

# EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



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## Supportive Teacher Supervision



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Better understanding of the importance of instructional quality in improving student learning outcomes has led to an increased focus on teacher training in many international development programs. New understandings of how students learn have provided teachers with, techniques for facilitating the learning process, resources and materials for enhancing it, and tools for assessing student progress and adapting instruction accordingly. Yet, in much of the world, teachers operate in closely-circumscribed environments, with standardized expectations, and with little to no support from other members of the education system. Head teachers, principals, content supervisors, and inspectors have significant power to facilitate or impede the development of new ways of teaching. Their understanding of, commitment to, and support for the changes promoted by teacher training interventions is critical to the success and sustainability of these efforts.

Teacher training efforts are therefore increasingly being paired with efforts to support educational managers and leaders in a transition to roles that support and enhance teaching through a lens of instructional leadership. Schools are being re-envisioned as learning communities, supported by higher-level personnel who engage in constructive dialogue around teaching practices, set high expectations for performance, provide resources for continuous professional development, and facilitate community understanding of and appreciation for new ways of teaching.

Where structured and regular supervision and inspection systems exist, personnel are transitioning from a focus on discipline, appearance, and low-inference measures of preparation and performance (like adherence to a standardized lesson plan and the use of an attendance book), to an approach that engages teachers in discussions about what kinds of teaching work best in a given context. Supervision includes observations that track performance against high instructional standards, and generates focused and practical feedback to help teachers improve their practice. The goal in these settings is to establish a regular, clinical cycle of supervision and support in which all members of the process understand the goals and are committed to performance improvement. Accountability and transparency in the supervision process are important for the development of will and commitment among participants.

Where regular supervision structures are limited or do not exist, efforts often focus on building the capacity of school leaders or teachers themselves to evaluate their students' needs and their own performance, reflect on how to improve their teaching, and experiment with and assess the success of new approaches.

Technology can assist both in the analysis of needs related to teacher supervision and in the provision of appropriate support. Analyses of teacher performance data can help set priorities for training and support and allow for more cost-effective tailoring of interventions and service delivery. Radio or other digital media can supplement visits by supervisory staff, allowing teachers to partially self-direct a professional development program, and connecting those most isolated to central goals, approaches, and resources.

Supportive supervision efforts are intended to help educational systems, schools and teachers focus on means of engaging with students that will allow them to maximize their learning, thus enhancing their opportunities for success in school and in life. This issue of EQ Review highlights programs in Malawi, Egypt, and Liberia that have developed innovative approaches for improving the quality of supervision and support for teachers.

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## Malawi: Localized and Supportive Supervision of Teachers

In 1994, following the government's policy of free primary education, 20,000 untrained primary school teachers entered Malawi's already struggling education system to meet the demand created by a nearly 50% increase in pupil enrollment. The Malawian government launched a short course to orient teachers, but it did not adequately prepare them for the challenges they faced in the classrooms. The ongoing support and supervision that was needed for these untrained teachers was largely unavailable. The supervision structure was overstretched and fundamentally inspection-oriented, with teachers afraid of anyone coming to observe them. The prevailing belief was when an inspector came, their mission was to find faults with the teacher and criticize their classroom instruction.

In response to this challenge, American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partners implemented several USAID-funded initiatives to improve the quality of education and in particular support teachers' professional development. Most recently, under the USAID-funded Primary School Support Program: A School Fees Pilot (PSSP: SFP), a complementary teacher supervision approach was developed to improve the professional skills of practicing primary school teachers. As part of PSSP:SFP's holistic school reform effort, the project launched Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTT), a hands-on supervision and training model adapted from the MTTT conceptualized under a related USAID program, Malawi Teacher Training Activity (MTTA).

Mobile Teacher Training Troupes originally included a group of three top performing, but now retired, teachers who spend a week in a school working with the teachers in the classrooms, providing feedback, modeling better practices, and tailoring support to individual needs. The long period of contact with MTTT members helped open teachers to feedback and by the end of the week, teachers actually sought out support for areas they felt needed improvement. PSSP: SFP, during the course of implementation, further refined the model to engage local star performing teachers to serve as troupe members. The shift was to promote local ownership and sustainability in the project's final year. To support a cluster of 3-5 geographically close schools, 67 troupes were formed in the project district. Each troupe had six teachers who were recognized for their exemplary skills in English, Chichewa (local language), early literacy, mathematics, science, local materials production (TALULAR or Teaching And Learning Using Locally Available Resources) as well as the head teachers to provide leadership and supervision. The troupe members were trained and developed coordinated plans to support neighboring schools for observation and feedback. MTTT members shared feedback from the observations with the government education supervisors, the Primary Education Advisor (PEA), and where common problems were discovered, suggested in-service training plans.

MTTT proved to be both an immediate and effective method of teacher mentoring that uses a friendly, but objective, approach to addressing challenges. MTTT bridged the gap in teachers' knowledge and skills by providing training and support locally in ways that most teachers needed. Teachers said it was easy to discuss the challenges they faced in content knowledge and pedagogy with a trouper because they were peers in sufficient contact with them, both of which helped to build trust. These mentoring sessions were focused and offered encouragement to help the teacher to be comfortable, and to be motivated to try out some suggestions. By using peer observers, MTTTs created a supervisory support system that fostered confidence among teachers and facilitated teachers to support one another in lesson preparation and delivery. Teachers' performance improved, as did their behavior and attitude to work. Teachers began to believe in themselves and felt empowered as they emulated what the troupers were doing. Using this grassroots level supervision approach, all teachers in the district could be reached each term. Furthermore, the fact that local troupers were teachers from within the cluster and they were excelling under the same constraints created a motivation for all teachers.

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*MTTT member demonstrating to teachers how they can use the local environment to explain concepts to learners*



*MTTT member sharing positive practices displayed across all classroom observations at the school*

## Egypt Education Reform Program (ERP) Support for Teacher Supervision



*Participants in an ERP classroom observation training for supervisors*

Egypt's 2003 National Education Standards emphasize student-centered active learning, effective classroom management, and the development of students' higher-level thinking skills as characteristics of effective teaching. The Education Reform Program (ERP) in Egypt has used this framework to build the capacity of supervisors and school leaders to support teachers and to develop tools that will help teacher supervision evolve from a punitive inspection process to an objective dialogue around standards of professional development.

ERP recognizes the importance of supervisors' gatekeeping role, and the necessity that they be aware of and able to foster the standards-based teaching and learning approaches on which teachers have been trained. The program has, therefore, involved supervisors in trainings both as participants and as trainers, an approach which has helped to increase their capacity to support, rather than impede, teachers' use of their newly-acquired skills in the classroom.

In addition to their routine inclusion in core training, supervisors have formed the primary cadre for the extension of ERP models beyond project schools. In response to a 2008 request to train all primary school teachers in seven governorates in active-learning methods, ERP further upgraded its existing training packages by increasing their emphasis on unit planning and formative assessment in the content areas. Subject-area supervisors participated in a training of trainers, and were then engaged by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in each of seven governorates to train the teachers. Feedback from ERP staff and supervisors themselves indicates that this training has succeeded in deepening supervisors' understanding of the importance of formative assessment and enhanced their ability to support teachers as they use these techniques.

To support teacher supervision at the classroom level, ERP collaborated with the MOE to develop a simple, yet focused, observation form that can be used by external supervisors, school principals, senior teachers or peer evaluators. The form's first column outlines standards-based expectations for teacher practice. The next two columns provide space for observational data and related suggestions for improving performance. The form is prepared in triplicate, with one copy for the teacher, another for the school training unit and principal, and the third for the supervisor. This information-sharing promotes transparency and increases the objectivity of feedback.

The Classroom Observation Form (COF) manual includes a set of detailed rubrics which specify the behaviors and evidence to look for when documenting the observation and providing suggestions for improving performance. The manual also includes recommendations for mutual preparation before an observation, and for follow up which supports the teacher's professional growth (including suggestions for the supervisor on how to provide constructive feedback and support teacher improvement in particular areas). The process is designed to foster an atmosphere of dialogue and collaboration in the teacher supervision process.

The results of the classroom observations are used to support ongoing professional development in several ways: to support individual teachers' growth through one-on-one interactions with instructional leaders, to provide input into training needs assessments and training plans, and to help supervisors assess and improve their own supervision skills.

The teachers benefiting from ERP's package of educational reforms have moved steadily upwards on measurements against the National Education Standards and consistently outperform their peers not supported by ERP. Supportive teacher supervision is an important component of that package.

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## Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP): Supportive Supervision of Teachers

Since 2006, the USAID-funded EQUIP2/Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP) has been working with the Liberian Ministry of Education (MOE) and the University of Liberia to revitalize the teacher training system of Liberia. LTTP is managed by the Academy of Education Development (AED).

Before LTTP, the country's three rural teacher training institutes had been closed for almost two decades. Sixty percent of teachers in the education system had no training. To address this issue, the program supported the reopening of the institutes and developed a primary education certificate program to train both new teachers and untrained teachers currently teaching. Concurrently, LTTP worked with the MOE in an inclusive eight-month process to develop *Professional Standards for the Liberian Teacher* and supported the use of these standards in a participatory process establishing the curriculum framework for primary teachers.

Once teachers are in the classroom, ongoing support and feedback are critical to ensure they meet Liberia's teaching standards and create an effective learning environment for students. LTTP has established local-level support and supervision of in-service primary school teachers conducted by field-based trainers who provide ongoing teacher observations of their classroom lessons. This supportive supervision, along with teachers' regular cluster-based training sessions, uses lesson planning and observation forms that build upon the established national standards for teachers. Importantly, these observation and evaluation procedures are built-in to teachers' pre-service training. Additionally, school-based mini-workshops and demonstration lessons are offered by local trainers to reinforce and support teacher learning.

While this teacher observation and support system is functioning in select regions, the system has yet to be fully developed on the national level. While local Education Officers should have roles in supporting schools, principals, and teachers, much of their time is devoted to administrative duties. Greater clarification of these roles and capacity building to help Education Officers provide guidance and assistance to school administrators, teachers, and communities is necessary. With the support models now in place, LTTP is working with these Education Officers on their roles and responsibilities to promote greater support to teachers in the classroom. Moving forward, LTTP hopes the supportive supervision processes and tools arising out of the program's teacher education process will contribute to national processes of teacher supervision.

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*Education stakeholders developed teaching standards and a new teacher training curriculum*



*School-based workshops and demonstration lessons give in-service teachers reinforce teacher support*