

Stakeholders' beliefs and conceptions about inspection and improvement in the Cypriot Educational System

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The question of how to improve the quality of teaching and learning lies in the heart of the contemporary educational debate. Accountability and inspection are part of the 'rhetoric' employed to define the problem of teaching quality. The particular research address issues of inspection and improvement within the Cypriot Educational System. School improvement is not defined in any official document in the current inspection system in Cyprus. It is rather stated within the purpose of inspections in official documents. An awareness of how people actually experience inspection as a source of change and improvement is vital to the basic understanding of whether there has actually been improvement. Such aims and questions necessitated the use of a 'case study' as a research design. A national standards system is not available, by which to make comparisons and correlations, to make inferences whether improvement has been achieved as a result of inspections. Inspection reports and grades (numerical data) are identified on the basis of subjective comments by the inspectors for a particular teachers' performance and any attempt to make any documentary analysis on these was not possible since access is not allowed by the educational authorities. Subsequently, in order to address this problem, I had to obtain the responses and therefore the perceptions of stakeholders as to whether and how improvement is achieved in the current inspection system in Cyprus and to study whether the conditions under which improvement through inspection exist or does not exist within the particular inspection system.

Introduction

*‘ ... few things in our world are certain...change,
not stability, will be the one sure force in our society’*

(Henderson and Perry 1981: 1)

Change itself is not something new. People, families, social institutions, complex bureaucracies of financial and government departments, society, nations and the whole world are involved and affected by change. We are all witnesses of rapid changes in education:

‘Education, then, finds itself, in a public and political arena of scrutiny derived from one of the most intensive periods of change in the history of the education system.’

(Burns, 2000 :1)

Forces directing standards and accountability

The wider cultural context in many countries around the world is characterized by two ‘complementary forces’ (Harris and Bennett, 2001:130): managerialism and the drive to raise standards in schools. The processes of setting and monitoring standards in education have emphasised the role of accountability. They are affected and directed by three forces:

Primarily, is the necessity for international competitiveness expressed through the effort to respond to the needs of economic competition and profitability. In many circumstances governments are imposing change through educational policies. Education has proved to be the major factor indicating the level of development of a country. Callaghan, (in

Butroyd, 1997) in broadening the debate about the nature and purposes of education not only gave impetus to the attack upon the professional status of the teacher, but also placed at the centre of the debate, a view that education should be directed towards the needs of an 'underachieving economy'. The globalisation of the economy has become 'a cliché', making international comparison more intense, and thus creating demands for a 'results-oriented' education system. Education systems should, under these circumstances, change in order to meet the demands of a global world in which every country is supposed to offer high standards of quality in sectors determined by the international comparison. "*The new orthodoxy is that wealth will increasingly depend upon the knowledge, skills and entrepreneurship of their citizens.* (McCulloch, et al, 2000:78)

In order to meet the current demands of the world, education has to change its traditional role. We are brought to a new reality: 'The true goal of the system, the reason it programmes itself like a computer, is the optimisation of the global relationship between input and output- in other words, performativity'.(Lyotard, 1984, p. 11) Therefore performativity is the second force directing standards.

Third, governments and public institutions in their turn are accountable to citizens and parents and "*references are to be made in which 'tax-payers' money is spent by institutions providing public services*". (Epstein, 1993: 249) Parents are well informed about their right to have a choice in the education of their children.(Burns, 2000) Over recent years, in England and Wales, Scotland, USA, Australia and other countries, a number of externally driven innovations have changed the conditions in which teachers work such as: parental preference on school admissions, parental representation in governing bodies, publication of school information. These, it has been claimed, are taking education to 'the road of consumerism' (Burns, 2000:1) by enhancing the role of the parent body and rendering schools more accountable to it. Different countries around the world have embraced the market in their education systems in different ways. Among these countries is the USA. In the USA the emphasis is placed on the relationship between expenditure and the educational outcomes evidenced by pupil achievement.

'...examining inputs and outputs results in a more comprehensive picture of top performing educational systems' (Goldschmidt and Eyermann, 1999:27). The focus is on measurable outputs. For this reason a series of reforms are introduced to enhance the educational outcomes.

Accountability

All these facts led to a proposal, widely accepted among governments; that the improvement of learning is the desired outcome, with testing and regulated accountability along the route towards this. This means that accountability and pupil achievement are forces for change and improvement in schools. The importance of accountability has been heightened through the interest invested in accountability as a means of evaluating reform programmes in order to learn 'what really works'. As a result the pressure to evaluate and judge schools has increased.

The effectiveness of the teaching force to bring improvement is under scrutiny. Accountability is a mechanism that controls teachers' work and roles and tests teachers' effectiveness to meet the requirements of the system as well as the requirements of the society. The different perspectives on accountability represent different ways of conceptualising accountability within the educational systems with consequent effects on the role of the teacher within the system and the society in general. This relationship has been explained by Giddens (1979) in his 'Theory of Structuration' and the notion of 'agency'.

The Meanings of Accountability

The concept of accountability is 'indelibly woven into today's education system'.(Burns, 2000:1) Yet, it is a term used 'widely, vaguely and incoherently'. (Radnor and Ball, 1996:45) I prefer to see accountability as a term referring to any mode of evaluating and influencing human action.

The East Sussex Accountability Project identified a framework of accountability, as:

- Answerability to one's clients, ie. pupils and parents (moral accountability)
- Responsibility to oneself and one's colleagues (professional responsibility)
- Accountability in the strict sense to one's employers or political masters. (contractual accountability). (cited in Day et al, 1990: 165)

The concept of answerability or moral accountability to the student flows from the relationship of the teacher to the child (Burgess, 1992). Many teachers are motivated directly by this responsibility to children, especially those in primary schools, even when it is counterbalanced by dominant pressures for 'upwards- contractual accountability'(ibid: 78) to meet curriculum and managerial goals. Teachers as professionals would have a sense of their moral responsibility for the satisfactory progress of the students they teach (answerability to clients) (Foster,1999) Answerability is then seen as a moral relationship entailing self-regulation, a relationship wherein an individual or institution feels a certain duty towards those who though affected by such actions, are not in a position to respond to them with authority. (Paterman, 1978; Kogan, 1986, Poulson, 1996) Answerability emphasizes inter-personal communication free from constraints imposed by 'the adoption of special statuses and roles', thus enabling people to influence 'rationally, the conduct of others'. As such, this presupposes a social context in which human relationships are not too 'formalised, standardised and hierarchalised'. (Elliott, J. 1981, p.22)

Professional accountability (or responsibility) is the responsibility to oneself and one's colleagues. It assumes that learning is a complex and ongoing process during which individual should be encouraged to develop a range of personal -knowledge and skills- as well as cognitive abilities. At the heart of this model is an assumption that any evaluation procedure should assist students to learn. '*The relationship of power existing between the parties engaging in professional accountability is based on the maintenance of professional values that relate directly to the process of education*'. (Ranson et al. 1986)

Accountability, further defined as contractual accountability, is distinguished from professional accountability or responsibility. (Forster,1989). In this distinction, Forster refers to a formal or legal relationship, which is externally determined and which links an individual or institution to another body having the power to impose sanctions if certain expectations are not met. Applying this distinction to a school setting implies that teachers would be accountable only to the body or system, which employed them. In the contractual mode of accountability, the criteria are standardised and responsibility for evaluation is hierarchalised (Elliot et al, 1981). This kind of accountability is a way of *'establishing control over people's actions in bureaucratised social systems where relationships are governed by impersonal and standardised roles'*. (ibid, p.22)

Interesting to note, is that the emphasis today has moved from responsibility to answerability and accountability. Day et al. (1998) and Burns (2000) observe that the perception of external accountability as the only accountability mechanism is not ideal, for there is an imbalance of accountabilities: *'Contractual accountability to one's employers/authority is dominating both moral accountability to children/parents and professional accountability to one's self and one's colleagues'* (Burns, 2000:36). Burgess warns, public and political security may stem temporarily from contractual accountability, but when this is *'at odds with teachers' feelings of responsibility to students and colleagues the tension is destructive'* (Burgess, 1992: 79). Each model, or form, of accountability on its own is inadequate. The three kinds of accountability can provide for the optimum mix. Each can be helpful in addressing and solving problems, for developing teachers and schools and *'restoring the confidence and morale of the service and the public'*. (Burgess, 1992) *"Confidence and quality are more likely when contractual accountability is the safety net, professional accountability the support and moral accountability the driving force. Together they make the structure"*(ibid, p.79). Nevertheless, educational authorities, inspectors, head teachers and governors in schools have a professional, moral and continuing contractual responsibility to ensure, not only,

that accountability in any form occurs, but that the results of such processes are ‘*communicated in appropriate ways to appropriate audiences*’ (Day et al, 1998: 139).

ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH INSPECTION

Purposes and forms of inspection

The purposes of inspection

HMI (1990) describe the main purpose of inspection to assess standards, identify weaknesses and provide support and advice. In their terms, the Inspectorate:

- a) *Assesses standards and trends and advises the Secretary of State on the performance of the system nationally.*
- b) *Identifies and makes known more widely good practice and promising developments and draws attention to weaknesses requiring attention;*
- c) *Provides advice and assistance to those with responsibilities and in the institution in the system through its day-to-day contacts, its contributions to training and its publication. (cited in Hargreaves, D. 1995: 117-118)*

The first two functions are concerned with issues of accountability and the third with support and development. If we agree that the dual purpose of accountability is to ‘*assess and develop*’, then we have to argue that inspection should have a summative and a formative aspect. The particular purpose is between teacher accountability, designed to control or influence the performance of teachers within their current positions, and teacher evaluation, for the purposes of making decisions about movements. In the second case (formative aspect of inspection) the purpose has to do with professional development, the improvement of practice through identifying strengths, weaknesses,

needs and interests. This purpose emphasises the ‘*complementary need to ensure that teachers continually review and improve their practices in the light of contemporary research and profession defined standards*’ (Ingvarson, 2001:164). The basic question here is: can these two purposes best be met within the one system of teacher evaluation, or do they point to the need for two separate systems?

Jefferson and Edwards (1998) claim that the separation of these two functions (formative and summative) is a critical position; they also support that the summative function of accountability and the function of accountability for formative development are incompatible, and cannot be combined in the same process. Any attempt made in this direction will damage the possibility of ‘professional growth’ and would in fact be ‘unethical’. (Stake, 1989:13) Interesting to note is the fact that this ‘historical separation’ between teacher performance, and teacher developmental initiatives creates a tension and a dilemma in teacher accountability (Cardno and Piggot, 1997; Middlwood, 1997;).

Forms of inspection

Among the forms of inspection available are: district and specialist visits, general inspections, focused inspections, follow-up inspections and quality inspections (Gray and Gardner, 1999). These are briefly outlined below:

- ❖ *District and specialist visits* provide the Inspectors with opportunities to gather information in an informal manner.

- ❖ *General inspections* are designed to provide an evaluation of a school across the broad spectrum of its activities. Inspectors in this case consider the extent to which the aims, policies and targets of a school are reflected in practice. The primary focus is on the quality of the pupils’ learning and of the teaching.

- ❖ *Focused inspections* concentrate on particular aspects of a school's provision, such as a particular area of study, like English or Mathematics. The inspection may focus on an issue of concern identified in a previous inspection.
- ❖ *Follow-up inspections* depending on the results of an inspection. A follow-up visit may take place up to twelve months after the initial visit.
- ❖ *Quality assurance inspections* are based on the principle of self-audit, practice. The self-evaluating school invites the inspectors to visit and carry out the proposed audit. Thus the impetus for 'inspection' comes from the school itself and has a number of potential advantages, such as less rush in pre-inspection preparation and less staff anxiety. Such processes potentially have a 'closer affinity with the school's own mission' (Gray and Gardner, 1999).

Research design and methods

A purposive sampling strategy was used for selecting the sample for this research in order to ensure that a diversity of cases was included and could yield the clearest understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Thus different groups of stakeholders were included who:

- Had different positions in the teaching hierarchy (Inspectors, head teachers, deputies, teachers, members of the teachers' union)
- Had different years of teaching experience (1-2, 3-6, 7-10, 11-14, 15-19, 20+)
- Were at different ages and at different stages of career development
- Came from different educational districts in Cyprus (Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Famagusta, Paphos) though a centralized accountability system imposed by the Ministry of Education guarantees the sameness of function in each district.

This was done in order to examine whether the position, teaching experience, the age and stage of the respondents' career development affected their responses. Respondents were drawn from all the educational districts in Cyprus (Nicosia, Limassol, Paphos, Larnaca).

A mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative methods was chosen in order both to achieve a better understanding of the participants' opinion and to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Information was collected using two main collection methods:

- ❖ Postal questionnaire to stakeholders;
- ❖ Semi-Structured interviews conducted with stakeholders;

Four hundred and seven (81.4%) participants responded to the questionnaire. (500 questionnaires were sent). The quantitative responses from the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). These were then coded according to the respondent's present position in education, total years of working in education, and qualifications of the respondents. These statements were then used in support of the qualitative findings.

Individual, semi-structured interviews were the second method used for collecting data. Based on my literature review and the issues referred to in the previous sub-section, some core themes for the interviews were identified as far as the purposes, function and the process of inspection is concerned:

These formed the basis of the questions in the semi-structured interviews. In determining the sample of the interviews, I followed the same principles I had used in the quantitative method of data collection (purposive sampling strategy); interviews were carried out with forty persons-stakeholders. They were transcribed, analyzed and the results were reported in the subsequent section. For establishing the trustworthiness of the research issues concerning triangulation, validity and reliability were considered.

The summative function of inspection in the Cypriot Educational System

In this section I will describe the results that concern the summative function of inspection within the Cypriot Educational System. Therefore this section will present the results obtained from questions 15,6,9,11,13,27,24,25 and 32.

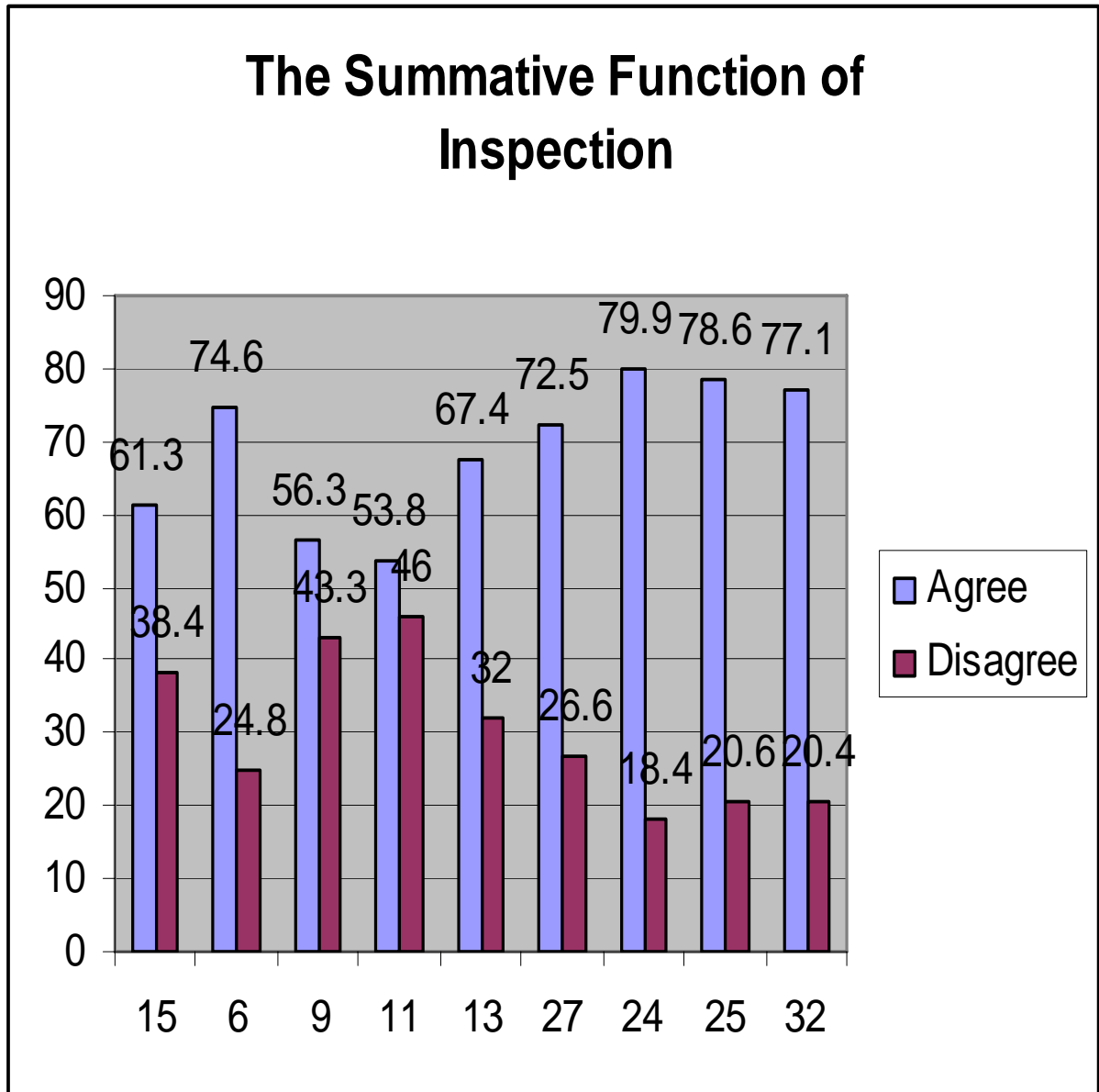
Table 7.1 –The Summative Function of Inspection in the Cypriot Educational System

S T A T E M E N T S			
	The function of inspection in the Cypriot Educational system is:	Agreement %	Disagreement %
15.	as a quality control mechanism (i.e. to evaluate systems for improving the quality in schools)	61.3	38.4
	The purposes of inspection in the Cypriot educational system are:		
6.	To hold teachers accountable for students' learning and progress	74.6	24.8
9.	To ensure that educational initiatives are implemented effectively	56.3	43.3
11.	To ensure discipline among teachers within the educational system	53.8	46
13.	To report on the effectiveness of education provided in schools	67.4	32
	The role of inspector in the Cypriot educational system is to:		
27.	collect information on the teachers' performance and report to the government	72.5	26.6

24.	make judgements about the quality of teaching	79.9	18.4
25.	make judgements about the quality of the school	78.6	20.6
32.	aid in decision making for promotion prospects	77.1	20.4

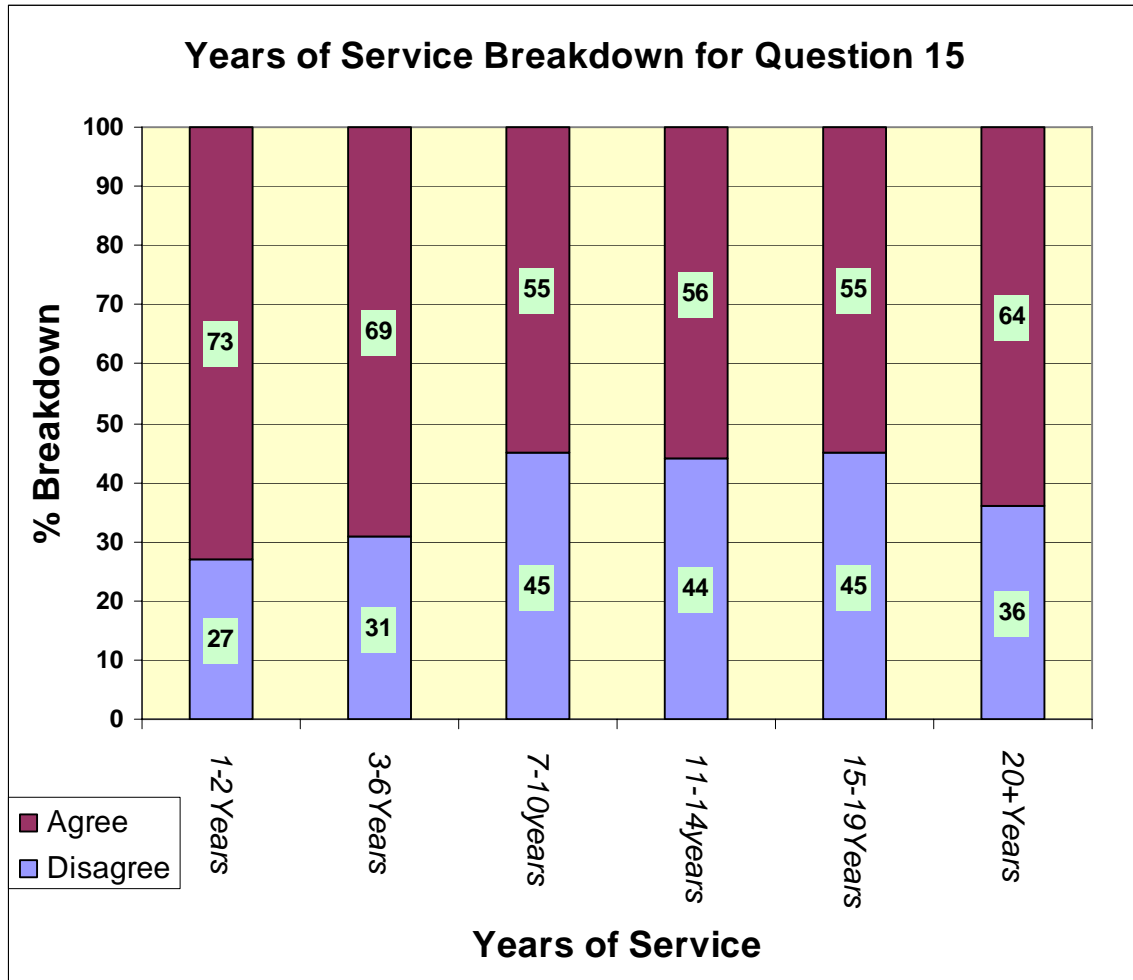
Table 7.2 – The Summative Function of Inspection in the Cypriot Educational System

The Summative Function of Inspection



7.2.1 The function and purposes of inspection in the Cypriot Educational System

The data from the above tables suggest that the majority of respondents agreed that inspection performs a summative function within the Cypriot Educational system. More particularly 61.3% of respondents reported that they perceive inspection within the system as a quality control mechanism, to evaluate systems for improving the quality in schools) (q15).

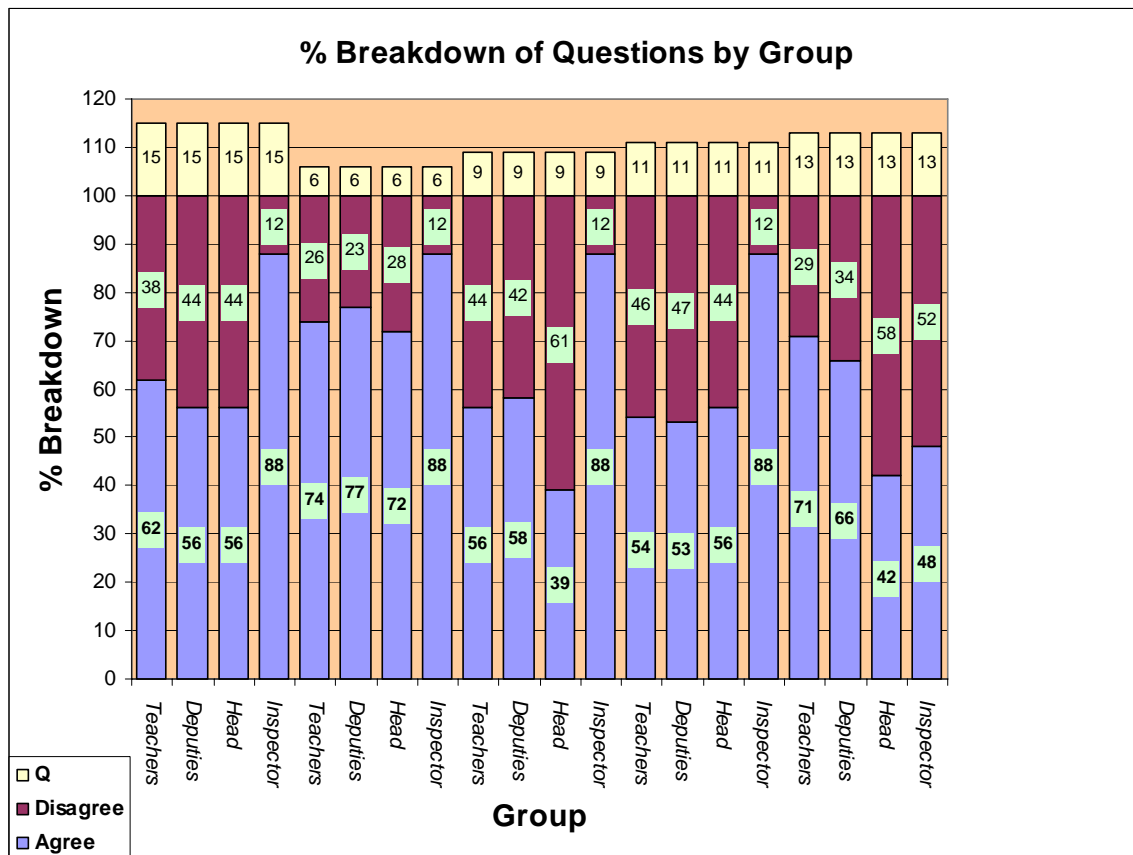


It is evident in this bar graph that the majority of respondents in all age-groups agreed that inspection in the Cypriot Educational System functions as a quality control mechanism; however the younger respondents (those who have 1-6 years of teaching experience) present the highest percentages of agreement. Another high percentage of agreement for the particular question is yielded by the eldest group (20+ years of teaching experience); the last group includes people in the hierarchy such as: deputies, heads and inspectors.

The data in this section has revealed that there is an agreement on the following issues concerning the purposes of inspection in the Cypriot Educational System: Three quarters of the respondents (74.6%) agreed that the purpose of inspection is to hold teachers

accountable for students' learning and progress (q6)(Appendix 12). Furthermore more than half of the respondents (56.3%) agreed that inspection is about ensuring that educational initiatives are implemented effectively (q9). Another 53.8 per cent of respondents reported that inspection is about ensuring discipline among teachers within the educational system (q11) whereas 67% of respondents agreed that one of the purposes of inspection is to report on the effectiveness of the education provided in schools (q13)

It is evident from the research results that the positions the respondents hold affected their responses. It is evident from the following bar-graph that inspectors present the highest percentage of agreement (88%) to questions 15, 6, 9 and 11. These questions refer to the summative aspect of inspection; inspection as a quality control mechanism, the purpose of inspection in holding teachers accountable, to ensure that educational initiatives are implemented effectively and to ensure discipline within the system.



From this it follows that there is an agreement that inspection functions as a quality control mechanism. As such, its purposes are directed towards ensuring discipline within the educational system, holding teachers accountable for their pupils' learning and progress, while at the same time reporting on the effectiveness of the education provided in schools.

7.2.2 The role of inspector in the Cypriot Educational System

The next set of statements provides information about the role of the inspector in the Cypriot Educational System. The evidence here indicates that there is agreement on the following issues: almost three quarters of the respondents (72.5%) agreed that the role of the inspector is to collect information on teachers' performance and report to the government (q27). It is evident in the responses obtained from questions 13 and 27 that a significant proportion of respondents agreed that one of the purposes of inspection in the Cypriot Educational System is to report on the effectiveness of the education provided in schools (q13) and this is supported by the respondents' agreement, about the role of inspectors within the Cypriot Educational System, being to collect information on the teachers' performance and to report to the Government. Nearly 80% of the respondents (79.9%) also agreed that the inspectors make judgements about the quality of teaching (q24), while nearly 79% of the respondents agreed that inspectors make judgements about the quality of the school (q25). It is also important to note that 77.1 % of respondents claimed that the inspectors aid in decision making for promotion prospects (q32). The outcomes here suggest that there is an agreement about the inspectorate playing a summative role within inspection. Therefore it is perceived that the inspector's role to make judgements about the quality of teaching and schooling and deliver reports on the effectiveness of education provided in schools, further, there is an agreement about the inspector's contribution in decision making about promotions.

Discussing the Summative Function of Inspection within the Cypriot Educational System

The quantitative data revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that: the purpose of inspection in the Cypriot Educational System is to hold teachers accountable for students' learning and progress and to report on the effectiveness of the education provided in schools; inspection is also about ensuring that educational initiatives are implemented effectively and about ensuring discipline among teachers within the educational system. There was also an agreement about the role of the inspector, who is to make judgements on the quality of teaching and learning and about the quality of the school, while at the same time aiding in decision making about promotion prospects. Inspection is finally perceived as a quality control mechanism.

The first form of inspection that functions in the Cypriot accountability system is inspection of the school as a unit of management; this is claimed to be used in order to make judgements about the quality of the school. However, it is generally accepted that the school inspection is not actually an inspection of the school unit. The 'target' of school inspection is the head of the school and the information collected is to help the team create an idea of how effective the head teacher is and to measure his/her contribution to the effective and efficient functioning of the school. The findings of the study suggest that this information is needed to fulfill the purposes of the system.

The second most evident focus of inspection, in the system is the scrutiny of the teacher. The findings of the study revealed that classroom observation represents the first and major part of inspection within the Cypriot Educational System, as well as the major means of collecting information for the purposes of inspection. The usual method for evaluating a teacher's performance has been to observe the teacher during a period of 'interactive teaching' (Byrne, 1987). This is evident in the interview data provided by the stakeholders.

Classroom observation, as we have seen in this study was accorded a prime place in the Cypriot inspection system. Its value resided according to the interviewees in the opportunity offered to the inspector to collect evidence for justifying a grade. This grade

would be later used for promotional purposes. According to the outcomes of this research inspection was also based on a 'snapshot visit' with limited teacher observation, often of an artificial, contrived or 'safe' classroom performance (Early, et al, 1998). It was evident that, although classroom observation could serve a number of developmental purposes, it is by no means being the only way to gather information for inspection.

In inspection the same process is supposed to help teachers improve their performance; at the same time decisions about the movement of teachers 'on career ladders' are typically tied in with inspection (Natriello, 1990:37). The emphasis on individual performance suggests that the career implications of inspection are considerable. Most teachers interviewed agreed that career development was to be an important part of inspection in the Cypriot Educational System. The interviewees were also certain of the direct link that inspection has with promotion although, according to their views this is 'to the detriment of good teaching' (Turner and Clift, 1988:181) and has led to an unfair system of rewards and/promotions:

'The inspector contributes to decision making about promotions through the grade...and in the wrong way; some people are promoted some others not...there is no justice or fairness. The inspector has the power through the grade to help teachers be promoted regardless of their qualifications or their competence....(R6)*

Such a hierarchical approach 'tends to look for results to justify judgements'. Inspection is in these terms 'a strategy of hierarchical surveillance and control over the work of teachers' (Wratten, 1995:57). Inspection is consistent with the government's broad strategy for improving the quality of education offered and raising the standard of pupil achievement. However there are not any centrally determined learning standards. If inspection is about improvement, then 'it requires a benchmark set of standards for teachers' performance against which to make an initial evaluation of whether the basic work of each teacher is satisfactory' (Fidler, 1995:104).

Conclusion

There are two major functions which inspection claimed to serve: Demonstrating accountability and leading to improvement. The data analysis suggested that there were a number of problems in the present system of assessing teacher performance. There were deficiencies in the current system of inspection which were related to the role of inspection within this system. The summative aspect of the model was over-emphasised at the expense of the formative one.

I have so far presented the outcomes of the research that are relative to the summative aspect of inspection in the Cypriot Educational system. This is a part of a research conducted for fulfilling the requirements of the University of Nottingham for the award of a PhD.

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