developed and grew over the next 30 years. However, under the current labour government, the whole approach to school evaluation has undergone a dramatic transformation, resulting in a new 'evaluation for improvement' approach that emphasises collaboration and co-design of evaluation process. This approach is responsive to the school's culture, context, and needs and is designed to foster increased ownership by schools of the entire process. Under this new less invasive and less coercive policy, instead of evaluating schools, the authorities will now evaluate with schools (Goodrick, 2022).

In summary, in New Zealand, every school has a three-year evaluation cycle, and during this period, every school will have an evaluation partner, who will support schools in building their self-evaluation capacity. Schools regularly self-evaluate their practices and develop and implement improvement plans, and at the end of three years, will evaluate the improvement they made during this time. In comparison to other jurisdictions such as England, a left-of-centre political agenda appears to be the key driver for the transformation of this evaluation approach. However, the impact of this new approach cannot be gauged at present, as it has only recently been introduced. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to suggest that the previous model contributed to improving the learning outcomes of Māori and Pasifika students.

Pakistan

The history of school inspection in Pakistan can be traced back to the third decade of the 19th century during British colonial times, when the East India Company started funding schools (Jaffar, 2010). The current system of school monitoring and supervision was established through the Education Sector Reforms of 2001-2004 when the Government of Pakistan introduced a Devolution Plan in 2001 and decentralised the education sector (Zafar, 2003).

In all provinces²², education up to higher secondary level²³ has been devolved to the district level since then (Government of Pakistan, 2002). Therefore, ‘the monitoring mechanism to supervise schools exists at the district level (Shah, 2009, p. 1). The District Education Officers (DEO)²⁴, for both Elementary²⁵ and Secondary²⁶ levels have a crucial role in monitoring the performance of schools (Shah, 2009) and the Assistant Education Officers (AEO) visit schools to support them as field staff. These positions are a part of the Department of Education and constitute the departmental or internal monitoring system aimed at keeping the schools functioning (Javed et al., 2021; Mahmood, 2017). However, almost a decade ago, Jaffer (2010) and Shah (2009) shared several reasons why this monitoring system is unproductive, and some of them have not improved ever since. In particular, recruitment criteria for these positions do not match the applicant’s expertise and experience with the functions of the position and constant political interference in the department’s administrative affairs. Moreover, duplication of roles, mandate overlap, and weak financial resource management negatively impact performance (World Bank Group, 2019).

The Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training (MOFEPT) recognised the need to set standards for educational inputs, processes, and outputs, and convened the Inter-Provincial Education Minister's Conference in 2016 to finalise minimum national standards for quality education to ensure uniformity across all provinces. After several inter-provincial consultative sessions, minimum quality standards were established for seven main dimensions: learners, teachers, curriculum, textbooks, assessment, and the school environment. This quality framework provides the provinces with the minimum standards of quality that they must provide to children in Pakistan (MOFEPT, 2017). However, there is limited information on whether this framework is shared with district education staff and schools, and whether it is

²² Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan

²³ Kindergarten – Class 12

²⁴ There are some variations in designations across the four provinces. Punjab- Chief Education officer, District Education Officer, Deputy Education Officer & Assistant Education officer
Sindh – District Education Officer & Taluka Education Officer
KPK & Baluchistan - District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officer & Assistant District Education Officer

²⁵ Classes 1 - 8

²⁶ Classes 9 & 10

guiding school supervision systems. This quality framework is not available on the websites of any provincial education department.

In parallel with internal supervision, another system of external monitoring was introduced initially in the province of Punjab under the Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme (PESRP) and later adopted by other provinces (Hathaway, 2005). The PESRP is mainly financed through domestic funding, and the World Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have also supported the government in the PESRP's reforms through several multi-year engagements (Mansoor, 2019). Among several steps taken to uplift the education sector in Punjab, the largest province in Pakistan, the Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU) was established in 2004 to oversee the progress of the PESRP.

At present, PMIU is implementing the Third Punjab Education Sector Project (PESP-III) in collaboration with the World Bank. The PMIU supervises and monitors school activities at the district and provincial levels through the Department of Education. At the district level, District Monitoring Officers (DMO) manage PMIU work with the help of field staff and Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants (MEA). The DMO's main responsibility is to oversee and manage MEAs and ensure high-quality data collection.

The MEAs' monitoring visits are unannounced, and they must visit 90% of the schools assigned to them every month. They collect data on student enrolment, attendance (teacher, student, and non-teaching staff), infrastructure functionality (school cleanliness, classroom, washroom, drinking water, furniture, electricity, the boundary wall), and utilisation of Non-Salary Budget (PESRP, 2020a). The data thus collected is being used for planning and preparing analytical reports for the policymakers as well as comparing the performance of districts in the province (Government of Punjab, 2018). Since 2014, instead of filling paper forms, MEAs have been provided with SIM-enabled tablets with the Education Management Information System application (App) installed in them. They can digitally submit school visit reports, and the PMIU has access to real-time data.

The focus of this monitoring system is mainly on checking the availability of facilities and teachers' attendance, but over a year, the MEAs have also been provided with assessment tasks on their Android devices using the Literacy and Numeracy Drive App, which is linked to a question bank that contains quizzes related to student learning outcomes, as outlined in the curriculum. The MEAs administer these assessments to a sample of grade 3 students in each school they visit to assess their learning (Government of Punjab, 2018). Although MEAs are not educationalists and have limited knowledge about the quality of education, they regularly report on schools. One of the most significant aspects of this initiative is its sustainability, as it has continued despite changes in political regimes. However, according to Chaudhry and Tajwar (2021), the emphasis on accountability has weakened since the change in government in 2018, and is gradually trickling down the system. Although data is still being collected, fewer actions are being taken based on this evidence.

The most recent measure in the school inspection system in Punjab is to strengthen the role of AEOs, and their primary responsibility has become to provide professional support to primary and Early Childhood Education teachers through lesson observation, mentoring, and feedback. A large number of AEOs have been trained by the Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED) in mentoring, coaching, and other pedagogical skills as a part of the PESP-III programme funded by the World Bank since its rollout in 2019 (PESRP, 2020). The AEOs are also provided with an App-based classroom observation tool where they record lesson observation data against eleven indicators²⁷ (PESRP, 2020b). The data collected were consolidated at the School Education Department dashboard. The other three provinces are also trying to follow the footsteps of Punjab.

Similarly, the Sindh Education Sector Reform Programme (SERP) is focused on improving access, equity, and quality in education by strengthening governance and institutionalising accountability in the provision and delivery of education services. The Monitoring and Evaluation section of the School Education Department was launched in 2015 through

²⁷ Sharing of lesson objectives, clarity and correctness of explanation of the content, relating content to student daily life experience, sharing of task expectations, effective questioning, monitoring of tasks, adjustment in teaching according to students' level, use of assessment for learning

an agreement signed between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), working in collaboration with the World Bank Group and the Government of Sindh (Government of Sindh, 2014).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the government has developed and approved an Education Sector Reform Plan and Roadmap to improve the quality of education in the province with the financial assistance of the United Kingdom agency known as the Department for International Development (DFID). An Independent Monitoring Unit (IMU) was launched in 2014 to improve teachers' attendance, basic facilities of schools, and check the dropout rate of students (Ali, 2014; Ali & Hussain, 2020), which was later converted into the Education Monitoring Authority (EMA) in 2018 working within the Department of Education through the EMA Act 2018.

The Government of Balochistan, through the Policy Planning and Implementation Unit (PPIU), has established an Education Monitoring unit to monitor the performance and implementation of initiatives carried out for the uplift of the education sector in the province (Government of Balochistan, 2015). The project has been implemented since 2014 with the financial support of UNICEF, and the Innovative Development Organisation (IDO) provides technical support to the education department in implementing, strengthening, and institutionalising Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) (Government of Balochistan, 2017).

The growth of accountability in school education in Pakistan through advanced information systems, according to Malik and Rose (2015), depends largely on the donor organisations' increased reliance on a results-based approach. Another crucial factor that cannot be ignored is the focus on educational policies and plans. Several reviews of education policies have iterated that, except for the National Education Policy 2009 (NEP), education policy discourse in Pakistan is focused on eradicating illiteracy, increasing retention rates from pre-school to grade 5, improving the transition rate from grade 5 to middle school, and emphasising the importance of higher education and religion (Ghaffar & Ambreen, 2003; Majoka & Khan, 2017; Roof David, 2015). Only the NEP 2009 acknowledges the need for monitoring and inspection systems. According to NEP (2009),

Provincial and district governments should establish monitoring and inspection systems to ensure quality education service delivery in all institutions (Government of Pakistan, 2009, p.20).

With no emphasis on quality assurance in education policy and when school monitoring and supervision are solely focused on the provision of facilities such as toilets, boundary walls, fans, and drinking water to fulfil the requirements of funding agencies, it will be challenging to see any significant improvements in learning. Furthermore, School self-evaluation is still a far cry from being used as a process to enhance educational quality and by association, school improvement planning also appears to be inconsistent across provinces. Despite this, there have been reports (e.g., Bari et al., 2013; Kayani et al., 2011; Nadeem & Saadi, 2019) that these monitoring and evaluation systems have improved school facilities in all provinces, leading to increased enrolment rates at both the primary and secondary levels and decreased teacher absenteeism. However, these monitoring visits can have high stakes for teachers, as financial penalties can be imposed if a teacher is absent without prior approval during the MEA visit (Chaudhry & Tajwar, 2019).

In summary, monitoring and education management staff of every district in Pakistan visit all public schools every month unannounced to evaluate schools' performance against a set of indicators. The political will of the ruling party and the funding agencies drive the school monitoring and supervision process. Finally, regular school monitoring and supervision have resulted in increased student enrolments, availability of basic facilities and improved teacher attendance.

Discussion and Conclusion

The countries that formed the basis for the analysis of inspection systems in this paper have unique systems for inspecting schools, as summarised in Table 4. These include for example, governance arrangements, the frequency of visits, reporting, and rewards and sanctions. Except for Pakistan, school inspections have a statutory status in all countries. In the case of Dubai and Pakistan, school inspection systems have developed over the last ten years, while in Ireland and New Zealand, the existing systems have been overhauled to meet changing needs. In New

Zealand, there has been a radical shift from event-based education reviews to an evaluation cycle in which the evaluated and evaluator work together, continually modifying practices and making changes to plans as they work towards school improvement. In New Zealand and Pakistan, reviewers and monitors are not specific to a sector or subject; however, in Dubai and Ireland, inspectors are specialists in their subject areas. Although inspection reports are publicly available in all four countries, their formats may differ. The inspection procedures in New Zealand and Pakistan are very different, as explained in previous sections of this paper, while in Ireland and Dubai, they do not vary significantly. Importantly, unlike in Dubai, there are no rewards or sanctions associated with inspection outcomes in Ireland.

The DSIB and ERO are independent agencies that work closely with the Ministry of Education of their respective countries. They adjust their goals according to national policies. The DSIB is based in Dubai and reports to the Executive Council through the KHDA. The ERO is based in a country that has a parliamentary system and reports directly to parliament. The Inspectorate in Ireland is housed within the Department of Education and works as a subsidiary office. All policy circulars and publications for the inspectorate in Ireland are managed under the umbrella of the Department of Education. In Pakistan, the Education Sector reforms of 2001-2004 delegated most of the operations to district-level education management, including school monitoring and evaluation.

Another important aspect of these systems is SSE and school improvement planning. In Dubai, Ireland and New Zealand, the inspectorates (ERO in the case of New Zealand) have developed SSE frameworks and guides to support schools in conducting reliable self-evaluations. However, in Pakistan, the SSE has not yet been established. The Dubai School Inspection Bureau has created a prescriptive SSE tool that schools must complete for inspection. In Ireland, despite having a well-developed inspection system, the Department of Education and Inspectorate prescribe what schools should focus on in their self-evaluation. Schools are still encouraged to collect and analyse data, but until the recent SSE cycle of 2022-2026, the focus was determined by the Department of Education. Even in the current cycle, schools are advised on priority areas from which to choose. Only in New Zealand do schools have the full autonomy to determine areas for improvement based on their data analysis and develop their own action plans.

As the context of each country is significantly different from the others, the drivers of school inspections and education reviews vary greatly. The consolidation of school monitoring services and development of Education Management Systems in all provinces of Pakistan can be attributed to funding from transnational agencies, such as the Asian Development Bank, European Union, DFID, and World Bank. These organisations demand tangible results to move to the next phase of the project and release further funding. The establishment of Education Management Information Systems and recruitment of school monitoring staff have provided access to real-time school monitoring data for funding agencies, district management, and education policymakers.

For the Dubai and Irish Education systems, performance in international evaluations such as PISA, TIMSS, and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) are important indicators of quality education. In Dubai, this is emphasised in the National Agenda, and both school inspection and self-evaluation are primarily focused on the results of these assessments. UAE private schools have achieved high standing in recent PISA and TIMSS assessments and have exceeded the National Agenda targets. The OECD evaluations appear to be the major driver of DSIB inspections, and the availability of resources has helped the city-state achieve its educational goals efficiently. In Ireland, the SSE system was established a decade ago in response to a decline in PISA performance, and schools were required to prioritise improvements in literacy and numeracy (Brown et al., 2017). Student achievement is also a key component of the National Quality Framework, and as an OECD member country, Ireland is strongly influenced by all OECD policies, including the development of a robust school evaluation system.

The New Zealand school evaluation system seems to have been originally driven by a neo-liberal political agenda, for example, the decisions taken in the light of the Picot Report 1987 and the Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce Report 2018 illustrate this. To some extent, it can be argued that the UNESCO Pacific Strategy may have influenced New Zealand's Pacific Strategy; therefore, the ERO has focused on the learning outcomes of Māori and Pasifika. In the 2009 PISA assessment, the New Zealand system was found to have, at least at the secondary level, high performance, but low equity, with Māori and Pasifika students overrepresented in the lowest achievement tier (Robinson et al., 2011). This led to a 'PISA shock,' and subsequently, the government announced a school policy proposal called 'Investing in Educational Success.' Under

the current government, the philosophy and conduct of inspections has changed radically. The emphasis now is firmly on collaborative in-house school evaluation, and the reputation that the country had as having a very robust and intrusive inspection model based on the OFSTED model in England has changed. This is an example of our earlier point that internal factors in any country, particularly political ones, have as much or more influence over inspection policies as the demands of external agencies.

To summarise, the influence of transnational agencies and international drivers on the growth of school inspection or evaluation systems cannot be denied, but equally, the local socio-political contexts have a significant impact. The DSIB inspections are built around national agenda points, and these national evaluation targets are given exclusive coverage in every school inspection report. In the case of Ireland, in order not to lose the support of powerful 'social' partners i.e. teachers' unions, the inspection practices and procedures are negotiated which is why the school inspection system in Ireland has never been 'high-stakes.' On the other hand, the ERO's existence and the recent development of collaborators in school evaluation and improvement are indebted to left-of-centre governance. Frequent changes in governments with varying political manifestos in Pakistan hinder the consistency of school monitoring and supervision despite funders' requirements.

From all this, we argue that some kind of common worldwide inspection system will emerge in time. In other words, the countries studied here converge into very similar systems. This is probably not the case for the reasons mentioned above. However, we can say that very similar themes, practices, and processes are to be found in all four and indeed in most countries, and these are likely to further develop. As noted in their earlier respective sections of this paper, these inspection (or evaluation/monitoring) systems have been successful in generating knowledge and creating an atmosphere of accountability. Data collection and use to guide policy and practice are common themes. All four countries have developed mechanisms to use the findings of inspection, education review or monitoring to contribute to decision-making. The ERO's national annual reports, Chief Inspector's reports in Ireland, and the DSIB annual reports are one such mechanisms that allow the findings of evaluation to feed into the development of policy, curriculum design, teachers and school leaders' professional development and school operations. In Pakistan, real-time data guide decision making at the district and provincial levels. Another common theme, apart from Pakistan, which is in the early stages of evaluation

development, is giving schools and teachers a role in school evaluation and planning through school self-evaluation systems.

All of this is quite remarkable given that a mere couple of decades ago school inspection was largely confined to a small number of countries and was mainly concerned with checking compliance with rules and in some cases observing the performance of teachers. Now however, school inspection is a feature of educational governance in virtually every country and while differing substantially according to local requirements, exhibits as our paper illustrates a remarkable commonality of themes, policies and processes.

Table 4: Organisation of School Inspection - Similarities and Differences

	Legislative footing	Governance arrangements	Frequency of school inspection visits	Quality Framework	Common inspection procedures	Notification duration	Reporting	Rewards/sanctions
Dubai	Executive Council Law No. 30 for KHDA and Law No. 38 for DSIB in 2007	KHDA is an independent public institution	Yearly	UAE School Inspection Framework 2015-2016	Lesson observation and feedback to teachers, meetings with stakeholders, document scrutiny, parents and students' questionnaire survey	Three days	All school inspection reports are available on the KHDA website	Schools with Outstanding ranking can increase their fee (a percentage decided by the KHDA)
Ireland	Education Act 1998 Section 13	School inspectorate is a subsidiary institution of the Department of Education	A sample of schools is selected ranging from schools with significant strengths and schools with significant weaknesses ²⁸ .	Looking at Our School 2022	Lesson observation and feedback to teachers, meetings with stakeholders, document review, parents and students' questionnaire survey	Ten days in case of WSE	All school inspection reports are available on the Department of Education website	A good school inspection report is a reward.
New Zealand	The Education Act 1989 Sections Part 28	ERO is an independent institution outside the Ministry of Education	Three years evaluation cycle	School Evaluation Indicators 2016 & School Improvement Framework 2022	As decided by the Principal and the Evaluation Partner	Negotiated between Principal and the Evaluation Partner	All school review reports are available on the ERO website	High performing schools are visited less frequently
Pakistan	An initiative of the provincial governments as a part of whole-system reforms to their education system	In all provinces monitoring units are a part of the Department of Education	Monthly	Minimum standards of quality	School visit to complete the audit checklist and get it signed by school principal/Head	Unannounced , surprise visit	School monitoring report once submitted is available on the monitoring unit/Education Department's website and becomes a part of monitoring unit data-base	Districts are rated on the basis of how schools perform against the indicators Teacher found absent from duty are fined or given show cause notices

²⁸ A GUIDE TO Inspection in Primary Schools
Pre-Examination Copy

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest in relation to the study undertaken for this paper.

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Chapter five: Publication Two

School Inspections: A rhetoric of quality or reality?

Sarah Gardezi, Gerry McNamara, Martin Brown, Joe O'Hara

Abstract

This study aims to explore the perspectives of school inspectors and leaders on the quality of school inspection in four countries with different inspection systems: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. The study also examines the general perceptions of school leaders and inspectors about the impact of quality assurance agencies on teaching and learning in these countries. Using semi-structured interviews of school leaders (n=28) and inspectors (n=14), the research found that school leaders' experiences and perceptions of school inspection and evaluation were varied in and across all four countries. While some expressed dissatisfaction with the inspectors and the process, others regarded it as a beneficial endeavour that instilled a sense of vigilance and attentiveness towards the quality standards and inspection criteria. School leaders' experiences and perceptions were mostly positive in Dubai and mixed in the cases of Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan. Furthermore, the study found a negative correlation between the perception of school leaders and inspectors regarding the quality of inspection practices and their perception of the impact of inspection. Thus, it is imperative to establish improved avenues of communication to facilitate heightened awareness among school leaders regarding the efficacy of inspectors' work and the comprehensive measures implemented by inspectorates to ensure the quality of their own practices. This initiative will foster enhanced trust between school leaders and inspectors, consequently amplifying the overall influence of school inspections.

Keywords: school inspection, evaluation, quality assurance, quality, school leaders, school inspectors.

Introduction

The process of appraising and assuring the quality of education provision exists as school inspection or evaluation in most of the education regimes across the globe (Hofer et al., 2020; Penninckx et al., 2016). Although there is considerable variability in the processes used to hold schools accountable for the quality of education, external evaluation through school inspection

is a predominant method of measuring education quality in Europe and the Pacific regions, as noted by Behnke and Steins (2017). Similarly, in several Asian countries influenced by British or European systems, school inspection serves as a major instrument of quality assurance (Gardezi et al., 2023). The growth of school inspection over the past two decades can be attributed to various social, political, and economic factors. According to Gardezi et al. (2023), these factors include the economic crisis of 2008, the adoption of new management policies and neoliberalism, the comparative evaluation of education systems such as the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), the result-based approach of transnational funding agencies like the World Bank, EU, and UNICEF, and the local socio-political contexts of countries. The economic crisis prompted countries to invest in human capital and monitor the development of future citizens (Brown et al., 2016a). Neoliberal and New Public Management approaches decentralised control and granted schools autonomy, while paradoxically leading to the implementation of stringent governance measures, including school inspection and standardised examinations, to maintain educational quality (Brown et al., 2016b). Funding agencies require rigorous monitoring systems to track ongoing progress as a prerequisite for releasing funds for education-related initiatives (Malik & Rose, 2015). For example, the revival of the school monitoring system in Pakistan is an outcome of such initiatives. In countries like Ireland and Dubai, performance in PISA serves as a driving factor (Brown et al., 2017; UAE, 2015).

Whatever the driver, school inspection or external evaluation has become a popular mechanism of quality assurance (determining *what* is good and *what* should be improved) and quality improvement (providing inspiration for *how* things can be improved) in education (Mac Ruairc, 2019). Hossain (2018) argues that it is a core institutional mechanism to assess the quality of education and according to Gustafsson et al. (2015), it holds schools accountable for a broad range of goals related to the quality of student achievement, teaching organisation and leadership (p. 47). Elsewhere school inspection is also defined as an activity meant to collect information about the quality of schools, check compliance with legislation and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning (Eddy-Spice et al., 2016, p.16). The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has repeatedly stressed the importance of effective school inspection in its publications. Such inspections provide schools with crucial feedback to improve their practices and drive change, shaping schools' decision-making processes and leading to continuous improvement in student learning (OECD, 2022).

Similarly, the mission statement of the inspectorate of Northern Ireland encapsulates the typical quality claim of many inspectorates as providing ‘an unbiased, independent, professional assessment of the quality of learning and teaching, including the standards achieved by learners’ (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2022, para. 3). Commitment to quality reverberates not only in the definition and mission statements but also in all the documents published online or in print pertaining to school inspection or evaluation across the globe.

Although several studies establish a direct link between school inspection and national education policy (see, for example, Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2017; Baxter, 2017), which is intended to assure and promote the effectiveness and quality of an education system at the system-level, there are also studies that highlight unintended consequences of school inspections, both, as it were, philosophical/ political and practical. The former tend to suggest that accountability systems come from a right-wing worldview, are demeaning of professional autonomy and thus tend to de-professionalise schools and teachers, while the latter focus on unintended consequences at the school level. In the case of the former the extent of the debate precludes a detailed treatment in a paper of this length. Suffice it to say that such criticisms have had a definite impact in challenging high stakes forms of school inspection in the minority of countries where they exist but have largely failed to stem the rising ubiquity of inspection as a moderate tool of school governance and control and a mechanism for improvement in many countries (McNamara et al., 2022; Ozga & Lawn, 2014).

The unintended consequences at school level include practices like window dressing, fabrication of documentation, and playing the game, which stem from accountability pressure (De Wolf & Janssens, 2007; Ehren et al., 2016; Penninckx, 2017; Penninckx et al., 2016). However, other studies present external pressure exerted through school inspection as a stimulus for positive change in schools (Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2017; Perryman, 2010; Van Bruggen, 2010). To achieve quality improvement in schools through school inspection, it is crucial for well qualified professionals to provide quality feedback and recommendations for improvement. The perceptions of school leaders regarding the quality of school inspectors play a vital role in the acceptance of feedback and its successful implementation in practice.

School inspection, as can be seen, is an appraisal of the quality of the overall performance of schools, but to be an appraiser, one needs to have requisite skills, qualifications, qualities and thorough knowledge of inspection procedures to conduct the review. Furthermore, the acceptance of the outcome of the appraisal depends largely on the appraisee's perceptions of the appraiser's quality and the credibility of the process (Reidy, 2020). This paper maps out these notions of appraisal onto the school inspection systems and quality assurance measures of the inspectorates and the perceptions of school leaders in four countries across the globe: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan. The study also aims to examine the general perceptions of school leaders and inspectors about the impact of quality assurance agencies on teaching and learning, using semi-structured interviews with both groups in these countries. It is an altogether novel aspect as generally, empirical studies on school inspection focus on the effects of school inspection (De Wolf & Janssens, 2007; Ehren et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Penninckx et al., 2016), the role of school self-evaluation in external evaluation (Chapman & Sammons, 2013; Brown et al., 2017; Macbeath, 2006; McNamara et al., 2022; McNamara et al., 2011) or school inspectors' roles and responsibilities (Baxter, 2017; Baxter & Hult, 2017; Penninckx & Vanhoof, 2017). It is essential to know that in Dubai and Ireland, this institution is called inspection; in New Zealand, evaluation, while in Pakistan, it is called monitoring and supervision. Lexically, the terms may be different, but in the context of these countries, these terms refer to quality assurance procedures.

These inspection systems were deliberately selected for they vary widely in terms of their approaches and procedures. While each system is unique in how it organises inspections, the ultimate goal remains the same: to ensure quality of education. For instance, the Dubai Inspection Bureau adopts a strict regime that rewards or sanctions schools based on their inspection outcomes, whereas the Irish inspection systems does not grade schools or follow up with return cycles. Instead, it only provides reports on what is working well and what needs improvement in a school. In Pakistan, monitoring and supervision involve frequent visits to schools with real-time data collection and high-level data review. Conversely, the new approach to school evaluation in New Zealand is more of an oversight of self-evaluation rather than external evaluation (Gardezi et al., 2023). Unlike other studies that include the viewpoint of either school leaders or school inspectors, the present study investigates both the perspectives and opinions of school inspectors and leaders on the quality of school inspection, within the context of these diverse case studies. The research aims to address the following questions:

- What do inspectorates do to ensure the quality of their practices and procedures?
- What are the general perceptions of school leaders about the quality of inspection practices and inspectors?
- Is there a gap between the perceptions of school leaders regarding the quality of inspection and those of the school inspectors themselves?

This paper begins by providing an overview of quality measures that the inspectorates undertake in these four countries to manage their own quality and establish their credibility based on an exploration of their official documents, website and literature. This is followed by an account of the methods employed to carry out this research and the analysis of the perceptions of school leaders and inspectors of the quality of school inspection. A critical discussion on the gaps in how school inspection is perceived and experienced by those who inspect and others who are inspected concludes this paper.

1.1 An overview of quality assurance practices of Inspectorates in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan

School inspection, evaluation or monitoring, as it is called in these case study countries, is a well-established practice. In the case of Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan, school inspection dates back to the nineteenth century, while in Dubai, it is a little over a decade old (Gardezi et al., 2023). In Dubai, the quality assurance agency is called Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB); in Ireland, the Inspectorate and in New Zealand, the Education Review Office (ERO). While in Pakistan, there are two parallel systems within the Department of School Education in all four provinces²⁹: one led by the District Education Authority³⁰ (supervision and monitoring) and the other the Monitoring and Implementation Unit (monitoring and data collection). These systems and the various positions that comprise them have slightly different nomenclature in the four provinces, but to avoid thickened expression, we have used the taxonomy of the largest

²⁹ Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa & Balochistan

³⁰ Punjab: a. Chief Education Officer, District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officer, Assistant Education officer. B. Policy Implementation and Monitoring Unit – Monitoring & Evaluation Assistants

Sindh: a. Director Education (schools), District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officer, Sub-divisional Education officer & Taluka Education Officer. b. Directorate of Monitoring and Evaluation – Field Monitors

KPK: a. Director Education (schools), District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officer, Assistant Sub-Divisional Education Officer & Assistant District Education Officer. B. KP Education Monitoring Authority – Data Collection and Monitoring Assistant

Balochistan: a. Director Education (schools), District Education Officer & Assistant District Education Officer. b. Policy Planning and Implementation Unit – School Monitors

province, Punjab. All these systems (Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan) are essentially different concerning how school evaluation activity is organised and managed even though the focus remains on the quality of education provision. On the basis of the initial review of the literature and document analysis, including the official websites, the quality assurance practices of these agencies are studied and reported under the following themes: Inspectors' selection criteria, induction and professional development, quality of inspection practices, quality framework and other supporting documents and the quality assurance of the inspection systems.

1.1.1 Dubai

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and its subsidiary Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) have several internal mechanisms for assuring the quality of their practices and procedures. Their quality assurance process begins with the recruitment of school inspectors. All inspectors must have teaching and school leadership experience, some knowledge of assessment data analysis and report writing together with other professional competencies such as communication, problem solving and conflict resolution skills. On induction, the novice inspectors receive training based on their skills through mentoring and shadowing a senior inspector. Inspectors are also given extensive orientation on the software system that the inspectors use, the school inspection framework and processes (KHDA, 2018). The inspectors also have opportunities for professional support while liaising with the other experts on the teams.

The school inspection framework lays the foundations of the quality and standards that the inspectorate expects schools to achieve and guides inspectors' work. The framework also outlines the code of conduct for the inspectors and schools during the inspection. Every inspection team has a quality assurance inspector who reviews and checks the reliability of judgements and any issues relating to the code of conduct while onsite (DSIB, 2010). Additionally, KHDA, at any time, may review the quality of an inspection and the outcomes. This quality assurance review involves a small team of inspectors visiting a school after the school-based part of the inspection (KHDA, 2014, p.11). Every attempt is made to ensure transparency at all stages of the school inspection process and the inspection outcome (KHDA, 2015). School inspection reports are published on the KHDA website and are accessible to the general public. Schools that achieve a good inspection grade are allowed to increase their fee by a certain percentage (Gardezi et al., 2023).

1.1.2 Ireland

The Irish Inspectorate is privileged to be one of the long-established inspectorates in Europe, and historically school inspectors in Ireland were held in high esteem with the title used for them, 'cigire' implying awe and respect (Brown et al., 2018). In continuation of that tradition, school inspectors' selection criteria are quite stringent even today. The applicants for the post of school inspector must have a first or second-class honours degree, some experience in teaching, school leadership, school support services, curriculum design and/or assessment practices and education research (Government of Ireland, 2022). The Inspectorate has developed comprehensive training, induction and mentoring programmes to build up and maintain evaluation expertise among serving inspectors. As a part of their long-term professional development, the inspectorate funds inspectors' post-graduate study and research related to the work of the Inspectorate (Hislop, 2022, p. 75). Also, inspectors are encouraged to attend or participate in International Conferences (Coolahan & Devonan, 2009).

The Department of Education Inspectorate (DEI), with the aid of guides to school inspection (2022a, 2022b) and quality framework, *Looking at Our School* (DEI, 2022c, 2022d), provides guidelines about the inspectors' work (pre-, while and post-inspection). The functions of the school inspectorate are also stated in the Education Act 1998 Section 13. The DEI has recently published a revised code of practice that includes general principles and standards, which guide the inspector's work besides serving as a benchmark to assess the quality of their professional practice (DEI, 2022e). The school evaluation procedures in Ireland are subject to national audits, according to Perry (2013). The DEI invites external experts to review aspects of their work, for instance, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in Northern Ireland was invited to review the inspectorate's work in the School Excellence Fund, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme and the e-Hub project (Hislop, 2022).

As mentioned in the Guide to School Inspection, the school inspection report published on the DEI website follows definitive steps and quality checks, starting from verbal feedback to the school management team and the first draft of the report sent to the school for factual verification right through until its confirmation by the school. There is also a documented review procedure in case a teacher, board of management of a school, practitioner, manager, or owner of an education centre is dissatisfied with an aspect of the inspection or with the inspection

report (DEI, 2022f). The DEI takes all these measures to ensure that the evaluation of educational provision is conducted in a fair, consistent, and transparent manner.

1.1.3 New Zealand

The Education Review Officers now also called the Evaluation Partners³¹ are recruited for the quality of their judgements, their analytical skills, knowledge of the curriculum, oral and written communication skills, and their ability to effectively relate to others (ERO, 2021a). Since 1992 within the ERO corporate office, development centres for the assessment and training of reviewers have been established (French, 2000). Simon (2013) during her visit to the ERO regional offices observed that a large number of reviewers had completed an evaluation Diploma and were familiar with various theories and methods of evaluation. Some were in transition from teacher and adviser to the evaluator role. Prior to joining the ERO, they all have substantial experience in teaching and school management (ERO, 2021b). The Education Review Officer Position Statement (ERO, 2021a) clearly defines the role specifications, responsibilities, and individual and team profiles of the reviewers. Additionally, the ERO evaluation capabilities framework (ERO, 2021c), Code of Conduct (ERO, 2021d) and Principles of Practice (ERO, 2021e) outline the expected level of professionalism that an evaluation partner should demonstrate during high-quality evaluations and assure the transparency in the evaluation processes.

Quite similar to Ireland, the ERO publishes several supporting documents to steer the school evaluation process. Along with the framework of School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success, schools are provided with, Guidelines for Board Assurance Statement and Self-audit Checklists (BAS), Education Now³² and A Framework of School Improvement. The evaluation indicators explain the processes and practices that contribute to the school's effectiveness and improvement, the BAS assists schools to be aware of and meet their legal obligations while the framework of school improvement enables the schools to mark their journey towards improvement during the evaluation cycle (ERO, 2016, 2022a, 2022b). On the ERO website, a number of other research-based publications are

³¹ The ERO has changed their evaluation approach instead of periodic and event-based evaluation, evaluation partners (formerly called reviewers) foster an ongoing relationship with schools assigned to them to support school self-evaluation and improvement. They work in a more collaborative way with schools to tailor approaches to school context and need (Goodrick, 2020).

³² Survey instruments with questions aligned to the *School Evaluation Indicators (2016)* to gather the perspectives of leaders, teachers, students and whānau

available for schools, for instance, National Reports, to consult and learn about the best practices in the area.

In the recently introduced collaborative evaluation approach, there are several key stages during the three-year evaluation cycle. At the conclusion of each key stage, a short summary report will be prepared, which will contribute to the final report. All reports are prepared collaboratively with the school involved (Goodrick, 2020). The ERO's work is regularly reviewed by external evaluators. In 2018, the Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce conducted a review that led to the transformation of the ERO's approach to school inspection, resulting in the current low-stakes collaborative process that is now being utilised.

1.1.4 Pakistan

In all four provinces, on induction, the school-monitoring staff are provided with an android tablet, which has a school-monitoring App connected with the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the monitoring units' websites to record and report real-time data about schools. Each Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant (MEA) undergoes an orientation session on the data-collection application, followed by a mentorship arrangement with a senior colleague who provides guidance on data collection procedures during school visits and appropriate conduct when interacting with school personnel. Except for Punjab, where MEAs are often retired Junior Commissioned Army Officers (Munawar et al., 2020), school monitoring staff can be fresh graduates and are recruited through the Public Service Commission³³ of the respective province. They are responsible for collecting information on the given set of indicators³⁴. As far as the second stream is concerned, recently the selection criteria for the Assistant Education Officer (AEO) were revised. According to the job postings, the incumbent must have a master's degree; they have to take a written test followed by an interview to qualify for the position. In most cases, they must have some teaching experience. In Punjab, besides orientation of the role and responsibilities, the AEOs are trained for lesson observation, giving feedback to teachers and coaching and mentoring (PESRP, 2020a).

³³ Public Service Commission (PSC) is a government agency responsible for hiring and administering the provincial civil services and management services. Every province in Pakistan has a separate PSC.

³⁴ Building availability, Building occupation, Classroom and room types, Teaching staff details, Non-teaching staff details, Enrolment-attendance gap, Administrative visits, Delivery of textbooks, Stipends, Basic facilities, Parent-teacher council funds.

Despite a joint framework for minimum standards of quality available on the website of the Federal Ministry of Education (MOFEPT), every province has its own set of indicators to monitor and evaluate schools (MOFEPT, 2017; PESRP, 2020b). Generally, the User Guides for the school monitoring staff or documents or circulars pertaining to school evaluation are not available on the websites of the departments of education. However, among the quality indicators for which MEAs gather data, one pertains to the frequency of visits conducted by officials from the education department (PESRP, 2020b, RTSM Statistics, 2019). It is a part of the quality assurance mechanism to record the professional support visits by the District Education Officers (DEO), Deputy DEO and AEO of schools. Higher authorities such as the Education Department at the provincial Secretariat, Directorate of Education (Schools) and divisional Directors or CEO's access and view these EMIS dashboards and are constantly aware of what is happening at schools. Likewise, the MEAs' monthly visits are documented and recorded in the EMIS. During these visits, the Global Positioning System (GPS) data of the school is downloaded, which serves as a means of verifying that the MEA has actually visited the school. This helps ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the MEA's visitation records. (School Education Department, Government of Balochistan [GoB], 2017). The real-time school monitoring information enables education officials to make immediate and informed decisions and address any situation based on the key findings (GoB, 2022). Additionally, the User Guides of the monitoring system across provinces have a professional code of practice for the monitoring staff (User Guide Independent Monitoring Unit, KPK, 2014).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design and gathered data through three distinct methods: (1) analysis of official documents obtained from relevant websites, (2) a review of existing academic literature, and (3) qualitative interviews with stakeholders including school principals and school inspectors (referred to as evaluation partners in New Zealand and School Monitors and District Education Management officials in Pakistan). Among the school staff, principals were specifically selected for this study because they are the key actors in preparing the school for inspection, facilitating the inspection process when the inspection team is onsite, facing either positive or negative consequences of the inspection and implementing changes in response to the inspection (Altrichter, 2017). Principals' interviews provided insights into their views of the inspection process and the competence of inspectors while, interviews with the

members of the inspectorate were conducted to gain understanding of their approach to quality procedures and how they are implemented in practice. The sample consisted of principals ($n = 28$), school inspectors and inspection experts ($n = 14$) from the four case-study countries.

A purposeful stratified sampling technique was employed for this study. The sample was selected based on two main strata: geographical location and the level of classes taught at the school. An equal number of primary and post-primary school principals were included in the sample, with a roughly equal representation of rural and urban areas from the case-study countries with the exception of Dubai. In the case of Pakistan, school leaders from all four provinces were included in the sample.

Clearly, such small samples could not hope to be entirely representative. Therefore, a purposeful sample was chosen using the following criteria: school type, recent engagement in an inspection within the past two years, and having undertaken some study in this area at a Higher Education Institution (HEI), indicating knowledge and interest in this field. These criteria and respondents were identified with the help of colleagues in each country. As for the inspectors, they were identified through contacts in the education ministries or HEIs in each country.

The interviewees' identities are anonymised by assigning them codes for the purpose of sharing their responses in the presentation and analysis section. Each interviewee is coded with a unique identifier, an alphanumeric code according to their country and position (for example, school leader and school inspector in Dubai – DBSL1 & DBSI1; Ireland – IESL1 & IESI1; New Zealand – NZSL1 & NZEP1; and Pakistan – PKSL1 & PKSI1). The first part of the code represents their country of origin and the second their position. However, due to a large number of designations of monitoring and supervisory roles in Pakistan, the code PKSI is used for all of them.

Document appraisal was guided by Scott's (2006) selection criteria: Authenticity, Credibility, Representativeness and Meaning. All documents were accessed from the official websites of quality assurance agencies and other relevant departments, ensuring their authenticity and accurate representation of the department's perspective. The information provided was clear and comprehensible. Document analysis was employed exclusively as a methodological

approach to develop the interview protocol and to shed light on the operational procedures of school inspections, as well as the strategies implemented by these inspection systems to ensure and regulate their own quality. The academic literature, official documents and reports were reviewed and analysed to identify the four primary themes that informed the development of the interview questions and subsequent analysis of the interview data. In total, nine sub-themes emerged from the analysis.

Table 5: Interview questions and Conceptual labels for Cross Case Analysis

Themes	Interview Questions	Conceptual Labels
Quality of school inspectors	How did you begin your career? In what way has your prior experience informed your work as an inspector/evaluation partner/ MEA and District Education Officials? What induction or CPD programmes are in place for inspectors/ evaluation partners/? How competent do you think school inspectors are?	● Background experience of school inspectors evaluation partners/ monitoring and supervision staff ● Induction and CPD programmes for inspectors ● Competencies and skills ● Concerns about the quality of school inspectors/evaluation partners/ monitoring and supervision staff
Quality of inspection practices	What are the key principles that guide and govern the work of inspectors/ evaluation partners/ MEA and District Education Officials? What are the functions of school inspectors/ MEA and District Education Officials? How has the school evaluation practice developed/changed over time in your country? With regard to the focus of school evaluation, main dimensions of quality review, inspection procedures that are followed, Inspectors' selection and training, and inspectors' role. What are the inspectorate/ERO/ MEA and District Education Office's internal systems of quality assurance? What activities have the inspectors/evaluation partners/ MEA and District Education Officials been involved in while at your school? In your opinion, what needs to be done to improve the quality of school inspection/evaluation/monitoring and supervision (to make it more useful for school improvement)?	● Quality of inspection procedures ● Internal quality assurance mechanism ● Quality of feedback and reporting
Quality of inspection documents (quality framework, SSE guides and other documents)	How useful do you find the quality framework and other documents and publications of the inspectorate/ERO?	● Quality of inspection documents and instruments
Impact of school inspection	What impact does inspection/evaluation/monitoring and supervision have on the quality of teaching and learning in your school/your country?	● Impact of school inspection

Interviews with school principals, inspectors, and inspection experts were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A reflexive thematic analysis was performed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach, which allows for a flexible approach and recognises the researcher's subjective experiences as the main instrument for interpreting and organising data. The researcher

adopted a deductive approach, following the steps including: reading and re-reading the transcripts, organising relevant texts under the themes, reviewing and refining the themes into sub-themes and finally, using the data extracts to construct the analytic narrative. The steps were taken in sequence and each stage was based on the previous one, but the analysis was a typical recursive process and underwent several iterations.

Findings and Results

3.1 Theme 1: Quality of School Inspectors/Evaluation Partners/Monitoring and Supervision Staff

Most of the school inspectors we interviewed are seasoned professionals with experience spanning two or more decades, except for MEAs whose monitoring experience ranges from three to five years. Nevertheless, as stated by an MEA, the frequent visitation of 50 to 60 schools each month, coupled with the repetitive nature of their tasks, enhances their proficiency in executing their duties because their fundamental responsibility revolves around a checkbox approach, assessing the presence and functionality of essential facilities such as boundary walls, power supply, and drinking water within schools. Their role basically entails updating this information within the designated application, without necessitating extensive intellectual decision-making processes. MEAs primarily observe and document pertinent information during their visits. The school leaders also have extensive experience in their field. In the case of Dubai, some school leaders have even experienced the first KHDA inspection in 2009. One of the school leaders said, 'I have experienced the first Inspection also but as a science head of the department, it was in 2009 and since then every year' (DBSL1).

3.1.1 Background experience of school inspectors/evaluation partners/ monitoring and supervision staff

School inspectors with an educational background can definitely have firsthand knowledge and understanding of the educational context and challenges faced by school leaders and teachers. During the onsite visit, they can comfortably engage in conversations with students, observe lessons and the overall environment of the classrooms and school. Their experience, as can be expected, enables them to make informed judgments, provide relevant feedback, and offer practical recommendations that are grounded in the realities of the classroom, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and credibility of the inspection process (Lindgren, 2015). In the case study countries, the school inspectors, evaluators and supervisory staff interviewed had an educational background and many of them were former school principals.

Evaluation Partners from the ERO shared their prior experience, with one saying, ‘I was the principal of a secondary school before I joined the ERO,’ (NZE3) and another saying, ‘I moved to ERO from being a teacher, head of a department and deputy principal’ (NZE1). One of the DSIB inspectors informed the interviewer that she ‘joined the education sector as a teacher, then became a vice principal and school principal’ (DBSI1). Another inspector had a different background starting as an English teacher for middle and senior classes, then becoming the head of the department of English (DBSI2). Irish inspectors referred to their prior experience as school principals, assistant principals, educational psychologists and teacher trainers (IESI2, IESI3). A staff member from a district education office in Pakistan mentioned taking the Public Service Commission examination for BPS-16 and being inducted into Special Education - Slow Learners Institute. After four years, she qualified for the post of DDEO through an interview (PKSI4). Most AEOs in Pakistan were former teachers for varying lengths of time, with years of service ranging from one to five years. However, an AEO from Sindh province shared that she was directly appointed as a ‘supervisor’ for 41 small village schools (PKSI3). In contrast, the monitoring assistants had diverse backgrounds, including retired JCOs in the army, training facilitator in the Human and Social Development Centre, and teachers (PKSI1, PKSI2, PKSI5, PKSI6).

3.1.2 Induction and CPD programmes for the inspectors

Professional development helps individuals to improve their skills, knowledge, and abilities so that they can perform their professional responsibilities diligently. It also refers to staying up to date on new trends within their field (Collin et al., 2012). This may include induction, which familiarises new hires with the job expectations of their role, the work environment, and the organisation's policies. Additionally, professional development also involves on-the-job experiential learning and staying current with advancements in the field.

In all four countries, the school inspection, evaluation, monitoring and supervisory staff undergo induction and professional development throughout their career. The school inspectors from DSIB stated, ‘We have a very professional group of inspectors and a training programme that prepares the inspectors for their inspections with training held annually for all inspectors’ (DBSI2). The other inspector added, ‘New inspectors don’t inspect schools directly, but shadow a senior peer and receive proper training and induction before inspecting independently’ (DBSI1). The inspectors from Ireland briefed that they have an ‘Intensive induction and training period that includes in-school work monitored carefully by experienced inspectors’ and have ‘mandatory CPD multiple times per year,’ as well as receiving specialised CPD for new models

and specialised inspections (IESI1). All ERO evaluation partners explained almost identical training and induction procedures for new team members. One senior evaluation partner described the induction process as follows:

When new evaluation partners join the team, they first observe the senior evaluation partners and their work. They familiarise themselves with the process of ERO and are attached to a seasoned evaluation partner who provides support and guidance during their induction period, which typically takes six months. As part of the induction process, the new partners are involved in the evaluation process and receive feedback on their performance (NZEP2).

Like in the other three countries, monitoring and supervision staff in Pakistan also receive intensive training when joining these roles. A monitoring assistant reported attending a training session with other MEAs, 'We learned how we will collect data, conduct ourselves in schools, and interact with teachers' (PKSI1). The district education staff, such as AEOs, informed that they receive a comprehensive two-month induction training covering a broad range of topics including school record-keeping, addressing out-of-school children, school environment, early childhood education, departmental rules, and administration of school funds.

3.1.3 Competencies and skills

The school leaders were asked about the quality of school inspectors, evaluation partners and the monitoring and supervision staff and they generally spoke highly of the inspectors' professional acumen. Phrases like these came up repeatedly during the interviews when school leaders talked about inspectors' professionalism and competencies, 'KHDA is hiring cream from all over the world' (DBSL1), 'in my opinion they were first class really' (IESL5) and 'very experienced and extremely good at looking at the whole school' (IESL1). 'They're well informed in terms of trends and things that are impacting schools at this time' (NZSL1).

Nevertheless, these remarks were punctuated with comments such as, 'They are experienced, but in a given situation, they could be harsh, or they could be unacceptable' (DBSL2). Another related their competence to the repetitive nature of their work, 'They become competent gradually as they keep doing the same tasks year after year' (PKSL6).

3.1.4 Concerns about the quality of school inspectors/evaluation partners/ monitoring and supervision staff

Though school leaders acknowledged that that school inspectors and evaluation partners are competent and skillful, they also expressed their concerns about the quality or attitude of the school inspectors. Many school leaders from Ireland and New Zealand referred to school inspectors (evaluation partners) as being teachers and lacking experience in leading schools. 'The lady, who's working with us, has never been a school leader. She's been a middle leader in a large school, which is fine, and she's done the appropriate training and has all those tools and the acuity in her bag but actually not having worked at that level, there is a risk of getting lost in bureaucracy, rather than actually focusing on the functionality of a school on a day-to-day basis' (NZSL4). A school principal in Ireland shared a similar observation, 'I know that a lot of the inspectors have been extremely fantastic and good teachers, but I haven't met many [inspectors] who have led a school. I think there should be more principals in the inspectorate' (IESL5). This is a very common theme and it would seem to make a great deal of sense to hire or at least second experienced school leaders to the inspectorate.

A school leader in a Dubai school spoke about inspectors' outdated perspective on teaching and learning, 'They're mostly very old people, and they don't like technology. They don't understand it and they are not interested' (DBSL5).

Most of the Pakistani school leaders interviewed complained about the fault-finding attitude of the school supervision personnel. A school leader of a rural town said, 'If it is a rainy day, they [MEAs] will come to check the student attendance and state of cleanliness and report, but they never bother to ask how a school leader is maintaining cleanliness without cleaning staff' (PKSL9). 'Though some of them take an interest in teaching and learning, they visit classes and ask questions of the students to get a general impression of their learning, many merely look at the cleanliness of the school and classroom displays' (PKSL6). One school principal, for example criticised the school supervisors for completely ignoring the 'ground realities of schools' (PKSL4).

With the new evaluation model in place, the school leaders in New Zealand also had several reservations and underscored the variability of competence among the evaluation partners.

‘As in any organisation, there will be a bell curve shape of competence within ERO. I think there is a risk that people who don't fully understand the complexities of the art of evaluation will cause some harm and make some mistakes’ (NZSL5).

Knowing the evaluation partner as a colleague also came up as another reason for not viewing them favourably ‘ABC [name of place anonymised] is a small area and so some of the people coming into the review team you may have even worked with previously in other schools. So, unfortunately, there is that little bit of bias and prejudice that might sit in your head’ (NZSL2).

In the case of Ireland, ‘rigidity’, ‘inflexible adherence to the rules’ and ‘contextually removed from practice’ surfaced repeatedly while talking to the school leaders (IESL4, IESL3). School inspectors are criticised for not exercising independent critical thinking or personal discretion in assessing quality. They primarily function as agents of the inspection department and adhere strictly to predetermined guidelines and protocols.

These themes make a strong case for better training and induction for incoming inspectors. Moreover, it does seem that, perhaps understandably, a determination to impose a large degree of uniformity in conducting inspections is resulting in very rigid systems, allowing inspectors little autonomy to share advice and experience.

3.2 Theme 2: Quality of inspection practices and procedures

School leaders in all four countries were familiar with the onsite tasks of the school inspectors, evaluators and MEAs except for those in Pakistan, where the approach of each supervisory personnel was described as individualised and sometimes arbitrary. The frequency of inspection visits varied by country. In Dubai, schools are inspected annually; and in Pakistan, MEAs visit each school once a month and the supervisory staff twice a month. In New Zealand, the frequency of visits by the evaluation partners is negotiated between the school leader and the evaluator. However, in Ireland most of the school leaders were not aware of the inspectorate’s selection process. A school principal shared, ‘I have no idea how they decide or select a school for inspection. We just get a phone call or notification letter saying that they are coming to inspect and with the incidental inspection, they'll just arrive on the day’ (IESL3).

With the introduction of a new evaluation approach in New Zealand, both school leaders and evaluation partners expressed high expectations and spoke positively about it. They emphasised its ‘bespoke’, ‘highly differentiated’ and ‘context embedded’ nature, focusing on ‘building

relationships’, and ‘developing a clear understanding of schools over time’ (NZE1, NZE2, NZE4 & NZE5). A school principal said, ‘It’s much more of a partnership model, which I think is what they’re really trying to work on now. Doing [evaluation] with not doing to [school]’ (NZSL3).

In the case of Ireland, on one hand, some of the school leaders appreciated the school inspection as providing them with ‘an extra pair of eyes.’

‘I used their recommendations as a checklist for school improvement. I am very conscious of what they see. It is like when you're in something and you're there every day, you actually are so close to it that you don't really see, and they are experienced outsiders’ (IESL5).

On the other hand, some school leaders criticised the inspection practice for being ostentatious and rigid.

‘I would have no questions about their [inspectors’] competency but the model itself is what I would have questions about in that it's just too rigid a model and it allows these very competent, very well-trained people to have no flexibility at all or no real connection with what's happening in the classroom’ (IESL4).

School leaders, in Dubai and Ireland, also spoke about unrealistic expectations especially with regard to student achievement.

‘They need to adjust the recommendations in light of the type of school they're in. They expect the attainment should be higher than normal. They say, “You’re below normal in certain subject areas in terms of attainment in the state exams.” It depends on the socio-economic group, which we are drawing our clientele as well. There’re so many other factors coming into play and after all, somebody has to be below normal otherwise, if everyone's above normal then the normal shifts anyway’ (IESL3).

‘KHDA pilots projects with some elite schools and then they try and test them in some other schools. Finally, they share with us that these are the best practices, which are going on in other schools. Obviously, we have to see the infrastructure and the budget of our school and do accordingly’ (DBSL1).

School inspectors, evaluation partners, and monitoring and supervision staff consistently emphasised the significance of reflective practices in enhancing their professional performance and optimising their impact on schools. Through intentional self-assessment and critical

analysis, they strive to refine their approaches, aiming to make them more advantageous and effective for the schools they serve. For instance, a DSIB inspector shared, 'Each year, it's a learning curve for us. We learn from what we did and how we can do things better' (DBSI1). Similarly, an evaluation partner asserted, 'ERO regularly reviews its' own procedures. The change in school review methodology is one example and the updated Code of Conduct is another (NZEP1).

The MEAs agreed that they have very clearly laid out monitoring procedures that they cannot deviate from while the AEOs reported that in the absence of any prescribed course of action, they keep reviewing their practice. 'I visit every school in my markaz³⁵ twice a month, so during one visit I focus on administrative tasks and in the second I do lesson observation, coaching and mentoring of teachers' (PKSI6).

Some School leaders, in New Zealand and Pakistan, articulated their worries regarding the magnitude of the work of evaluation partners and MEAs and AEOs that can affect the quality of their work. For example, each evaluation partner has to visit and facilitate the evaluation of forty schools. Every month, MEAs are responsible for visiting 50 to 60 schools to collect data, while AEOs are expected to visit the 13 schools in their assigned centre (known as the *Markaz*) twice a month to monitor the physical environment, review the disbursement of their 'non-salary budget' and 'Farogh-e-Taleem fund' and provide coaching and mentoring to teachers.

Notable in the above is once again the issue of rigidity in approach required of the inspectors and the limitations this can impose on how much they can work closely as partners. Interestingly, the new model in NZ, which puts partnership rather than oversight at the centre of the inspection engagement is being positively received and may well be the model for the future.

3.2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The school inspectors, evaluation partners, monitoring and supervision staff described a wide range of procedures to ensure quality of their practices. These measures included the establishment of digital record-keeping systems to ensure the accessibility of records for relevant individuals, including inspection managers and inspector mentors/mentees.

³⁵ A cluster of schools assigned to an AEO

Furthermore, regular review meetings are conducted among inspectors to foster discussions and facilitate the exchange of best practices. Additionally, inspectors are paired with seasoned colleagues who serve as mentors, offering invaluable guidance and support regarding ongoing matters. Moreover, the school inspection reports undergo a stringent system of quality assurance to uphold their accuracy and reliability.

The Irish inspectors particularly emphasised the measures they take to guarantee the quality of their work.

Inspection managers not just manage their local inspection teams but also participate in the team inspection to monitor the team's working. We have a rigorous system of monitoring and quality assurance of inspection reports. Additionally, our clear frameworks, standardised templates for collection and recording of evidence and clear guidance on report writing lead to quality and consistency in practice. Within our Guidelines to school inspection there are also mentioned complaints' processes including informal and formal appeal mechanisms, which are transparent and objective. Following WSE inspections, all teachers and principals are invited to complete an online survey and give feedback about the quality of inspection procedures and inspectors. All inspection records are regularly updated and monitored (IESI).

Similar systems are in place in New Zealand and Dubai inspectorates. The Dubai inspectorate distinguishes itself by implementing an inspection quality assurance team, which sets it apart from other inspectorates in this regard.

'In addition to the inspection team, we have a separate quality assurance team to ensure the quality of inspection practices across the system. Before conducting an inspection, we do a risk assessment to anticipate potential issues. We also evaluate the composition of the team being sent to the school. If a complaint is made about the inspection at a school, the quality assurance team investigates' (DBSI1).

Only the school leaders of Dubai schools mentioned the quality assurance measures of the inspectorate during conversations with school leaders.

'After four years of inspection, the KHDA introduced quality assurance for their own practices, which has improved the onsite inspection practices and the behaviour and attitude of the inspectors' (DBSL1).

In Pakistan, the monitoring visits are recorded automatically by the GPS on the Tablets used by MEAs to record and submit school data, and supervisory staff visits are monitored and reported by the MEAs. However, no school leader referred to these quality assurance mechanisms reflecting their limited accessibility to this information and a lack of transparency in the quality assurance procedures.

3.2.3 Quality of feedback and reporting

School leaders across all four countries conveyed their discontentment regarding the quality of feedback and reports they received, but they also appreciated certain aspects of reporting. School leaders in Ireland, Dubai, and New Zealand shared comparable concerns, with a principal from New Zealand expressing dissatisfaction with the review reports for their lack of specificity and absence of meaningful differentiation across different schools.

‘The reviews in the past have always been incredibly bland. After the last review, I took our review report, removed our name, downloaded two other reports, removed their names, photocopied them, and gave them to our board. I asked them which one was ours, and they couldn't tell me’ (NZSL2).

Interviewees in Pakistan reported a lack of standardisation in the sharing of monitoring reports by MEAs with the school or uploading it directly into the EMIS. Some MEAs discuss the report with school leaders but most do not. Supervisory staff write their remarks in the school's visitor log and ‘a written lesson observation report that includes a way forward is handed over to the teacher observed’ (PKSI6). Most school leaders voiced displeasure about the rushed and perfunctory visits of the supervisory staff excluding AEOs. A principal in the metropolis describes the process,

‘After their visit, they document their comments in our logbook. They often make positive remarks, such as praising the high level of cleanliness in my school. If there are any concerns, they provide suggestions for improvement, which I believe is just a formality’ (PKSL6).

However, school leaders in Ireland appreciate that school inspections do not involve grading or ranking of schools, as is the case in high-stakes inspections. This relieves schools of the stress associated with achieving specific grades (e.g. IESL1).

Some school leaders in both Dubai and Ireland expressed genuine interest in the inspection feedback and findings. An Irish school leader stated, 'The WSE-MLL typically has eight or ten recommendations. In response, we work on these recommendations and take them seriously in good faith' (IESL1).

Likewise, School leaders in Dubai went a step further and appreciated the inspectors' complete information of their previous inspections reports and acknowledged that 'Inspectors' feedback helped us improve our self-evaluation tremendously because when we are observed by external evaluators, we come across a critical perspective' (DBSL5).

It is clear that the quality of feedback is a major factor in the value, or otherwise, of inspection. We can see a movement towards these reports becoming less bland and generic, and it emerges that schools and school leaders value advice and guidance, which can often provide a roadmap to improvement and provide them with a tool which can be used to move the school in a particular direction.

3.3 Theme 3: Quality of tools and Instruments

The school inspection framework, along with other supporting instruments such as the school self-evaluation guide, SSE template, and school improvement guidelines, play a crucial role in the inspection process. These tools provide a structured and standardised approach for inspectors to assess and evaluate various aspects of school performance, including teaching quality, learning outcomes, and overall school effectiveness. By employing these instruments, inspectors are able to ensure consistency, fairness, and objectivity in their evaluations (DEI, 2022c, 2022d; ERO, 2021b; KHDA, 2014). All school leaders in Dubai schools acknowledged the high quality of the inspection framework and related materials on the KHDA website, and they exhibited a good understanding of the standards and indicators. A principal spoke about his initial experience with the inspection framework, saying, 'I found that the framework, introduced by Dubai and aligned with UK Ofsted, to be remarkable. It was a significant opportunity for growth and learning for me' (DBSL2). Another principal explained 'One of the benefits of the inspection process is that you have access to a framework that you can study, but it truly comes to life during an actual inspection. The framework provides you a theoretical

understanding, but when you go through the inspection, you can make real-life connections with what you've learned. It makes the framework more meaningful and impactful' (DBSL3).

In the case of Pakistan, school leaders occasionally voiced apprehensions about the lack of quality criteria. 'They [supervision staff] don't have proper criteria to tell the schools what areas will be monitored, where schools are and what they should aim to achieve?' (PKSL1) The only standards mentioned by the school leaders were the indicators used by the MEAs to collect data and the standardised classroom observation tool used by the AEOs in their clusters.

In Ireland, the inspectorate has recently introduced a revised framework of quality. When questioned regarding the effectiveness of the new document, the school principals referred to a discrepancy between the schools' practice and the expectations set by the framework, especially since it was launched after the pandemic, a time when communication between schools and the inspectorate was limited or non-existent. The school leaders raised several concerns, as follows:

'I think certainly it was a retrograde step to introduce a brand-new document that was just a revamp of an old document and is very externalised' (IESL4).

'To me many of them [indicators] sound like a lofty kind of success criteria' (IESL3).

School leaders in New Zealand showed an interest in utilising both the Framework of School Improvement and the framework of evaluation indicators jointly. As a school principal stated,

'Both frameworks are incredibly helpful, especially when school leaders take time to read them, share the information with their teams, and think about how they can make a positive impact in the school. I believe that these documents are based on well-informed research' (NZSL6).

All the evaluation partners consulted were highly optimistic about the tools that the ERO has developed to facilitate the self-evaluation process. One evaluation partner, for example commented that the Framework of School Improvement enables schools to self-evaluate their position on various aspects of the school and to set aspirational goals for improvement. Another tool, the Board Assurance Statement, was noted to assist 'schools understand the legal obligations they have and must be completed by the School Board of Management' (NZEP3).

3.4 Theme 4: Impact

School inspection is likely to have several impacts. It is expected to promote accountability and quality assurance, potentially driving school improvement through feedback and recommendations. It may also foster a culture of continuous self-evaluation and professional development among educators. Furthermore, school inspection is anticipated to enhance transparency and trust among stakeholders, facilitate the identification of best practices, and potentially contribute to raising educational standards and outcomes (Ehren et al., 2013; Hofer, et al., 2022). Most of the school leaders, in Dubai and Pakistan, acknowledged that inspections have contributed towards improving some aspects of schooling. A school principal shared, 'Our teacher and student attendance, overall cleanliness of the school, the physical environment of the school, and students' learning [we have to show them our annual results] have improved because of MEAs and AEOs' monthly visits. Without monitoring and supervision, I think we will become complacent' (PKSL5).

A principal of a Dubai school appreciated school inspection for bringing a radical change in the teaching practices. 'What I feel is that if we had no inspection, we would have been the old 17th century model of the blackboard and the chalk' (DBSL5).

The overwhelming majority of school leaders in Dubai expressed positive sentiments regarding the influence of school inspection, particularly in relation to its efficacy in promoting the effective utilisation of formative assessment, leveraging data to inform instructional practices, and incorporating technology in teaching and learning processes.

The Irish school leaders were sceptical of the impact of the school inspection.

An Irish deputy principal shared, 'I am 34 years in the classroom, and I've only had two inspections in all those years of teaching. Of all the 1000s of classes I have taught, I've only had two people in my room' (IESL3).

School leaders in New Zealand while appreciated the newly launched approach to school evaluation, they criticised the previous approach as inadequate for bringing about any improvement in teaching and learning especially with regard to serving the underserved and marginalised.

‘I really don’t know if there has been [an impact] and I think that’s part of the problem with it. That’s why they’re looking for change’ (NZSL2).

Another principal ironically commented that while the education review itself may not have had an impact, its report certainly did.

‘The education review officer visits schools to conduct review, which can result in a negative report and put the school on a one or two year review cycle. This can lead to students and parents leaving the school. However, some schools, like mine, have a longer four or five year review cycle, which has resulted in a waiting list of hundreds of students. This may impact the students who tend to migrate to other schools’ (NZSL4).

One principal, for example highlighted a significant observation and stated that the direct impact of the ERO feedback is limited due to the school leadership's tendency to foster an attitude among their staff that can hinder the effective utilisation of received feedback (NZSL3).

All representatives of the inspection agencies emphasised that they have been instrumental in improving the quality of education to some extent.

‘We started around with, let's say 30% of our schools were good and better. Now it's like 70% of our schools are good and better. So definitely inspections have influenced the schools and influenced the improvement of schools. It might not be a direct improvement support, but inspection forces or pushes schools to improve’ (DBSI1).

‘The Irish inspectorate would always argue that inspection, by itself, can never guarantee that teaching and learning in schools is of a good quality – inspection is just one element of a complex eco-system that supports and encourages high quality provision’ (IESI1).

‘We have made a significant impact, but it is challenging to quantify as there are many factors that contribute to a school’s success, and we are only one part of it. After conducting one and two year reviews with schools that had problems, I can confidently say that 80-85% of the schools I worked with went on to become successful, as the issues were addressed. We served as a catalyst for change’ (NZEPS).

‘Our monitoring report is integrated with EMIS, an efficient system that is linked to the SIS [school information system]. If any serious issues arise, they are immediately brought to the attention of the District Education Authority and Administration, which has brought a lot of improvement in the teacher and student attendance and availability of essential facilities in schools’ (PKSI1). The above is of great interest, in that without a significant impact, the entire

expensive business would be a waste of resources. In general, the response was positive although in NZ it was felt that the new system would in time produce more of value than the previous one. Irish school leaders were a bit sceptical and so it seems that the Irish Inspectorate may perhaps have some more convincing to do.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Interestingly, school inspection is a reciprocal activity in which inspectors assess the quality of teaching and learning in schools while schools, in turn, continually evaluate the professional competence of the inspectors. Inspectors utilise quality criteria as the basis for evaluating schools, while schools maintain a stringent focus on inspectors' code of conduct and professional standards. Any deviation from the prescribed professional trajectory is deemed unacceptable. Despite the professionally competitive environment, the experiences and perceptions of school inspection and evaluation among school leaders varied. While some expressed dissatisfaction with the inspectors and the process, others regarded it as a beneficial endeavour that instilled a sense of vigilance and attentiveness towards the quality standards and inspection criteria. The variability in school leaders' perceptions of the inspection process and inspectors is highlighted by one school leader who observed 'huge variations' in the level of professionalism exhibited by inspectors (IESL3). Bitan, Haep and Steins (2015) as a part of their study about the perceptions of school principals about school inspections quantified the qualitative responses of the school principals and found that 42% of the respondents had positive attitude towards school inspections, while 32% expressed negative attitudes (p.430).

One of the common features of all these school evaluation regimes is the professional development of inspectors, monitoring and supervision staff, and evaluation partners. Regardless of their background, prior experience and qualifications, they receive training upon induction. These agencies invest heavily in building the capacity of their human resource to enable them to provide high-quality evaluation, analysis and advice. The inspectors and other personnel responsible for quality assurance mentioned two distinct types of professional development: induction training and ongoing continuous professional development. These two categories of training are also acknowledged by Baxter and Hult (2017), particularly emphasising the significance of continuous professional development, which allows inspectors to learn and grow through practical experience, eventually progressing from a team inspector role to a lead inspector position. Therefore, notwithstanding their concerns and reservations, school leaders generally concurred that school inspectors and evaluators possess substantial training and expertise in their field. However, except for Pakistan, the two primary concerns expressed by

school leaders regarding school inspectors or evaluation partners were their lack of experience in school management as principals, resulting in limited or no experience in running a school. Additionally, as they have not been in schools for years, their knowledge of current classroom practices and stakeholders' expectations may be outdated. Both criticisms are valid and pose a challenge for these professionals, who are expected to guide school leaders towards improvement in teaching and learning and hold schools accountable for their actions (Penninckx et al., 2016).

Although school leaders had several concerns about the quality of inspectors, they were generally aware of the onsite inspection activities and agreed that inspectors usually follow their code of conduct. It can be said that the quality assurance agencies have been successful in communicating their processes and ensuring transparency in most cases. As stated by the ERO, 'We designed our review process to be as open as possible. There should be no surprises' (ERO, 2021b). Especially in case of New Zealand, the BAS checklist results in 'an increased awareness of laws and regulations at school level' (Hult & Segerholm, 2017, p.129).

School leaders in Dubai and Pakistan felt that the quality assurance systems have brought about some improvements in schools, while those in Ireland and New Zealand did not find them impactful. There is also a clear dichotomy between school leaders' perceptions and inspectors' claims of impact at least in these two countries. This attitude reflects a negative correlation between the duration of a quality assurance service and its perceived effectiveness. The longer the quality assurance service has been in place, the less effective it is perceived to be by those who receive it. The perception of decreasing effectiveness of a school inspectorate over time may be attributed to several factors. One possible reason is that as the inspectorate becomes more established, there may be a tendency for complacency or routine in the inspection process, leading to a reduced sense of novelty or impact. Additionally, stakeholders who have experienced the inspectorate for a longer duration might develop higher expectations or critical perspectives based on their accumulated experiences, which can contribute to perceiving the inspectorate as less effective. Moreover, there generally appears to be a negative correlation between the perception of school leaders and inspectors regarding the quality of inspection practices and their perception of the impact of inspection. In other words, the greater the difference between their perceptions, the smaller the perceived impact. Similarly, the school leaders' perception of the quality of inspection and inspectors is positively correlated with their perception of the impact of school inspection on improving the school. When school leaders

have a positive image of the quality of school inspection and the inspectors who conduct them, they are more likely to believe that school inspection has a positive impact on improving the school. Put simply, school leaders' opinions about the quality of school inspection and inspectors are related to their opinions about the effectiveness of school inspection in bringing about positive changes. According to one of the principals in New Zealand, if a principal has a 'mindset of resistance' or views feedback as 'criticism', it is unlikely that school inspection will have a positive impact (NZSL4). On the other hand, when school leaders and teachers view inspection as a positive process that contributes to school improvement, the school is more likely to benefit from it (de Wolf & Janssens, 2007). In order for school inspection to be considered a beneficial element in school improvement, it is essential that the school leaders perceive it as a constructive and supportive activity.

By publishing a range of documents, guides, reports and explicit quality criteria outlined in extensive quality frameworks and making these resources accessible to the public via websites and other means, the school evaluation agencies assume that the school staff understand them well and work accordingly. Intended to promote transparency of school inspection practice, these resources, on the contrary, are perceived as the inspectorate's documents at least in Ireland. Despite the involvement of experienced researchers in developing these frameworks and other inspection support materials and holding orientation and training sessions for the school leaders, the top-down nature of these frameworks cannot be reversed. To increase the acceptance of the quality criteria and other support materials, it is essential to involve a representative sample of school leaders and teachers in the development process, both through face-to-face interactions and by creating an online forum where they can review the documents and minimise the disconnect between theory and practice before sharing them with all schools. However, school leaders in Dubai displayed a remarkable familiarity with the quality criteria, demonstrating an in-depth knowledge and recall of the relevant standards.

Regarding Pakistan, it was observed that the school leaders and supervisory staff were primarily aware of only the indicators that were used by the MEAs to collect data. This limited awareness appears to have led to a significant overlap in their onsite monitoring and supervisory practices. For instance, one school leader expressed dissatisfaction with the frequent monitoring and supervisory visits, stating 'Instead of spending so much on inspection and monitoring officials, the education department should prioritise investing in teachers' professional development'

(PKSL7). However, the AEOs were found to be familiar with their classroom observation tool and its usage. Unfortunately, not a single interviewee referred to the Framework of Minimum Standards of Quality.

School leaders from all four jurisdictions knew little about the internal quality assurance mechanisms of their evaluation agencies. During interviews, only school leaders from Dubai referred to the quality assurance team, while a principal from Ireland mentioned the complaint process. There appears to be a wide communication gap between schools and the inspectorates regarding the measures that they take to improve the quality of their service and their inspection practice as a whole. To address the misconceptions that exist among school leaders about the inspection services, the inspectorates need to have frequent and open communication with schools and the stakeholders, both upstream and downstream, to ensure they are fully aware of the inspectors' work and can appreciate it.

Despite various measures taken by inspectorates and the quality assurance agencies, there remains a disconnect between school inspectors' professed quality and school leaders' perceptions of their quality. As one of the school principals agreed that the best professional development that she ever received was when she took a sabbatical at the ERO for a few months, where she spent time with evaluation teams visiting schools 'that was just completely eye opening.' She found the review officers to be highly skilled at picking up, as they walked into the school, what the school was like. She suggested that 'anyone going to be a principal should spend six months with the ERO and get a flavour of what's going on around the place and see the good and the bad and the ugly at times' (NZSL2). Another school leader from Ireland expressed concerns about the outdated knowledge of classroom practices held by inspectors and suggested that they should spend time working in schools to gain better understanding of recent challenges and demands in the system. We recommend that education systems establish a rotation programme to allow school inspectors and leaders to switch role after a period of time. This would provide school leaders with a greater appreciation of the inspectors' work and update inspectors on the day-to-day realities faced by school leaders. This would help reduce the trust deficit that was frequently observed during our conversations with school leaders.

School leaders expressed concerns about quality of inspectors, dissatisfaction with reporting and feedback process and at times, did not appreciate the documents related to school inspection. Despite variations and criticism, a common observation that emerged was that every

school leader was familiar with the inspection procedures, indicating successful communication of quality assurance services limited though. However, it is essential for quality assurance services to ensure that school leaders have confidence in the proficiency of inspectors and are aware of the ongoing efforts undertaken by quality assurance services to recruit exceptionally skilled professionals who possess contemporary knowledge and extensive expertise in best practices. Moreover, it is imperative to establish improved avenues of communication to facilitate heightened awareness among school leaders regarding the efficacy of inspectors' work and the comprehensive measures implemented by inspectorates to ensure the quality of their own practices. This initiative will foster enhanced trust between school leaders and inspectors, consequently amplifying the overall influence of school inspections.

In conclusion, inspectorates and other quality assurance agencies train their staff, develop supporting documents, and update their websites and practices to stay up to date with changing trends in the field. This is acknowledged by many respondents in this study. However, as Lindgren and Rönnerberg (2017) argue, despite these efforts, school inspection systems often strike a balance between transparency and a level of 'black-boxing' to establish their credibility (p. 173). The present study also reveals a gap between the perceptions of school leaders and school inspectors, which may arise due to intentional or unintentional 'black-boxing,' and can only be rectified through open and frequent communication.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest in relation to the study undertaken for this paper.

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Chapter six: Publication Three

Three Exploring the Multifaceted Nature of School Inspectors' Power Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Four Quality Assurance Systems

Sarah Gardezi, Gerry McNamara, Martin Brown and Joe O'Hara

Abstract: This research critically explores the role of school inspectors in driving improvements across diverse educational settings, focusing on the nuanced dynamics of their influence on school leaders' attitudes towards feedback. The study employs French and Raven's 'The Bases of Social Powers' framework to investigate the various forms of power wielded by school inspectors. The examination encompasses inspection regimes with varied approaches, ranging from high-stakes to low-stakes, each conferring different degrees of authority on school inspectors. Conducted in four jurisdictions —Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan—each characterised by distinct school quality assurance systems, the research aims to provide readers, including academicians, policymakers, quality assurance personnel, and school leaders, with examples of current practices and models.

Through interviews with school leaders and inspectors, the findings reveal that leaders' perceptions of inspectors' powers influence both their attitudes towards inspectors and their responses to feedback. The six bases of power—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, expert, and informational—as postulated in French and Raven's Framework—are identified in the school leaders' responses and highlighted in the structural dynamics of the inspection systems under study, though at varying degrees. Notably, all forms of power hold value in influencing school leaders and driving changes in their practices. While the first three focus on regulating and evaluating school operations, the latter three foster change by inspiring and guiding school leaders. The findings underscore the need for a balanced integration of these power bases in school inspection systems, tailored to the unique contexts of every country. By shedding light on the interplay between power dynamics and school leaders' responsiveness to feedback, this research contributes valuable insights to inform the development and refinement of school inspection systems. The ultimate goal is to maximise the impact of inspections and enhance the efficacy of quality assurance systems in promoting positive change and improvement within diverse educational environments.

Keywords: school inspectors' power, school inspectors' influence, school evaluation, monitoring

Context and Implications

Rationale for the study

Previous studies have not explored the influence of school inspectors in fostering school improvement through various bases of social power. In this study, we analyse four school inspection and quality assurance systems to identify the bases of social power held by the quality assurance personnel and their manifestation within these systems.

Why the new findings matter.

Our findings suggest the necessity of integrating the six bases of social power in school inspection systems, customised to every country's distinct contextual factors. This ensures the effective utilisation of inspection feedback for school improvement while concurrently fulfilling the accountability function inherent to inspection processes.

Implications for policymakers

Policymakers can optimise the effectiveness of school inspection and quality assurance systems by strategically integrating both sets of social power bases, what one might call soft power—expert, informational, and referent, and perhaps strong power, reward, coercive, and legitimate. Understanding that an overreliance on one set of power bases can limit the influence associated with the other set is crucial for policymakers aiming to refine these systems.

1. Introduction

It is increasingly widely recognised in many countries and states that overseeing the standard of education in schools is necessary (OECD, 2013). Typically, a regulatory body, commonly known as an Inspectorate, is established to conduct routine evaluations of schools (Bokhove et al., 2023; Gustafsson et al., 2015; Hofer et al., 2020; Penninckx et al., 2016). Gardezi et al. (2023a) mention several factors that have contributed to the growth of school inspection systems worldwide over the last twenty years. These include the economic recession of the early 2000s, the shift in management policies towards neoliberal ideology in the 1990s, results-based demands of transnational funding agencies (e.g., the World Bank), international comparisons of education quality through the OECD's evaluations (e.g., PISA – the Programme for International Student Assessment), and, most significantly, the socio-political context of each jurisdiction. Numerous other studies also attribute the growth of inspection systems, especially in Europe and British Commonwealth countries, to prevailing neoliberal trends (see, for example, Baxter, 2017; Baxter & Hult, 2017; Brown et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2018; Clarke, 2017), which introduced the concept of the 'citizen consumer' with the right to choose from a range of public services based on the data and information provided by regulatory services, including school inspectorates.

School inspection, at its best, serves multiple purposes beyond merely providing information to parents, viewed as 'citizen-consumers,' about the quality of education. It is also designed not only to enhance educational standards, whether academic or more broadly conceived but also the entire range of the activities of schools (Baxter, 2017). School inspection has, however, evolved very differently in different countries depending on an array of factors, including whether the concept dates back centuries or is a quite recent development. In addition, school inspection tends to be very heavily influenced by current political thinking and the views of those in power. For example, the evolution of school inspection philosophies and approaches in New Zealand and Ireland has been influenced by neoliberal trends, but recently, New Zealand has moved in a very different direction and taken a new approach, largely because of the left-of-centre philosophy of the Government. In contrast, Ireland introduced whole-school evaluation in 1998 (Brown et al., 2016), has emphasised school self-evaluation since 2012 (Brown et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2018; McNamara et al., 2022), and initiated various short,

focused forms of inspections (Department of Education [DoE], 2022) in response to OECD comparative evaluations and neoliberal trends.

Dubai's education system exemplifies market accountability, where schools cater to the demands and preferences of parents, acting as primary consumers on behalf of their children (Ben Jaafar et al., 2022). This dynamic is reinforced by school inspection reports and rankings, which foster competition and drive schools to align their services with parental expectations, while performance in international assessments like PISA, Progress in the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Trends in the International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) further informs and shapes the national inspection agenda.

In Pakistan, school inspection is heavily influenced by funding agencies, particularly the World Bank, which funded the Education Sector Reform Programme across all four provinces² and promoted, as well as required, a results-based approach. This approach provided schools with resources and support while prioritising the enhancement of teacher quality as a critical factor influencing school quality and student learning outcomes (Government of Balochistan, Education Department, 2015; Government of Punjab, 2018; Government of Sindh, 2014; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Education Monitoring Authority, 2014). Concurrently, it placed a strong emphasis on rigorous monitoring and accountability measures to ensure the desired results (Malik & Rose, 2015; Chaudhry & Tajwar, 2021).

So, as we can see from the foregoing, despite variations in the drivers of growth and development of inspection, it is evident that all inspection regimes serve two fundamental purposes: the 'monitoring and accountability function' and guiding school improvement' (Hofer et al., 2020, p.1). In pursuit of these objectives, inspection systems employ various strategies in their processes to impact school operations. The techniques employed and the areas highlighted during inspections exhibit significant similarities, not only in these four jurisdictions, but across education systems worldwide (Simeonova et al., 2020). Equally, however, there are also clear and differing influences in philosophy and inspection implementation across these examples. The difficult question raised in this paper is whether we can move towards a common approach – an almost worldwide commonality - which might lead to the best outcomes achievable – or whether we are prisoners of history, politics and resources resulting in very differing approaches and outcomes in each case.

Comparative studies by Simeonova et al. (2020) and Perry (2013) refer to specific structural and implementation measures that categorise inspections as either high-stakes and sanctions-oriented or low-stakes and advisory. Altrichter (2017) and Penninckx and Vanhoof (2017) define school inspections as either low-stake or soft governance, or high-stake or hard governance. The latter places significant emphasis on accountability, measurement, and consequences for schools that fail to meet specified standards, while the former is designed to support schools in improving their practices. In low-stakes school inspections, inspectors often collaborate with school leaders and teachers, taking a consultative and supportive approach to governance. The ongoing debate revolves around which approach is more effective and beneficial for schools. However, both low-stakes and high-stakes approaches empower school inspectors to influence school practices.

According to Brown (2013), there is a correlation between power and influence, where individuals in positions of power can exert influence, and the extent of their power can be measured by their ability to modify the actions of others. In another study, Brown et al. (2024) analysed inspectorates across the globe using French and Raven's extended framework 'the Bases of Social Powers' (Reward, Coercive, Legitimate, Referent, Expert, and Informational power) to establish a link between these powers and their influence on school practices (Erchul & Raven, 1997). The present study delves further by utilising semi-structured interviews conducted with school leaders and inspectors to explore their perceptions and to compare the power and influence of school inspectors across four distinct school inspection systems: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. This study also employs French and Raven's framework 'the Bases of Social Powers' as a lens through which to examine the relationship between school inspectors' power and changes in school policies and practices.

Examining the power and influence of inspectors is crucial for both understanding how school inspection impacts school improvement and identifying specific areas of school inspection that require improvement to enhance its effectiveness. The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the powers vested in school inspectors within the four distinct school inspection systems under study, facilitating their ability to exert influence over schools. The study seeks to delineate the various forms of social power wielded by these inspectors and the methods they use to exercise these powers. By exploring the interplay between the power

and influence of school inspectors, the study aims to provide valuable insights for developing and refining school inspection practices. This endeavour seeks to enhance the efficacy of school inspectors and quality assurance systems, ultimately fostering a positive impact on the quality of education and contributing towards the continuous improvement of schools.

The following are the research questions addressed in this study:

- How do school leaders perceive the different forms of power wielded by school inspectors, as defined by French and Raven's framework, and their relative importance and influence within each particular inspection system?
- How do these forms of power influence the work of schools?
- What methods do inspectors use to wield these tools available to them?

School Inspection: Variety yet commonality across the world.

The four inspection systems under study have been deliberately chosen because they vary widely in history, organisation and approach (Gardezi et al., 2023a). They all occupy different positions on the continuum of approaches to school inspection, as defined by Simeonova et al. (2020) and Perry's (2013) indicators of low and high-stakes inspections. For instance, these inspection systems differ based on the frequency of inspection visits, extent of notification before inspection visits, availability of a quality framework to guide inspection, presence/absence of legislative footing, reporting of outcomes, and governance structure. However, the inspection procedures during the onsite phase of the inspection are largely similar.

The systems vary based on the factors that have contributed to their coming into existence and subsequent development. The school inspection system in New Zealand is as old as its national education system and originated in 1877 (Rae, 1991 cited in Gardezi et al., 2023a). With the Education Act 1989, the Education Review Office replaced the old inspectorate and embraced neoliberal and left-wing policy trends, granting schools significant autonomy to drive and manage their school improvement efforts (French, 2000). Gradually, it has now moved into an evaluation for improvement approach³⁶ where external evaluators have become 'evaluation

³⁶ In the new school evaluation approach in New Zealand, each Evaluation Partner (previously known as the Education Review Officer) is assigned 40 schools that they must visit as per the

partners' whose main task is to contribute towards building school leaders' evaluation capacity (Goodrick, 2022). In fact, external evaluation appears to be minimal, with the predominant reports available on the ERO website being Profile reports. These reports meticulously outline the school's contextual features, strengths, and overarching objectives for the forthcoming three-year evaluation cycle. Consequently, the prevailing governance approach of the ERO appears to lean towards soft governance, suggesting relatively low stakes for the schools involved. A high level of trust in the schools' capacity to achieve equitable learning outcomes, as well as the effectiveness of evaluation partners' evaluative messages, is perceived as the primary motivating factor that encourages schools to participate in the evaluation process (Gardezi et al., 2023a).

The school inspection system in Ireland dates to the British time in the early 19th century but having fallen into abeyance after independence has once again become a force in recent years. It has been influenced by the EU and the OECD and is perceived as key to economic growth (McNamara, et al., 2022). In consequence, what has emerged, in line with much of Europe, is a 'neoliberal' trend which allows a degree of autonomy to schools. Yet this is very circumscribed as pressure to maintain PISA performance retains a significant degree of control with the Department of Education both through inspection and semi-prescriptive self-evaluation (Brown et al., 2016). The conjoined inspection and school self-evaluation system might be described as low stakes since there are no direct consequences for schools for poor performance (McNamara et al., 2022; O'Brien et al., 2019). However, 'soft power' in the form of the influence of the inspectorate, publicly available reports on schools, and school professional pride combine to encourage schools and teachers to engage with inspection advice.

In Dubai, the substantial expatriate population prompted the proliferation of private schools offering diverse curricula, claiming to deliver high-quality, world-class education. In 2007, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) was established to oversee this burgeoning sector. All private schools are subject to annual inspections by the KHDA, with the resulting inspection reports and grades made publicly available on the KHDA website. The consequences of poor performance on these inspections are significant: without access to public funding and the inability to increase fees to match inflation rates, schools with low grades

schools' needs and assist in building their evaluation capacity. Evaluation Partners no longer conduct team visits to schools for a specified number of days to review their practices.

struggle to attract students and qualified teachers, often leading to closure (Gardezi et al., 2023a). This stringent market accountability effectively positions KHDA inspections as a form of hard governance, imposing considerable stakes on schools. Consequently, schools closely adhere to the quality criteria set by inspectors, recognising the limited room for deviation afforded by this regulatory system.

The inception of school inspection in Pakistan dates back to the early 19th century during British colonial rule, coinciding with the East India Company's initiation of funding for schools. However, the current system of school supervision was established during the Education Sector Reforms of 2001-2004. These reforms decentralised education up to the higher secondary level by establishing district education authorities. Subsequently, the monitoring and evaluation system was implemented nationwide through the Education Sector Reforms Programme across all four provinces³⁷, with financial support from the World Bank, Department of International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, and other entities. Regular visits by supervisory, and monitoring and evaluation staff³⁸ occur monthly, with the former focusing on teaching quality and facilities, while the latter collects quantitative data on service provision, including teacher attendance. Strict monitoring of teacher attendance is enforced, with unauthorised absences potentially resulting in salary deductions and disciplinary action. The education system operates within a hierarchical structure, with school leaders directly accountable to district education authorities (Gardezi et al., 2023a). Compliance with directives from these authorities is mandatory. This system carries significant consequences for the individuals involved.

In the next part of the paper, we elaborate on what previous research says about the powers of school inspectors and their impact on school improvement, as well as how French and Raven's framework 'the Bases of Social Powers' applies to school inspectors. Section 3 of this paper describes the methodology used, while Section 4 provides a description of the findings. Section 5 contains a discussion of the key emerging points and summarises the most important conclusions.

³⁷ Four provinces in Pakistan- Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan

³⁸ These services have similar roles and designations in all four provinces, albeit with slightly different titles. To maintain clarity and avoid redundancy, the titles used in the largest province, Punjab, are utilised for all provinces.

2. Literature review

2.1 Powers of School Inspectors in Low-stakes and High-stakes Inspections

In the academic literature, school inspections are often categorised as low-stakes or 'soft governance' or high-stakes or 'hard governance' (Altrichter, 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2015; Penninckx & Vanhoof, 2017). A low-stakes or soft governance type of school inspection involves a less formal and more supportive approach to evaluating schools and promoting school improvement. It results in facilitative measures if non-compliance is observed or if a school fails to meet expectations. Such inspections offer valuable information to schools, providing school leaders with fresh perspectives that they can use to enhance the quality of the school and classroom (Altrichter, 2017, p. 212). In low-stakes systems, according to Gustafsson et al. (2015), schools are inspected regularly without any rewards or sanctions. Ireland serves as an example in this research. New Zealand represents, in recent years, a perhaps even less punitive and intrusive system than Ireland. The recent 'Evaluation for Improvement Approach' in New Zealand marks a significant shift towards a 'soft governance' school inspection system. Evaluation partners now collaborate with schools in the evaluation process instead of imposing it upon them, with a three-year evaluation cycle for every school (Goodrick, 2022). In contrast, high-stakes and hard governance-type inspections imply a more formal and rigorous approach with stricter rules and serious consequences for schools that do not meet expectations or where non-compliance is observed. According to Altrichter (2017), 'inspections are 'hard governance' models if they operate through target-setting, indicators, benchmarks, and evaluations' (p. 212). The consequences of non-compliance can include funding cuts, school closure, or the dismissal of staff. The results of the inspection may be used to determine the school's rating, which can have potentially far-reaching consequences for the school's image, pupil intake, and financing (Hult & Segerholm, 2017; Penninckx & Vanhoof, 2017, p. 254). Both Pakistan and Dubai in this research represent quite similar approaches along this hard governance line. However, interestingly, there is research evidence that indicates that schools and teachers feel pressured by the existence of inspections almost regardless of the level of low or high-stakes powers wielded by the inspectorate (Altrichter, 2017).

School inspectors, it appears, wield significant power over schools, irrespective of whether the school inspection is deemed high-stakes or low-stakes, as they establish the criteria by which effective school practices are evaluated (Brown, 2013; Perryman et al., 2018). Perryman et al. (2018) argue that school inspectors' power has undergone transformation through the

implementation of the 'panoptic performativity' strategy in school inspections. Instead of being a single, intimidating presence, inspectors now exert pervasive and continuous influence on schools, making them feel constantly monitored and pressured to conform to inspection standards to avoid negative consequences. Clapham (2015) concurs with this notion of 'panoptic performativity' and argues that the implementation of short or no notice periods for inspections has given rise to a phenomenon known as 'post-fabrication.' This implies that schools are consistently maintained in a state of 'inspection readiness,' where preparedness for inspections becomes an ever-present reality rather than a fabricated representation of events.

Of course, to an extent, the higher the stakes of school inspection, the more likely schools are to engage in 'window dressing' activities created with the sole purpose of receiving more favourable evaluations from inspectors (Ehren et al., 2016; Penninckx, 2017; Perryman, 2009).

'This change in behaviour can be seen in terms of the fabrication of documentation, staging, and game-playing before and during inspections, and a sense of cynicism about the entire process' (Perryman, 2009, p. 620).

Penninckx and Vanhoof (2017) attribute the behaviours exhibited by schools as reactions to inspectors' power 'to make high-stakes decisions about the schools' (p. 254). These high-stakes inspections generate significant 'accountability pressure' for school leaders, motivating them to become more proactive in improvement endeavours. However, these inspections also unintentionally amplify the negative consequences of school inspection (Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2018). According to the outcomes of Altrichter and Kemethofer's (2018) cross-European online survey of school leaders, a significant majority of participants in a range of inspection systems reported a sense of performance pressure in relation to inspection expectations. This perceived pressure was significantly linked to the accountability rating. The authors identify administrative consequences, pressure from stakeholders, and the potential competitive advantage or disadvantage associated with receiving a positive or negative report as sources of pressure on schools. As a result, school leaders often revert to familiar practices, adopting strategies such as 'discouraging new teaching methods, narrowing the curriculum, and utilising traditional instructional approaches' (p. 44). Brown et al. (2017) further highlight that stakeholders, particularly parents, place significant weight on external inspection reports,

considering them more credible compared to self-evaluation processes. Consequently, school leaders tend to avoid risk-taking, concentrating on 'performing for inspection' when inspectors are present, adhering to student teaching methods outlined in the inspection framework and conforming to 'accepted modes of successful practice' (Perryman, 2009, p. 614).

Perryman (2009) draws a connection between Foucault's concepts of power-knowledge and school inspectors, because inspectors collect knowledge about schools through inspections, thereby possessing power. School inspectors also possess knowledge of the inspection criteria and standards, which empowers them to assess schools and inform them how they should function. A vital aspect of the exercise of school inspectors' power and influence is feedback, and the way in which feedback is communicated is crucial. According to previous studies (e.g., Behnke & Steins, 2017; Dobbelaer et al., 2017; Perryman et al., 2023; Quintelier et al., 2020), the acceptance of critical feedback depends on several factors, such as the credibility of the feedback provider and the perceived quality and value of the feedback for learning within the immediate school context. Nevertheless, receiving critical or negative inspection feedback often leads to resistance or rejection, especially when it is delivered in an authoritarian manner. However, a more positive and constructive approach to criticism increases the likelihood that school leaders will incorporate the inspection recommendations into their school improvement plans. The attitudinal change largely depends on school leaders' overall attitudes towards school inspection.

The Social Aspect of Inspection.

Of course, it is one thing to have the coercive power of hard inspection, including sanctions, or merely the more limited power of soft inspection and encouragement. It is quite another to wield these powers in a way that brings schools and teachers on board and does not do more harm than good to the school system, for as we have seen above even soft inspection can engender fear, and lead to the covering up of the reality of the school. It is therefore of interest, particularly in the training of inspectors to identify the kinds of social powers inspectors possess and how their use may enhance or inhibit school and teacher improvement.

In exploring the dynamics of power and influence within the context of school inspections, the authors considered three prominent frameworks: Social Exchange Theory (SET)³⁹, Theory of Social Dominance (SDT)⁴⁰, and French and Raven's Bases of Social Power. While each framework offers valuable insights, French and Raven's model is particularly suited for analysing the specific power dynamics in school inspections.

SET posits that social interactions are governed by reciprocal exchanges where individuals aim to maximise rewards and minimise costs. In the context of school inspection, one could interpret the relationship between inspectors and school leaders as an exchange of resources—inspectors offer feedback and evaluations, while school leaders provide compliance and improvements. However, this perspective simplifies the complex nature of school inspections. The power imbalance between inspectors and school leaders is not easily explained by reciprocity alone. Inspectors are not merely participants in an equal exchange but are vested with authority that transcends mutual benefit, limiting the explanatory power of SET in this context.

Similarly, SDT highlights hierarchical structures and the role of dominance in maintaining social hierarchies. While this theory can help explain power differentials between inspectors and school leaders, its primary focus is on broader, group-based dominance — large-scale systemic power structures that exist between social groups, such as those based on race, class, or gender. As a result, SDT does not adequately address the more localised, role-specific power dynamics that arise in specific contexts, such as the nuanced, situational power relations between inspectors and school leaders during the inspection process.

In contrast, French and Raven's framework offers a structured classification of power bases—described as reward, coercive, expert, informational and referent power—that allows for a more precise analysis of the multifaceted nature of power in school inspections. This framework is particularly useful in educational settings, where power dynamics are often complex and context specific. Inspectors may exert influence through legitimate authority, coercion via accountability measures, or expert power through specialised knowledge. This granularity

³⁹ Social Exchange Theory was first introduced by George C. Homans in 1958.

⁴⁰ Theory of Social Dominance was initially proposed by Jim Sidanius, Erik Devereux, and Felicia Pratto in 1992.

makes French and Raven's model ideal for capturing the various ways inspectors can shape the decisions and behaviours of school leaders.

Therefore, French and Raven's framework was chosen as the most appropriate lens for examining the power dynamics in school inspections, as it provides a systematic yet flexible approach to understanding how power operates within these specific interactions.

2.2 Mapping French and Raven's Framework of Bases of Social Powers on School Inspectors' Work.

Reward, Coercion, Legitimate, Expert, Informational and Referent Powers

French and Raven (1959) describe power as closely linked to influence, which they define as causing a psychological change in a person. Social change, as they explain it, involves modifying an individual's beliefs, attitudes, or conduct through the actions of another individual, who is the influencing agent. Social power, on the other hand, refers to the capacity of the influencing agent to bring about such modifications by utilising the available resources at their disposal (Raven & Bertram, 2004). In the present study, inspectors serve as the influencing agents, while school leaders are the targets of influence. School inspectors' work can be associated with various bases of social power. In the academic literature, school inspectors are often referred to as 'policy implementers' (Baxter, 2017; Hofer et al., 2020), and they may employ coercive power to enforce compliance with regulations and policies. Schools that fail to meet standards may risk losing their licenses to operate, face funding cuts, or experience disciplinary actions against school leaders or teachers who fall short of guidelines. Even in the case of a low-stakes inspection system, a negative school inspection report on the public record can permanently tarnish a school leader's reputation (Moreton et al., 2017).

Inspectors may also wield reward power to incentivise good performance. They can provide favourable grades or rankings to schools, resulting in a longer return cycle (fewer visits by the inspection team) or offering recognition to teachers and school leaders who excel in their roles. School inspection reports, especially grading, imply not only inspectors' coercive power, as discussed earlier, but also their reward power. In the case of Ofsted (the Office for Standards in

Education, Children's Services and Skills)⁴¹ inspections, Moreton et al. (2017) assert that when a school receives an 'inadequate' grade or fails to demonstrate sufficient improvement after receiving a 'requires improvement' grade, the headteacher and governing body may face replacement. Conversely, schools receiving an 'outstanding' rating are strategically positioned within the educational landscape. This includes opportunities to sponsor other schools with lower performance, engage in teacher training initiatives, and access resources for leading professional development efforts (p. 141).

Due to their statutory status, school inspectors possess legitimate power. Their position grants them the authority to enter schools and request any necessary information or documents to fulfil their duties. For instance, in Ireland, the Education Act 1998, Section 13 outlines the basis of the legitimate power of school inspectors:

'An Inspector shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of performing his or her functions and shall be accorded every reasonable facility and cooperation by the board and the staff of a school or centre for education' (Education Act 1998, Section 13).

In the new Education and Training Act 2020 currently in effect in New Zealand, there are 'powers of review officers,' but the language has been made 'less prescriptive' compared to the previous Act (Ministry of Education, 2023). Nevertheless, they still retain 'statutory powers' to fulfil their mandated role (ERO, 2021). Invariably, school inspectors in Dubai as well as monitoring and supervision staff in all provinces of Pakistan possess the power to enter, investigate, and report on the strengths and weaknesses of schools (Dubai School Inspection Bureau [DSIB], 2012; Independent Monitoring Unit: System User Guide, 2014). Clarke (2017) and Baxter (2017) emphasise the legitimate powers of inspectors, referring to them as a 'vital cog in the machinery of governing schooling' (p. v) and 'street-level bureaucrats' (p. 6) responsible for overseeing policy implementation processes and practices in schools.

On one hand, inspectors possess legitimate power derived from their position of authority and designation; on the other hand, they may also wield expert power. School inspectors can exercise expert power if they possess extensive knowledge and experience in their field. This

⁴¹ The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects education and skills services for learners of all ages in England and regulates services that care for children and young people.

expertise can make them valuable resources sought after by school leaders and teachers for guidance and support in their school improvement efforts. The work of school inspectors is guided by inspection criteria that establish quality expectations. These criteria can play a pivotal role in enhancing a school's internal management capacity, as school leaders can use them to envision and integrate academic excellence into their school development plans (Elwick & McAleavy, 2015). Perryman (2009) suggests that school inspectors generally undergo extensive training and acquire knowledge in the standards and practices outlined in the inspection criteria. This knowledge empowers them in the inspection process, and consequently, school leaders place trust in their abilities. School leaders may adjust their practices based on the feedback provided by inspectors, who leverage their expertise to bring about positive changes in the school's operation.

Additionally, school inspectors may exercise informational power, largely depending on their expertise and interpersonal skills, to explain to school leaders 'how the job should be done differently, providing persuasive reasons for why this would result in a better and more effective procedure' (Raven & Bertram, 2004; Raven, 2008, p. 2). When school leaders understand and accept the reasons presented to them, it leads to lasting changes in their thought processes and school practices. Even if the change in school practices occurs due to the inspector's feedback or guidance, it may continue without the school leader actively remembering or referring to the inspector's advice.

The final type of power, referent power, heavily relies on whether school inspectors are respected and admired by the school staff. In such cases, school leaders may be inclined to follow their advice and suggestions due to the high esteem in which they hold the inspectors. When inspectors possess referent power, school leaders not only seek to emulate them but also find satisfaction in adhering to the inspectors' instructions on how tasks should be carried out.

3. Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative research design, combining a literature review with semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Sample

The research utilised qualitative methods and involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 28 school leaders and 14 inspectors, evaluation partners, monitors, and school supervisory

staff. Recognising the inherent limitations of a modest sample size, it was understood that such a collection of participants could not be considered fully representative of the broader population. Therefore, school leaders and quality assurance personnel were purposefully selected to obtain "information-rich" cases that aligned with the research objectives (Patton, 2014). The individuals chosen were expected to have a deep understanding of the phenomenon being researched. To achieve this, specific criteria were used, including having undergone multiple school inspections, possessing leadership experience of five years or more, representing both primary and secondary education sectors, having completed relevant Higher Education Institution (HEI) courses, and demonstrating a keen interest and expertise in the field. The criteria for participant selection and the identification of suitable respondents were guided by collaborative discussions with colleagues in each country and in the city-state of Dubai. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with an even representation of rural and urban school leaders from the four inspection regimes. In the case of inspectors, identification was facilitated through connections in education ministries, HEIs, or direct outreach to inspection agencies. The key criterion for the selection of inspectors was a minimum of three years of professional experience in their role.

In total, 28 school leaders participated in the study, with 15 from primary schools and 13 from secondary schools. Each participant was interviewed individually. The gender distribution among these leaders was 12 women and 16 men, with their leadership experience ranging from five to 30 years. The broad range of experience, which encompasses varying lengths of tenure among school leaders in the study, enriches the study by capturing a comprehensive spectrum of perspectives, enhancing the depth and breadth of its findings regarding the dynamics of school inspection practices. Table 6 shows the distribution of sampled school leaders by jurisdiction, work experience, professional titles, and gender.

Additionally, 14 quality assurance personnel were interviewed, including seven women and seven men. These personnel included inspectors, evaluation partners, monitors, and supervisors, all of whom had varying levels of experience in their respective fields, ranging from three to 35 years.

Exclusively school leaders were selected as interview subjects among all school personnel, as they occupy pivotal roles in orchestrating school readiness for inspection, providing on-site

support and coordination to inspection teams, assuming accountability for the outcomes of inspections, encompassing both favourable and adverse evaluations, and spearheading the execution of modifications in reaction to the findings of school inspections (Altrichter, 2017).

The interviews were conducted by the same interviewer, audio-recorded, and transcribed. To protect the anonymity of the participants, a system of alphanumerical classification was used instead of their real names. The following abbreviations are used in the Analysis and Findings section to represent the participants: School leaders (SL), Inspectors (SI), Evaluation Partners (EP), Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants (MS – monitoring staff), Assistant Education Officers, and Deputy District Education Officer (SS – supervision staff).

To distinguish between the school leaders from Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, their respective identifying codes are added to the abbreviation. For example, DBSL is used for school leaders from Dubai, IESL for school leaders from Ireland, NZSL for school leaders from New Zealand, and PKSL for school leaders from Pakistan. Since quality assurance personnel in both Dubai and Ireland are referred to as 'inspectors,' codes (IE for Ireland and DB for Dubai) are added to differentiate between them. Thus, DBSI is used for inspectors from Dubai and IESI for inspectors from Ireland.

Table 6: Distribution of Sampled School Leader Participants

Country	Professional title	Gender	Work experience in Years
Dubai	Principal	Female	12
	Principal	Male	06
	Vice Principal	Female	10
	Vice Principal	Female	05
	Headmistress	Female	09
	Headmaster	Male	07
Ireland	Principal	Male	24
	Principal	Male	17
	Principal	Female	16
	Principal	Male	05
	Assistant Principal	Female	22
	Assistant Principal	Female	23
New Zealand	Principal	Female	21
	Principal	Female	16
	Principal	Male	14
	Principal	Male	08
	Principal	Male	5.5
	Principal	Female	5
Pakistan*	Principal	Male	30
	Principal	Female	13
	Principal	Male	09
	Principal	Female	05
	Vice Principal	Female	19
	Headmistress	Female	25
	Headmistress	Female	30
	Headmistress	Female	09
	Headmaster	Male	05
	Headmaster	Male	05

3.2 Data collection and analysis

French and Raven's framework, 'the Bases of Social Powers,' along with the literature review, guided the development of interview questions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questions, they were shared with two experts in school inspection who reviewed them for relevance, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the research objectives. Following their feedback, the questions were revised and approved by the same experts. Subsequently, the interview questions underwent pilot testing with two respondents to finalise the tool. This pilot testing provided valuable insights into aspects such as length, format, and participant responsiveness (Ahlin, 2019), resulting in further adjustments. Consistency in wording and question format was maintained across all interviews, as they were conducted by the same researcher, thereby minimising variations in responses due to differences in question phrasing.

Particular attention was given to the formulation of interview questions to ensure the omission of terms such as power, authority, and influence. This precautionary measure was taken to prevent the posing of leading questions and to maintain the neutrality of the conversation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of responses and to provide context.

The interviews were digitally recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed both manually and using NVivo software for thematic analysis. The six bases of social power—Reward, Coercive, Legitimate, Expert, and Informational Power—served as the deductive themes, while inductive codes were also identified based on the participants' verbal responses using the open coding technique. The interview transcripts were meticulously reviewed to identify codes. Some of the identified codes included grading and ranking, inspection reports, window dressing, monetary gains/losses, statutory status and experience. The codes were organised according to deductive themes, which were then further examined and linked to relevant text excerpts in order to develop an analytical narrative, following the process of thematic analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2022).

Within the framework outlined by French and Raven (1959), expert and informational powers are elucidated in conjunction, while reward, coercion, legitimate, and referent powers are explained separately. In our analysis, we chose to amalgamate expert and informational powers,

maintaining fidelity to the framework, and likewise unified reward and coercion powers due to their shared mechanisms of influence when wielded by inspectors. However, the remaining two bases of social power, legitimate and referent powers, are presented individually.

4. Analysis and Findings

In this section, we turn to the analysis of the interview data in light of the theoretical framework outlined by French and Raven. The responses in each case are considered in a cross-case analysis of the four inspection systems. The importance and influence attached to each factor by those interviewed in each jurisdiction are compared and contrasted. Finally, in section 5, we present the key emerging points regarding how inspections operate in varied circumstances and attempt to elucidate how context impacts the evaluation of schools.

Reward and Coercive Powers

The interviews with school leaders and inspectors in all four regions consistently referred to the importance of the inspection report as a key influential outcome resulting from the inspection process. Invariably, these reports are published on the Internet and accessible to the general public. Particularly, in Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand, the school inspectors' reward and coercive powers are closely linked to the school inspection report. For example, within KHDA school inspections in Dubai, the exercise of reward and coercive powers is often manifested through the ranking assigned to schools in inspection reports, along with the ensuing positive or negative consequences.

Schools in Dubai are ranked as 'outstanding,' 'very good,' 'good,' 'acceptable,' 'weak,' or 'very weak' by the inspection team and this ranking is clearly indicated in the school inspection report. Schools adjudged as 'outstanding,' 'very good,' or 'good' are eligible to raise school fees by a certain percentage and add more class levels if they desire. Conversely, schools receiving a low ranking and unfavourable report face serious damage to their reputation due to the competitive education market in Dubai. Such schools may lose credibility among parents, resulting in immediate and detrimental effects on enrolment and financial viability. Restrictions on fee increases for low-performing schools create financial challenges as they struggle to provide necessary resources, facilities, and competitive staff salaries. In some cases, these financial burdens may lead to the eventual closure of such schools, particularly in the face of rising inflation rates in the city-state. The school inspectors referred to the rewards and coercive

powers of the inspection reports as follows, 'We have implemented a linkage between school fees and the overall quality of school performance. Schools that do not achieve a rating of 'good,' 'very good,' or 'outstanding' in terms of overall quality are not allowed to raise their fees. Additionally, this prevents the admission of new students to schools that are rated as 'weak' (DBSI1). Moreover, 'the ability to expand the range of grades offered is linked to the school's inspection rating' (DBSI2).

So, consistent underperformance leading to recurrent poor grades may eventually result in closure or acquisition by larger educational institutions in the market. To avoid such a dire outcome stemming from inspection rankings, as one principal noted, schools often enlist the help of consultants to meet the inspectors' expectations and adhere to their recommendations. 'Lots of schools are appointing consultants, where they have been consistently rated as weak. No school in Dubai can afford to be on that rating for very long because there are big groups, ABC and XYZ [anonymised for confidentiality] ready to take the running of these schools' (DBSL2).

School inspection reports in Ireland and New Zealand do not assign an explicit grading or ranking to schools but in New Zealand, the older model of school evaluation had a return cycle. The more positive the report, the longer before another inspection. School leaders agreed that a favourable ERO report was used as a 'marketing tool,' a 'badge of honour,' and 'a selling point' (NZSL1 & NZSL5). Additionally, an affirmative inspection report, both in Ireland and New Zealand, serves as a comprehensive validation for all stakeholders involved in the school, confirming commendable performance and providing external validation for its accomplishments. Consequently, this achievement leads to increased recognition among other schools, heightened parental attention, and an improved ability to attract highly qualified teachers, as well as diligent and well-mannered students. A school principal in Ireland explained,

'I think there's a feeling of pride when a school receives a positive report, and it's shared with parents and published online. It's a great accomplishment for a school to be recognised with an external evaluation for good performance. It's like receiving a green light and a smiley face' (IESL4).

In contrast, an unfavourable inspection report bears its own set of drawbacks. According to school leaders, it is often perceived as a form of public naming and shaming, which could significantly impact the school's reputation and potentially lead to a decline in student enrolment.

As articulated by one school leader, 'The inspection report is publicly accessible, and its contents can be highly damaging to the school's reputation. For instance, if it highlights the poor quality of teaching and learning, which is a fundamental aspect of the school's functioning, or points out a lack of support for SEN [special education needs] students, it reflects negatively on the school' (IESL2).

In New Zealand, however, with the new evaluation for improvement approach, the old and more threatening approach has been abandoned and all schools have a three-year-long evaluation cycle. During this time the ERO's role is to support the schools in their evaluation for improvement cycle to improve outcomes for all learners. At the conclusion of three years, the ERO will support schools in reporting their progress to the community.

In the context of Pakistan, while supervisory staff report internally on the quality of education and facilities in a school after their visit, Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants (MEAs) during monitoring visits, assess the presence or absence of facilities within the school premises, closely monitor the attendance of both teachers and students; and digitally document and publicly report all observations on the departmental website. In the event that a teacher or school leader is found absent on the day of the monitoring visit without prior approval for leave, they are issued a 'show cause notice,' and their salary for that day may be deducted. Additionally, if multiple teachers are found absent on the same day, the school leader is required to provide a written explanation.

Moreover, the MEAs cross-check the number of students present in any classroom against the number of students listed in the class attendance register. Discrepancies between these figures result in 'show cause notices' being issued to the school leaders. The MEAs also conduct the Literacy and Numeracy Drive (LND) test on a random sample of Grade 3 students and teachers,

particularly in the Punjab region. Poor performance by students on the LND test carries significant consequences for the respective teachers.

Consequently, school leaders take proactive measures, as one principal shared, 'We start prepping the kids from Grade 1 in reading, writing, and math so that by the time they reach Grade 3, they perform well on the LND test conducted by the MEAs' (PKSL6). Furthermore, MEAs also generate reports evaluating the performance of the supervisory staff.

School leaders mentioned that the school monitoring database generates graphs based on the indicators, and areas of concern are marked in red. If multiple areas are marked in red, school leaders may face reprimands, be asked for explanations, or have their salary withheld.

The school leaders and supervisory staff both mentioned following a similar sequence of sanctions to address inefficiency. These sanctions include verbal reprimands, written notes in the school logbook or visitor log, issuance of a letter of explanation or a show cause notice and calling the individuals to the office to provide an explanation. However, there is a lack of consistent practices at the system-wide level to recognise and appreciate school leaders or teachers for achieving their targets.

School leaders emphasised the potential for various rewards to be granted based on their students' performance in public examinations, the receipt of an outstanding report from the MEA, or the attainment of student enrolment targets for the year. These rewards may encompass verbal appreciation, written commendations, positive remarks in performance evaluations, or even cash incentives. However, it is crucial to recognise that such practices can vary significantly across different regions and districts within the country. One principal shared their experience, stating, 'I have been awarded a cash prize four times for achieving excellent results' (PKSL8), whereas another expressed, 'There is no reward for high-performing schools or principals, no appreciation in the system' (PKSL4). Additionally, an AEO mentioned, 'I issue appreciation letters to school heads and teachers' (SS6).

In all four jurisdictions, for most of the school leaders interviewed, the school inspection process is described as a stressful and emotionally challenging experience. According to one respondent,

'It is stressful for the school leaders. If teachers do not perform well, then there is always a risk of losing your inspection grade. So, the subject heads are always under pressure' (DBSL3). Another participant expressed, 'It puts added pressure on management' (IESL2). Similarly, a third interviewee noted, 'We are always on our toes because of the strict monitoring' (PKSL6). Reflecting on the extensive preparations, another leader described, 'I spent almost two or three weeks formulating a presentation and packaging of data and other things to present to ERO... it was a bit of a performance...to make sure that we presented the best face of the school' (NZSL5).

The quality assurance system in Pakistan appears to lean heavily towards coercion, with measures of coercive power being more prominently emphasised than rewards. KHDA inspectors in Dubai exercise rewards and coercion powers to ensure accountability, policy enforcement, and school improvement, demonstrating equal strength in both approaches. In contrast, in Ireland, the exercise of reward and coercive powers by school inspectors is tied solely to the accessibility of inspection reports to the public. Meanwhile, New Zealand's approach to school improvement evaluation, as highlighted by Goodrick (2022), underscores collaboration between school leaders and evaluation partners. This approach actively discourages reliance on reward and coercion within the ERO evaluation process.

Legitimate Power

Legitimate power is intricately linked to one's position in the social hierarchy and one's official designation (French & Raven, 1959). Across these jurisdictions, quality assurance personnel benefit from robust support from their respective agencies and their legislative footing. For instance, school inspectors in Ireland (Education Act 1998, Section 13) and Dubai (the Executive Council Resolution No (38) of 2007 about the establishment of Dubai School Inspection Bureau), as well as evaluation partners in New Zealand (Education and Training Act 2020), hold statutory status. In a similar manner, the monitoring and supervisory roles in Pakistan are instituted through official gazette notifications issued by the respective education departments across all four provinces. These notifications delineate the roles and responsibilities associated with these positions.

In Dubai, KHDA serves as the regulatory body for private schools, exercising unquestionable legitimate authority over these institutions, alongside the inspectors appointed by the KHDA.

The legitimate power wielded by school inspectors is deeply felt by school leaders and according to these interviews leads to their unwavering acceptance of the feedback provided. For example, a school principal stated, 'The inspectors are from KHDA, and they consistently demonstrate competence by providing valuable insights. That's why we willingly accept their guidance. Their expertise carries significant weight, and they provide us with the parameters of the national agenda to work upon. Both the inspectors and the schools take these parameters seriously. I appreciate their approach to conducting inspections' (DBSL4).

School inspectors in Ireland possess statutory powers that authorise them to access educational institutions, and they are granted the right to expect reasonable cooperation and assistance from the school's board and staff. It is explicitly stated in the code of practice of the inspectorate that any individual who hinders or obstructs an inspector in the exercise of their conferred powers is committing an offence and may face legal consequences, including conviction and a fine (DoE, 2022). The designation of school inspectors bestows considerable authority upon them, as evident from the unconditional compliance expressed by all school leaders interviewed. They adhere without reservation to the recommendations provided by the inspectors. The statutory and legitimate power vested in inspectors' reports emerged as a recurring theme in the conversations, with school leaders expressing their concerns using strong phrases such as 'that will destroy us,' 'school will hit rock bottom,' 'we will lose our competitive edge in this town,' and 'we will be regarded as the school of last resort' (IESL3, IESL1) or another, 'You would be inviting trouble if you choose not to address the recommendations. I am aware of a few schools that didn't implement them due to disputes with the inspectorate regarding the legitimacy of the recommendations. In such cases, the inspectorate would follow up with a further report expressing disappointment over the lack of action taken on those specific recommendations' (IESL1).

Quite similar to school inspectors in Ireland, the ERO's evaluation partners have the power and authority to enter schools and work with school leaders according to their code of conduct and job specifications. With the new approach, as their role expectations have changed, so too has their legitimate power—the privileges that come with their role as evaluators in the ERO. The ERO in New Zealand, much like Ofsted in England, is an independent department. An evaluation partner expressed their legitimate powers as follows:

'We are an independent department in our own right. We don't sit within the Ministry of Education; we are independent from the Ministry of Education. We report to the ministry, the minister of the day, and the government of the day. Our mandate is to review and report. As part of that important role, we provide advice to the Minister of the day about what we observe in our school reviews, not only at the individual school level as required, but also at a system level' (EP3).

While providing independent and objective advice to the government of the day, the new legitimate power of the evaluation partner is 'to assess the school's capacity for self-review' (NZSL3) and 'to conduct evaluations with schools, with schools driving the process so they take ownership of it' (EP5).

In New Zealand, similar to the experiences observed in Dubai and Ireland, most school leaders demonstrated a willingness to embrace the feedback provided by the evaluation partners in the new landscape.

'The way we're working now, I believe, will have more impact because we're going into the schools to ensure they follow through on what they say they're doing. Evaluation won't be a discrete piece of work; instead, we'll be keeping a watchful eye' (EP5).

With robust reward and coercive powers, monitoring and evaluation, and supervision staff in Pakistan naturally hold legitimate power over school leaders, teachers, and their practices. Initially met with resistance, MEAs encountered reluctance from school leaders to share data and documents upon the introduction of monitoring services in 2014-2015. However, 'realising the potential negative impact on their school reports, leaders became more cooperative with MEAs' (MS2).

Furthermore, MEAs document supervisory staff visits and note deficiencies in basic facilities, which can reflect poorly on the performance of district education officers if widespread. Consequently, both schools and district education authorities not only cooperate with MEAs but also adopt the reported indicators as quality criteria. Supervisory staff also exert legitimate power over school leaders and teachers by employing assertive language in their interactions, emphasising the necessity of giving orders and ensuring compliance—a practice uncommon in

Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand. The vocabulary they used while talking about their relationship with teachers or school leaders often included phrases like 'if I have to give an order,' 'sometimes we have to be a little harsh,' and 'we have to strictly ensure' (SS3, SS4).

School leaders interviewed acknowledged improvements resulting from monitoring, including enhanced teaching practices, school cleanliness, safety measures, infrastructure, teachers' attendance, punctuality, and student enrolment. For instance, one school leader expressed, 'Due to regular monitoring, teachers come prepared to school. Syllabus is covered according to the monthly syllabus sheet. Previously, teachers used to cover the syllabus only partially, and that too towards the end of the school term' (PKSL9).

These instances underscore how the legitimate power of monitoring and supervisory staff is supported by their coercive power, influencing practices and driving changes within the education system.

Across all four regions, school inspectors in Dubai and Ireland, quality assurance staff in Pakistan, and evaluation partners in New Zealand wield significant legitimate power, bolstered by legislative support. In Dubai and Pakistan, particularly, the legitimate power base is reinforced by robust foundations of coercion and reward mechanisms, amplifying its impact.

Expert and Informational Powers

As elucidated within the framework proposed by French and Raven (1959), the efficacy of expert power possessed by school inspectors predominantly hinges upon school leaders' perception of their professional competence. In this process, school leaders engage in a comparative evaluation, juxtaposing the knowledge of school inspectors with their own and against established quality criteria. The stronger their conviction in the expertise of the school inspectors, the more inclined they are to embrace the information conveyed. Across all four regimes, school inspectors are appointed based on their prior experience in education, including teaching and learning, curriculum development, and school leadership. Upon induction, they undergo comprehensive training in school evaluation, with numerous opportunities for ongoing professional development to enhance their expertise. This approach is designed to solidify their

role as experts, empowering them to lead discussions on school improvement following inspections (Gardezi, et al., 2023b). There was a somewhat mixed response from school leaders under this heading. To some extent, leaders across all four jurisdictions acknowledged school inspectors' knowledge and expertise, though in Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, this acknowledgement was, on occasion, expressed with a degree of scepticism.

Only in Dubai, did school leaders express complete confidence in KHDA inspectors' expertise and knowledge and widely admitted their credibility and reliability. As one of the school leaders stated, 'Mostly, they are very experienced. The majority of the inspectors know what they are saying, they provide meaningful comments' (DBSL3). School inspectors are also aware of the influence they wield on schools and assert that their feedback is always taken positively. School inspectors are also conscious of their expert power and the influence their feedback can have on schools. According to an inspector, 'School leaders are well aware of the considerable benefits they derive from the feedback provided on each observed lesson. As school inspectors, we offer feedback on every lesson we attend, which proves beneficial for the teachers. The presence of an external perspective, with fresh eyes observing their classroom performance, guides them in making improvements' (DBSI1).

Generally, in Ireland, school leaders conceded that inspectors are competent, experienced, professional, and well-trained. They also praised the well-structured nature of the feedback provided by inspectors. One school leader noted, 'I found their reports to be very well-balanced and thorough. Throughout my experience, I observed that they provide objective and carefully considered feedback. I have never encountered a report that made me question its accuracy or validity' (IESL5). Another school leader explained the significance of inspectors' feedback in comparison with their own evaluation, 'Self-evaluation, by its very nature, tends to be somewhat biased. It is essential to have an external perspective from someone outside the organisation to provide a balanced view. While you may not always agree with their assessments, engaging in such discussions can ultimately lead to improvements' (IESL3).

However, some school leaders expressed concerns about the inflexible nature of the current school inspection system, which they feel limits the potential of inspectors to provide tangible practical benefits to schools. One principal remarked, 'They are very much formalised in their approach. They have very little leeway in terms of how they can interact within the school. It's

very much a box-ticking exercise, looking for certain things and at certain things... There's no room for real problem solving or talking outside of the box about the realities of the school' (IESL4). School leaders in Ireland recognised and acknowledged the influential role of inspectors' expert power in shaping efforts towards school improvement but dissatisfaction primarily stems from the rigidity of the inspection system rather than from any perceived lack of expert power on the part of the inspectors.

In New Zealand, both school leaders and evaluation partners not only underscored the necessity for evaluation partners to possess relevant experience and expertise in the field, but also highlighted the critical importance of cultivating trusting relationships to ensure the effectiveness of the evaluation model within schools.

One evaluation partner noted, 'The feedback that I'm receiving indicates that people really appreciate the relational model ... if you've built up the emotional bank account or a relationship with the school, you can then have those difficult conversations' (EP5). School leaders' trust in the evaluation partners' proficiency is important, as it influences their acceptance of feedback and encourages adherence to their guidance.

School leaders generally acknowledged the expertise of evaluation partners in the field and appreciated their efforts in guiding them on their school improvement journey. A school leader stated, 'Many of the evaluation partners are highly expert in the field of evaluation, and this actually makes them a valuable resource for schools rather than mere inspectors coming to check up on us. They work alongside us as external critical friends' (NZSL3).

Equally, however, in Ireland and New Zealand some school leaders expressed scepticism concerning the competence and expertise of some school inspectors. They alluded to the fact that some school inspectors lack experience as school principals and therefore, may not have a firsthand understanding of the role's intricacies. They also expressed concerns about the outdated perspective of school inspectors and evaluation partners, whose experience of the realities within schools and stakeholders' expectations may be dated. Any uncertainty regarding an inspector's expertise can potentially undermine the influence of their expert power on school leaders.

School leaders in Pakistan also admitted the expert power of some of the supervisory staff while discrediting others for their limited professional efficacy. For instance, one school leader mentioned, 'Every supervisory staff member has their own strategy to monitor the school; there is no standardised format' (PKSL4). Some supervisory staff visit classes and engage students in questioning to assess their learning, while others make more general inquiries about the school and teachers. Some visits involve students reading or giving dictations, while in other cases, the supervisory staff merely goes around the school and leaves, making the school visit seem perfunctory.

On the other hand, the AEOs are trained to mentor and coach teachers (PESRP, 2020). According to the self-report of the AEOs interviewed, they are positively regarded by teachers due to their provision of valuable support aimed at enhancing teaching practices.

'I visit schools to work with them. I guide them with regard to teaching and learning and administrative matters. I have very good relations with school staff. Both teachers and school leaders respect me and listen to me because I'm very senior and experienced' (SS1).

However, the necessity for frequent, unannounced, and monthly surveillance of schools by supervisory staff suggests that their capacity to influence school practices through expert power may be constrained.

The school leaders recognised the competence of MEAs in carrying out their assigned tasks, but they tended to feel that MEAs primarily focus on collecting 'quantitative data' and 'ticking boxes' (SS2). As a result, they are not actively involved in assessing the quality of teaching and learning, and hence, it is suggested, have limited expert power to influence the school leaders.

Moving forward, informational power extends beyond expert power as school leaders acknowledge the experience and knowledge of school inspectors and accept the information or feedback they receive. According to French and Raven (1959), this represents a primary form of influence. When shared information persuasively aligns with the school leaders' existing

cognitive structure, it has a lasting impact. School leaders become fully convinced of the specific practice, independent of further influence from the school inspectors.

School leaders in Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand mentioned instances of school inspectors' informational power. For example, a principal shared, 'It was reassuring that evaluation partners were overseeing the same things we were seeing. They were able to acknowledge the things that we had already changed or improved, which was quite validating' (NZSL1).

Most of the school leaders in Ireland recognised the constructive influence of school inspectors on the national educational framework, facilitating its alignment with evolving global trends and widely accepted best practices. This influence is manifested through the dissemination of contemporary information, often conveyed via quality criteria and feedback mechanisms. These are the two main conditions reflective of the inspectors' informational power. According to a principal, 'I firmly believe that the Irish inspectors have made a significant and positive impact on Irish schools. They have worked collaboratively with principals, teachers, and volunteer parents, equally contributing to ensure that our schools evolve and remain relevant with the changing times' (IESL2). School inspectors asserted their informational power as follows,

'Inspection plays a crucial role in the educational ecosystem as it can serve multiple purposes. Firstly, it helps in setting standards for schools and educational settings. By providing an external perspective on the work of these institutions, it offers valuable insights to the leaders and staff, as well as to the public they serve. Moreover, inspections also play a pivotal role in identifying, praising, and encouraging good practices, which often offers essential reassurance and motivation to the educational community. Additionally, inspections help in pinpointing weaknesses within the system and aid in ensuring that necessary improvements are made to enhance overall performance' (IESI2).

Informational power, as French and Raven explain it, is contingent not only on the substantive content of communication, which undoubtedly constitutes valuable knowledge, but also on the interplay of interpersonal and persuasive skills employed by school inspectors. If they adeptly

articulate alternative approaches to school practices and convincingly illustrate the superior merits of such approaches, changes in school practices—initially prompted by the inspector's feedback or guidance—become ingrained in the school leaders' schema, suggesting lasting change. For example, a KHDA school inspector related an instance of their informational power: 'If you visit any school and attend any lesson, you will see that teaching is no longer teacher-focused; it is student-focused. Assessment for learning is being used rather than the assessment of learning. Students now lead their own learning and are highly engaged' (DBSI1).

Similar to the scenario with expert power, informational power appears to be underutilised within the supervisory system in Pakistan. The system, as reported by a principal, upholds a rigid hierarchical structure wherein individuals higher in the hierarchy wield greater legitimate power to dispense rewards or punishments.

'Imagine if there are no checks and balances; one becomes lazy. They [the supervisory and monitoring staff] check school leaders, and then we, as school leaders, check teachers' (PKSL6).

During the interviews, nevertheless, some school leaders spoke favourably about specific DDEOs who demonstrated a genuine commitment to educational quality. During their school visits, these officers provided model lessons, conducted brief assessments to gauge learning levels within classes, and offered guidance to both school leaders and teachers. These actions demonstrated a certain degree of informational power.

In Dubai, school inspectors command robust expert and informational powers. School leaders not only accept but highly value the feedback provided by these inspectors, appreciating its relevance and utility. The inspectors are esteemed for their extensive experience and profound knowledge. Instances have been noted, albeit sporadically, where school leaders have referred to the expert and informational powers of monitoring and supervisory staff in Pakistan. In the context of New Zealand, as discussed, the ERO's new school evaluation approach inherently promotes the exercise of informational power. In Ireland, school leaders frequently acknowledge the informational power, and to a degree expert power, wielded by school inspectors. They invoke the inspectors' rich experience, affirming the pertinence and

congruence of the feedback with their assessments of areas requiring improvement within the school.

Referent Power

In the context of our study, referent power, as defined by French and Raven, implies that school leaders will seek to associate themselves with school inspectors if the latter possess referent power over the former, a form of power that relies on the charisma and personality characteristics of the school inspectors. Across all four jurisdictions, school leaders displayed varying degrees of influence from the referent power of school inspectors. In Dubai, every school leader interviewed expressed a strong aspiration to become a school inspector. This inclination can be understood within the framework of Dubai's private education system, where school inspectors are perceived as an attractive and highly esteemed group. The school leaders articulated their desire to emulate school inspectors, viewing this role as a means to improve the educational outcomes of the schools they would oversee. This admiration for school inspectors among school leaders signifies the internalisation of the inspectors' beliefs and principles, shaping their thinking, understanding, and approach to their own responsibilities.

One principal expressed her keenness to be a school inspector as follows: 'I believe that becoming a school inspector aligns perfectly with my interests, as I have a genuine passion for coaching and mentoring individuals. I find great joy in this work. The way I see it, when we inspect someone, we are offering them an opportunity to develop and better themselves, especially when they approach it positively. This, in turn, becomes a rewarding experience for me too, as I get to learn something new during each inspection. It's like seizing a fresh chance to enhance my own knowledge and skills' (DBSL4).

In contrast to the enthusiastic reception among school leaders in Dubai, those in Ireland exhibited a range of attitudes towards the prospect of transitioning to become school inspectors. While some expressed disinterest in the role, preferring to maintain their current positions as school leaders due to the immediate impact they can wield, others entertained unconventional reasons for considering the switch. For instance, one school leader highlighted the appeal of being able to take annual leave, which is possible as a school inspector but not available due to the demanding nature of their current responsibilities. Nevertheless, some expressed genuine interest in the role should the opportunity arise.

Conversely, those who articulated disinterest provided articulate explanations for their stance. A principal eloquently stated, 'Why anyone would desire to become a school inspector is beyond my understanding. Personally, I fail to perceive any personal value in such work. It entails visiting schools and being the person who is supposedly welcomed but often faces an unwelcoming atmosphere' (IESL4).

In New Zealand, school leaders generally expressed temporary interest in becoming evaluation partners due to the legitimate power it grants them to enter schools and observe practices. This experience offers valuable learning opportunities and insights they can later apply in their own schools. Many regarded it as a 'significant opportunity' and 'a wonderful learning experience.' However, not all principals embraced this idea, preferring the rewards of staying within their own school communities. One principal shared, 'I'm not sure how satisfying it would be moving from school to school. I like being in my school, working with my team. I love interacting with students and being part of my school community' (NZSL5).

In contrast, another principal saw it as a viable career move, stating, 'I would never have wanted to go into the review office with the previous model. But with this model, I see huge potential, and it does excite me as a possible career move beyond principalship. I feel I have a lot to offer in that role' (NZSL1).

School leaders acknowledged the exposure and prestige evaluation partners enjoy, making the role appealing, albeit temporarily, as they seek to gather insights and experiences from diverse school environments.

In Pakistan, unlike in Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand, the two QA systems have different social statuses, thereby exerting varying degrees of influence. The MEAs possess powers of reward, coercion, and legitimate influence, yet their compensation structures and benefits do not align with those of school leaders. Understandably, no school head expressed any inclination towards joining this group. In contrast, supervisory staff hold a superior position, evoking a sense of privilege among school leaders. During interviews, school leaders spoke of the respect and favourability associated with positions such as DDEO or DEO. Some officers earned admiration

from school leaders through personal attributes and qualities; for instance, one school leader mentioned a DEO who would teach Mathematics to classes during school visits (PKSL5).

Consequently, school leaders displayed an interest in these supervisory roles. However, the demanding nature of the positions, coupled with poor work-life balance and excessive political interference, disinclined them from pursuing such roles further. One principal explained, 'I have been offered the DDEO's position several times, but there's too much political interference. As a principal, I have more autonomy to do as I please' (PKSL7).

In Dubai, there is a pervasive desire among school leaders to transition into the role of a school inspector, highlighting the significant referent power these inspectors possess. Conversely, in Pakistan, while not all school leaders aspire to join the ranks, there exists a palpable sense of respect and admiration for certain supervisory officers. This sentiment underscores a clear exercise of referent power, as these officers are esteemed and trusted by school leaders. In Ireland, a subdued level of referent power is observed. Despite the varying attitudes, it is notable that school inspectors do not exert considerable referent power over school leaders. Conversely, in New Zealand, evaluation partners wield substantial referent power, evident in school leaders expressing keen interest in assuming such roles due to the abundant learning opportunities associated with them, albeit temporarily. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of MEAs, all QA personnel in the four regimes under study had prior experience as school leaders or teachers before joining the QA regimes. This suggests that perhaps influenced by the referent power of school inspectors, they chose to transition into these roles.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Across the investigated QA systems, a comprehensive examination of the roles of inspectors, evaluation partners, monitoring, and supervisory personnel has revealed the presence of six essential bases of social power. These power bases manifest with varying degrees of influence on school leaders, as acknowledged both explicitly and implicitly throughout the interview process. Table 7 presents the levels of influence for each base of social power across the examined jurisdictions, as determined through the analysis of interview data, using Vagias' (2006) Likert scale response anchors. Notably, the reward and coercive powers wielded by the supervisory and monitoring staff appear most potent in the context of Pakistan, as these powers

are tightly focused on individuals, influencing aspects such as teacher salaries and school leaders' reprimands or inquiries. This creates a high-stakes or hard governance inspection regime. Dubai's reward and coercion mechanisms primarily concern institutions, where a school's presence or exit from the market hinges on inspection reports and the rankings given therein. Nevertheless, poor rankings have severe consequences, ranging from parental distrust in educational quality to potential school closures, making Dubai's inspections nearly as high stakes as that of Pakistan. In Ireland, school inspectors' application of reward and coercive powers are channelled through inspection reports. The absence of school grading and lack of repercussions for poor performance render the inspection system low stakes (O'Brien et al., 2019). Nonetheless, there can still be considerable implications. As Hult and Segerholm (2017) contend, due to the recognition that inspection reports can be used to bolster school recruitment efforts, there has been a perceptible shift in school leaders' attitudes towards inspectors and the outcomes of inspection. Conversely, in New Zealand, the implementation of the new school evaluation for improvement approach has led to a reduction in the emphasis on rewards and coercion. This departure from traditional methods of power and influence in external inspection renders the presence of these influences largely nominal or symbolic rather than substantive, making it virtually devoid of any stakes. It remains to be seen how this departure from, as it were, the traditional tools of inspection impact upon inspection outcomes and effectiveness over time.

Table 7: Level of Influence of Bases of Social Powers

	Reward	Coercion	Legitimate	Expert	Informational	Referent
Dubai	extremely influential	extremely influential	extremely influential	extremely influential	extremely influential	extremely influential
Ireland	somewhat influential	somewhat influential	very influential	very influential	very influential	somewhat influential
New Zealand	not at all influential	not at all influential	very influential	very influential	very influential	very influential
Pakistan	slightly influential	extremely influential	extremely influential	somewhat influential	somewhat influential	somewhat influential

Reward and coercive powers demand continuous monitoring, legislative support, adherence to quality standards, and authoritative positions to ensure compliance (Brown, 2013). In Pakistan and Dubai, frequent visits by quality assurance personnel are observed, and any laxity in this aspect can result in reduced compliance, as reward and coercion mechanisms may not significantly impact school leaders' internal beliefs or concerns. While this approach may not always be cost-effective or sustainable for achieving transformative quality improvements, according to previous studies, specific areas have shown progress: these include teachers' attendance and punctuality, student enrolment, availability of basic facilities, and the frequency of supervisory support visits (Gardezi, et al., 2023a; Nadeem & Saadi, 2019). Therefore, although the utility of reward and coercion powers in promoting quality improvement is acknowledged, their ability to bring about a deeper transformation in school leaders' attitudes and belief systems may be limited, requiring a more nuanced approach and sustained efforts.

Brown (2013) groups reward, coercive, and legitimate power together, arguing that these tools are inherently tied to the hierarchical position of the influencing agent. The operation of reward and coercive powers within the school inspection process greatly elevates its stakes in the perception of those on the receiving end. In Dubai and Ireland, discussions with school leaders revealed the presence of accountability pressure, occasionally leading to "window dressing" strategies aimed at achieving favourable inspection reports. Pakistan's unique approach of unannounced visits by monitoring and supervisory staff prevents such strategies, keeping schools under a state of "panoptic performativity" (Perryman et al., 2018). In contrast, New Zealand's new approach seems to lessen the stakes, yet it places a greater onus on school leaders to ensure internal or self-evaluation alignment, as they steer the evaluation process. For

example, a school leader shared, 'I think it's a high trust model and inherently in a high trust model there's a higher chance of loss of rigour... there's a danger that rigour can be removed from parts of it, because the evaluation partner is not coming in to look at the whole school. The evaluation partners are coming to look at the pre-agreed dimension that the school would like to focus on' (NZSL3).

In each of the four regimes, whether attributed to inspectors, evaluation partners, or monitoring and supervisory staff, legitimate power is consistently strong. Designation and job descriptions confer specific legitimate powers, affording these individuals the authority to enforce cooperation among school leaders and staff, thereby ensuring compliance with recommendations to avert potential sanctions. The authority of quality assurance personnel's legitimate power is augmented through the coupling of rewards and coercion, leading school leaders in Dubai and Pakistan to conform to inspection requirements. The ERO, operating uniquely as a national agency directly accountable to the parliament, also wields legitimate power, influencing the Ministry of Education to take corrective measures in response to evaluation findings, as reported by school leaders, 'ERO reviews have been used by the Ministry of Education to get rid of principals and boards and to bring in people from outside' (NZSL2). In Ireland, a distinctive amalgamation emerges, characterised by a prevalence of high legitimate power juxtaposed with a low-stakes inspection system.

Expert, Informational, and Referent Powers share a common thread of influencing internal beliefs, operating independently of the hierarchical position of the influencing agent (Brown, 2013). Expert and informational powers are intrinsically linked to school leaders' faith and trust in the inspectors' experience and expertise. Stronger belief engenders higher credibility and increases the potency of inspectors' recommendations and feedback in shaping school leaders' practices. School improvement sustainability, as suggested by Baxter (2017), is built upon trust and confidence between school leaders and inspectors. Elsewhere, Ehren and Baxter (2021) suggest that in a high-trust context where school leaders and inspectors share similar goals and are committed to meeting those goals intensive monitoring is not required. In the case of New Zealand, phrases such as trust, building relationships, and instilling confidence emerged as recurrent themes in conversations, but only time will tell if their evaluation for improvement approach will be successful. However, these phrases did not come up during interviews in other jurisdictions.

Referent power, a particularly intriguing aspect, emerges from the personal qualities and attributes of inspectors that resonate with school leaders, making them relatable and likable. When inspectors hold referent power, school leaders are more amenable to influence, more inclined to heed guidance, and more motivated to comply with requests or suggestions due to the positive feelings and admiration they generate. Notably, Dubai's school inspectors command substantial referent power, as expressed through school leaders' eagerness to join the inspectors' team. Some school leaders in Ireland and New Zealand also expressed interest in becoming inspectors or evaluation partners, viewing it as a privilege and a learning opportunity. Some did not entertain the idea at all depending largely on the interaction they might have had with the school inspectors. In Pakistan, although instances of individual respect for monitoring and supervisory staff do exist, the overall inclination towards joining their ranks is limited. Moreover, in Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, where the reception of referent power among school leaders towards school inspectors exhibits variance, a corresponding variability is observed in the recognition of expert power. This observation implies that when school leaders perceive school inspectors as possessing expertise and knowledge, there is a heightened probability of alignment in perspective and viewpoint between the two parties. This point strongly indicates that inspectors, in order to have and operationalise these powers, need a high level of experience, knowledge, and training and most intangibly of all the personality type required to encourage and influence those they are evaluating and mentoring.

Gustafsson et al. (2015) propose that school inspection, as a catalyst for change, often operates indirectly, fostering developmental processes that set clear standards and expectations, and supporting schools in building evaluation and improvement capacities, rather than relying on direct coercive methods. This perspective aligns with the expert and informational powers of school inspectors, influencing school leaders' practices more sustainably while minimising the influence of coercive power. Brown (2013) concurs, emphasising that referent, expert, and informational powers, by altering school leaders' internal belief systems, contribute to transformative quality more effectively than the other power bases, provided that school leaders have confidence and trust in inspectors' competence and credibility. Altrichter and Kemethofer (2018) posit that in high-stakes inspection systems school leaders pay more attention to inspection criteria before the inspection visit to avoid sanctions while in low-stakes systems, inspection criteria are regarded as long-term targets deemed of significance across an

extended period of time. Therefore, in New Zealand school leaders are more likely to respond positively to the informational messages of evaluation partners than in the rest of the jurisdictions. However, as in any organisation, quality assurance personnel in these jurisdictions may have different levels of expertise despite large investments in their professional development (Gardezi et al., 2023b). Not all of them can exercise an equal degree of referent, expert, and informational powers on school leaders and this is evident in the school leaders' responses.

In conclusion, while referent, expert, and informational powers exert stronger influence over internal beliefs, the importance of reward, coercive, and legitimate powers should not be overlooked. These forms of power, which are closely tied to policy compliance and adherence to quality standards, play a crucial role in driving improvement (Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2018). Furthermore, the methods used by QA personnel—such as grading, public reporting, effective communication, and personal charisma to wield the powers vested in them by their QA system—shape the extent to which school leaders adjust their practices. According to Brown et al. (2024), for inspections to be genuinely effective, they must not only regulate and evaluate but also inspire and facilitate sustained improvement in schools. The analysis of school inspectors' influence and efficacy across four quality assurance systems provides valuable insights into the diverse practices and perceptions of school leaders and QA personnel. These insights are essential for informing the development and refinement of school inspection systems, with the ultimate goal of maximising the impact of inspections and enhancing the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms. To achieve this, a balanced integration of different power bases should be tailored to the specific contexts of each country or state, fostering positive change and improvement across varied educational environments.

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Chapter seven: Publication Four

The development and status of self-evaluation as a component of school inspection and quality assurance: A comparison across four countries

Author: Sarah Gardezi

Abstract

Objective and rationale: The increasing prominence of school self-evaluation (SSE) as a pivotal element in global quality assurance practices is attributed to its cost-effectiveness, relevance to school contexts, empowerment of schools in managing and leading the school self-evaluation processes and holding them accountable for achievement standards. This paper aims to explore various approaches and SSE practices through the evolution and current status of school self-evaluation within the realms of school inspection and quality assurance in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan. The paper emphasises a comparative perspective to showcase SSE models from these countries as pioneering initiatives for quality assurance in educational improvement, especially for nations where SSE practices are still evolving.

Methods: This study employs literature review, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with school leaders (n = 32) to offer insights into current school self-evaluation practices in these four countries through a comparative analysis. These methods were chosen in line with the specific aims and research questions of the paper which are to provide an overview from the research literature of the development and current status of SSE as an element of school evaluation in each country studied. To analyse, compare and contrast policy in the area in each case and to obtain, through interviews, rich deep data and findings on the attitude and opinions of key personnel in each country on SSE as a policy and practice.

Results: School self-evaluation (of varying types) is being built into each school evaluation system and becoming an integral part of inspection and quality assurance, and it is argued here, broadly moving along a similar spectrum in each case. However, for now, SSE practices are different in all four countries, usually due to the stage of development of the school inspection system and, above all, the overall structure of their respective educational landscapes— that is to say, whether it is a centralised, controlled and hierarchical education system or a decentralised and autonomous system.

Conclusion: The study suggests that it is possible to integrate school self-evaluation into a wide range of educational systems and philosophies, eventually leading to educational improvement in any country following the case study countries discussed as models.

Introduction and Background

The primary objectives of school inspection, or external evaluation, are widely recognised to encompass both accountability and school improvement. School inspection ensures schools'

compliance with regulatory requirements and educational standards (Baxter, 2017). Simultaneously, it promotes improvements in the quality of education delivery. Achieving this latter objective involves not only external agencies monitoring schools for compliance with statutory and quality standards but also an internal process wherein schools evaluate their own practices. This internal review mechanism, known as School Self-Evaluation (SSE), has become an integral component of global school quality assurance (QA) protocols (O'Brien et al., 2022).

Previous research on SSE shows that it empowers schools to set their own objectives, engage staff, and focus on areas needing improvement based on internal evaluations. This fosters ownership of the improvement process and grants schools the autonomy to identify and address their specific needs (Barry et al., 2023; Davies & Rudd, 2001). MacBeath et al. (1995) highlight SSE's critical role in enhancing school evaluation effectiveness, advocating for self-evaluation to be central in national school improvement strategies, integrating accountability and self-improvement (p.92).

Several studies also note an economic rationale for self-evaluation (MacBeath, 2005; McNamara et al., 2022). Wilcox (2000) posits that external evaluation requires significant manpower and financial resources, particularly for inspector recruitment. Historically, inspection costs were obscured as inspectors undertook various roles, including managing school facilities and resources (Walsh, 2016). While external evaluation can drive change and support decision-making and resource allocation, it demands vigilant oversight and transparency to ensure resources are used effectively. Thus, accountability for linking inputs and outputs lies with both schools and inspectors.

Studies also highlight several limitations of external surveillance, such as lack of transparency (Lindgren & Rönnerberg, 2017), concerns about evaluator professionalism, inspector subjectivity, and schools resorting to window dressing under high-stakes systems (Hossain, 2017; Moreton et al., 2017; Penninckx & Vanhoof, 2017; Altrichter, 2017; Perryman, 2009). These issues have led to a combined approach using both external and internal evaluations, where each complements and validates the other. Leading inspection jurisdictions and organisations like the

Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI)⁴² advocate for integrating SSE into school practices due to its proven benefits for student learning and educational excellence.

Although SSE is increasingly recognised as an indispensable component of quality assurance practices worldwide, discrepancies persist in its implementation across diverse education systems, and minimal research has been dedicated to identifying the most effective SSE approaches within various educational contexts. This paper intends to explore the various approaches and SSE practices and the evolution and current status of SSE within the realms of school inspection and quality assurance, emphasising a comparative perspective. For this purpose, the study scrutinises the evolution and current status of SSE in four distinct educational landscapes: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. These were chosen both for similarities and differences as described below.

In Dubai, where 90% of children and young people attend private schools, and 76% of schools belong to the private sector (KHDA, 2021; OECD, 2021), the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), a government agency, oversees and controls the quality and operations of private schools (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018). This oversight includes managing the fee structure and class levels without offering any financial or other assistance (Gardezi et al., 2023). In Ireland and New Zealand, schools for compulsory education are self-managing and, though they receive public funding, have a degree of autonomy to make decisions concerning aspects of staffing, budget, curriculum, governance and ethos (Timperley, 2013). In contrast, Pakistan has a hierarchical education system with substantial top-down control. This control extends over recruitment, promotion, curriculum development, and instructional content (Simkins et al., 2003). Despite the devolution of the education system to the district level since 2001, along with resource pooling at the district level (Zafar, 2003), the prevailing top-down, autocratic, and authoritarian approach leaves little room for school leaders and teachers to drive change (Behlol & Perveen, 2013; Gul & Khilji, 2023; Razzaq & Forde, 2014). In every province⁴³, there are two parallel streams of quality assurance, Monitoring and Evaluation

⁴² <https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Members/Inspection-Profiles>

⁴³ Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) & Balochistan

focused on collecting quantitative data against a set of indicators⁴⁴ and supervisory staff with a responsibility to enhance the quality of and access to education (Gardezi et al., 2023a, 2023b).

Several studies have examined the benefits and challenges of implementing SSE (see for example, Davies & Rudd, 2001; MacBeath, 2005; McNamara, 2022). This study distinguishes itself by presenting a comparative analysis of SSE practices across four educational systems and aims to showcase SSE models from these countries as pioneering initiatives for quality assurance in educational improvement, especially for nations where SSE practices are still evolving. This study employs a dual approach, combining a thorough review of academic and grey literature with semi-structured interviews involving school leaders. Through these interviews, the study endeavours to capture the perspectives of school leaders on SSE, school improvement planning, SSE practices, and the various SSE-related supports available within their education systems. Understanding the dynamics of SSE is crucial for enhancing educational quality and fostering continuous improvement within educational systems. This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- How has SSE evolved within the realms of school inspection and quality assurance in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan?
- What are the current practices of SSE in these countries and how do they compare?
- What are the general perceptions of school leaders in these countries about the significance and implementation of SSE?
- How does the structure of a country's educational system influence the development and implementation of SSE?

These questions aim to delve into the various aspects of SSE practices within four different educational contexts, focusing on comparative analysis, evolution, challenges, and influencing factors.

The following section delves into the literature on the evolution and development of SSE, discussing its benefits and theoretical underpinnings. Subsequently, the methodology employed

⁴⁴ School status, infrastructure details, teaching and non-teaching staff details, student enrolment and attendance details, administrative visits, delivery of textbooks, stipend details, basic facilities, Parent-teacher council details

in this study is explored. Following that, I examine the implementation of SSE in each of the four countries under consideration. Finally, a comparative analysis is undertaken to elucidate similarities and differences, as well as to address issues, challenges, and, importantly, the potential benefits of SSE within diverse education systems.

Literature review

Several definitions of SSE offer diverse insights into the nature of the process. Schildkamp and Visscher (2010) describe SSE as a systematic information gathering procedure initiated by the school itself, aimed at assessing its functioning and the achievement of its educational objectives. The primary goal of SSE is to support decision-making, promote learning, and enhance overall school improvement. Meuret and Morlaix (2003) emphasise the collaborative nature of SSE, where it is conducted by various school stakeholders, including management, staff, pupils, and parents, in contrast to the external evaluation performed by outside agents. Mutch (2012) underscores the importance of balancing internal and external perspectives within SSE, especially in a system requiring both improvement and accountability. To sum up, MacBeath (2012) places internal evaluation at the core of the quality assurance and improvement process, emphasising its rigorous nature, systematic evaluation of practice, use of indicators as inquiry frameworks, and the application of various analytic and formative tools. These definitions collectively contribute to a broader understanding of the multifaceted nature of SSE and its recognised role in enhancing educational quality and accountability.

Academic research posits multiple reasons for the initiation of self-evaluation in schools. Neoliberal trends in education have provided schools with greater autonomy for self-management while also assigning them the responsibility to enhance their quality through the review and evaluation of their practices (McNamara & O'Hara, 2008; Brown et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2018; Simons, 2013). Mutch (2012) maintains that the evolution of SSE is an outcome of the broader movement in the field of evaluation, resulting in democratic approaches, including participatory, empowerment, and democratic evaluation methods. These methods encourage evaluands to participate more fully in evaluative activities, encompassing both self-evaluation and evaluations conducted by external evaluators. Similarly, schools are urged to lead their SSE while also participating in the external evaluation. This represents a shift

from the traditional top-down approach to a bottom-up endeavour, where schools and teachers are engaged in evaluating their own performance (Brady, 2016).

Studies have also attributed the emphasis on self-evaluation to the high costs associated with cyclical external evaluations (MacBeath, 2005; McNamara et al., 2022; Wilcox, 2000; Mutch, 2012; Brown et al., 2016; Simons, 2013). Compared to external evaluations, SSE is undeniably cost-effective and offers a greater capacity for follow-through. It encompasses not only economic considerations but also intellectual aspects. If the knowledge acquired during external evaluations is not utilised for school improvement and is instead taken away by the evaluators, it represents a missed opportunity (Mutch, 2012). Furthermore, these studies stress the importance of considering the unintended effects of school inspections, such as window dressing and game-playing when assessing the costs of such inspections (Altrichter & Kemethofer, 2015; Jones et al., 2017). School inspections involve significant financial and time costs, along with the possibility of unintended consequences. These consequences may encompass heightened stress levels experienced by both teachers and school leaders, as well as the diversion of valuable time and resources towards inspection preparations, which could otherwise have been directed towards fundamental instructional practices (Ryan et al., 2013).

Additionally, school inspections involve several aspects that render them vulnerable to controversies. For example, inspectors' subjective views on education can influence their judgments and interpretations, potentially leading to discrepancies in assessments and perceptions, which may raise concerns about the fairness and consistency of the process (Moreton et al., 2017). Inspectors often face criticism for their preconceived notions and biases, which can affect their objectivity and credibility, ultimately eroding trust between schools and inspectors (Penninckx & Vanhoof, 2017). Moreover, a common perception of insufficient transparency at various phases of the inspection process (pre-inspection, during inspection, and post-inspection) may undermine the credibility of the process and lead to controversy (Lindgren & Rönnerberg, 2017; Altrichter, 2017). Lindgren and Rönnerberg (2017) maintain that the legitimacy of school inspection largely depends on transparency and black boxing, a certain level of concealing the social production of facts to establish authority. School inspection often faces criticism due to its limited scope. Inspectors, primarily focusing on academic achievement, may overlook the broader context of the school and the intricacies of the education system. Last but

not the least, is the high stakes associated with external evaluations, such as their impact on a school's reputation, funding allocation, and other accountability measures (Altrichter, 2017). These controversies have resulted in dissatisfaction among schools and teachers with the school inspection process (Early, 2017). Consequently, education systems have shifted toward a devolved quality control mechanism, encouraging schools to assess their own performance by providing them with quality standards (Brown et al., 2016). This approach fosters awareness of their current status and empowers them to determine their desired goals. Furthermore, it supports schools through the development of school improvement plans, enabling them to chart their path towards improvement.

Inspection systems across middle-income and lower-middle-income countries, such as Pakistan, encounter several shared challenges. A UNESCO report on Accountability in Education 2017/2018 highlights that these challenges include limitations in both human and financial resources, a reluctance among inspectors to make regular school visits, and a capacity deficit in identifying schools' genuine issues. Furthermore, a significant communication gap exists between school administrations and inspectors. Essentially, negative perceptions held by teachers about inspectors, coupled with a deficiency in the inspectors' professional approach to constructive school evaluations, hinder the effectiveness of the inspection procedures. Consequently, this impedes the overarching objective of inspections, which is to enhance school outcomes by reinforcing mutual accountability between schools and higher administrative bodies (Hossain, 2017). Therefore, SSE can be seen as a quality assurance measure with the potential to mitigate the controversies and challenges associated with external evaluation or school inspection and assist schools in their improvement efforts.

The foundation of SSE is rooted in several theories and frameworks that shape its practices. One such theory is the Learning Organisation Theory, as proposed by Peter Senge, which envisions schools as learning organisations (Stoll & Kools, 2017). Within this framework, the principles of team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking support SSE. It underscores the process through which schools continuously acquire new knowledge, skills, and capabilities to enhance their performance while considering their unique contexts and challenges (Barry et al., 2023; Stoll & Kools, 2017). Another influential framework is Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, introduced by W. Edwards Deming in the 1950s (Taguma et al., 2018). This iterative model

guides schools in planning improvements, implementing them, assessing their effectiveness, and taking responsive actions. Additionally, Wenger's concept of a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998) also serves as the foundation for SSE, fostering collaboration among school leaders, teachers, students, and parents who share common goals in achieving school improvement and better learning outcomes. According to Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015), 'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (p.2). Every school constitutes a community of practice, aiming to build capacities and capabilities by sharing information and applying newfound knowledge to enhance their work. Together, these theories and frameworks contribute to the essential processes of SSE, promoting continuous improvement within educational institutions.

SSE represents an embodiment of school empowerment, effecting a transfer of authority from central government to the school community. Within SSE, school leaders, management, and school boards find a valuable mechanism for instigating organisational change (Brown et al., 2016). Furthermore, school leaders and teachers who actively participate in SSE activities progressively develop their evaluation capacities, which can be effectively applied in various facets of their professional roles (Barry et al., 2023; Davies & Rudd, 2001). This collaborative process actively engages school leaders, teachers, parents, and students in the evaluation process, thus affording them a collective voice in school decision-making procedures. This approach fosters a sense of collegiality and collaboration among all stakeholders (Brown et al., 2020). Notably, SSE demonstrates sensitivity to the local context and unique characteristics of individual schools (Brown et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2021; Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007). Self-evaluating schools can establish their own agendas, allowing staff to concentrate on areas requiring improvement that are relevant to their specific context, thus encouraging ownership of the process (Brady, 2016; Meuret & Morlaix, 2003; Brown et al., 2021; Boyle et al., 2020). Boyle et al. (2020) concur that these attributes collectively render SSE a sustainable approach to school improvement.

To reap the numerous benefits of SSE, it is crucial to navigate several challenges when initiating and embedding this self-improving process in schools. These challenges include ensuring that school leaders and teachers possess the necessary professional skills for conducting evaluations

(Altrichter, 2017; Brown et al., 2021), the availability of reliable and comprehensive educational data (McNamara et al., 2020), and the time that school personnel can dedicate to SSE and school improvement planning (Brown et al., 2021). Any education system seeking to implement SSE must proactively address these challenges to fully capitalise on its potential. Additionally, the implementation of SSE is influenced by varying governance contexts, local policies, and accountability systems, which can significantly impact school inspection and quality assurance practices. As a result, findings from Western studies on SSE may not be directly applicable to low- and middle-income countries (Ehren et al., 2017). To bridge this gap, this research presents a range of SSE exemplars that can be tailored to fit the unique socio-political contexts of different countries aiming to harness this proven method for sustainable school improvement.

While previous studies have underscored the value and significance of SSE (Brown et al., 2016; MacBeath, 2005; O'Brien et al., 2022), explored its general implementation (Brady, 2016; Brown et al., 2021; McNamara et al., 2021), and examined its evolution within specific national contexts (e.g., Brown et al., 2017; Mutch; 2012; Earl, 2014), a critical gap remains in the literature. There has been a lack of comparative analyses of SSE practices across different educational systems, as well as an examination of the historical trajectories of these practices. Understanding these variations is essential for identifying the most effective SSE strategies within specific educational contexts, whether centralised or decentralised. This study addresses this gap by providing a comparative analysis of the current status and historical evolution of SSE practices in four countries, highlighting the relationship between these practices and the organisational structure of their educational systems.

Methodology

In the pursuit of comprehensive and nuanced insights, this research adopted qualitative research methodology, which was chosen to deeply explore the subject matter and generate a rich understanding of the dynamics surrounding SSE practices and school improvement planning as perceived by school leaders. Employing a multiple case study design, the investigation focused on school inspection and quality assurance systems in four countries: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan. This design enabled a detailed analysis within each individual context as well as across different contexts. By comparing multiple cases, similarities and differences were identified, providing valuable insights into the various influences on different

educational systems, as suggested by Gustafsson (2017). Additionally, the use of multiple case studies helped to enhance the external validity of the findings. By providing detailed descriptions of each case context, the study may also help others to determine the transferability of the findings to similar contexts. For the internal validity of each case, multiple sources of evidence were used to strengthen the conclusions, thereby ensuring a robust and reliable analysis.

Three primary data collection methods were judiciously employed to facilitate this exploration, namely: literature review, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with school leaders who play a pivotal role in the SSE process. The literature review for this study aimed to identify existing research on SSE to provide context, highlight gaps in knowledge, and establish a theoretical foundation. Academic databases, including Google Scholar and Scopus, were primarily accessed, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2023. The search strategy involved using keywords such as [self-evaluation], [internal evaluation] and [school inspection], and Boolean operators were applied to refine the search results. Extracted data was organised using a literature matrix, categorising studies by themes and findings. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common patterns and discrepancies among the studies. By synthesising the existing research, the results were contextualised within the broader field, demonstrating how the study contributes to advancing knowledge in SSE specifically and school inspection in general.

The document analysis phase involved a systematic examination of official websites, notifications, reports, and departmental publications of the four quality assurance systems under study. Analysing the content of such documents, in most cases, reveals the motivation, intent, and purpose within their particular context. These sources were selected based on their inherent qualities of authenticity, credibility, meaning, and representativeness, as they serve as authoritative conduits of departmental viewpoints and regulatory information (Scott, 2006). Document analysis provided insights into the evolution of SSE in these countries over time, the current practices of SSE, and its role within the broader school inspection system. Additionally, it elucidated the expectations placed on school leaders concerning SSE in these four countries. Document analysis not only served as a valuable source of initial information but also played a key role in shaping the subsequent semi-structured interviews. To maintain flexibility and

ensure that interviewees' responses were not unduly constrained, open-ended questions were formulated, aligning with the exploratory nature of this research.

Patton (2002) underscores the importance of purposeful sampling in qualitative research, advocating for the deliberate selection of information-rich cases for in-depth investigation (p. 230). Following this methodology, thirty-two school leaders were intentionally chosen, ensuring almost equal representation from each country. These selections primarily comprised school principals, alongside a few vice principals, headmistresses, and headmasters. Given the exploratory focus of the research, the emphasis was on uncovering novel ideas and gaining a profound understanding, rather than pursuing statistically representative data. Thus, a modest sample size was deliberately maintained, prioritising cases rich in information.

In accordance with the goal of purposeful sampling — to deeply explore cases providing substantial insights into the central study issues — selection criteria considered various factors. These factors encompassed geographical location, spanning both rural and urban settings, school type (primary or secondary), and school leaders' experience levels in monitoring, evaluation, and supervision. The research intent was to eschew broad empirical generalisations in favour of a nuanced examination of specific cases. The study involved school leaders whose leadership experience varied from five to thirty years. This wide range of experience, covering different lengths of tenure, enriched the research by incorporating a diverse array of perspectives. As a result, this diversity contributed to a more thorough and expansive understanding of the significance and implementation of SSE practices. Through collaborative discussions with colleagues in each country, the criteria for selecting participants were formulated, and they also aided in identifying suitable respondents.

The study primarily employed theoretical themes derived from document analysis and literature review. The respondents, who were school leaders with extensive experience in school inspection and quality assurance practices, were carefully selected for their relevance (Mwita, 2022). The alignment of pre-determined themes and codes with the interview questions facilitated a process in which each successive interview validated the information obtained from previous interviews. This process led to data saturation, as Fusch and Ness (2015) defined, where no new data, themes, or coding were identified. Interviews were conducted with school

leaders from one country at a time to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the data. The initial phase involved conducting four interviews to establish a base size and identify unique themes. Subsequently, three additional interviews were conducted to search for new information. In the second set of interviews, new information was rarely encountered. For instance, in the case of Pakistan, the feedback on SSE was not very positive. Consequently, four additional school leaders were interviewed to ensure data saturation and robustness of the findings.

All interviews adhered to a consistent approach, with the same interviewer conducting each session. Prior written consent from interviewees was diligently obtained, and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to safeguard the accuracy and integrity of the collected data. The interview questions were thoughtfully structured around four principal themes: the significance of SSE in the QA system, the methodologies employed for SSE within schools, school improvement planning processes, and the training and support related to SSE provided to school leaders.

To uphold the ethical principle of participant confidentiality and anonymity, a systematic coding system was implemented for each research participant. Alphanumeric codes, such as SL1, SL2, and so forth, were assigned to each participant along with the country codes (DB – Dubai, IE- Ireland, NZ- New Zealand, and PK- Pakistan). This coding system replaced any personally identifiable information and ensured that the identities of the school leaders remained protected throughout the study. This precaution was taken to encourage open and candid responses from the participants, thus fostering an environment of trust and honesty during the interviews and data analysis phases.

The analysis of interview transcripts followed the procedural framework outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017) for thematic analysis (TA). This method was chosen due to its applicability for both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) analyses. While the study primarily adhered to a deductive approach, employing a predefined set of themes, the coding process retained an inductive element, accentuating noteworthy features across the entire dataset. The TA analysis encompassed several key steps. Initial readings and subsequent reviews of the transcripts were conducted to establish familiarity with the data. Codes, both open and

predefined, were identified, with an emphasis on organising them according to the predefined themes. A comprehensive review of themes ensued, involving an assessment of their effectiveness in relation to coded extracts and the dataset as a whole. The subsequent steps involved ongoing refinement of themes through continuous analysis, ensuring specificity and coherence. The definition of themes was a crucial phase, contributing to the articulation of the overall narrative derived from the analysis. The final step involved summarisation, where vivid and compelling examples were selected, and their relevance was assessed by contextualising them within the research question and existing literature.

SSE Practices in Dubai

The Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB), a part of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, initiated school inspections during the academic year 2008-2009. The emphasis on SSE was gradually adjusted, allowing schools to familiarise themselves with and gain confidence in the self-evaluation and improvement planning processes (DSIB, 2008). Initially, schools were encouraged to integrate the inspection framework into ongoing performance reviews, aligning it with other self-evaluation measures and prioritising future improvement efforts. This phase underscored two essential reflective questions: 'Where are we?' and 'Where would we like to be?' (DSIB, 2009). Subsequently, schools were prompted to align their SSE progressively with the quality indicators outlined in school inspection handbooks. As a result, SSE records became a pivotal component in the evidence-gathering process for DSIB's inspection preparation (DSIB, 2010).

In the initial inspection round, approximately one-third of schools exhibited deficiencies in self-evaluation and improvement planning. However, during the subsequent academic year (2010-2011), inspectors noted a substantial improvement, with about half of the schools assessed as performing well or exceptionally in these areas (DSIB, 2009). By the academic year 2011-2012, SSE had evolved into an integral aspect of the school inspection process (DSIB, 2011; KHDA, 2011).

Schools receive supplementary guidelines for self-evaluation to facilitate this process (KHDA, 2011). Concurrent with the handbook's publication, the DSIB has introduced an online resource

named 'Self-Evaluation: An Online Resource for Schools,' accessible through their official website⁴⁵. This platform presents a set of essential inquiries designed for schools to employ during their self-evaluation exercise. It offers templates and relevant questions aligned with each quality indicator featured in the inspection handbook. Schools are strongly encouraged to utilise the information sheets and the provided key questions, either as integral components of their continuous self-evaluation processes or as elements of their submissions to accreditation teams or DSIB inspectors (DSIB, 2010).

In Dubai, SSE is sequentially linked to external evaluation (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004), necessitating schools to electronically submit self-evaluation forms to DSIB before onsite inspections. Inspectors conduct comprehensive assessments, encompassing interviews with school staff, interactions with students, classroom observations, and evaluations of student work (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018; Thacker & Cuadra, 2014). The collected data undergoes rigorous analysis and is matched with SSE findings to evaluate school leaders' understanding of their schools. This aims to transition to validated SSE as the primary inspection mode (Education Trust, 2020).

The self-evaluation template closely mirrors the inspection criteria, mandating schools to rate themselves on a six-point scale for each standard outlined in the quality framework (KHDA, 2015). This structured and prescriptive tool, required for inspection preparation (Gardezi et al., 2023a), undergoes close scrutiny during onsite inspections. Inspectors engage in discussions with school leaders to affirm the assigned grades, resembling a validation process.

Additionally, almost during every cycle of inspection, as part of the national agenda or policy, some 'special inspection topics,' are added to the quality criteria which both inspectors and schools are required to evaluate during the on-site phase of the inspection process and in SSE. These topics encompass various areas, including the quality of a school's support for students with special educational needs, their progress in core subjects, the academic achievements and progress of Emirati students, the use of digital technology, and gamification among others.

⁴⁵ www.khda.gov.ae

Schools are expected to self-evaluate their performance in these specific areas, which are then assessed by inspectors as part of the overall evaluation process.

SSE practices have come a long way from a two questions-based reflection in 2009 (as mentioned above) to an SSE cycle that comprises: Review (how are we doing?), Reflect (how well should we be doing?); React (what will we be doing to improve?). The quality of SSE is also among the key limiting judgements⁴⁶ on which schools have to achieve good, very good, or outstanding to get an overall good, very good, or outstanding grade. No school can be rated highly if its quality of SSE is not adjudged highly by the school inspectors and no school can stay in the market either if it is repeatedly adjudged acceptable or below (Gardezi et al., 2023b). The KHDA school inspections with a strong focus on SSE are also appreciated in scholarly research for continuous improvement in teaching and learning and for cultivating a professional education environment within private schools (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018; Al Saadi, 2017).

The interviewed school leaders unequivocally endorsed the significance of SSE in school improvement planning. They stressed its pivotal role in external inspections, highlighting its use as a foundation for validation. The leaders emphasised the critical need for accuracy in SSE.

‘The middle leaders along with the senior leadership team, sit down to complete SEF [self-evaluation form], which is a working document by the way it goes. It's an ongoing thing that gets completed well in time before the inspection... Self-evaluation tells them a whole story about where the school is, what we are doing, where we stand... So, inspectors use the SEF and SIP [school improvement plan] provided by each school as starting points for their work’ (DBSL2).

Another leader emphasised that inspectors prioritise how self-evaluation contributes to the school's self-improvement during inspections.

‘The primary focus for inspectors is how the self-evaluation contributes to the school's self-improvement. During inspections, there's a common concern among inspectors that many schools develop impressive Improvement Plans, but often they lack a foundation in evidence or fail to address the specific needs of the school’ (DBSL3).

⁴⁶ There other three key limiting judgements are student progress and achievement, quality of teaching and learning and leadership and management.

Further insights were provided by a school leader who stressed the significance of accuracy in self-evaluation, noting its impact on the perception of leadership.

‘Self-evaluation is a big deal because it needs to be spot on. If it's not accurate, it really shines a light on the leadership? (DBSL5)

In terms of supporting the development of evaluation capacity among school leaders, the leaders discussed a variety of publications and resources accessible through the KHDA website. Notable examples include the annual Key Findings of School Inspections and supplements dedicated to providing guidelines for school leaders and teachers on self-evaluation. Additionally, the KHDA offers professional development opportunities and facilitates the sharing of best practices and knowledge among schools graded as Outstanding or Very Good with others.

The prescriptive SSE instrument, along with supplementary resources to complete the SEF, has simplified the SSE process for adoption by school leaders. Concurrently, the decisive role of the grade given to SSE in the overall school inspection report increases the urgency among school leaders to adhere to KHDA inspectors’ SSE guidelines. All school leaders interviewed were not just familiar with these expectations but seemed to be diligently following them.

SSE Practices in Ireland

SSE became mandatory in Ireland in 2012 (Department of Education [DoE] Circular Nos. 0040/2012 and 0039/2012), with processes for its implementation beginning well before (Boyle et al., 2020). The Whole School Evaluation pilot of 1999 initiated internal evaluation, a precursor to SSE. From 2001 to 2003, some schools participated in a European Commission-funded project to understand and implement SSE (McNamara et al., 2021; Hislop, 2012). This led the Department of Education to recognise the need for a quality assurance system integrating internal and external evaluations (Department of Education [DoE], 2003). As a first support mechanism, the Department of Education Inspectorate published, Looking at Our Schools – an aid to second-level schools [LAOS] (DoE, 2003). However, knowing the limited capacity of schools to carry out effective SSE and the limited training provided by the DoE support services

the inspectorate did not strongly enforce an impact-focused approach to SSE (Brown et al., 2018; DoE, 2013; McNamara & O'Hara, 2012).

But, according to Brown et al. (2021), the decline in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test scores in 2011 expedited its launch as a mandatory requirement for all schools in 2012 (Brown et al., 2018; McNamara et al., 2020). The SSE was introduced as a structured six-step cycle expected to be completed in three to four years in each school. Currently, schools are conducting the third cycle of SSE. Initially, during the first cycle of SSE, to simplify the process, school leaders were instructed (Circulars 0039/2012⁴⁷, 0040/2012⁴⁸) to focus on literacy and numeracy, along with one additional area for school improvement. In the second cycle (Circulars 0039/2016⁴⁹, 0040/2016⁵⁰), recognising schools' growing familiarity with SSE, they were encouraged to extend their focus to one or two curriculum areas in primary schools and post-primary schools. This extension aimed to identify and address aspects of teaching and learning, with reference to the Framework for Junior Cycle and other national initiatives, while maintaining a primary focus on teaching and learning. However, in the third cycle (2022–2026, Circular 0056/2022⁵¹), schools are empowered to choose the areas they consider crucial for improvement. This includes a focus on Well-being and the integration of digital technologies in teaching and learning, aligning with the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023⁵², and The Digital Learning Framework 2017⁵³, identified as national priority areas. Compared to the first cycle, the second cycle provided more flexibility and choice to schools in managing and organising the SSE process (Chief Inspector's report 2016–2020), and similarly, the third cycle allows even greater autonomy than the second cycle (DoE, 2022a, 2022b).

The inspectorate offers robust support for school leaders and teachers to enhance evaluation skills and assist in school improvement planning. The Department of Education website⁵⁴

⁴⁷ <https://assets.gov.ie/12882/2875307675b84dcf9d8c80fcff77d316.pdf>

⁴⁸ <https://assets.gov.ie/12878/e02b6ee94eec41b0a3427e46280ce84a.pdf>

⁴⁹ <https://assets.gov.ie/12884/b29e7ca35d304e3b879e87da8f0ca35e.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://assets.gov.ie/12880/283c9d37846c49089b573afe5d886292.pdf>

⁵¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/232751/54405353-26ba-4aad-ac7c-4b15c822a88b.pdf>

⁵² <https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf>.

⁵³ https://www.dlplanning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DLF_Primary.pdf;
<https://www.dlplanning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/digital-learning-framework-post-primary.pdf>

⁵⁴ <https://assets.gov.ie/232734/3e6ca885-96ec-45a6-9a08-3e810b7cd1ea.pdf>

provides various SSE resources, including guides to school self-evaluation, SSE support webinars, as well as the option for schools to request advisory visits by inspectors. The School Quality Framework (LAOS – Looking at Our School) has undergone two revisions, in 2016 and 2022, emphasising schools' self-evaluation for continuous development and improvement (DoE, 2022c, 2022d). Each edition reflects recent educational reforms and emerging needs, covering areas such as child safeguarding, inclusion, digital competences, approaches to remote teaching and learning, and the development of pupils' independent learning skills (DOE, 2022d, p.6). Schools are reminded that LAOS is a quality framework, not a rigid checklist, and they are not expected to cover all aspects during self-evaluation (DoE, 2022c, 2022d).

Since the implementation of SSE as a mandatory practice in Ireland, it has been presented as a cyclic six-step process⁵⁵ for school improvement. This model involves identifying a focus, gathering evidence, analysing and making judgments, writing and sharing a report, implementing the improvement plan and monitoring actions, and evaluating impact. Notably, the model places a strong emphasis on evidence gathering and analysis, encouraging schools to make decisions based on their data—a practice commonly referred to as data-informed decision-making. Brown et al. (2018) characterise the Irish inspection model as a co-professional evaluation. This designation stems from its unique attribute of allowing schools a significant voice through dialogue and self-evaluation, thereby shifting the balance of evaluation power. In essence, this approach transforms the role of inspectorates into one focused on aiding schools in enhancing quality through robust internal processes.

Inspectors must consider schools' internal reviews to validate commendable practices and achievements (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012). The symbiotic relationship between SSE and external evaluation is emphasised, with SSE serving as a crucial source of evidence for improvement. SSE and external inspection are viewed as complementary, and the quality of SSE is a pivotal aspect in the 'Whole School Evaluation' report. The Chief Inspector's report for 2016-2020 noted commendable engagement with SSE by school leaders, either rated as good or very good, positively impacting the learning environment (DoE, 2022b).

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/52e10-school-self-evaluation-six-step-process/>

The interviewed school leaders consistently demonstrated their familiarity with the SSE process and understanding of its essential role in facilitating school improvement initiatives.

It [SSE] is essential. You're monitoring attendance, academic attainment, retention, literacy, numeracy, all those kinds of things. So, you're putting in place initiatives and you're having action plans and you're constantly setting targets, evaluating, seeing where you can make further improvements, and so forth (IESL2).

At the same time, they criticised it for being prescriptive and wanted the inspectorate to involve the schools more in rethinking the SSE model.

'The department's model of self-evaluation is quite restrictive as it will have you looking at literacy and numeracy as the only real components of school success. I think schools' self-evaluation has a way to go in building evaluation competencies among school staff and adopting a transformational leadership model where schools take control of improvement themselves, set targets and actions, and work towards them' (IESL4).

'I think it's something that the inspectorate should look at maybe, talking to schools more about SSE and giving them more of the rationale for it' (IESL1).

The school leaders also referred to inadequate professional support provided to schools to effectively carry out the self-evaluation, possibly leading to challenges in implementing the process.

'There is a difficulty with SSE and the difficulty is that all schools were asked to do it. We were given the process, but we weren't taught about the product' (IESL5).

In Ireland, where the SSE process was introduced and implemented over two decades ago, school leaders seek increased autonomy in conducting SSE while simultaneously requesting specific support for its effective implementation. Further, principals have a dual perspective on the SSE model: while they critique its prescriptiveness, they also recognise its importance and advocate for greater school involvement in reshaping the framework to better align with the needs and realities of educational practice.

SSE Practices in New Zealand

In the 1980s, New Zealand embarked on educational reforms influenced by market principles to streamline bureaucracy and empower schools in decision-making. By the early 2000s, the focus shifted towards improving the quality of education, introducing education reviews and

evaluation criteria (Timperley, 2014). Over two decades, this review methodology became integral, fostering collaboration between the Education Review Office (ERO) and schools, aiming for a self-improving and sustainable education system. This collaborative approach merges external evaluation with the constructive potential of self-review, emphasising ERO's role as an active partner in school evaluation (Mutch, 2012).

The school evaluation indicators include 'self-review' as one of the sub-areas of the main dimension: leading and managing the school. The ERO (2011) says, 'schools are required to conduct their own self-review, although the manner in which this is to be done is not prescribed' (p. 8). According to Timperley (2014), it is important to distinguish between prescription, which implies a mere replication and checklist approach, and the specification of crucial processes rooted in a profound comprehension of their significance and how they can be implemented in alignment with a set of guiding principles. In this drive towards promoting self-review, schools were urged to actively engage in self-review across various dimensions, including strategic, regular, and emergent reviews, which also involved a keen examination of their current status, the integration of data as a regular practice, and the utilisation of evidence to gauge progress towards objectives and identify subsequent actions (Earl, 2014).

Recently there has been a big change in the ERO's evaluation approach. The new approach is called the Evaluation for Improvement Approach and according to Goodrick (2020) is based on Developmental Evaluation principles as presented by Patton (2010). The ERO has transitioned away from event-based evaluations, which previously yielded summative judgments of a school's performance following a three- or four-day on-site evaluation. Instead, each designated review officer, now referred to as an 'evaluation partner,' is allocated a portfolio of schools. This revised approach promotes a more collaborative engagement, whereby evaluation processes are conducted in partnership with schools, rather than being imposed upon them (ERO, 2021). This collaborative approach offers 'sharing of evidence at the conclusion of each phase, critical reflection opportunities, and progressive reporting to ERO' [Goodrick, 2020, p.1].

Moreover, the approach is grounded in key principles aimed at achieving equity and excellence in education for all students. It emphasises learner-centeredness, participatory collaboration, and cultural responsiveness. Technical rigour is maintained throughout the evaluation process,

with a focus on utilising results to inform decision-making and improve educational practices. Additionally, the framework supports the development of evaluation capacity within schools, enabling meaningful self-review (ERO, 2021). For instance, a school principal shared, 'It's [ERO evaluation approach] not reviewing the school itself. It's reviewing the school's own capacity for self-review. The model is actually arranged around the school's own evaluation for improvement cycle' (NZSL3).

In conjunction with the assistance of an evaluation partner, ERO provides a range of supporting documents on its website. Among these resources, a notable document is the 'School Improvement Framework,' which offers a continuum for various dimensions⁵⁶ of school improvement (ERO, 2022). Schools, based on their self-review processes, determine their current status and select their goals for a three-year period. According to school leaders interviewed, the Evaluation for Improvement Approach is a high-trust model based on evaluation partners' trust in school leaders' capacity to self-evaluate and schools' trust in the evaluation partners' ability to facilitate a professional dialogue on improvement and support. Founded on a robust collaboration, the model allows the ERO to gain a more accurate perspective on what is and is not effective across schools in New Zealand (Goodrick, 2022). However, during the course of interviews school leaders referred to variability in school leaders' evaluation capacity resulting in evaluation partners spending more time in school where the need is more (NZSL5).

According to the ERO strategic plan for 2020-2024, the school evaluation strategies in place have demonstrated considerable efficacy. ERO has identified twenty percent of schools in New Zealand as strong, with the majority being classified as well-placed. These collectively encompass approximately 95 percent of student enrolments. Conversely, only eight percent of schools exhibit areas of concern that outweigh their areas of effective practice, as reported by ERO in 2020 [ERO, 2020, p.11). Furthermore, an examination of the PISA results for 2018 indicates that New Zealand achieved scores above the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average in reading, mathematics, and science literacy. Notably, there

⁵⁶ Learners: Learner Progress & Achievement, Te Tiriti O Waitangi, Inclusive Learning Climate, Wellbeing & Safety and Conditions to support learners: Responsive Curriculum & Planning, Effective Teaching, Leadership and Capability, Partnerships, Stewardship, Evaluation for Improvement

was no statistically significant deviation in performance in reading, mathematics, and science literacy when compared to the PISA 2015 results (May et al., 2019).

All school leaders interviewed had no ambiguity about the significance of SSE in SIP and referred to several levels at which SSE can be applicable.

‘It [SSE] is integral to the SIP. It involves self-review processes at both the individual level, focusing on professional learning, and at the broader levels of faculty and the entire school. (NZSL2).

School leaders frequently allude to the rigour that permeates their SSE practices, as they meticulously collect data from diverse sources to assess their school's performance and determine their subsequent course of action.

‘We are never satisfied with our level of performance and when something happens, we always go back and ask ourselves, how did it go? What went well? What do we need to improve? Who else should be included in the consultation? So, we are pretty hard on ourselves in terms of our self-review, probably harder than what ERO would be actually’ (NZSL5).

The school leaders also acknowledged the array of resources and professional learning opportunities available to them. They appreciated the support of their evaluation partner, which allows them significant autonomy.

‘I much prefer the new relationship, because it is ongoing so we're able to set goals, and then they [evaluation partners] come in, observe what I've talked about, and give me some feedback on how I'm going towards achieving those goals’ (NZSL6).

‘We have the opportunity as a school to set our own targets with some conversation and critique and in dialogue with the evaluation partner’ (NZSL4).

The SSE practices, introduced through the evaluation for improvement approach, grant schools complete autonomy to utilise their data, select areas for improvement, and set targets based on their individual contexts. The role of ERO evaluation partners is merely to oversee the quality of the SSE process and help build the evaluation capacity of the school leaders by asking tough evaluative questions.

SSE Practices in Pakistan

The term SSE was noticeably absent from the websites, official documents, and notifications of the Departments of Education across all four provinces. Consequently, I initiated an examination of the job descriptions (JD) for school leaders, as well as those for district-level supervisory and monitoring staff. The primary objective was to discern, within the delineated responsibilities and expectations of these roles, whether there is a direct or indirect reference to SSE practices. Simultaneously, I also sought to investigate any explicit mention of school improvement planning, aiming to establish a connection between SSE and SIP. Furthermore, I explored whether supervisory staff were tasked with the responsibility of enhancing the evaluation capacity of school leaders and teachers.

Remarkably, the JD and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for school leaders are exclusively available on the School Education and Literacy Department (Sindh) website. School leaders in Sindh, who were interviewed with access to the JD, demonstrated familiarity with the expectations of their roles. School leaders in Balochistan also had a copy of the notification issued by the School Education Department⁵⁷ that has detailed JDs of various levels of school leaders. Conversely, in the other two provinces, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), the JD could not be located on the education department websites, and the interviewed leaders did not possess copies. However, the school leaders mentioned that their respective Departments of Education issue notifications periodically, detailing their responsibilities. The school leader's JD and KPIs for Sindh encompassed references to SSE-related activities and SIP. This includes developing, implementing, and monitoring school development plans, utilising student data for retention, grade repetition, and dropout analysis, and appraising teachers' performance through class inspections and student reviews. Moreover, some school leaders in Punjab shared 'A Head Teachers' Guide,' outlining various responsibilities of primary and elementary school leaders, including academic roles and tasks. This guide covers evaluating and preparing annual reports, analysing examination results, and reviewing the school's performance in both in-class and out-of-class activities (Directorate of Staff Development, 2021, p.2).

⁵⁷ No.PPIU/8-70/(A7F)/2023/2552-61/dated 9th May 2023.

Supervisory staff JDs⁵⁸ are available on provincial education department websites, outlining responsibilities for ensuring quality education. Their roles encompass enhancing student learning, managing learning and development programmes, training staff, conducting inspections, and using data for teacher development. They also focus on student retention and staff appraisals, but their administrative duties often overshadow academic ones. Furthermore, a notable observation is the significant overlap among the duties associated with various designations within the departments of education. This overlap implies a complex interplay of roles, potentially impacting the effective execution of their responsibilities.

The KPK Education Monitoring Authority⁵⁹ (KPEMA) website outlines its objectives, and a System User Guide shared by one of the monitoring officers provides details about the indicators and guidelines for different tiers of monitoring staff, including Data Collection and Monitoring Assistants. The Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit⁶⁰ (Punjab) website details the responsibilities of monitoring staff and provides descriptions and analysis of data collected from schools. The Directorate General of Monitoring and Evaluation in Sindh⁶¹, as well as the School Monitoring System in Balochistan⁶², focus primarily on reporting information related to teacher attendance, student attendance, and the availability of basic facilities in schools.

Several studies [e.g., Javed et al., 2021; Nadeem & Saadi, 2019; Nawaz et al., 2019; Assad-us-Samad et al., 2023; Saleem & Naureen, 2017) report that this service has generally contributed to teacher regularity and attendance, and it has improved the functionality and availability of basic facilities. Yang et al. (2020) argue that monitoring systems have improved teacher attendance and regularity but do not guarantee quality teaching. Similarly, the service merely tallies the number of support visits conducted by district supervisory staff, completely disregarding the purpose and nature of these visits (Jan & Iqbal, 2018).

⁵⁸ Sindh Education and Literacy Department

<http://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/notifications?S=Search&key=Job+description&pageNumber=1&id=34>; Job Descriptions & Competencies of District Education Office, KPK
<https://kpese.gov.pk/job-descriptions/>; Job Descriptions of the offices of the Directorate of Education (Schools) Balochistan No. PPIU/8-70/(A & F)/2023

⁵⁹ <http://175.107.63.45/newimwebsite/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.pesrp.edu.pk/>

⁶¹ <https://mne.seld.gos.pk/#/main>

⁶² <http://emis.gob.pk/RTSMS/SchMonitoringConcept.aspx>

While SSE-related activities are referenced in the JDs, websites, and other documents, the term 'SSE' itself never appears in any of these materials suggesting that SSE is not deemed obligatory. All school leaders interviewed shared different measures they undertake to ensure the quality of education in their schools. Though they universally acknowledged the importance of SSE for school improvement, common SSE practices varied among them. Many mentioned observing lessons and evaluating students' notebooks to assess the quality of assignments and the rigour of checking. Some leaders also stated that they review lesson plans. The level of commitment and understanding of these tasks greatly varied.

For instance, a school principal stated, 'I observe newly appointed teachers only. It feels awkward to observe the lessons of senior and experienced staff. Some principals sit at the back of the classroom to assess teaching, but I don't find it appropriate. I prefer spot checks. I complete nearly 3–4 rounds of my school daily. I don't allow teachers to check notebooks in the classrooms [during teaching time] or use mobile phones' (PKSL8).

Some school leaders also mentioned that they 'conduct monthly review meetings with the staff, examining the overall weak areas of the school and collectively deciding measures to address them' (PKSL5).

However, most of them considered SSE only as the daily monitoring of school activities.

Similarly, their understanding of school improvement planning and practice also greatly varied. A principal explained that he collaborates with a group of teachers and develops medium-term and long-term plans for the school.

'The long-term plan involves the expansion of the infrastructure (classrooms, furniture) of the school in light of projected needs. Our medium-term plan encompasses areas such as annual school paint and repair work, timetabling, distribution of free schoolbooks among students, purchasing stationery for teachers, conducting surveys for new admissions, providing teaching resources for teachers, and planning examinations, among other activities' (PKSL7).

To other school leader, the SIP was more about maintaining a register and recording co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and some referred to SIP as an annual statement of resources and expenditures. However, a school leader clarified that 'School development plans are mostly not prepared, as it is not mandatory for schools. Not a common practice, actually' (PKSL4).

Except for certain school leaders in primary and elementary schools in Punjab who acknowledged receiving a lesson observation instrument from their designated Assistant Education Officers, utilised consistently during lesson observations, and engaged in coaching and mentoring teachers for the development of activity-based learning approaches and effective use of audio-visual aids, no other school leader mentioned any SSE-related professional development.

SSE-related tasks are incorporated into the job descriptions of all supervisors, but research, such as the study conducted by Noor and Nawab (2022), indicates that the priorities of school leaders tend to lean more towards administrative and managerial tasks rather than focusing on student achievement, professional development for teachers, and the establishment of a conducive learning culture.

Discussion and Conclusion

The methods utilised have proven instrumental in addressing the research questions and fulfilling the objectives of the paper. Through a comprehensive review of research literature and policy documents, coupled with interviews conducted with key stakeholders, I obtained a nuanced understanding of both the overarching policies and the practical implementations of SSE in each respective country. These methods not only provided a thorough overview of policy and practice but also facilitated a deeper insight into the perception of SSE within each context.

In this final section, I undertake a comprehensive examination of the SSE practices within the four distinct educational systems, as delineated in Table 8. Through meticulous comparison and contrast of these practices, my objective is to elucidate nuanced patterns, strengths, and potential areas for improvement. This comparative analysis not only underscores the diversity of SSE implementation but also highlights its adaptability across varying educational contexts, thereby filling the knowledge gap identified in previous research. Furthermore, I endeavour to draw policy conclusions regarding the value of SSE and propose ways forward to increase its role and effectiveness in very diverse education systems.

Regarding Pakistan, a distinctive circumstance prevails in which the term SSE finds no mention in any official documentation. The interviewed school leaders made no reference to the use of

school data, including achievement and attendance, to set targets for school improvement. No one referred to SSE and school improvement planning as a process; instead, they mostly talked about SSE as a singular, episodic accountability event. The prevailing explanation for this circumstance, as elucidated, is rooted in an approach where most district supervisory and monitoring and evaluation staff consider the availability of teachers and basic facilities as indicators of the quality of education, and this approach has permeated down to school leaders. Despite the mention of student achievement and retention data to plan interventions and classroom observation as a means of assessing teachers' training needs in the official documents, these are not common school practices. Furthermore, the centralised control structure significantly restricts the autonomy accorded to school leaders and teachers. Coupled with the paucity of professional development opportunities, as discerned through interviews with school leaders, this contributes to the constrained capacity for self-evaluation of their professional practices. Despite the identified challenges, the current absence of SSE in the framework does not preclude the possibility of integrating it into the educational system.

As document analysis and interviews of school leaders in the other three case studies, Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand reveal, SSE places value on sustainable school improvement, but this is achieved in differing ways. In Dubai, SSE is a strictly rigid process imposed on private schools by a state agency, where quality criteria are used as a checklist by schools and then supported by evidence for self-rating presented to school inspectors. In Ireland, SSE is characterised by a low-stakes accountability system (Barry et al., 2023; O'Brien et al., 2019), allowing schools to focus on two to three areas during one SSE cycle and plan actions for improvement and in New Zealand, external evaluation is almost completely integrated into SSE, granting full autonomy to schools to assess their context and needs and make decisions accordingly.

Moreover, the SSE approach adopted appears to mirror the structure of the education system within each country. For example, in New Zealand, the collaborative partnership of ERO and SSE aligns with the significant autonomy granted to school leaders. Ireland's semi-prescriptive SSE correlates with its low-stakes accountability framework, providing some degree of constraint on otherwise autonomous school leaders. Conversely, in Dubai the fully prescriptive SSE of KHDA inspections reflects the stringent control exerted by KHDA over private schools to maintain their presence in Dubai's education market. The complete absence of SSE terminology from school

documents underscores the hierarchical and autocratic nature of Pakistan's education system, where school leaders possess limited autonomy to drive improvement initiatives.

The implementation of SSE and improvement planning has been a gradual and incremental process across three of the four jurisdictions under consideration: Dubai, New Zealand and Ireland. Moreover, the mandatory nature of these initiatives has exhibited variation in both the approach and pace of adoption. In Dubai, for instance, within two years of its initial introduction, SSE became a compulsory undertaking, with potential downgrading consequences for schools failing to conduct realistic and evaluative SSE. In Ireland, schools are encouraged to engage in the SSE process, yet there are no repercussions for poor performance, given the absence of grading and publicly available school league tables (O' Brien et al., 2019). Meanwhile, in New Zealand, the implementation has followed a gradual trajectory, emphasising the provision of tools and nationwide training programmes aimed at enhancing the self-review capacities of school leaders and utilising self-review as a mechanism for school improvement (Nusche et al., 2012).

The recent approach observed in New Zealand reflects the outcome of sustained efforts by the ERO to strengthen the self-review capabilities of school leaders. This evolution has led to a transition toward a high-trust model, wherein the ERO places trust in schools to possess the requisite capabilities for reviewing their practices and effecting improvements, particularly in enhancing student achievement. Simultaneously, evaluation partners contribute evaluative insights to schools, augmenting the evaluative quality of their self-review processes. A very similar gradual progression is taking place in Ireland. Certainly, therefore one can argue that the acceptance and sustainability of SSE within schools in these less centralised and prescriptive jurisdictions depend on the gradual initiation and evolution of the process even in the different educational governance environments of Dubai and Pakistan one can perceive a slow but similar movement to placing great responsibility for school standards and improvement on the schools themselves. It may well be that, for reasons of cost and practicality if no other, the direction of travel is, if slowly, towards the New Zealand approach. SSE is a mandatory activity and a government imperative in Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand. The differences, as previously discussed, lie in its prescriptive or non-prescriptive nature. Simons (2013) posits that when SSE is only a voluntary activity, its uptake is generally slow and infrequent. Schools often require an external imperative to initiate the process (p. 18). Hence, for SSE to be effectively implemented

in any education system, it needs to be made a government imperative. As can be seen, in the case of Pakistan, in the absence of an official mandate, SSE practices are erratic across the country.

Although SSE is a well-established process in Dubai, Ireland, and New Zealand, its initiation encounters various challenges. For instance, McNamara et al. (2020) assert that the successful implementation of SSE in Ireland faced several issues, including the availability of key data in schools for conducting SSE, the capacity of school leaders and teachers, limited involvement of the entire school community, a restricted role for parents or pupils, and an unclear relationship between SSE and external evaluation. Similarly, in New Zealand, schools initially lacked the internal capacity for the analysis and use of data, and staff may have had insufficient time and motivation for gathering and scrutinising data. Challenges also arose in determining the types of data that were most pertinent and of the highest priority. These challenges were addressed through capacity building for SSE, deemed an essential avenue for professional learning and support for teachers, school leaders, and Boards of Trustees, facilitating effective school self-review and the efficient use of evaluative data for improvement (Nusche et al., 2012).

In the case of Dubai, similar challenges are anticipated, necessitating the development of guidelines and support materials for SSE. When teachers and school leaders receive training in systematic data collection and utilisation, coupled with an awareness of its role in school development, the likelihood of sustaining the SSE process increases (Simons, 2013). Therefore, prior to initiating SSE, staff responsible for ensuring school quality must undergo training in activities that guide and support SSE practices. There is also a need for continuous professional support for school leaders to enhance their evaluation capacity. The variability in school leaders' ability to self-evaluate and the requirement for SSE practice training consistently emerged during interviews, particularly in cases involving Ireland and Pakistan. The KHDA has addressed this issue by simplifying the SSE process, while ERO has assigned an evaluation partner to several schools, catering to their capacity-building needs.

In Pakistan's context especially, the motivation of school leaders and teachers to engage in SSE can also pose a challenge. School leaders and teachers are civil servants recruited through provincial public service commissions, and terminating their services is a lengthy and challenging

process, as Simons (2013) illustrates in the case of teachers and school leaders in Spain. They may question why they should spend their time conducting SSE, as it might encroach upon their administrative and teaching responsibilities. The incentive, of course, is the improvement in teaching and the provision of better learning opportunities for students; nevertheless, it needs to be deeply ingrained in the system.

The successful implementation of SSE and school improvement planning, as discerned through the study of education systems other than Pakistan, requires a gradual and incremental initiation. SSE needs to become an obligatory requirement, and, above all, those in school support roles, school leaders, and teachers must undergo training to build their evaluation capacity. With these prerequisites met SSE can be successfully initiated by mandating schools to proactively assess their own performance and practices. The SSE can typically be guided or overseen by supervisory staff, as it pertains to Pakistan, who hold official positions in the education system and are responsible for ensuring compliance with standards, regulations, and educational goals. In such contexts, supervisory staff plays a crucial role in guiding and supporting the school's self-evaluation efforts, often providing expertise and feedback, and ensuring that the evaluation aligns with educational objectives and quality standards. Such collaboration between the school and supervisory staff can contribute to enhancing the overall quality of education and school performance. However, there is a need to shift the approach, moving the focus from merely considering student enrolment, teacher attendance, or basic facilities to improving the quality of teaching and learning and achieving better learning outcomes.

In summary, these exemplars provide a continuum of approaches to SSE, with Pakistan at one end, exhibiting minimal SSE practices dependent on school leaders' arbitrary choices and lacking official obligations. New Zealand, on the other hand, stands at the opposite end, where SSE serves as the primary quality assurance activity. Dubai and Ireland occupy positions somewhere in between. In countries like Pakistan, where SSE is scarcely present in the system, Dubai's prescriptive SSE model can serve as a valuable starting point. As schools become familiar with the SSE process, there is room for introducing more autonomy and flexibility, following Ireland's example. Eventually, collaborative partnering, similar to the model in New Zealand, could be the ultimate goal at a later stage. The findings of the study can be extrapolated to apply to any

country where schools face constraints on autonomy or where SSE practices are either not initiated or are at a rudimentary stage.

Implications, Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study advances both the theoretical and practical understanding of SSE by demonstrating its potential integration into diverse educational systems and offering actionable insights for stakeholders. The comparative analysis of SSE practices in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan underscores SSE's adaptability to centralised as well as decentralised structures, highlighting its potential as a universal and scalable framework for global quality assurance and educational improvement. The research also provides a conceptual framework for understanding SSE's evolution in relation to school inspection systems and broader educational landscapes, while also offering a strategic roadmap for policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners.

Possible limitations of the study include its reliance on the perspectives of school leaders, which may not capture the full scope of SSE practices. Incorporating the views of other stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents, would provide a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, the study's focus on current SSE practices may not fully reflect long-term outcomes. To address these limitations, future research should consider a broader range of stakeholder perspectives and conduct longitudinal studies to examine the enduring effects of SSE.

Table 8: Comparison of SSE Practices in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan

Country	Role of SSE in QA	Introduction of SSE	Focus of SSE	Documents Guiding SSE	SSE and School Improvement Cycle	Other SSE supports
Dubai	Functions complementarily with External Evaluation processes	Implemented gradually	SSE Form replicates School Inspection Framework	School Inspection Framework	One year	Supplementary resources on the KHDA website
Ireland	Complementary to External Evaluation	Implemented gradually	Emphasis on Numeracy, Literacy, Digital Learning, Wellbeing, and other school-identified areas of significance	Looking at our School and circulars issued by the Department of Education prescribing SSE procedures	Three to four years	Advisory visits by school inspectors
New Zealand	Constitutes a central component of the Quality Assurance system	Implemented gradually	Focus areas determined by the school according to contextual needs	School Evaluation Indicators	Three years	Evaluation partner's onsite capacity-building visits
Pakistan	Not a part of QA framework though mentioned in school leaders JD	Yet to be introduced as a QA practice	Student achievement and quality of teaching and learning (as in school leaders' JD)	Randomly referred to in different documents in different provinces	Not mentioned anywhere	Supervisory staff support visit

Declarations

Ethical approval statement

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Dublin City University, with ethics approval reference DCU/REC/2022/008

Data availability statement

The data associated with this study has not been deposited into a publicly available repository due to the presence of confidential information.

Declaration of Interest Statement

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Chapter eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter synthesises the research findings and examines their implications for the effectiveness of school inspections and school improvement. The chapter is organised into six sections, each addressing a critical aspect of the research and its broader impact. The first section summarises the research aims, themes, and findings of each publication, highlighting key objectives and significant results. The second section outlines important limitations, acknowledging constraints and potential biases that could impact the interpretation and generalisability of the findings. The third section discusses the overarching objectives of the research and how the four publications collectively address these goals, demonstrating their coherence and integration. The fourth section explores the implications of the findings for policy development, considering how they can inform and influence decisions related to school inspections and improvement, and offering specific policy recommendations. The fifth section places the research within the broader academic context, identifying its contributions to the existing literature on school inspections and their influence on school improvement. It reflects on theoretical and practical advancements made by the research and its impact on future scholarly work. Finally, the sixth section identifies potential areas for future research and study, highlighting unresolved questions, emerging trends, and new areas of interest uncovered by this research. This section aims to inspire continued scholarly inquiry and contribute to the ongoing development of knowledge in the field.

In summary, this concluding chapter provides a comprehensive synthesis of the research findings, critically examines their implications for policy and practice, situates the work within the existing literature, and identifies promising directions for future research.

8.2 Overview of the four publications

Table 9: Overview of findings of Publications One, Two, Three and Four

	Publication One	Publication Two	Publication Three	Publication Four
Purpose	The study aims to investigate the development and characteristics of school inspection, as well as analyse the national and international factors that have defined and shaped its practices. I chose to study the school evaluation systems of four different countries, Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan.	This study explores the perspectives of school inspectors and leaders on the quality of school inspection and the impact of quality assurance agencies on teaching and learning in four countries: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan.	The objective of this study is to comprehensively examine the powers of school inspectors across four distinct systems, identifying the forms of social power they wield and assessing the durability of their influence. The study aims to offer insights for improving school inspection practices.	This paper aims to examine the different approaches and practices of SSE and trace the development and present state of SSE within the context of school inspection and quality assurance, with a focus on comparative analysis. The study explores the progression and current status of SSE in four diverse educational settings: Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan.
Research Questions	How has school inspection evolved over the past two decades in these countries? What factors contribute to its growth? How does school inspection affect education in each case?	What do inspectorates do to ensure the quality of their practices and procedures? What are the general perceptions of school leaders about the quality of inspection practices and inspectors? Is there a gap between the perceptions of school leaders regarding the quality of inspection and those of the school inspectors themselves?	What are the different forms of power that school inspectors wield in these inspection regimes, defined according to French and Raven's Framework? How do these forms of power influence the work of schools? What methods do inspectors use to wield these tools available to them? Which tools (or combinations thereof) are best for moving schools in the desired direction?	How has SSE evolved within the realms of school inspection and quality assurance in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan? What are the current practices of SSE in these countries and how do they compare? What are the general perceptions of school leaders in these countries about the significance and implementation of SSE? How does the structure of a country's educational system influence the development and

				implementation of SSE?
Main research method & sample population	Review of literature, document analysis (including official websites)	Semi-structured interviews with school leaders and inspectors	Semi-structured interviews with school leaders and inspectors	Semi-structured interviews with school leaders
Themes explored/identified in the data	Historical Context, Current Practices, Inspection Processes & Driving Factors	Quality of school Inspectors, Quality of inspection practices, Quality of inspection documents & instruments, Impact of school inspection	Rewards & Coercive powers, Legitimate power, Referent Expert & Informational powers	Evolution of SSE, Current SSE Practice, School leaders' perceptions, support for SSE practices
Main findings	The influence of transnational agencies and international drivers on the growth of school inspection or evaluation systems cannot be denied, but equally, the local socio-political contexts have a significant impact. However, the countries studied seem to converge into very similar systems with very similar themes, practices, and processes that are likely to further develop. It can be argued that some kind of common worldwide inspection system will emerge in time.	The present study also reveals a gap between the perceptions of school leaders and school inspectors, which may arise due to intentional or unintentional 'black-boxing,' and can only be rectified through open and frequent communication between the two.	The study suggests that the first three powers (rewards, coercive, legitimate) drive rapid change, while the latter three (referent, expert, and informational) are associated with gradual sustainable transformation. The findings highlight the need for a balanced integration of these power bases in school inspection systems, tailored to the unique contexts of each country.	School self-evaluation, in its various forms, is increasingly being incorporated into school evaluation systems, becoming a key component of inspection and quality assurance processes. It is argued that these systems (Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan) are generally progressing in a similar direction across different contexts. Furthermore, school self-evaluation can be adapted to diverse educational systems and philosophies, potentially driving educational improvements in any country following the models of the case study countries discussed.

8.3 Limitations of the analysis

This project, comprising four publications, explored distinct educational contexts in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, offering valuable insights into the diverse practices and approaches of school inspection systems shaped by their unique socio-political environments. While this broad comparative analysis highlights significant variations, future research could extend these findings by investigating inspection and quality assurance systems in additional socio-political contexts. Exploring countries or regions with different educational frameworks and governance models would help to further enrich the understanding of inspection practices and their adaptability across diverse settings. Such research could deepen global insights into how socio-political factors influence school inspection systems and contribute to a more comprehensive body of comparative educational research.

Moreover, as a cross-sectional study, the research examines inspection practices and their immediate impacts at a specific point in time. This design, while useful for capturing a snapshot of prevailing practices and perceptions, may not fully reflect the evolving nature of educational policies and socio-political environments. Shifts in these contexts over time could influence the applicability and continued relevance of the findings. Therefore, the temporal limitation inherent in cross-sectional research suggests that longitudinal studies would be necessary to assess the enduring effects of inspection systems and the evolution of stakeholder perceptions.

From a methodological perspective, this study's qualitative focus—emphasising documentary analysis, literature review, and semi-structured interviews—has provided in-depth, context-sensitive insights into school inspection systems. Building on these findings, future research could incorporate quantitative methods to validate observed patterns and extend the study by including a broader range of stakeholders, such as policymakers, parents, teachers, and students, whose perspectives were not captured. Involving these additional voices would enhance the understanding of how inspection systems are perceived and implemented across different levels. Furthermore, adopting mixed methods approaches that integrate quantitative data with qualitative insights could offer a more comprehensive and multidimensional perspective on school inspection practices.

Finally, the exploratory nature of this research necessitated a purposive sampling approach, with participants selected based on their substantial professional experience in school leadership and inspection. This strategic selection aimed to ensure that respondents possessed the requisite expertise to offer meaningful insights into the inspection practices and quality assurance systems under investigation. To enhance the reliability of the findings, considerable attention was given to achieving data saturation, ensuring that additional interviews yielded minimal new information. This careful approach was critical for capturing a diverse range of perspectives while maintaining the depth and robustness of the qualitative data. However, it is important to note that the perspectives of school leaders and inspectors are contextually bound, shaped by the unique socio-cultural environments of the respective countries. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the complexities and nuances of school inspection systems in contexts with differing cultural and educational paradigms. Participants' responses, inherently subjective, are influenced by personal experiences, professional roles, and perceived expectations within their specific contexts. This contextual subjectivity further highlights the need for caution when extrapolating findings to other regions or educational systems. Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal designs, expanding the geographical scope, and engaging a broader range of stakeholders to capture more diverse perspectives on school inspection practices.

8.4. Overall objectives of the research

The project addressed five overarching research objectives:

- To investigate the development and characteristics of school inspection.
- To analyse national and international factors that have defined and shaped school inspection practices.
- To explore features of school inspection—such as power dynamics, authority, and internal quality assurance—that affect the efficacy of school inspectors and influence school leadership, ultimately determining their contribution to school improvement.
- To evaluate the role of school self-evaluation as a crucial component of school inspection, facilitating improvement in various educational systems, whether centralised or decentralised.
- To assess the role of school inspection within education systems and its contribution to education policy and practice.

In the following sections (8.4.1 to 8.4.5), the findings of the four publications are summarised with reference to these overarching research objectives.

8.4.1 Overall findings in relation to Objective one:

The broad objective of this study—understanding the evolution and effectiveness of school inspection and evaluation systems—is addressed comprehensively across the four publications, with the first publication focusing exclusively on historical trajectories. The analysis highlights critical moments that shaped these systems, demonstrating both contextual specificity and shared patterns across Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, and Dubai.

In Ireland and New Zealand, the inception of school inspections was intrinsically tied to the establishment of mass national education systems and public funding in the 19th century (Brown et al., 2016; Coolahan, 2009). Similarly, in Pakistan, school inspections emerged during colonial governance, with the East India Company initiating school funding in the same era (Jaffar, 2010). Despite these shared origins, the role of inspectors evolved distinctly, reflecting each country's socio-political and educational priorities. For instance, while Pakistan's colonial legacy embedded inspection as a mechanism for compliance, Ireland and New Zealand gradually expanded the scope to include developmental goals over time.

The analysis identifies key legislative and policy shifts that catalysed significant changes in each country's inspection model. In Ireland, the Education Act of 1998 and the 2009 PISA Shock redefined inspection protocols, introducing mandatory self-evaluation in tandem with targeted inspections (McNamara et al., 2022). New Zealand's Picot Report (1987) dismantled the traditional inspectorate, replacing it with the Education Review Office and shifting towards a collaborative evaluation framework in 2018, focusing on internal capacity building (ERO, 2022). In Pakistan, decentralisation reforms in the 2000s introduced a system emphasising data-driven monitoring, with inspections pivoting towards performance metrics such as attendance, supported by technology (Chaudhry & Tajwar, 2021). Dubai's later adoption of inspections in 2008, aimed exclusively at private schools, reflects a distinct governance structure and educational landscape (AlKutich & Abukar, 2018).

A comparative analysis reveals significant variation in governance structures, legislative underpinnings, and inspection frequency. However, a common thread across contexts is the emphasis on leveraging data for improving learning outcomes and shaping educational policy. For instance, while Ireland and Dubai maintain traditional inspection approaches with elements

of developmental feedback, New Zealand's model represents a radical departure. It positions evaluation as a school-led process, with external agents acting as facilitators rather than enforcers, fostering trust and reflective practices (Goodrick, 2022).

The study critically examines the interplay between self-evaluation and external inspection, highlighting a fundamental tension: the extent to which schools can reliably self-regulate without external oversight. New Zealand's advanced model highlights a paradigm shift, wherein external evaluators primarily focus on capacity building rather than compliance. By contrast, the continued reliance on direct external evaluation in Ireland, Dubai and Pakistan suggests a lingering scepticism in the efficacy of self-evaluation as a sole mechanism for improvement. This dichotomy raises broader questions about the balance between autonomy and accountability in educational evaluation systems.

Despite differing approaches, a recurring theme is the aspiration to align evaluation practices with trust-building and capacity development. New Zealand's model, with its emphasis on reflective questioning and collaborative improvement strategies, emerges as a potential archetype for future evaluation systems. However, achieving such a balance requires careful calibration of trust, capacity, and accountability—a challenge that inspectorates worldwide continue to grapple with.

8.4.2 Overall findings in relation to Objective two:

The second objective, though extensively examined in Publication One and briefly touched upon in Publication Two, provides a nuanced understanding of the socio-political dynamics shaping school inspection systems across four jurisdictions. A thorough review of the literature and document analysis highlights diverse factors influencing these systems' evolution, with the socio-political environment emerging as the predominant driver. This analysis delves into the interplay between governance structures, economic imperatives, and policy influences, offering a comparative perspective on the underlying mechanisms.

In Ireland, the inspection system reflects broader European socio-economic and political trends. The economic downturn of 2008 served as a critical inflection point, emphasising the need for a skilled workforce to avert future crises. Neo-liberal governance and market-driven policies have also permeated the education sector, augmented by the influence of international organisations such as SICI and OECD through PISA findings. Despite these pressures, teacher unions have

maintained a strong stance against the adoption of high-stakes inspections (Brown et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2018). Consequently, Ireland's system focuses on collective teaching evaluations rather than individual accountability, with school reports publicly available but devoid of grading or ranking mechanisms. This demonstrates a balance between international accountability norms and localised resistance to performative governance.

New Zealand's school inspection approach is underpinned by a left-of-centre political ethos, prioritising school autonomy and self-management (Openshaw, 2014). ERO fosters a collaborative framework by providing regulatory guidance and resources, such as self-audit checklists, to empower school boards and leaders. This approach highlights a decentralisation of accountability, where external inspection operates jointly with internal capacity-building. The emphasis on enhancing self-evaluation capacity reflects New Zealand's commitment to fostering sustainable, grassroots-driven improvement within its education system.

Dubai's regulatory framework exemplifies the confluence of globalisation and governance in education. With its unique demographic composition and reliance on private education providers, the government has leveraged inspection systems to align market-driven schooling with national workforce goals. The establishment of the Dubai School Inspection Bureau ensures rigorous compliance with government standards while embedding accountability through prescriptive mechanisms, such as National Agenda Points linked to international assessment benchmarks (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS). This centralised and outcome-oriented model positions inspectors as enforcers of policy mandates (Baxter, 2017), with self-evaluation reduced to formalised criteria.

In Pakistan, the school inspection landscape is deeply entwined with the country's tumultuous political history and reliance on transnational funding. The introduction of monitoring systems across provinces, driven by donor agency requirements for results-based accountability, marks a significant shift towards evidence-driven governance (Ali, 2014; Government of Balochistan, 2015; Government of Punjab, 2018; Government of Sindh, 2014). These systems focus on real-time data collection and hold district education authorities accountable for addressing resource gaps. However, their effectiveness is contingent upon political stability, as frequent changes in government and varying policy priorities have led to inconsistencies in implementation (Chaudhry & Tajwar, 2021).

In summary, the evolution of school inspection systems across these jurisdictions points out the pivotal role of socio-political contexts in shaping governance and accountability frameworks. While some systems, like those in Ireland and New Zealand, emphasise collaboration and

localised control, others, such as in Dubai and Pakistan, adopt more centralised and prescriptive approaches. This comparative analysis highlights the complex interplay between global influences, national priorities, and local resistance in determining the trajectory of education quality assurance systems.

8.4.3 Overall findings in relation to Objective three:

Objective three provided a conceptual framework for the analyses presented in Publications Two and Three, examining school leaders' and inspectors' perceptions of internal quality assurance mechanisms and the dynamics of power and authority within school inspection systems. These studies critically evaluate how these perceptions shape the receptivity to feedback and the effectiveness of inspection processes across four diverse jurisdictions.

The findings reveal a pervasive lack of understanding among school leaders regarding the internal quality assurance procedures employed by evaluation agencies, highlighting a significant communication gap between schools and inspectorates. This disconnect extends to the measures aimed at improving inspection quality and strategies for ensuring inspectors are attuned to contemporary educational practices. Despite inspectorates' efforts to deliver robust training programmes, a discrepancy persists between the standards inspectors claim to uphold and how school leaders perceive these standards. An inverse correlation emerges: the wider the perception gap, the less impactful the inspection process is considered to be.

Transparency in inspection processes, while emphasised by quality assurance agencies, is not fully realised, creating an opacity that undermines school leaders' confidence in feedback. Conversely, when school leaders perceive inspections and inspectors positively, they are more likely to recognise the constructive role inspections play in driving school improvement. This emphasises the importance of bridging the perception gap to enhance inspection efficacy.

Using French and Raven's framework on social power, Publication Three delves into the nuanced interplay of power dynamics within inspection systems. It explores how inspectors leverage various bases of power—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, expert, and informational—to influence school practices and foster desired outcomes. The analysis reveals notable contrasts in power utilisation between high-stakes systems (Dubai, Pakistan) and low-stakes systems (Ireland, New Zealand).

In high-stakes systems, such as Dubai and Pakistan, the emphasis is on reward, coercive, and legitimate powers, often underpinned by frequent surveillance to drive swift compliance and results. These systems also recognise the supplementary roles of referent, expert, and informational power, though to a lesser extent. By contrast, low-stakes systems like those in Ireland and New Zealand prioritise legitimate, expert, informational and to some extent referent power. These bases of power, which foster intrinsic motivation and align with internal beliefs, have a longer-lasting impact without necessitating constant oversight.

The findings also feature the dual role of compliance with policies and quality standards as both a mechanism for immediate improvements and a cornerstone of sustainable quality assurance practices. The balance between immediate responsiveness (reward, coercive, legitimate powers) and lasting impact (expert, informational, referent powers) is critical. While the former achieves short-term results, the latter fosters deep-seated, enduring change.

The study concludes that all six bases of social power influence school leaders' practices, though their effectiveness varies by context. High-stakes systems benefit from structured compliance mechanisms, while low-stakes systems leverage collaborative and expert-driven approaches for lasting improvements. A tailored balance of these power bases, aligned with the specific socio-political and cultural contexts of each jurisdiction, is recommended to optimise the impact of school inspection systems and promote sustained educational development.

8.4.4 Overall findings in relation to Objective four:

The findings position self-evaluation as a pivotal component of school quality assurance and improvement, serving as a mechanism for fostering autonomy and accountability within diverse educational systems. While extensively acknowledged in existing school improvement literature (e.g., McNamara et al., 2021; McNamara et al., 2022), Publication Four uniquely undertakes a comparative analysis of self-evaluation practices across Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand, and Pakistan, illuminating how national education structures influence the integration and implementation of self-evaluation systems. This analytical approach identifies patterns and divergences in how self-evaluation functions within varying socio-political and educational contexts.

The study highlights a paradigm shift in education governance through the gradual integration of self-evaluation within external inspection frameworks. This shift reflects a movement towards

decentralisation, enabling schools to assess their progress, set objectives, and align with national quality standards. However, the degree of autonomy granted to schools varies considerably, reflecting the differing levels of centralisation within the educational systems of the four jurisdictions under review.

In New Zealand, self-evaluation represents the zenith of decentralisation. Schools operate with full autonomy under the guidance of ERO, which establishes broad quality indicators while empowering schools to define their objectives and evaluate progress over a three-year cycle (ERO, 2022c; Goodrick, 2022). This approach positions self-evaluation as a collaborative, reflective, and school-driven process, underpinned by national curriculum standards. By contrast, Pakistan exemplifies a highly centralised model, where hierarchical structures restrict decision-making at the school level. Here, self-evaluation is not formally embedded in policy or practice but is instead implicitly present through routine reviews of metrics such as student achievement, professional development needs, and enrolment patterns.

Ireland and Dubai occupy intermediate positions on this continuum. Ireland's approach, framed by the 'Looking at Our School' quality framework, strikes a balance between prescription and autonomy. While schools are guided by Department of Education standards, they progressively gain discretion in prioritising areas for improvement across self-evaluation cycles. Dubai's system, on the other hand, remains prescriptive, relying on a checklist-driven model that mandates schools to self-audit against predefined quality criteria established by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority. This rigid approach emphasises compliance over reflection, contrasting with Ireland's evolving flexibility.

The comparative findings suggest that the effectiveness and adaptability of self-evaluation practices hinge on the balance between autonomy and regulation within a given educational system. Autonomy, as seen in New Zealand, fosters innovation and deep institutional reflection, while overly centralised or prescriptive models, such as those in Pakistan and Dubai, risk reducing self-evaluation to a procedural formality. Importantly, the study identifies a shared need across all jurisdictions for enhanced support and training for school leaders to implement self-evaluation effectively, underlining the critical role of capacity-building in successful quality assurance.

Furthermore, the findings reveal a consistent trajectory in the evolution of self-evaluation practices across these contexts. Each system appears to progress along a spectrum of development, transitioning from externally driven compliance to greater institutional ownership and reflection. This trajectory emphasises self-evaluation's transformative potential in driving

systemic educational improvement when tailored to the specific structural and cultural contexts of each jurisdiction. By contextualising self-evaluation within varying frameworks, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of its role as a catalyst for educational reform and improvement.

8.4.5 Overall findings in relation to Objective five:

The overarching objective of enhancing educational quality is consistently stressed across the four publications, reflecting a cohesive narrative of the inspection agencies' roles in supporting systemic improvement. This analytical exploration highlights how inspection agencies, including inspectors, evaluation partners, and supervisory staff, function not merely as evaluators but as pivotal agents of change within education systems. Their contributions are intricately linked to the development of policies, the modernisation of practices, and the enhancement of educational outcomes, albeit with varying degrees of impact across jurisdictions.

Inspection feedback has proven instrumental in facilitating tangible improvements in schools identified as underperforming, particularly in Dubai and New Zealand. In these contexts, inspectors' recommendations prompted significant progress in teaching practices, school management, and compliance with educational standards. In Dubai, the alignment of inspections with the National Agenda Points has modernised instructional methodologies and enhanced managerial efficiency, linking inspection outcomes directly to policy decisions on fee structures and curriculum mandates. Conversely, in Ireland, while the Chief Inspector's Report (2016–2020) acknowledged improvements in educational quality, school leaders voiced scepticism regarding the depth and attribution of these enhancements to inspections alone. This divergence suggests a nuanced relationship between inspection practices and perceived impact, mediated by contextual and cultural factors.

The findings highlight the strategic influence of inspectors in shaping education policy, a role vividly illustrated in Dubai and Ireland. Dubai's inspectors not only evaluate school performance but also provide critical insights to stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, to inform decisions on curriculum implementation, instructional time requirements, and systemic reforms. This alignment of inspection outcomes with national policy objectives highlights their dual role as evaluators and policy advisors. Similarly, in Ireland, the Inspectorate produces extensive reports on key educational themes, such as digital learning and STEM, offering data-driven recommendations to guide policymakers and educators. These reports serve as a bridge

between practice and policy, fostering a research-informed approach to educational development.

In New Zealand, ERO emphasises fostering self-review practices within schools, positioning evaluation partners as facilitators of internal accountability and capacity-building. This strategic focus on embedding reflective practices illustrates a shift from external compliance to collaborative improvement, reinforcing the role of inspections in cultivating sustainable school autonomy. National reports generated by ERO further emphasise the agency's broader contribution to identifying systemic gaps, such as the support for students with special abilities, thereby driving targeted interventions and responsive educational policies.

Across all jurisdictions, the scope of inspection agencies extends beyond school-level evaluations to sector-wide analyses. In Ireland, the publication of thematic reports on foreign languages, digital learning, and other areas illustrates a commitment to addressing emerging educational challenges. These analyses not only provide actionable insights for schools but also inform national strategies to align educational priorities with societal and economic needs. Such a sectoral focus stresses the evolving role of inspection agencies as knowledge hubs, facilitating evidence-based reforms and strategic planning.

Despite these achievements, the findings reveal critical challenges, including gaps in perception and alignment between inspection agencies and school leaders. In Pakistan, while inspections are associated with improvements in resource provision and teacher attendance, their broader role in driving pedagogical or managerial transformation remains limited. This highlights the need for a more integrated approach to aligning inspection practices with local educational contexts and leadership expectations.

The findings collectively highlight the multidimensional role of inspection agencies as evaluators, policy advisors, and catalysts for improvement. While their impact is evident in fostering modernisation, policy alignment, and reflective practices, challenges persist in bridging perception gaps and ensuring sustained impact across diverse educational landscapes. Future efforts should focus on enhancing collaboration between inspectors and school leaders, tailoring inspection frameworks to local contexts, and leveraging inspection outcomes for systemic and sustainable educational reforms.

8.5 Implications for school inspection influence and impact

The four interconnected studies presented in this analysis not only have the potential to improve inspection frameworks in under-researched contexts such as Pakistan, but also inform transnational quality assurance practices and highlight significant implications for both policy and practice concerning the influence and impact of school inspection systems. These studies emphasise the critical need for policymakers to carefully consider the unique socio-political contexts of their respective countries when developing or adapting school inspection frameworks. By ensuring that these systems are culturally relevant and practically applicable, policymakers can create more effective and meaningful inspection practices.

One of the key recommendations emerging from this body of research is the importance of tailoring policy development to the specific educational environments within different countries. A customised approach to school inspections, which takes into account the diverse educational contexts and needs of schools, can lead to more accurate and equitable assessments. Such an approach may involve the creation of bespoke inspection frameworks that are responsive to the varying challenges and opportunities present in different educational settings.

Publication One, in particular, highlights the necessity of fostering stronger collaboration between transnational organisations and local educational entities. Strengthening these partnerships can enhance the effectiveness of school inspection systems by ensuring that global standards are appropriately aligned with local needs and circumstances. By harmonising international guidelines with local educational goals, inspection systems can become more relevant and supportive of schools' efforts to improve quality.

To further enhance the impact of school inspections, the studies recommend the implementation of continuous professional development (CPD) training programmes for both inspectors and educators. These training programmes should be designed to provide a deep understanding of international standards while also integrating knowledge of local educational contexts. Such an approach will enable inspectors and school leaders to apply a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to quality assessment. Additionally, these CPD programmes should address areas of dissatisfaction identified by school leaders and stakeholders, ensuring that the objectives and benefits of inspections are clearly communicated and understood.

The findings from Publications Two and Three, especially, highlight the crucial role of stakeholder engagement in the development and evaluation of school inspection practices.

Increasing the involvement of teachers, parents, and community members in these processes can lead to the creation of more comprehensive and widely accepted systems of quality assurance. When stakeholders are actively involved, the inspection process is likely to be perceived as more legitimate and beneficial, leading to greater support and cooperation.

Furthermore, the studies point to the need for improved communication channels between schools and school evaluation agencies. Establishing robust communication mechanisms between inspectors and school leaders can foster trust and transparency, which are essential for effective collaboration. Enhanced communication can also help clarify expectations, reduce misunderstandings, and ultimately contribute to more successful inspection outcomes. Initiatives that focus on building trust between inspectors and school leaders are particularly important, as they can improve perceptions of the inspection process and increase receptivity to feedback.

Publication Three emphasises the importance of balancing power dynamics to foster trust in school inspection processes. In the high-trust model employed in New Zealand, the responsibility for school evaluation is entirely delegated to school leaders, who are empowered to make decisions regarding school improvement. Rather than providing direct recommendations, the external evaluators pose guiding questions to support a self-directed evaluation process led by the school leaders. In contrast, the Dubai model adopts a more directive approach, where inspectors establish specific improvement goals for schools and conduct annual visits to monitor progress.

Finally, the research highlights the value of implementing systematic feedback loops that allow school leaders to express their experiences and concerns regarding inspections. By creating structured opportunities for school leaders to provide feedback, policymakers and inspection agencies can continuously refine and improve inspection processes. This iterative approach not only enhances the effectiveness of inspections but also ensures that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of schools and educational communities.

In conclusion, these studies provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing the influence and impact of school inspection systems. By prioritising cultural relevance, stakeholder engagement, professional development, and open communication, policymakers can develop more effective and contextually appropriate inspection practices that contribute to the ongoing improvement of educational quality.

8.6 Concluding remarks and future directions

The four studies that constitute my project open several promising avenues for future research, particularly in areas of school inspection that have not yet been extensively explored. There is significant potential for researchers to explore new dimensions of school inspection, providing insights that can inform both policy and practice.

One key area for future exploration is the conduct of more comparative studies across countries in different regions as I have attempted. Expanding the scope of research to include a diverse range of socio-political contexts would allow for a broader comparative analysis of school inspection systems. Such studies identify patterns and best practices, offering valuable lessons on how different socio-political environments shape the effectiveness and adaptability of school inspection frameworks. This comparative approach also reveals how varying educational policies influence the outcomes of school inspections, contributing to a global understanding of what works in diverse settings.

Most existing empirical studies on school inspection are cross-sectional, offering only a snapshot of the systems at a single point in time. There is a critical need for longitudinal studies that investigate the long-term impacts of school inspections on educational quality and outcomes. Such research could provide deeper insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of inspection practices over time, shedding light on how these systems influence educational progress, equity, and overall school improvement. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how perceptions of school inspections evolve among educators and other stakeholders, and how these changing attitudes affect educational practices and outcomes.

Incorporating broader stakeholder perspectives is another essential direction for future research. While much of the current literature focuses on the views of policymakers and school leaders, there is a need to include the voices of teachers, students, and parents. Research that utilises both qualitative and quantitative methods, such as interviews and surveys with these stakeholders, could offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the impact of school inspections. This approach could highlight the challenges and successes associated with inspections from the perspectives of those directly involved in the education system, leading to more informed and effective policy decisions.

Further exploration is also needed into how globalisation and the influence of transnational organisations affect local education policies and practices, extending beyond the realm of school inspection alone. Investigating the broader trends in educational reform driven by global influences could provide valuable insights into the ways in which international standards and practices are adopted, adapted, or resisted in various local contexts. This line of inquiry could reveal the complex interactions between global and local forces in shaping educational policy and practice.

Quantitative impact assessment of school inspection practices over time is another crucial area for future research. By systematically analysing the effects of inspections on teaching and learning outcomes, researchers can generate valuable data to inform policy and practice. Such studies would help to quantify the benefits and limitations of current inspection systems, providing evidence-based recommendations for improvement.

Finally, future research should delve deeper into the role of cultural factors in shaping the perceptions and effectiveness of school inspections. Understanding how cultural differences influence the reception and implementation of inspection practices in different contexts is vital for developing culturally sensitive and effective inspection frameworks. Research in this area could explore the ways in which cultural values, norms, and expectations impact the success of inspection processes, and how inspection systems can be adapted to better align with the cultural contexts in which they operate.

These future research directions not only build upon the findings of the current studies but also pave the way for meaningful discussions on improving school inspection systems. By addressing these areas, researchers can contribute to the ongoing development of more effective, equitable, and contextually appropriate school inspection practices that enhance educational quality and outcomes across diverse settings.

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Appendix A: DCU REC approval letter

Olioscail Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi
Centre of Evaluation, Quality & Inspection (School of Policy and Practice)

Prof. Gerry McNamara
School of Policy and Practice

Dr. Martin Brown
School of Policy and Practice

11th February 2022

REC Reference: DCUREC/2022/008

Proposal Title: Comparative Analysis of the characteristics of School Inspection Systems in Four Countries Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan to identify the drivers that define and shape School Inspection

Applicant(s): Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi, Prof. Gerry McNamara, and Dr. Martin Brown

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to notification review, DCU REC are pleased to issue approval for this research proposal.

DCU REC's consideration of all ethics applications are dependent upon the information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in accordance with the information provided in their ethics application.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Melrona Korrane
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Taisghle & Nuálaíocht Taiscéadai
Olioscail Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire
Research & Innovation Support
Dublin City University
Dublin 9, Ireland
T +353 1 300 8400
F +353 1 296 8000
E research@dcu.ie
www.dcu.ie

Appendix B: Interview questions – School leaders

1. How long have you been a school principal?
2. How many times has your school been inspected/have you experienced school inspection?
3. What activities have the inspectors been involved in while at your school? How is school inspection organised? Inspection procedures?
(My notes: phases of inspection, lesson observation, document scrutiny, meetings etc.)
4. How often is a school inspected? Frequency of inspection visits/return cycle?
5. Has there been any change in the school inspection procedures over the years? Why, in your opinion, have the inspection procedures/expectations changed over time? What are the drivers behind these changes? (Any role of transnational agencies: the world bank, OECD, SICI, UNESCO etc.)
6. Have you as a school leader been informed/updated about the changes in the expectations of school inspection?
7. How has the inspection process and feedback influenced your school?
8. In your opinion, what needs to be done to improve the quality of school inspection (to make it more useful for school improvement)?
9. How competent do you think are the inspectors in evaluating the quality of education provision in your school?
10. In your opinion, what is the purpose/focus of school inspection? (focus on compliance, quality of education, standardised exam results)
11. How much, do you think, inspection has contributed to improving the overall quality of education in your country?
12. How crucial is self-evaluation in the school improvement process? How do you perceive the role of SSE with regard to external evaluation?
13. What are the functions of the school inspectors? (rewards/sanctions)

Appendix C: Interview questions – School Inspectors

1. How did you begin your career? In what way your prior experience informed your work as Inspector/Review Officer/Education supervisor/monitoring and evaluation assistant/Associate?
2. Give a brief history of Education Review/inspectorate in New Zealand/Ireland/Dubai/Pakistan. How, when and why did school evaluation start in New Zealand/Ireland/Dubai/Pakistan?
3. What factors underpinned the growth of inspection system in your country?
4. Were some models of school inspection considered before initiating the inspectorate? Was any specific model of school inspection followed? What school inspection model influenced the work of ERO/inspectorate/monitoring/supervision? Has the influence changed overtime?
5. What are the main drivers at national and international level that have defined and shaped the inspection practices in your country? (my notes: transnational organisations: The World Bank, OECD and UNESCO' role in the initiation and development of ERO/inspectorate)
6. In your opinion, does culture have any role in determining the purpose and scope of ERO/inspectorate and in shaping ERO's/inspectorate's evaluation practice?
7. How has the school evaluation practice developed/changed overtime in New Zealand/Ireland/Dubai/Pakistan? With regards to focus of school evaluation, main dimensions of quality review, inspection procedures that are followed, Education Review Officers' /inspectors' selection and training, role of Education Review Officers/inspectors (rewards/sanctions/accreditation of schools)? What prompted those changes?
8. What, in your opinion, should be the priorities for national education in your country and how do you think these national priorities can be achieved and who will be involved in the process to drive change? (my notes: e.g. use of ICT in teaching and learning)
9. What position does school inspection occupy in your education system? To what extent has the school inspection made a direct contribution to education policy and practice in your country or is subservient to the educational policy?
10. How well has school inspection contributed to challenge thinking, evaluate impact, and stimulate improvement in the education system in your country?
11. In several inspection jurisdictions, inspection has both advisory and evaluative role. What steps does the inspectorate/ERO/supervision/monitoring to achieve equitable balance between advisory and evaluative role? (my notes: Teachers' perception that

this balance is skewed more in favour of the evaluative role and that the advisory role of the Inspectorate is secondary).

12. What impact does school inspection have on school practices (quality of teaching and learning, school facilities, resources etc.) in your country? How do you know this?

(My notes: School supervision services exist in most countries in the world and they play a role in the development of the public education system by monitoring the quality of the educational service provided by the schools. However, many teachers and school leaders believe that the inspection service does not have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom).

13. What are the general perceptions of majority of teachers and school leaders about the school inspectors/review officers? (My notes: Sometimes teachers complain that some inspectors do not display collegiality and their lack of practical advice and praise demoralises them).

14. What are the key principles that guide and govern the work of school inspectors?

15. What are the functions of school inspectors?

16. How does ERO/inspectorate address or pre-empt the inconsistencies of expectations and judgements within or between inspection teams?

(My notes: Inspection teams are criticised for inconsistencies of expectations and judgments despite the quality criteria for school evaluation within teams and between teams, for example, teachers regularly complain about the lack of uniformity in terms of the classroom planning expectations from one inspector to the next, with one inspector requiring copious, detailed notes while another may be happy with a briefer outline of work. Teachers need more clarity on what the Inspectorate as a whole require from teachers in their classroom planning.

17. What is the role of self-evaluation in your education system? In your opinion what should be the focus of SSE?

(My notes: Focus of SSE should be on supporting continuous improvement by strengthening self-evaluation capability and engaging effectively with parents and communities).

18. To what extent can the results of standardise test and examinations be used for quality monitoring purposes?

Appendix D: Plain language statement

Plain Language Statement for Research Participants

1. Introduction to the Research Study

- The research working title is Comparative Analysis of the characteristics of School Inspection Systems in Four Countries Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan to identify the drivers that define and shape School Inspection practices.
- The research is being conducted by Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi, a PhD student in the School of Policy and Practice, in DCU.
- Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi can be contacted at sarah.gardezi@dcu.ie

2. Details of Involvement in the Study

- Participants will be required to be available for one online Zoom interview with the principal researcher.
- It is possible that the researcher may request a follow-up interview.
- Interviews should last no longer than 1 hour.
- The researcher will request that interviews be recorded (audio only) in order to facilitate data gathering and subsequent data analysis. Participants retain the right to decline the researcher's request to record an interview.
- Interviews will take place during the 2022/2023 academic year.

3. Potential Risks to Participants arising from involvement in the ResearchStudy

- It is not envisaged that there are any risks to participants arising from involvement in the study.

4. Benefits (direct or indirect) to Participants

- It is intended that the outcomes of this study will help inform school inspection policy and reveal those aspects of school inspection that actually contribute to educational improvement. Therefore, it is hoped that the participants, school leaders, inspectors and inspection experts in academia, may indirectly benefit from participation in the study.

5. Procedures aimed at protecting confidentiality

- Every effort will be made to respect participants' anonymity.
- The data collected will be analysed by the principal researcher alone.
- Participants' actual names will be protected.

- Interview notes and/or transcripts will be held by the principal researcher and stored in a secure location.
- Confidentiality of information will only be protected within the limitations of the law- i.e., it is possible for the data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

6. Data Destruction

- It is planned that the data collected from interviews will be destroyed within three years from the initial date of collection.

7. Voluntary Participation

- Participants may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

8. Additional Information

- It is envisaged that in total approximately twenty participants will be interviewed as part of this study. The participants will be school leaders, inspectors and inspection experts in academia from Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary,
Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee,
c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research,
Dublin City University,
Dublin 9.

Tel 01-7008000

Appendix E: Informed consent form

Participant Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title

The study in which you are being requested to participate has the working title of *'School Inspection: A driver of School Improvement - Comparative Analysis of School Inspection Systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan to identify the drivers that define and shape School Inspection practices.'* It is being conducted by Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi, a PhD student in the School of Policy and Practice, in DCU.

II. Purpose of the research

This study aims to identify the common themes in the school inspection systems in four countries viz., Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan, where school inspection systems were initiated under different circumstances and during different periods of time. It will also explore the factors that underpinned the growth of these inspection regimes and determine the overall impact of school inspection on education or educational policy for other jurisdictions to learn from or follow. This study is expected to generate new insights into this important area.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

As stated in the Plain Language Statement, participants in this research will be requested to participate in at least one online Zoom interview, which the researcher will request to record (audio only).

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement	Yes/No
Do you understand the information provided?	Yes/No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes/No
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	Yes/No
Do you agree to have your interview audiotaped?	Yes/No

Participants' involvement in this study is totally voluntary. As a participant you may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

IV. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data

Every effort will be made to respect participants' anonymity. The data collected will be analysed by the principal researcher alone. Participants' actual names will be protected, and fake names will be used if direct references are required. Interview notes and/or transcripts will be held by the principal researcher and stored in a secure

location. Confidentiality of information will only be protected within the limitations of the law- i.e., it is possible for the data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

V. Signature

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Declaration of Authorship Form 1

Declaration of Authorship for PhD by Publication

Section 1: Candidate's Details	
Candidate's Name	Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi
DCU Student Number	21264208
School	Institute of Education, Policy and Practice
Principal Supervisor	Professor Gerry McNamara
Title of PhD by Publication Thesis	School Inspection: A Driver of School Improvement? A comparative analysis of school quality assurance systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan
Section 2: Paper Details	
Title of co-authored paper included in the thesis under examination	The Rise and Convergence of Regimes of School Inspection A comparative analysis of school Inspection in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan
List of authors as in order given on accepted/published version	1. Sarah Gardezi 2. Gerry McNamara 3. Martin Brown 4. Joe O'Hara
Publication Details (e.g. Year of Publication, Journal Name, Issue Number, Page Numbers, Place of Publication, DOI, ISSN, URL etc.)	Year of Publication (2023) Journal Name: Supervision 21, Vol Issue Number: 68 Issue Number: 68 Page Numbers: 1 – 58 Place of Publication: Spain https://doi.org/10.52149/Sp21/68.14 https://supervision21.usie.es/index.php/Sp21/article/view/700
Publication Status (e.g. Published, Accepted)	Published

Provide a brief statement here on the disciplinary ranking of this publication and the peer-review process involved (e.g. how many reviewers, single-blinded or other, initial decision, revision timeline, etc and any other details that speak to the rigour of the peer review process)	Single-blinded peer review, three reviewers. The review process took five months from first submission to publication.
This paper (Chapter Four) is one of three co-authored papers to be submitted as part of the PhD by publication thesis submitted for examination.	
Section 3: Candidate's Contribution to the Paper	
Provide details below of the nature and extent of your contribution to the paper (include both your intellectual and practical contributions) and your overall contribution in percentage terms. Note that these categories can be customised according to disciplinary norms My overall contribution is 90%. Briefly outline your contribution to the conception of the work described in this paper: Following consultations with my supervisors, I decided to pursue a PhD by Publication. During these discussions, we also collaboratively established the conceptual framework for the four papers I intend to develop as part of this doctoral work. Briefly outline your contribution to the literature review in this paper: I independently carried out the literature review. Briefly outline your contribution to the methodological design: After consultation with my principal supervisor, I decided to employ document analysis and a comprehensive literature review as the primary methodological approaches for this paper. Briefly outline your contribution to data collection: I independently managed and carried out the data collection process. Briefly outline your contribution to data analysis: I independently managed and carried out the data analysis. Briefly outline your contribution to the synthesis and summary of findings: I independently managed and carried out the synthesis and summary of findings. Finally, outline your contribution to the writing and revision of the paper: I am the primary author of the paper, responsible for drafting the manuscript in its entirety. My supervisors provided feedback during the review process, and I revised the paper accordingly in response to their comments before submitting it for publication.	

Section 4: Signature and Validation

I confirm that the following statements are true:

- (a) the information I have provided in this form is correct
- (b) this paper is based on research undertaken during my candidature at DCU

Signature of PhD Candidate:  Date: 24/12/24

I confirm that the information provided by the candidate is correct:

Signature of Principal Supervisor:  Date: 09/01/25

In some cases, it may be appropriate for verification to be given by both the principal supervisor **and** the lead/corresponding author of the work (where the lead/corresponding author of the work is not the candidate or the principal supervisor):

Signature of Lead/Corresponding Author _____ Date: _____

Nature of Current Post/Responsibilities _____

Home institution _____

Appendix G: Declaration of Authorship Form 2

Declaration of Authorship for PhD by Publication

Section 1: Candidate's Details	
Candidate's Name	Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi
DCU Student Number	21264208
School	Institute of Education, Policy and Practice
Principal Supervisor	Professor Gerry McNamara
Title of PhD by Publication Thesis	School Inspection: A Driver of School Improvement? A comparative analysis of school quality assurance systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan
Section 2: Paper Details	
Title of co-authored paper included in the thesis under examination	School Inspections: A rhetoric of quality or reality?
List of authors as in order given on accepted/published version	5. Sarah Gardezi 6. Gerry McNamara 7. Martin Brown 8. Joe O'Hara
Publication Details (e.g. Year of Publication, Journal Name, Issue Number, Page Numbers, Place of Publication, DOI, ISSN, URL etc.)	Year of Publication: 2023 Journal Name: Frontiers in Education Vol Number: 8 Page Numbers: 1 -15 DOI: https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1204642
Publication Status (e.g. Published, Accepted)	Published
Provide a brief statement here on the disciplinary ranking of this publication and the peer-review process involved (e.g. how many reviewers, single-blinded or other, initial decision, revision timeline, etc and any other details that speak to	Double-blinded peer review, reviewed by three reviewers. The paper underwent revisions twice and was then accepted for publication. The whole process took almost five months.

the rigour of the peer review process)	
This paper (Chapter Five) is one of three co-authored papers to be submitted as part of the PhD by publication thesis submitted for examination.	
Section 3: Candidate's Contribution to the Paper	
Provide details below of the nature and extent of your contribution to the paper (include both your intellectual and practical contributions) and your overall contribution in percentage terms. Note that these categories can be customised according to disciplinary norms My overall contribution is 90%. Briefly outline your contribution to the conception of the work described in this paper: Following consultations with my supervisors, I decided to pursue a PhD by Publication. During these discussions, we also collaboratively established the conceptual framework for the four papers I intend to develop as part of this doctoral work. Briefly outline your contribution to the literature review in this paper: I independently carried out the literature review. Briefly outline your contribution to the methodological design: After consultation with my principal supervisor, I decided to employ document analysis, literature review and semi-structured interviews as the primary methodological approaches for this paper. Briefly outline your contribution to data collection: I independently managed and carried out the data collection process. Briefly outline your contribution to data analysis: I independently managed and carried out the data analysis. Briefly outline your contribution to the synthesis and summary of findings: I independently managed and carried out the synthesis and summary of findings. Finally, outline your contribution to the writing and revision of the paper: I am the primary author of the paper, responsible for drafting the manuscript in its entirety. My supervisors provided feedback during the review process, and I revised the paper accordingly in response to their comments before submitting it for publication.	
Section 4: Signature and Validation	
I confirm that the following statements are true: (c) the information I have provided in this form is correct (d) this paper is based on research undertaken during my candidature at DCU	

Signature of PhD Candidate: <u></u> Date: <u>24/12/24</u>	
I confirm that the information provided by the candidate is correct:	
Signature of Principal Supervisor: <u></u> Date: <u>09/01/25</u>	
In some cases, it may be appropriate for verification to be given by both the principal supervisor and the lead/corresponding author of the work (where the lead/corresponding author of the work is not the candidate or the principal supervisor):	
Signature of Lead/Corresponding Author _____ Date: _____	
Nature of Current Post/Responsibilities _____	
Home institution _____	

Appendix H: Declaration of Authorship Form 3

Declaration of Authorship for PhD by Publication

Section 1: Candidate's Details	
Candidate's Name	Syeda Sarah Batool Gardezi
DCU Student Number	21264208
School	Institute of Education, Policy and Practice
Principal Supervisor	Professor Gerry McNamara
Title of PhD by Publication Thesis	School Inspection: A Driver of School Improvement? A comparative analysis of school quality assurance systems in Dubai, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan
Section 2: Paper Details	
Title of co-authored paper included in the thesis under examination	Exploring the Multifaceted Nature of School Inspectors' Power Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Four Quality Assurance Systems
List of authors as in order given on accepted/published version	9. Sarah Gardezi 10. Gerry McNamara 11. Martin Brown 12. Joe O'Hara
Publication Details (e.g. Year of Publication, Journal Name, Issue Number, Page Numbers, Place of Publication, DOI, ISSN, URL etc.)	Year of Publication: 2024 Journal Name: Review of Education Vol Number: 12 Issue Number: 3 Page Numbers: 1 - 30 DOI: 10.1002/rev3.70013 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/rev3.70013
Publication Status (e.g. Published, Accepted)	Published

Provide a brief statement here on the disciplinary ranking of this publication and the peer-review process involved (e.g. how many reviewers, single-blinded or other, initial decision, revision timeline, etc and any other details that speak to the rigour of the peer review process)	Double-blinded peer review, four reviewers. The paper underwent revisions twice and was then accepted for publication. The whole process took almost nine months.
This paper (Chapter Six) is one of three co-authored papers to be submitted as part of the PhD by publication thesis submitted for examination.	
Section 3: Candidate's Contribution to the Paper	
Provide details below of the nature and extent of your contribution to the paper (include both your intellectual and practical contributions) and your overall contribution in percentage terms. Note that these categories can be customised according to disciplinary norms My overall contribution is 90%. Briefly outline your contribution to the conception of the work described in this paper: Following consultations with my supervisors, I decided to pursue a PhD by Publication. During these discussions, we also collaboratively established the conceptual framework for the four papers I intend to develop as part of this doctoral work. Briefly outline your contribution to the literature review in this paper: I independently carried out the literature review. Briefly outline your contribution to the methodological design: After consultation with my principal supervisor, I decided to employ document analysis, literature review and semi-structured interviews as the primary methodological approaches for this paper. Briefly outline your contribution to data collection: I independently managed and carried out the data collection process. Briefly outline your contribution to data analysis: I independently managed and carried out the data analysis. Briefly outline your contribution to the synthesis and summary of findings: I independently managed and carried out the synthesis and summary of findings. Finally, outline your contribution to the writing and revision of the paper: I am the primary author of the paper, responsible for drafting the manuscript in its entirety. My supervisors provided feedback during the review process, and I revised the paper accordingly in response to their comments before submitting it for publication.	

Section 4: Signature and Validation

I confirm that the following statements are true:

- (e) the information I have provided in this form is correct
- (f) this paper is based on research undertaken during my candidature at DCU

Signature of PhD Candidate:  Date: 24/12/24

I confirm that the information provided by the candidate is correct:

Signature of Principal Supervisor:  Date: 09/01/25

In some cases, it may be appropriate for verification to be given by both the principal supervisor **and** the lead/corresponding author of the work (where the lead/corresponding author of the work is not the candidate or the principal supervisor):

Signature of Lead/Corresponding Author _____ Date: _____

Nature of Current Post/Responsibilities _____

Home institution _____