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Educational Quality Improvement Program
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Towards Effective, Decentralized Classroom Reform

Education policymakers seek approaches that move pedagogical reform from mere rhetoric to practical classroom change. In order to be effective, project implementers must incorporate bottom-up development strategies that involve schools and teachers in the design, implementation, and assessment of reforms. One notable strategy, implemented successfully in Namibia, introduces a system of teacher self-assessment to inform policy change and effect reform at the school level.

The Namibian Ministry of Education introduced a system of school self-assessment as part of its ongoing school improvement planning cycle. Self-assessment ensures an instrumental role for teachers to both transfer national pedagogical reform initiatives to the classroom and influence education policy. According to the Namibia model, successful bottom-up pedagogical reform requires methodologies for teachers to:

- Reflect on their own professional practice;
- Ask questions about their own and other teachers' classroom practices;
- Relate their classroom instruction to learners' success or failure;
- Use print materials to learn about policies, curricula, syllabi, and classroom methods;
- Determine relevant professional development activities;
- Receive regular training through a cascade system; and
- Engage in dialogues with other teachers and education officers.

A school self-assessment system ensures that teachers understand policy initiatives and become more directly involved in implementation strategies. System indicators include teaching strategies, school management, outside support, and parent involvement. Teachers individually rate their own practices and reflect on findings through dialogues with fellow teachers and other stakeholders. Regional education officers act as teacher support providers, conducting classroom observations to validate teacher self-report data, cater professional development services to teachers' specific needs, facilitate teacher dialogues, and develop school support plans and activities. Over time, teachers' self-assessment ratings and officers' classroom assessment ratings correspond more and more exactly.

By analyzing teacher self-assessments and comparing them to national data, education policymakers gain a fuller understanding of classroom practice, teachers' professional development needs, and the successes of or challenges to reforms over a period of time. Through decentralized evaluation and bottom-up policy implementation, teachers more thoroughly comprehend the concepts that guide practice. Self-assessment offers teachers a means to assess their own work against attainable objectives, assert their support needs, and develop the skills and confidence to influence policy decisions and act as local leaders.

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Namibia's collaborative problem-solving experience provides lessons that can be applied elsewhere for effective, decentralized teacher development. Although self-assessment and decentralized policy implementation are time-consuming, the Namibian Ministry of Education found that teachers can begin to implement reforms while continuing traditional whole-group learning and evaluation strategies. A gradual and phased-in approach relying on cascade training, steady dissemination of materials on new policies, and education officer support works best in most environments.

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