



Challenges in Quality and Quality Assessment in Education: Subjectivity, Ambiguity, and Professional Deficiencies in the Bulgarian Context: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT: This research critically examines the dismal state of the quality assessment framework in the Bulgarian education system, revealing a “*tangled eclectic educational patchwork*” that fails to yield any meaningful improvements. Through an incisive analysis of key official documents—namely, the “Framework for Assessing the Quality of Education,” the “Inspection Guide,” and the “Analysis of the Quality of Education Provided by Schools”—the study exposes a system “riddled with vagueness, subjectivity, meretricious practices of no in-depth value and real positive results and significant limitations in the current assessment approach. Specifically, the findings indicate a pervasive subjectivity linked to personal impressions of inspectors, a lack of clear and standardized indicators, and insufficient stakeholder involvement, which collectively undermine the reliability and validity of quality assessments which create a “blurry picture” that lacks reliable benchmarks. The absence of real feedback from essential stakeholders—students, parents, and teachers—leaves the entire framework detached from reality, with desultory emphasis on compliance over genuine improvement that resulted in a culture that prioritizes procedural adherence instead of stimulating an environment conducive to educational excellence. The disconnect with international benchmarks (as given PISA) further exacerbates these issues, highlighting rough discrepancies between reported data and actual performance outcomes. This study aims to provide insights into the systemic challenges facing Eastern European and especially Bulgarian education, along with practical recommendations for enhancing the quality assessment framework to more effectively support student learning and institutional development.

KEYWORDS: Educational Accountability, Insufficient Compliance, Quality Assessment, Subjectivity, Systemic Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Specifics and general characteristic of the Bulgarian educational system and its quality

The body of research and publications on the quality of education is vast, with Google Scholar listing approximately 8,560,000 results on the topic and around 65,700 studies published between 2020 and 2025 alone. Despite extensive exploration, quality education remains a complex and subjective concept, shaped by various theories and approaches. Recent studies have examined key factors influencing educational quality, including inputs such as teachers, students, and staff, as well as processes like curriculum design and instructional methods (Ashraf & Ahmed, 2022). Core principles of quality education emphasize mutual respect, differentiated instruction, and the pursuit of knowledge for human flourishing, alongside universal values of equity and democracy (Karatsiori, 2023). Quality education is commonly assessed through measures of efficiency, effectiveness, equity, relevance, and sustainability, while its essential components include a conducive learning environment, well-structured content, effective teaching processes, and meaningful educational outcomes (Panthee, 2022). Both internal and external influences, along with resource allocation, play a crucial role in improving educational quality (Halawa & Mulyanti, 2023). To propagate excellence, educational institutions should prioritize the development of teaching materials, innovative learning strategies, diverse instructional media, comprehensive assessment systems, and adaptive curricula. Continuous monitoring and evaluation programs are essential to ensuring sustained improvements in education (Grzyb, 2022; Kyriakides et al., 2020; Mehta, 2013).

The focus and scope of this article is not on defining quality or examining various implications due to specific determinants but rather on critically analysing the erratic and desultory, eclectically- made and ineffective implementation of quality control in Bulgarian education without any **deictic** and **dioristic proofs** of it to lead to may better effect for the system. This framework lacks



clear, firmly demonstrable evidence of effectiveness and fails to yield meaningful improvements in the system. In this context, quality is understood as the degree to which the ideal expectation aligns with the actual achievable outcome. It is determined by the coherence between needs, processes, methods, and resources in producing an educational service that meets expected results. Quality is ensured and measured through this alignment and relevance.

The fragility of educational organizations in Bulgaria presents a significant challenge, particularly in light of prolonged and largely unsuccessful educational reforms. This fragility undermines schools' ability to maintain high standards and adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The underdevelopment of the education market, due to strict state regulation, has exacerbated territorial disparities, with educational services concentrated in regional and large municipal centres at the expense of smaller communities. The partial application of a state monopoly has led to a surge in the number of educational institutions, yet without a corresponding improvement in quality.

State intervention remains a defining feature of Bulgaria's education system, consistent with the principles of a liberal market economy. The government plays a key role in financing education, structuring the educational process, licensing and accrediting institutions and programs, and providing information support. However, this involvement has also contributed to systemic problems, including insufficient budget allocation, a lack of motivation for educational and pedagogical initiatives, and growing social disparities due to the low status of education professionals.

Despite ongoing economic transformations, schools in Bulgaria remain disengaged from the diffusion of education market. This market both reflects and influences economic shifts, with a strong interdependence between labour demand and educational offerings. Effective planning of student enrolment and curriculum development requires active labour market analysis to align educational services with the needs of students and employers. However, while state educational standards provide formal benchmarks, they fail to adequately address the practical demands of businesses or the realities of the educational process. Efforts to improve educational quality remain largely aspirational with vague and meretricious conceptualization and vision, as there are no established national mechanisms for systematically collecting feedback from users of educational services. As a result, policymaking operates on a trial-and-error basis.

Several key challenges emerge from this analysis, including low economic growth, high unemployment, insufficient labour market demand, and an oversupply of educational services. In an environment of uncertainty, implementing meaningful educational reforms and forecasting future developments becomes particularly difficult. While socio-economic changes occur rapidly, reforms in education are slow due to the system's inherently conservative nature. The decline in educational quality in Bulgaria is driven by both formal and structural factors, and projections for the system's future remain bleak. A World Bank report on education in transitional economies, based on research from 27 European and Central Asian countries, criticizes that these systems remain overly focused on rote memorization. This approach fails to adapt to labour market needs, creating a significant gap between societal demands and educational outcomes. Additionally, resources are often used inefficiently.

The concept of quality in education is not absolute but rather shaped by social, economic, and cultural contexts. It is achieved through specific methods and tools designed to meet defined objectives. Quality is also a socially constructed and dynamic phenomenon, shaped by the interaction between education providers and consumers. Consequently, the same educational service may be perceived differently by various users, depending on their expectations and needs. Quality education must cultivate both specific and general key competencies essential for professional success. While economic development is crucial, moral values and social norms also play a vital role, yet they seem increasingly absent in everyday life. The difficulties in maintaining educational quality are further exacerbated by the growing preference among students—regardless of their academic performance—to seek additional private lessons. This trend suggests that public schools fail to meet students' expectations, reinforcing the rise of non-formal education as a compensatory mechanism. Although informal learning has historically been an integral part of society, especially in a globalized world, an overreliance on it may threaten the stability and effectiveness of formal education.

The *National Inspectorate of Education* (NIE) of Bulgaria serves as the primary institution responsible for overseeing and reporting on the quality of education. As an independent body funded by the Council of Ministers, it conducts external inspections of kindergartens and schools to assess and enhance educational standards. The NIE, whose main function is external assessment of the quality of education in kindergartens and schools through inspection, strives to create and improve policies for ensuring high quality of education in support of European and national priorities for developing the quality of preschool and school education and promoting cooperation between stakeholders.



Its key functions include:

1. Developing, approving, and improving criteria and indicators for educational quality assessment.
2. Organizing and conducting inspections of educational institutions.
3. Providing assessment and guidelines for the directors of kindergartens and schools, as well as for the heads of relevant Regional Departments of Education.
4. Notifying the relevant Regional Department of Education in cases of identified violations of regulations or when the quality of education, as evidenced by student learning outcomes, is deemed insufficient.
5. Providing the Council of Ministers with regular analyses of the quality of education in inspected kindergartens and schools, covering specific regions or the entire country.

The ambiguous effectiveness of the National Inspectorate of Education (NIE) in Bulgaria is found to be limited, with its oversight practices exhibiting inconsistency and a superficial approach based on “*educational captation*” and attempts to attain recognition rather than evidence-based efforts to enhance educational quality. The institution's control mechanisms lack systematic implementation, resulting in assessments that do not effectively contribute to meaningful improvements in educational quality.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a case study methodology to critically analyse and examine the conceptualization and operationalization of these regulations in their task to assess quality within the Bulgarian education system. The case study focuses on analysis of official documents related to quality assessment in Bulgarian education. The three key official documents are:

1. “*Framework for Assessing the Quality of Education¹*” (or *the Framework*) published by the National Inspectorate of Education. This document outlines the overarching framework for quality assessment in the Bulgarian education system, defining key criteria and indicators.
2. “*Inspection Guide*” published in Sofia in 2022. This document provides specific guidance for inspectors on how to conduct quality assessments within the framework established by the first document. It outlines methodologies, procedures, and tools for data collection and analysis.
3. “*Analysis of the Quality of Education Provided by Schools² (2021/2022 academic year)*” (or *the Analysis*) comprehensive report that presents the findings of quality assessments conducted during the specified academic year. This report serves as a practical application of the framework and inspection guidelines outlined in the previous documents.

The study aims to identify challenges and limitations within the current framework, such as subjectivity, ambiguity, and resource constraints. The research also examines how quality in education is conceptualized and measured within the Bulgarian context, investigating how it is defined and operationalized. It also seeks to assess the coherence and consistency of the quality assessment framework, evaluating whether it provides a clear and uniform basis for measuring educational quality across different levels and types of schools.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The Framework

The Framework for the Assessment of the Quality of Education [1:1] - 2022 (or the Framework) is a document whose purpose is:

- [1] To present in a summarized form the concept of the NIE for the assessment of the quality of education.
- [2] To provide easy access to information on the guiding principles and documents of the NIE in the inspection process.
- [3] To ensure transparency and publicity of the inspection process and the results of the assessment of institutions.

The NIE adopts the following definition of **quality of education**:

“Quality of education is a set of characteristics of the educational process that lead to the realization of goals and policies related to:

- [1] the level of knowledge, skills and competencies of students.
- [2] the degree of development of personal qualities and social competencies.
- [3] the satisfaction of the needs of society, parents and students” [1:5]

The provided definition of “quality of education” presents several inherent challenges, primarily stemming from subjectivity and ambiguity. Firstly, assessing the “level of knowledge, skills, and competencies of students” can be subjective, influenced by the assessor’s own biases and interpretations. The terms themselves are broad and open to varying interpretations, making it difficult to



establish consistent standards. For example, what constitutes a “sufficient” level of critical thinking or problem-solving skills can vary significantly across individuals and contexts.

The defining and measuring “*personal qualities and social competencies*” being so generalized presents significant challenges. These concepts, which may include creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and communication skills, are often abstract and difficult to quantify objectively. Their development is influenced by a multitude of factors, including individual personalities, cultural backgrounds, and social experiences, making it challenging to isolate the impact of education alone. Determining the “satisfaction of the needs of society, parents, and students” presents inherent subjectivity. The needs of each stakeholder group can vary significantly and may even be in conflict with one another. Defining and measuring “satisfaction” sounds rather unserious for national document, as it involves subjective perceptions and experiences. Accurately and consistently measuring the satisfaction of all stakeholders can be logistically complex and may not always accurately reflect the true quality of education. These inherent challenges in defining and measuring quality in education can lead to inconsistencies in assessment practices, difficulties in comparing outcomes across different institutions, and a lack of clarity regarding the overall goals of education.

Based on the data provided from the Framework where *Subjectivity, Ambiguity, and Professional Deficiencies* (in definition and action development) are not lacking, it can be concluded that the information in the national report (which is made based on this framework and is examined in the article) may be inaccurate and unfairly analyzed for several reasons:

1. **Lack of transparency in the assessment methodology** – [1:15] states that “*the process of assessing the quality of education ends with the production of an inspection report*”. Without a clear idea of how exactly the assessment is structured and what methods were used in the inspection, there is a risk of subjectivity in the analysis. For example, if the methods applied in the three stages of the inspection *are not described gradually and precisely*, it cannot be guaranteed that the results are representative.
2. **The existence of conflicts of interest** – On page 16 [1:16], it is stated that the evaluation includes “*summary assessments by type of educational institution*”, but without specifying how conflicts of interest are avoided in the evaluation of schools related to inspection, the results may be biased.
3. **Unclear selection of inspected institutions** – On page 12[1:12], it is noted that “*institutions are selected at the level of settlement, municipality, administrative-territorial region.*” Without clear selection criteria, for example, how to determine which institutions to inspect, differences in assessments by region can lead to erroneous conclusions.
4. **Lack of training and qualifications of inspectors** – Page 4[1:4] emphasizes that it “*relies on qualified teachers*” without specifying how inspectors who assess quality are trained and what expertise is needed to cover the requirements for effective control. Lack of proper training for inspectors can lead to unprofessional and inaccurate assessments.
5. **General trite positive assessments without specification** – Although page 17[1:17] states that “*summarizing positive aspects of the quality of education*” is part of the analysis, the lack of specific examples or data supporting these positive aspects leaves the impression of a superficial and vague analysis. Without specification of what aspects are being discussed, the impression is that the situation in education is better than it actually is.
6. **Unspecified reasons for failures** – The texts on page 17[1:17] mention that “*identifying the reasons for low achievement of objectives*” is part of the analysis, but *no specific examples or cases are provided*. The lack of specification as to what these objectives are and why they were not achieved leads to ambiguity and confusion for the reader.
7. **Trends without statistical support** – The possibility of “*identifying trends and policies in organizational development*” is mentioned [1:15], but the text does not provide statistical information or specific examples to support these claims. Without statistical support, conclusions about trends remain unclear and can be manipulated.
8. **Generalization of violations without specific cases** – Page 16[1:16] states that “*violations found during the inspection process*” exist, but without providing specific cases or examples of violations and definition of what violation is expected to be! This general statement can lead to misunderstandings about the real state of the inspected institutions and the perception of their quality status.

The abundance of *unclear findings, altiloquence statements, amphilogisms* and circumlocutions combined with *consilient, desultory* and *corrupted practices*, that undermine the credibility of the analysis and make it difficult to draw valid conclusions from the results obtained and lead to suspicion on deliberate and premediated corrupted practices for political consumption.



What's Missing in the Framework

Within the framework of the assessment of the quality of education, as presented in the documents provided, some criteria that are inherent to the quality systems in different countries are not explicitly included or formulated. Some of these missing criteria include:

1. **Standardization and clear indicators** – Many international quality systems, such as UNESCO's ISCED system or the EFQM models in Europe, apply strictly defined standards and indicators for assessment. The documents presented lack sufficiently clearly formulated criteria and indicators to allow benchmarking or comparison of quality against internationally recognized standards. [1:7]
2. **Focus on internationalization** – In many developing education systems, there is an emphasis on internationalization and global approaches to assessment. The Bulgarian framework has not emphasized the adaptation of local practices to international contexts and needs, which could improve the quality of education. [1:9]
3. **Measuring stakeholder satisfaction** – Many evaluation systems, such as those used in Scandinavian countries, emphasize collecting data on student, parent and teacher satisfaction with the educational process. The framework provided does not mention a sufficiently explicit methodology for actively incorporating feedback from all stakeholders. [1:9,15]
4. **Specific improvement measures** – Within the analysis of inspection results, there is an emphasis on conclusions and recommendations, but there is a lack of specific guidelines or formal action plans for quality improvement. In foreign quality systems, such as those of Australia and New Zealand, the development of specific improvement strategies is often required as a result of the assessments carried out. [1:17]
5. **Analysis of comfort and safety of the learning environment** – In many countries, such as the United Kingdom and Canada, assessments include criteria for the physical safety and psychological comfort of students in the school environment. The Bulgarian framework does not place enough emphasis on these aspects, which may leave gaps in assessments of the quality of education. [1:16]

As a summary it could be concluded that *The Framework* lacks *standardization, clear indicators, a focus on internationalization, and measures for stakeholder satisfaction; specific improvement measures and analysis of the learning environment's safety and comfort; subjective criteria such as personal impressions of inspectors, teacher satisfaction, and general parental opinions* introduce ambiguity.

When assessing the quality of education, it is important to analyze the criteria that can be considered *vague, unclear, or ill-defined*. The presented criteria sometimes lead to subjective interpretations and often fail to provide accurate and reliable information about the actual quality of education. In the following, we will examine some of the main criteria that can fall into this category, as well as the arguments for their vagueness. The case examples are:

1. Personal impressions of the inspectors

Personal impressions based on the individual perceptions of inspectors can introduce significant ambiguity into the assessment process. Any human assessment is influenced by experience, biases and personal beliefs. For example, an inspector who has had positive experiences with a particular teaching style may rate it significantly higher, regardless of the actual results in the classroom. This makes the assessment subjective and not entirely objective.

2. Teacher satisfaction level

Teacher satisfaction is another criterion aspect that can be ambiguous. Teachers' feelings about their work environment, pay, and professional development are often complex and multifaceted. Satisfaction can be influenced by a multitude of factors, some of which are not related to the quality of education, but rather to personal circumstances or external pressures. Therefore, using this criterion may not provide a valid assessment of the quality of education.

3. General opinion of parents

Parents' opinions about the quality of their children's education are an important but often imprecise criterion. Parents may be influenced by personal feelings, social status, or even hearsay, rather than by factual data about the quality of teaching. Thus, assessments based on general opinion can vary greatly and may not reflect the actual educational environment.

4. Creativity of teaching materials

The criterion of creativity of teaching materials is another aspect that is difficult to objectively assess. Like any artistic expression, creativity is a subjective aspect that depends on individual tastes and preferences. One inspector might find certain textbooks



innovative and inspiring, while another might consider them inappropriate or ineffective. This widens the scope for contradictory assessments and makes the measurement of the quality of education lower.

5. Communication skills of the administrative team

The inability to objectively measure the sociability of the administrative team presents another ambiguity. The degree of communication and interaction can vary significantly depending on many factors, including personal experience and interpersonal relationships. Without clear and defined criteria for assessment, this aspect could lead to different interpretations and distortions of reality. Summary of the vague criteria is given in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Summary of 15 subjective indicators (criteria) that may provide insufficient accuracy and adequacy when assessing the quality of education (source: author's)

<i>Indicator (Criterion)</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Personal impressions of the inspectors</i>	An assessment based on individual prejudices or experience.
<i>Teacher satisfaction level</i>	Subjective perception of working conditions.
<i>General opinion of parents</i>	Personal perceptions that do not always reflect real facts.
<i>Creativity of teaching materials</i>	An assessment that depends on personal taste and understanding.
<i>Teachers' teaching style</i>	Difficult to assess objectively, depending on personal preferences.
<i>Public opinion about the school/educational institution</i>	Perceptions from rumors or unconfirmed information.
<i>Emotional climate in the classroom</i>	A complex aspect, difficult to quantify.
<i>Number of innovations proposed by teachers</i>	Not every innovation is successful, evaluation is subjective.
<i>Communication skills of the administrative team</i>	Interpreted differently by participants, it reduces objectivity.
<i>Students' attitude towards subjects</i>	Perceptions are influenced by many external factors.
<i>Curriculum Concept Guidelines</i>	It can be interpreted differently depending on the personal experience of the teachers.
<i>Level of student engagement</i>	It may vary from day to day and may not reflect the overall attitude towards learning.
<i>Opinions of education experts</i>	Susceptible to individual interpretations and may not reflect the opinion of the general public.
<i>Quality of relationships between students</i>	The complexity of social dynamics makes it difficult to test and quantify.
<i>The role of the school in the community</i>	Personal perceptions that can be influenced by various social factors.

The Analysis (2022-2023)

These vague and ambivalent criteria from **Table 5**. a biannual analysis is made (last one in Bulgaria). According to the document, the assessment of the quality of education is carried out through independent expert assessment and objective indicators, but the results show a significant share of directors who express varying degrees of subjectivity regarding the objectivity of this assessment. Specifically, 48% of directors assess the objectivity of the analysis as high, 24% as average, 12% as low, and 16% cannot assess. [2:96]

This suggests that despite attempts to objectify criteria and indicators, there is still some subjectivity related to the personal perception and experience of directors.

Also, the share of 29.45% of schools that do not have adequate library infrastructure can be considered as an indicator of inadequacy of released resources, which calls into question the overall quality of learning conditions. [2:31]

In addition, attempts to achieve a certain level of appropriateness of indicators and criteria, as well as differences in their implementation, may raise doubts about the reliability of the data reported. [2:19,31]

The vast dissonance: what the Framework assesses and reports and what PISA reports (period 2022-2023)

Based on the data provided from the Analysis of the Quality of Education [2:2], it can be concluded that the information in the analysis may be inaccurate and unfairly analyzed for several reasons:



The dissonance between the data in the analysis of the quality of education in Bulgaria and the results of international studies such as PISA (Program for International Students Assessment) can be explained by multiple factors:

- [1] **Difference in methodology and criteria:** The Bulgarian Education Quality Report may use different criteria and indicators for assessment compared to PISA, which focuses specifically on the reading, mathematics and science skills of 15-year-old students. For this reason, the results of the analysis may appear more optimistic, as the emphasis is on the presence of systems and processes, rather than on actual learning outcomes. [2:19]
- [2] **Subjectivity of assessments:** As mentioned, a high percentage of principals and schools rate their own effectiveness and quality as “satisfactory” or even “good”, which may signal subjectivity in these self-assessments. There may be a tendency to justify administrative efforts and improvements, which may lead to a distortion of the real picture of the quality of education. [2:10, 49]
- [3] **Focus on indicators rather than outcomes:** The report may focus on quantitative outcomes, such as the availability of support programs for vulnerable groups or innovations in governance, rather than on actual student achievement as measured by PISA. For example, improvements in infrastructure or administration do not necessarily guarantee improved student outcomes. [2:51]
- [4] **Implementation issues:** While the principles in the report call for innovation and improved approaches, their implementation often remains at the level of declaration. For example, the existence of innovative practices and good examples does not mean that they are widely implemented throughout the education system. The lack of follow-up and a sustainable evaluation model can also lead to differences in results. [2:49]
- [5] **Potential for data manipulation:** Although there is no direct evidence of *data and trend “fabrication”*, oppositional sentiments and criticisms regarding reports on the quality of education may cast doubt on the data provided. Distrust in institutions and systems may raise doubts about the accuracy of the information provided.

the following data can yes be manipulated in the report for quality on education for the purpose yes is created more positive idea in context on the results from the international PISA study:

- [1] **Participation on certain schools:** could be choose only schools with high results and yes is neglected those with lower achievements. This would influence on the presented data and would yes created impression for better total quality on education than real exists. [2:51]
- [2] **Distortion on statistics for Achievements:** could be manipulate the data for grades and achievements on students. For example, performing on selectively reporting on high ratings, while the low one’s ratings remain unnoticed or is underestimate. This firmly would lead to distorted idea for success on the system. [2:72]
- [3] **Focus on positive polls:** At research and surveys among teachers and parents, the data can yes be distorted, for yes emphasizes on the positive one’s opinions, while the negative is ignored, or no is published. It is possible to is observes and artificial manipulation on the wordings on the questions, so that yes direct the answers to positive assessment. [2:11]
- [4] **Incomplete presentation on context:** could be ignore aspects as socio-economic backgrounds on the students who significantly influence on educational results. For example, insufficient attention on the vulnerable groups and their real achievements directly lead to higher average assessment for quality on education on national level. [2:67]
- [5] **Incorrect interpretation on results:** The results from the national assessments and research can yes is interpret by way that yes it seems that scientists progress, even when PISA shows understated results. For example, if the national tests give inflated ratings, then this creates false feeling for success deliberately. [2:19]

These hypothetical examples can yes bring to significant difference between the report for quality on education in the country and the results from PISA, which are international recognized for inspection on educational systems.

Here some from the illogicality that can yes be highlighted in the analysis on quality on education, as presented in the report:

- [1] **Disproportion between the positive assessments of the Analysis and PISA:** If the report shows high percentages on positive ratings from students and parents, but the country receives unsatisfactory PISA results, this causes questions for reliability on the local ratings. This difference can yes mean that the system on evaluation is not adequate and not reflects the real one’s skills on the students, [2: 58, 46].
- [2] **Lack on systematically study on Participants:** According to the report, in many schools’ no is practices systematically study on the opinion on participants in the educational process. *How can then the grades on parents and students are*



consider for accurate and representative if no organized mechanisms for reverse connection and improvement? This lack of commitment would lead to accumulation on discrepancies between attitudes and reality. [2:57, 58].

- [3] **Persistence on the positive one's self-assessments:** Despite that very schools receive high ratings for management on quality, according to the analysis, is observe significant frustrations and criticisms from country on teachers. It is illogical to is claims that the institutions have good mechanisms for management on quality, at condition that the workers express dissatisfaction and quote specific problems. [2:46,51]
- [4] **Essential Survey gaps:** The analysis indicates that from respondents' groups, 48% meet difficulties at the filling on questionnaires. This statistic puts under question validity on the data that is they lay for basis on the estimates in the report. *How can half from participants doesn't transmit correctly information, but at the same time the data is considering as reliable?* [2:87, 94]
- [5] **Incorrect interpretation on for consistency on the data:** The possibility the same schools yes reports positive results in one context (national) and inflated levels on the analysis in PISA is also illogical. When one student no achieves definitely level in international standards, it is very doubtful that he would be evaluated positive from the local evaluators. [2:72]

These illogicalities raise important questions regarding accuracy on the data and methodology used for preparation on the report for quality on education and how they influence on comparability with the world standards presented in PISA.

DISCUSSION

The current **quality assessment approach** in the Bulgarian education system contributes to the lack of meaningful improvements through several interrelated factors:

The assessment criteria are often **vague** and **subjective**, leading to inconsistencies in how quality is measured across different institutions. Inspectors may use **personal impressions** instead of objective data, which can skew results and undermine the credibility of assessments.

There are no clearly defined **standards** or **indicators** for assessing quality, making it difficult to benchmark or compare educational outcomes against **international standards**. This lack of clarity hampers efforts to identify areas needing improvement.

The framework does not adequately include feedback from **stakeholders** such as students, parents, and teachers. This omission leads to a disconnect between assessment outcomes and the actual needs or experiences of those directly affected by educational policies.

Assessments often result in general positive ratings without addressing specific problems or deficiencies. This over-generalization can mask underlying issues and prevent targeted interventions that could lead to real enhancements in quality.

The framework focuses more on **compliance** with established procedures rather than fostering genuine quality improvements. This approach can create a culture of "checking boxes" rather than pursuing continuous improvement.

Insufficient training for inspectors and a lack of resources for schools hinder the effective implementation of quality assessment. Without proper training, inspectors may not apply assessment criteria uniformly, leading to varying quality reports.

The disconnect between local assessments and **international benchmarks** (like PISA) indicates that the domestic approach may not align with global educational expectations, resulting in a disparity between reported outcomes and actual student performance. The rigidity of the assessment approach does not allow for adaptations based on changing educational needs or societal demands, which can stifle innovation and responsiveness in the education system.

In summary, the current quality assessment approach lacks **clarity**, **stakeholder engagement**, and **adaptability**, which all contribute to its ineffectiveness in bringing about meaningful improvements in the Bulgarian educational system.

CONCLUSION

Vague, unclear and ill-defined criteria for assessing the quality of education, not only make it difficult to carry out an objective assessment but also undermine trust in the inspection process. These criteria often lead to subjective interpretations and can adversely affect educational policies and practices. Therefore, it is necessary to develop specific, measurable and objective criteria that reflect the real quality of education provision and provide a basis for transparency in the education system. the current quality assessment framework within the Bulgarian education system is fraught with challenges that hinder its effectiveness in driving meaningful improvements. The inherent subjectivity, ambiguous criteria, and lack of stakeholder engagement all contribute to an assessment



culture that prioritizes compliance rather than genuine enhancement of educational quality. The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for a re-evaluation of the assessment processes to incorporate clearer standards and indicators, as well as more robust methods of stakeholder involvement. By bridging the gap between local assessments and international benchmarks, the framework can be transformed into a tool that not only measures educational quality but also drives continuous improvement and supports the holistic development of students. Implementing these changes will require commitment from all stakeholders within the education system, including policymakers, educational institutions, and communities, to ensure that the Bulgarian education system can adapt, grow, and ultimately deliver a higher quality of education for all students.

NOTES

1. <https://nio.government.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%9E.pdf>
2. <https://nio.government.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/%D0%90%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-2021-2022-%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0.pdf>

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