

FROM EVALUATION TO EMPOWERMENT: HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR BORDER-SCHOOL ECOSYSTEMS IN THAILAND

DA AVALIAÇÃO AO EMPODERAMENTO: ESTRATÉGIAS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO DE RECURSOS HUMANOS PARA ECOSISTEMAS DE ESCOLAS FRONTEIRIÇAS NA TAILÂNDIA

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Abstract

This study examines how External Quality Assessment (EQA) outcomes might be strategically utilized to improve Human Resource Development (HRD) in primary school environments throughout Thailand's national borders. The research uses a step-by-step approach that combines different methods, including analyzing needs, mapping the context with SWOT-PEST, getting expert feedback, and surveying stakeholders, to find important gaps between how things are currently done and how they should be done with EQA data. Findings indicate a systemic underutilization of External Quality Assurance (EQA) in developing Human Resource Management (HRM), highlighting inadequacies in teacher professional development, leadership planning, and data-driven decision-making. This study highlights the strategic potential of EQA as a catalyst for inclusive, context-sensitive HRD, in contrast to previous material that emphasizes compliance-based uses. Seven comprehensive initiatives are recommended, encompassing teacher upskilling, collaborative curriculum co-design, equity-centered planning, and the establishment of educational information systems. A comparative review of ASEAN border education models illustrates the importance of culturally sensitive and participative methodologies, while disparities in digital readiness and policy alignment elucidate variations in implementation efficacy. The paper provides an empirically based, policy-relevant paradigm for data-driven human capital development in unstable education systems by contextualizing the findings within global HRD theory and regional border dynamics. It provides pragmatic recommendations for ministries, accreditation

Resumo

Este estudo examina como os resultados da Avaliação Externa da Qualidade (AEQ) podem ser utilizados estrategicamente para aprimorar o Desenvolvimento de Recursos Humanos (DRH) em escolas de ensino fundamental em todo o território nacional da Tailândia. A pesquisa utiliza uma abordagem passo a passo que combina diferentes métodos, incluindo a análise de necessidades, o mapeamento do contexto com a análise SWOT-PEST, a obtenção de feedback de especialistas e a pesquisa com as partes interessadas, para identificar lacunas importantes entre a prática atual e a prática ideal, utilizando os dados da AEQ. Os resultados indicam uma subutilização sistêmica da Avaliação Externa da Qualidade (AEQ) no desenvolvimento da Gestão de Recursos Humanos (GRH), destacando inadequações no desenvolvimento profissional de professores, no planejamento de liderança e na tomada de decisões baseada em dados. Este estudo ressalta o potencial estratégico da AEQ como catalisadora para um DRH inclusivo e sensível ao contexto, em contraste com trabalhos anteriores que enfatizam usos baseados em conformidade. Sete iniciativas abrangentes são recomendadas, englobando o aprimoramento das habilidades dos professores, o co-design colaborativo do currículo, o planejamento centrado na equidade e o estabelecimento de sistemas de informação educacional. Uma análise comparativa dos modelos de educação nas regiões fronteiriças da ASEAN ilustra a importância de metodologias culturalmente sensíveis e participativas, enquanto as disparidades na prontidão digital e no alinhamento de políticas elucidam variações na eficácia da implementação. O artigo apresenta



organizations, and regional educational authorities to include EQA in long-term HRD planning, transforming evaluations from mere compliance instruments into catalysts for educational resilience and equity in marginalized learning contexts.

Keywords: Educational Ecosystem. Sustainable Human Resource Management. Teacher Empowerment. Capacity Building. Multicultural Education.

um paradigma empiricamente fundamentado e relevante para políticas públicas, voltado para o desenvolvimento de capital humano orientado por dados em sistemas educacionais instáveis, contextualizando as descobertas dentro da teoria global de Desenvolvimento de Recursos Humanos (DRH) e da dinâmica regional nas fronteiras. Fornece recomendações pragmáticas para ministérios, organizações de acreditação e autoridades educacionais regionais, para que incluam a Avaliação Externa da Qualidade (AEQ) no planejamento de DRH a longo prazo, transformando as avaliações de meros instrumentos de conformidade em catalisadores para a resiliência educacional e a equidade em contextos de aprendizagem marginalizados.

Palavras-chave: *Ecossistema Educacional. Gestão Sustentável de Recursos Humanos. Empoderamento de Professores. Capacitação. Educação Multicultural.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Ensuring **equitable access to high-quality education** is a key global development priority (UNESCO, 2022). In Thailand, educational improvement efforts include **External Quality Assessments (EQA)** by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA, 2017) to boost accountability, especially in underachieving regions (Chantarasombat, 2020).

However, geographic isolation and socio-cultural diversity limit the impact of EQA in border schools. These schools face significant challenges, including **teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, linguistic barriers, and minimal community involvement** (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2020; OECD, 2021), which prevent assessment data from leading to meaningful, lasting reform.

Scholars increasingly view Human Resource Development (HRD) as a crucial lever for change, especially in underprivileged communities. Strategic HRD focuses on empowering educators, strengthening leadership, and building flexible learning environments tailored to local needs. Recent HRD literature (e.g., Crocco, 2021a, 2021b; Crocco, Nguyen, & Tkachenko, 2021; Tkachenko, Crocco, Nguyen, & Jonathan, 2022) emphasizes regional and contextual strategies, including foundational studies on HRD development in Southeast Asia. A regional emphasis is the application of institutional

theory in human resource development within ASEAN (Tkachenko et al., 2022). Researchers advocate for the incorporation of indigenous methodologies into HRD research (Trenerry, Chng, Wang, Suhaila, Lim, Lu & Oh, 2021), alongside efforts to conceptually align capacity building with HRD (Danquah, Crocco, Mahmud, Rehan, & Rizvi, 2023).

This study addresses this need by examining how **EQA results can guide inclusive, participatory, and sustainable human resource strategies**. The research focuses on primary schools in **Thailand near the borders with Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia**.

The specific objectives are to:

1. **Assess EQA Utilization:** Analyze the current and ideal use of EQA in these border schools.
2. **Conduct Context Analysis:** Analyze the schools' internal strengths/weaknesses and external opportunities/threats impacting HRD.
3. **Develop & Test HRD Models:** Create and test HRD models that translate EQA results into empowering practices.
4. **Propose Policy:** Suggest policies to align EQA data with inclusive and sustainable HRD strategies.

The study aims to transition the focus from **compliance-orientated evaluation to empowerment-centered HRD, enhancing our** understanding of how strategic human resource management fosters educational fairness and resilience in diverse, resource-limited settings. The findings will offer practical advice to policymakers, planners, and accreditation agencies.

To ground this inquiry, the subsequent literature review examines themes related to HRD, border school ecosystems, and the strategic use of assessment data in marginalized school systems.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Human resource development in education

Human Resource Development (HRD) is crucial for building equitable, high-quality educational systems. Effective HRD in school's centers on **empowering**

educators, cultivating strong **leadership capabilities**, promoting **innovation**, and ensuring **pedagogical methods are contextually relevant** (Garavan, McGuire & Lee, 2015; Garavan, Wang, Matthews-Smith, Nagarathnam & Lai, 2018; Garavan, 2023; Gallagher, Wolfson, Reilly & Mathieu, 2023).

In **border and marginalized regions**, HRD must address complex socio-cultural and economic realities that often fall outside standard educational policies. Global HRD practice emphasizes **adaptive learning and developmental strategies** that are sensitive to local needs and environments (Chalofsky, Rocco & Morris, 2014). This requires equipping educators to manage **sociocultural diversity** through inclusive pedagogy and equity-focused policies (Done & Murphy, 2018; Naraian, 2021; Naraian, 2021). These perspectives advocate for flexible, context-aware HRD that fosters inclusion and capacity in marginalized educational settings.

2.2 Educational ecosystems in border area

Border schools face interconnected challenges, including teacher shortages, linguistic and cultural diversity, inadequate infrastructure, and limited community engagement (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2020). Despite these difficulties, these settings also offer a unique opportunity for community-driven and intercultural education, particularly when human capital is efficiently utilized.

The OECD's report on equity and inclusion (2021) stresses that increasing diversity—driven by global issues like migration, demographics, and inequality—requires education systems to adopt inclusive and context-sensitive practices that leverage local resources and cultural capital. Moreover, systemic educational transformation must be based on the substantial involvement of communities and educators, fostering collaborative cultures that integrate local knowledge into school improvement (Fullan, 2016).

Collectively, the evidence confirms that by prioritizing inclusive, participatory HRD strategies, marginalized border environments can become centers for innovative, equity-focused learning.

2.3 Strategic use of data for human capital development

Integrating data from External Quality Assessments (EQA) into HR strategies provides a powerful way to link educational improvement with evidence-based decision-making. Used effectively, EQA data moves beyond mere accountability to become a catalyst for focused human capital development.

Schools can leverage EQA data to evaluate teacher effectiveness, identify skill gaps, prioritize pedagogical improvements, and design customized professional development strategies tailored to their unique context (Tavares & Vaz, 2025). This data-centric approach enhances organizational agility, allowing leaders to optimally allocate personnel and build leadership pipelines based on empirical performance metrics.

However, the strategic implementation of HR management (HRM) in education—especially in remote and rural areas—is often inconsistent. Many resource-limited institutions have HRM strategies that are reactive rather than proactively aligned with institutional goals (Clardy, 2008; Akdere & Egan, 2020; Galvão, Marques & Ferreira, 2020). In these settings, school leaders often underuse EQA data due to limited analytical capacity, poor digital infrastructure, and insufficient training.

To close this gap, there is an urgent need for training that equips teachers and leaders to interpret, apply, and integrate EQA findings into flexible HRD strategies that support continuous improvement and long-term workforce stability.

These observations raise important questions about applying data-driven HRM in educational systems within border regions. The following section reviews region-specific studies to highlight the structural, cultural, and institutional dimensions of human capital development in cross-border educational ecosystems.

2.4 Human capital development in border-school ecosystems: lessons from case-based literature

Research on human capital development (HCD) in border school areas emphasizes the need to align teaching with the unique sociopolitical and cultural challenges of cross-border regions. For example, in Thailand, policy frameworks like the Buffer School Policy aimed to strengthen national identity and security while improving quality in underserved areas (Keawsomnuk, 2017).

However, implementation often suffers from gaps due to poor coordination, inadequate data integration, and flawed HR systems (Kaewkumkong, 2019). Strategic collaborations, such as the Thailand–Indonesia school initiatives, offer promising models. These programs foster collaborative learning and reciprocal capacity enhancement, boosting teacher professional development and institutional innovation (Kosonen & Person, 2014; Maber, 2018; Oh, Walker, & Thako, 2021; Gyi & Waters, 2023). They highlight how regional cooperation can effectively address border-specific challenges like teacher shortages, language barriers, and administrative fragmentation.

Comparative studies from other ASEAN border regions, such as Indonesia–Malaysia and West Kalimantan, indicate that data-driven empowerment of school committees and community education can improve workforce resilience and local ownership (Darmawan, Maadad & Ben, 2025; Sugianto, Akiang & Rendra, 2019; Risal, Irawanto, Hergianasari, Rahma & Pramudiana, 2022; Prabowo, Indrayani, Rusfiana & Sinaga, 2022). Furthermore, sustainable HCD initiatives in border schools fundamentally rely on inclusive pedagogies and culturally responsive leadership, often anchored in critical literacy and community narratives (Lopez, 2015; Maitreephun, 2019; Ferguson, 2019; Khamratana & Adunyarittigun, 2021; Brown, Altrichter, Shiyun, Rodríguez Conde, McNamara, Herzog-Punzenberger, , ... & Sánchez, 2022; Crawford, Aguayo & Valle, 2022; Kaewpanya, Mangkhang, Phuwanatwichit & Jaengaksorn, 2025; Treve, 2025).

Global comparative studies, extending beyond Southeast Asia (Golunov & Bitabar, 2025a; 2025b), stress the importance of institutional capacity, trust-building, and contextual negotiation for effective transnational education systems. Collectively, these cases affirm that the meaningful use of data in border education must be contextualized within a broader framework of intercultural collaboration, local empowerment, and institutional capacity enhancement.

This literature review has covered both formal cross-border collaborations and national policies. The following section will examine literature focusing on community-led educational projects in border areas affected by conflict, statelessness, and diverse identities, and explore the ramifications for inclusive and culturally informed HRD practices.

2.5 Human capital development and inclusive learning in border and stateless schooling contexts

Educational systems across contested and peripheral borders face intersecting issues of statelessness, conflict, and cultural marginalization, which critically impact human capital development (HCD). For example, the lack of official citizenship and unrecognized educational credentials create major obstacles to sustainable schooling for Karen refugees along the Thailand–Myanmar border (Yeo & Gagnon, 2020; Wardeh & Marques, 2021; Storen, 2024, July; Yeo & Yoo, 2022; Kitchanapaibul, Apidechkul, Srichan, Mulikaburt, Singkhorn, Udplong & Wongnuch, 2022). While stakeholders attempt to integrate state and non-state systems, these efforts remain fragmented without policy collaboration rooted in peacebuilding and cultural awareness (Justino, 2014). Furthermore, community education efforts have adapted to cross-border conflict by focusing on informal, identity-affirming practices that build local leadership and resilience (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2019). In regions like the Thailand–Lao PDR border, cultural citizenship and identity politics heavily influence teacher recruitment, curriculum relevance, and inclusivity (Sapphasuk & Nawarat, 2018). These findings align with the call for critical pedagogy as a transformative tool to enhance inclusive literacy and empower local educators in Thai border schools (Ubaque-Casallas, 2025).

Gender and ethnic disparities further complicate HCD strategies, particularly for marginalized groups, such as Hmong women in Lao PDR (Ghiațău & Măță, 2015) and ethnic minority girls in the border regions of Cambodia and Laos (Coleman, 2012; Allan & Artiles, 2017; Dabrowski, Ahmed, Goundar, Wong & Spink, 2024; Sen, 2025).

These studies collectively demonstrate that successful HRD in border areas must be grounded not only in numerical data but also in a profound understanding of local socio-political dynamics, ethnic diversity, and the complex roles of both non-citizen students and teachers.

2.6 Research gaps

Despite existing studies on HRD and educational issues in border regions, significant gaps remain. Initially, there is a constrained incorporation of EQA within

strategic HRD methodologies. EQA systems, such as those provided by ONESQA, are underutilized in marginalized regions due to a prevailing emphasis in current research on compliance rather than leveraging EQA findings for developmental purposes (Chantarasombat, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). Therefore, research on how EQA data could strategically enhance HR planning and professional development in border schools is immediately necessary.

Second, there is an absence of contextualized human resource management models for border education systems. Contemporary, standardized, and urban-centric HRM frameworks fail to assist educators operating in regions characterized by complex social and political contexts. Such an issue indicates the necessity for localized flexible models that accurately represent these circumstances (OECD, 2021).

Third, there is a deficiency of empirical evidence regarding data-driven human resource management in education: research is limited on the practical application of educational quality assurance and school-based data in Southeast Asian schools for recruitment, capacity enhancement, and leadership development (Pulakos et al., 2019; Wang & Swanson, 2008), a shortcoming further intensified by inadequate digital infrastructure and restricted analytical capabilities.

Fourth, there exist tenuous links between evaluation systems and frameworks for empowerment. Educational evaluation frequently misaligns with concepts that promote empowerment and innovation. To address this issue, we need models that integrate evaluation with developmental Human Resource Development (HRD) and foster professional agency and lifelong learning (Garavan et al., 2018; Fullan, 2016).

Finally, there is insufficient research on participative and culturally sensitive human resource development in border schools. Community empowerment and cultural sensitivity are essential for sustainable human resource development in ASEAN border contexts (Rana & Ardichvili, 2014; Chen & Su-Yen, 2016; ADB, 2020; Tkachenko et al, 2022; Crocco & Tkachenko, 2022); however, inclusive methodologies based on grassroots knowledge are often neglected in traditional human resource management discussions.

2.7 Significance of study

This study advances strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) in education by investigating the systematic transformation of External Quality Assessment (EQA) results into empowerment-focused HR strategies within marginalized contexts.

This research is significant in three primary aspects: it contributes to the discourse on Human Resource Management (HRM) in education by proposing the "evaluation-to-empowerment" approach; it serves as a resource for policymakers and national educational authorities by providing evidence-based recommendations; and it offers schools in border regions strategies to enhance the inclusivity and relevance of their HR development initiatives.

2.8 Research questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the existing conditions, desired conditions, and priority requirements for implementing EQA in border schools?
2. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) associated with integrating EQA into HRD for border schools?
3. What HRD methods can be formulated using EQA findings to empower educators and enhance learning ecosystems?
4. To what extent are the proposed HRD techniques effective in addressing human resources and educational needs in border contexts?

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research design

This study uses a three-step mixed-methods approach to rigorously investigate how to translate External Quality Assessment (EQA) results into enhanced Human Resource Development (HRD) for primary schools in Thailand's border areas.

The multidimensional complexity of the study justifies a mixed-methods design. Interconnected social, cultural, political, and institutional factors influence border school

ecosystems, making it impossible for a single method to fully capture them. By using mixed methods, the researcher can triangulate large-scale data (e.g., surveys from many schools) with detailed qualitative data (e.g., focus groups and strategy reviews) to develop an in-depth understanding of EQA-HRD dynamics (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Three-step process includes:

1. Phase I: Gap Identification: This step uses survey data and a PNI-modified analysis to identify critical gaps between the current and desired use of EQA, establishing an evidence-based foundation for strategic intervention.
2. Phase II: Contextual Analysis: Building on Phase I, this phase incorporates stakeholder perspectives via SWOT and PEST analyses to clarify systemic limitations and opportunities, particularly those embedded in the local contexts.
3. Phase III: Strategy Development: The final step utilizes expert judgment to collaboratively develop, assess, and confirm HR plans that are both practical and sustainable.

This design enhances the study's validity, relevance, and policy influenced by triangulating

data sources and integrating stakeholder perspectives across multiple levels of the educational system. It aligns with contemporary demands for evidence-based, participatory HR planning in marginalized and culturally diverse areas (Rana & Ardichvili, 2014; Chen & Su-Yen, 2016; ADB, 2020; Tkachenko et al, 2022; Crocco & Tkachenko, 2022; UNESCO, 2022).

3.2 Population and sampling

3.2.1 Population

The target population for this study comprises school administrators and educators from 354 elementary schools located along Thailand's borders with Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The final sample size was 1,062 participants, determined using stratified selection and Taro Yamane's formula, consisting of one school administrator and two teachers from each school.

The focus on the borders with Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia is based on acute geographic significance and educational necessity. These three borders share long land

boundaries with Thailand, facilitating significant cross-border movement of people, cultures, and languages—factors that intensely shape the educational environment.

In contrast to the southern border with Malaysia (which features greater economic integration and established formal bilateral agreements), the borders selected for this study are characterized by:

- **High Concentrations of Marginalized Ethnic Populations:** These groups often face restricted access to public services, including education (ADB, 2020; UNESCO, 2022).
- **Greater Educational Inequalities:** This includes significant disparities in infrastructure and teacher allocation, particularly in rural and hilly regions (OECD, 2021).
- **Multilingual and Multicultural Settings:** These necessitate specialized HR methods to facilitate inclusive and culturally responsive teaching.

Variables such as poverty, migration, and political instability intensify educational problems in these regions, particularly adjacent to Myanmar. The study specifically targets Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia as key areas to examine how EQA results can improve HRD in the least supported and most culturally complex schools near Thailand's frontiers.

3.2.2 Samples, sampling method, and rationale

3.2.2.1 Sampling frame and units

The sampling frame includes the 354 primary schools located in Thai border areas adjacent to Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Each school acts as a sampling unit, with three participants selected per institution: one school administrator (principal or deputy director) and two full-time teachers.

3.2.2.2 Sampling method

A multistage stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across the three border regions:

1. Stratification by Border Region: Schools were initially grouped into three strata based on their proximity to the Laos, Myanmar, or Cambodia borders.
2. Proportional Allocation: The number of schools selected from each stratum was determined proportionally, based on the total number of qualified schools in that specific border region.
3. Selection: Schools were chosen via simple random sampling within each stratum. Participants within each selected school were then chosen via purposeful selection to guarantee the inclusion of both administrative and instructional perspectives.

3.2.2.3 Rationale for sampling design

The multistage, stratified methodology ensures the dataset is proportionally representative of all significant border regions. By purposefully selecting both administrators and teachers, the design addresses both administrative and instructional viewpoints on EQA and HRD.

The sample size of 1,062 individuals was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula for finite populations, ensuring a 95% confidence level and a maximum sampling error of 5%. This large, representative sample enhances the generalizability of the results and supports rigorous statistical and thematic analysis.

3.3 Data collection procedures, instruments, and analysis

The mixed-methods design was chosen to ensure comprehensive research, integrating quantitative breadth with qualitative depth. Each phase targeted a distinct study objective and contributed to developing empirically grounded, contextually pertinent HRD methodologies.

3.3.1 Phase 1: quantitative needs evaluation

To assess the current and desired circumstances regarding the use of EQA data for promoting HRD and to identify the priority needs in primary border schools.

3.3.1.1 Instrumentation and data acquisition

The research instrument was a standardized questionnaire featuring paired response items designed to evaluate both current and optimal conditions. The instrument focused on three primary areas: the utilization of EQA results, the development of learning environments, and strategies aimed at enhancing teaching quality and institutional governance.

3.3.1.2 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize the data. The Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI-modified) was then employed to prioritize developmental needs by systematically comparing current and desired states. This analysis identified the strategic entry points for HR intervention and systemic improvement.

3.3.2 Phase 2: qualitative SWOT–PEST analysis

To examine the internal and external factors influencing the execution of EQA-informed HRD strategies in border-school ecosystems.

3.3.2.2 Sources of data and participants

Focus group discussions were conducted in each border region (Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia) with 8–12 key informants per area. Participants—comprising educational administrators, local education officers, and senior teachers—were chosen to use purposive sampling based on their expertise and involvement in quality assurance and school leadership.

3.3.2.2 Implemented frameworks

Two frameworks were employed for internal and external analysis. The 2S4M Model was employed in the Internal Analysis (SWOT) to examine aspects such as

structure/policy, services, personnel, expenditures, support resources, and oversight. The PEST framework was employed to examine political, economic, social, and technological variables for external analysis.

3.3.2.3 Data analysis

Qualitative data from the focus groups were transcribed and subjected to content analysis. A TOWS matrix was then used to integrate the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats into strategic action domains for HRD. This integration helped match internal competencies with external issues and opportunities.

3.3.3 Phase 3: strategy development and validation

To develop, refine, and validate strategic HRD models that effectively use EQA results in empowering schools in border contexts.

3.3.3.1 Strategy creation

The results from Phases 1 and 2 were used to outline **seven key HRD directions**. These strategies focused on areas such as teacher training, stakeholder involvement, curriculum adaptation, and using data for leadership. The strategies were specifically framed around **sustainable HRM** and **equity-focused educational improvement**.

3.3.3.2 Expert validation

A panel of experts—including policymakers, educational researchers, school supervisors, and HR professionals—was consulted to evaluate the **relevance, clarity, and feasibility** of the proposed strategies. Experts rated each strategy using a **5-point Likert scale** and provided open-ended feedback.

3.3.3.3 Data analysis

Quantitative validation data was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations to assess consensus among the experts. **Qualitative feedback** was analyzed thematically to refine and finalize the strategies. The outcome of this phase was a **context-specific, policy-ready HRD framework** informed by empirical evidence and expert judgement.

3.4 Reliability and validity checks

To ensure the methodological rigor and reliability of the investigation, various methods were employed across three research phases to confirm instrument reliability and construct validity.

3.4.1 Instrument reliability (phase 1)

Two methods were employed to ensure the reliability of the systematic questionnaire. The instrument underwent preliminary testing with 30 participants from non-sampled border schools to identify ambiguities and ensure clarity. Secondly, we assessed internal consistency by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all segments. All components demonstrated robust internal consistency, with coefficients ranging from 0.81 to 0.89, exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70.

3.4.2 Construct validity (phase 1)

Two significant metrics were implemented to assess construct validity and ensure that the results aligned with theoretical expectations. The initial phase was an expert review. Five specialists in educational assessment, human resource development, and border education examined the items for relevance, conceptual alignment, and cultural appropriateness. The subsequent phase was utilizing the expert opinion to produce the Content Validity Index (CVI). Items that received scores below 0.80 were modified or eliminated to ensure the final instrument met the standards of content validity.

3.4.3 Trustworthiness of qualitative data (phases 2 and 3)

This study employed Lincoln and Guba's (1988) four criteria to ensure rigor in the qualitative components, which included focus groups, SWOT–PEST analysis, and expert validation. Credibility was created by data triangulation including administrators, educators, and regional officials, as well as member validation, in which participants confirmed the accuracy of conversation summaries. Transferability was maintained by providing comprehensive descriptions of the educational and sociocultural contexts of the three targeted border regions (Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia). Reliability was guaranteed through a comprehensive audit trail that documented all coding activities, analytical procedures, and strategy development. Ultimately, confirmability mitigated personal bias through dialogue between two independent qualitative researchers regarding their work.

3.4.4 Validation of HRD strategies (phase 3)

In the final phase, expert panels (with 8 to 12 members from each region) reviewed the seven proposed HRD strategies. They used a 5-point Likert scale to rate the clarity, relevance, and feasibility of each strategy. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to determine overall approval.

Qualitative feedback was analyzed to refine the tactics based on practical input. The mean ratings for all strategies ranged between 4.41 and 4.72, demonstrating strong consensus regarding their applicability and contextual relevance.

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4 RESULTS

4.1 Priority needs analysis

Addressing Research Question 1 (What are the current conditions, desired conditions, and priority needs for utilizing EQA in border schools?), Phase 1 findings showed that school personnel rated both **current and desired conditions** of EQA utilization as 'high,' but a clear **gap remains between practice and expectation**.

The **Modified Priority Needs Index** (PNImodified) measured this disparity and identified the most pressing developmental needs across three key domains:

Table 1. Priority Needs Analysis (PNImodified) of EQA Utilization in Border Schools

Domain	Foremost Requirement (Highest PNImodified)	Least Pressing Requirement (Lowest PNImodified)
Application of EQA Results	Employment of EQA as a management instrument (0.071)	Conceptual application of EQA findings (0.056)
Enhancement of Educational Quality	Improvement of learning quality (0.058)	Student learning outcomes (0.035)
Learning Ecosystem Development	Strategic planning for learning ecosystem management (0.049)	Curriculum and learning activity design (0.033)

Source: Authors

Table 1 presents the findings of a modified Priority Needs Analysis (PNI) on the utilization of External Quality Assurance (EQA) by Border Schools. The Priority Requirements Analysis (PNImodified) data provides a definitive enumeration of urgent requirements and corresponding priorities for the implementation of External Quality

Assurance (EQA) in Border Schools. This indicates a transition from comprehending concepts to executing strategic actions.

4.1.1 Primary objectives for implementing EQA

The research consistently highlights that the primary requirements in all areas are the active, strategic, and practical execution of EQA solutions rather than their underlying design or conceptualization.

4.1.1.1 Utilization of EQA outcomes

The essential requirement is the employment of EQA as a management instrument (0.071). This indicates that the primary issue is not the insufficiency of EQA reports but rather the lack of utilization by schools. They must use the outcomes as a framework for decision-making, resource allocation, and setting strategic objectives. The conceptual application of EQA findings (0.056) is the least significant need. This indicates that schools possess a substantial understanding of the implications of the outcomes, although they struggle to apply this knowledge effectively in the administration of the institution.

4.1.1.2 Enhancement of educational quality

The fundamental objective of teaching is to enhance learning experience (0.058). This plan prioritizes the enhancement of daily teaching and learning activities within the classroom. The research suggests that enhancing instructional quality is a more urgent priority than directly targeting student learning outcomes (0.035), which is the least critical concern. This strategy posits that effective execution of the procedure (learning quality) will naturally yield favorable results (learning outcomes).

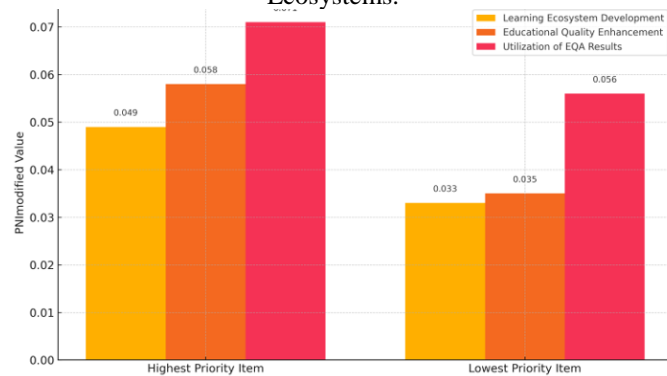
4.1.1.3 Establishing a learning ecosystem

Strategic planning for the management of learning ecosystems is crucial in overseeing the entire environment. Such an outcome indicates an immediate necessity for a comprehensive, long-term strategy to integrate all components of the learning

environment, spanning infrastructure and culture, to facilitate students in achieving their educational objectives. Conversely, the design of curriculum and learning activities (0.033) is the least significant requirement. The present educational framework and activity structures are subordinate to the overarching strategy for managing the entire supporting ecosystem. In summary, the evidence indicates that border schools must cease merely obtaining EQA findings and begin incorporating them into their strategic planning and management to effect substantial improvements in learning quality.

The disparity is visually represented in Figure 1, which clearly shows that the employment of EQA as a management instrument is the most critical priority need across all domains.

Figure 1. Priority Needs Identified Using PNImodified Across Three Domains in Border-School Ecosystems.



Source: Authors

Figure 1 illustrates the significance of several needs in relation to the utilization of External Quality Assurance (EQA). Its primary function is to illustrate the variances in priority levels

(PNImodified scores) across the various criteria under each of the three domains: "Application of EQA Results", "Enhancement of Educational Quality", and "Learning Ecosystem Development".

The table highlights that the paramount finding is that the "employment of EQA as a management instrument" is the essential requirement across all examined domains. This indicates that its PNImodified score (likely 0.071, as illustrated in the table above) is the highest overall, signifying that it is the most critical area for action within the border-school ecosystem. The picture promptly illustrates that the primary issue border

schools must immediately address is the inadequate strategic and administrative use of EQA findings.

4.2 The SWOT–PEST analysis

In addressing Research Question 2 (What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the utilization of EQA in HRD for border schools?), the outcomes of the SWOT–PEST study yielded the following findings:

The investigation identified several significant strengths among the border schools, including a distinct strategic purpose, operational objectives, and delineated stakeholder duties in most institutions. Educators are diligently developing customized curricula and learning activities that receive community approval. Furthermore, schools demonstrate proficiency in utilizing technology and innovative teaching methodologies, attributable to effective planning and an emphasis on participatory leadership and governance in management.

The research identified several critical weaknesses, namely a limited understanding of EQA utilization among staff and students, leading to inconsistent integration of EQA data into instructional strategies and human resources planning. Furthermore, educational institutions possessed inadequate or absent information systems for monitoring EQA applications, resulting in inflexible learning plans that failed to accommodate the diverse needs of students and local contexts.

The PEST analysis indicated numerous avenues for advancing HRD, particularly via the robust cross-border educational collaboration established within ASEAN frameworks. International and national funding, such as that from NGOs and the World Bank, constitutes an additional source of assistance. Furthermore, educational institutions benefit significantly from extensive community engagement and a readiness to instruct in multiple languages or cultures. Such involvement is facilitated by innovative digital learning and data platforms.

The research found several critical threats, including the lack of a customized educational approach tailored to the unique requirements of border regions and persistent governmental underinvestment in border education. Moreover, internal challenges such as linguistic and cultural disparities hinder the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches, while obstacles related to internet connectivity and insufficient digital

literacy impede the adoption of contemporary human resource development and learning methodologies.

4.4 Effectiveness of the proposed strategies

This section evaluates the effectiveness of the strategies developed in Section 4.3 in relation to **Research Question 4** (How effective are the recommended strategies in addressing HR and educational demands in border contexts?). The assessment integrates need-strategy alignment, multi-criteria expert validation, and stakeholder insights.

4.4.1 Alignment of needs and strategies

The proposed strategies directly address the prioritized HR and educational requirements identified in Section 4.1, which include improving teacher competency, curriculum coherence, leadership strategizing, and data applications. The core strategies that align with these needs are: upskilling teachers and school leaders; contextualized and flexible curriculum development; strategic use of EQA results for continuous improvement; and development of educational information systems. This alignment confirms the strategies are grounded in empirical evidence.

Table 2. Priority Needs Analysis (PNI-modified) of EQA Utilization in Border Schools

HRD Strategy	Effectiveness (1-5)	Stakeholder Support (1-5)	Feasibility (1-5)	Implementation Challenges (1-5)
Upskilling Teachers and School Leaders	4.5	4.6	4.2	2.0
Contextualized and Flexible Curriculum Development	4.3	4.4	4.0	2.3
Strategic Use of EQA Results for Continuous Improvement	4.2	4.3	3.7	2.5
Development of Educational Information Systems	3.8	3.9	3.5	3.0

Note: Lower scores in the "Implementation Challenges" column indicate fewer practical barriers to implementation.

Source: Authors

The table above presents a multi-criteria expert evaluation of four key HRD strategies. The scores (1 = very low, 5 = very high) assess effectiveness, stakeholder

support, and feasibility, while implementation challenges are rated inversely (lower score = fewer obstacles). The upskill of teachers and school leaders was identified as the most highly rated strategy across all positive criteria (effectiveness: 4.5; stakeholder Support: 4.6; feasibility: 4.2) and had the lowest Implementation Challenge score (2.0), signifying both high strategic viability and relative ease of execution. Contextualized and flexible curriculum development also demonstrated substantial stakeholder support (4.4) and practicality (4.0), despite marginally elevated implementation obstacles (2.3). The strategic use of EQA results received strong stakeholder support (4.3) and manageable challenges (2.5), validating its potential as a policy-based, data-driven approach for school improvement. Conversely, the Development of Educational Information Systems received the lowest ratings across all criteria (Effectiveness: 3.8; Feasibility: 3.5) and the highest challenge score (3.0). This suggests this strategy faces substantial obstacles, likely linked to issues with technical capacity, digital infrastructure, or system integration preparedness.

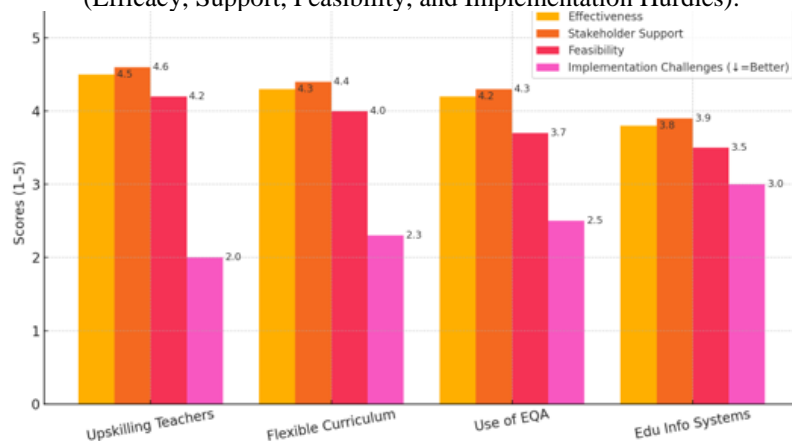
This assessment underscores the need to prioritize people-centric and capacity-enhancing techniques in educational reform while simultaneously addressing infrastructure deficiencies to facilitate technology-driven innovation.

4.4.2 Multi-stakeholder evaluation results

A thorough assessment was also conducted using a comparison matrix, which incorporated stakeholder input on four key criteria: efficacy, stakeholder support, feasibility, and implementation hurdles. The stakeholder surveys yielded clear insights confirming that a) the strategy of upskilling educators and school administrators effectively meets current needs; b) the curriculum adaptability plan accurately represents the local context and cultural identity; c) EQA results are strategically utilized to inform school enhancements; and d) educational information systems enhance planning through adept data analysis.

The subsequent matrix illustrates the measurement and amalgamation of these qualitative stakeholder contributions. Figure 2 illustrates the comparative effectiveness of these fundamental strategies, considering their perceived efficacy, stakeholder support, ease of implementation, and anticipated challenges during execution, as assessed by the multi-stakeholder group.

Figure 2. Multi-Stakeholder Comparative Evaluation Matrix of Core Strategic EQA Utilization Strategies (Efficacy, Support, Feasibility, and Implementation Hurdles).



Source: Authors

Figure 2 visually depicts the comparative efficacy of the four principal strategies. Upskilling Teachers and School Leaders received the highest scores across all positive areas and the lowest score for implementation challenges (2.0), signifying robust stakeholder endorsement and limited opposition. Flexible Curriculum Development excelled in stakeholder support (4.4) and feasibility (4.0).

In contrast, the **Development of Educational Information Systems** had the lowest overall scores and faced the largest challenges (3.0). This result highlights the strategic value of prioritizing **professional development and curriculum adaptability** in border or resource-limited environments, while also emphasizing the necessity for targeted investment in digital infrastructure to improve the efficacy of data-driven educational systems.

This framework offers a reproducible, context-sensitive model that connects human capital development with inclusive education, capacity-building, and institutional resilience, making it especially beneficial for borders and marginalized education systems.

4.4.3 Expert review and rubric analysis

Experts assessed the HRD plans using six-dimensional rubric (scores 1 = inadequate to 5 = excellent): (1) Alignment with policy priorities, (2) Responsiveness to local needs, (3) Impact on equity and inclusion, (4) Potential for sustainability, (5) Integration of EQA and data utilization, and (6) Feasibility of implementation. All

strategies received high scores, ranging from 4.0 to 4.9, indicating substantial strategic merit. The results are shown in Table 3.

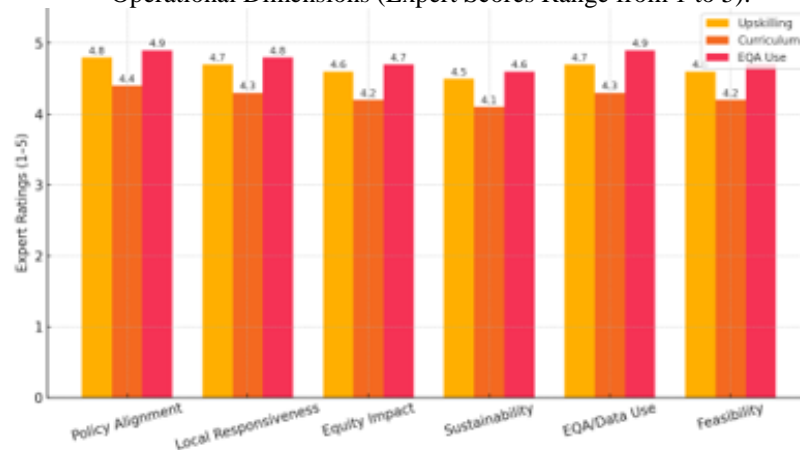
Table 3: Multi-Criteria Expert Evaluation of HRD Strategies: Effectiveness, Stakeholder Support, Feasibility, and Implementation Challenges

HRD Strategies	Upskilling Teachers and School Leaders	Contextualized and Flexible Curriculum Development	Strategic Use of EQA Results for Continuous Improvement
Alignment with Policy Priorities	4.8	4.4	4.9
Responsiveness to Local Needs	4.7	4.3	4.8
Equity and Inclusion Impact	4.6	4.2	4.7
Potential for Sustainability	4.5	4.1	4.6
Integration of EQA and Data Use	4.7	4.3	4.9
Feasibility of Implementation	4.6	4.2	4.7

Source: Authors

The average scores corroborate the expert consensus: upskilling teachers and leaders averaged 4.65, flexible curriculum development averaged 4.27, and strategic use of EQA results attained the highest average at 4.77. The results, visually depicted in Figure 6, consistently demonstrate the strong strategic importance of the **EQA model**, particularly in areas of policy alignment, data integration, and responsiveness to local educational requirements. Table 3 contains the numerical evaluations of experts about the Human Resource Development (HRD) techniques across all six rubric categories. A visual depiction is necessary for a quick comparison of the strategic characteristics of these programs. Figure 3 visually represents the quantitative data, illustrating the consistency of high results and comparing the merits and limits of each HRD technique.

Figure 3. Expert Rubric Evaluation Profile of Three Proposed HRD Strategies Across Six Strategic and Operational Dimensions (Expert Scores Range from 1 to 5).



Source: Authors

Figure 3 visually represents the data from Table 3, which illustrates the multi-criteria expert assessment of the three HRD methodologies. The illustration presents the expert evaluations (ranging from 4.0 to 4.9 on a 5-point scale) for the three primary strategies: Upskilling Teachers and School Leaders, Contextualized and Flexible Curriculum Development, and Strategic Utilization of EQA Results for Continuous Improvement. It also demonstrates their performance against the six assessment criteria: alignment with policy priorities, responsiveness to local requirements, equity and inclusion impact, potential for sustainability, integration of EQA and data utilization, and feasibility of implementation.

4.4.4 Key findings from expert ratings

The elevated ratings indicate that all three proposed methods possess significant strategic value, as illustrated by the figure. The Strategic Use of EQA Results for Continuous Improvement consistently had the highest comparative strength, with an average of 4.77 and a peak of 4.9 in both Alignment with Policy Priorities and Integration of EQA and Data Use. Conversely, the Contextualized and Flexible Curriculum Development plan, initially deemed effective, consistently received the lowest scores across all six areas (e.g., 4.1 for Potential for Sustainability), rendering it the least favored or beneficial option among the experts.

4.4.5 Strategic recommendations

The overall findings indicate that the most impactful strategies for HRD in border schools are upskilling teachers and school leaders, contextualized and flexible curriculum development, and the strategic use of EQA results.

The recommendations derived from these investigations are classified into three categories: 1) Prioritize intersectoral connections to enhance collaboration among educational institutions, governmental bodies, and communities for problem-solving and resource allocation at the local level; 2) Amplify effective practices by leveraging successful elements of esteemed strategies while proactively addressing existing equity and inclusion challenges; and 3) Enhance digital infrastructure through strategic

investments that facilitate the development and efficient utilization of educational information systems, thereby addressing current technical difficulties.

5 DISCUSSION

This section correlates the study's findings with existing research on Human Resource Development (HRD), strategic educational planning, and inclusive education in border and marginalized regions.

5.1 Alignment with HRD and leadership theories

Established HRD and leadership theories strongly support the assertion that "Upskilling Teachers and School Leaders" represents the most effective and pragmatic HRD approach. This aligns with Wang and Swanson's (2008) assertion regarding the enhancement of organizational flexibility through professional development, as well as Garavan et al.'s (2018) perspective on leadership's role in maintaining high HR competence. This study's novelty lies in the recontextualization of traditional HRD frameworks, demonstrating its relevance and adaptability in low-resource, multicultural border communities facing complex regional challenges.

5.2 Strategic use of data versus compliance

The elevated expert assessment of the "Strategic Use of EQA Results" method aligns with the necessity for evidence-based HR planning promoted by scholars like Pulakos et al. (2019) and Chantarasombat (2020). This study is unique since it focuses on using EQA data for development instead of punishment. This underscores the significant cultural shift towards growth-oriented assessment, rooted in the research's participatory and context-sensitive methodology, which sharply contrasts with traditional centralized, top-down evaluation approaches.

5.3 Curriculum and infrastructure challenges

While the development of a flexible curriculum received high praise, aligning with Arnesen and Allan's (2009) advocacy for inclusive, context-sensitive teaching, the cited practical challenges diverge from the rules requiring prompt curricular modifications (OECD, 2021). This difficulty likely arises from the necessity for educators to simultaneously address two challenges: administering standardized state assessments and ensuring that the curriculum is suitable for multilingual and politically complex border regions. Conversely, the Development of Educational Information Systems had the lowest scores, indicating a significant disparity from the digital optimism typically shown in studies of urban or well-resourced regions (Nguyen et al., 2021). This discovery elucidates the critical infrastructural and analytical shortcomings in border areas, highlighting the risk of digital exclusion unless human resource development initiatives incorporate vital support mechanisms.

5.4 Contribution and future research

This study enhances the field by incorporating cross-sectoral, culturally attuned, and data-informed HRD models into border-school systems that are often analyzed in isolation (Danquah et al., 2023; Fullan, 2016). It adeptly connects macro-level policy objectives with micro-level realities via strategies informed by stakeholders and experts (Chalofsky et al., 2014), resulting in a comprehensive, scalable HRD model that effectively integrates EQA data utilization, teacher empowerment, and inclusive curriculum development (Garavan et al., 2018; Pulakos et al., 2019). Theoretically, the research advances the discipline by recontextualizing known HRD concepts within transnational, multilingual, and marginalized educational frameworks (Crocco et al., 2022; Wang & Swanson, 2008). Methodologically, it advances the field through its participatory and visual strategy evaluation procedures, enhancing both the rigor and practical applicability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Subsequent research should investigate the applicability of similar HRD programs to other educational systems affected by war and characterized by considerable cultural variety (Justino, 2014; Yeo et al., 2020).

6 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the implementation of External Quality Assessment (EQA) to enhance Human Resource Development (HRD) in Thai border schools, providing an evidence-based framework for strategic HR initiatives in marginalized educational settings. Key findings indicated that while school personnel rated both current and desired EQA utilization favorably, a significant performance gap remains, underscoring the critical need to transform EQA from a mere compliance metric into a management tool for school improvement, especially concerning teacher capacity and leadership planning (Priority Needs). The Contextual Dynamics (SWOT–PEST) research revealed that schools possess strengths like adaptable leadership and community engagement, although they also exhibit weaknesses, including insufficient digital infrastructure, alongside risks such as political instability and elevated turnover rates in education. This indicates that HRD tactics must be attuned to the situation and grounded in the community. Seven integrated HRD strategies were developed in response. They emphasize a holistic, data-informed strategy that includes skill enhancement, a curriculum pertinent to students' experiences, and cross-sector collaboration. Multi-stakeholder and expert assessments validated their significance, with the strategies for "Upskilling Teachers and School Leaders" and "Strategic Use of EQA Results" attaining the highest ratings for feasibility and endorsement. However, the development of educational information systems was identified as necessitating considerable infrastructural support to address practical implementation obstacles (Effectiveness and Feasibility).

The study concludes that leveraging EQA as a **developmental rather than punitive tool** is key to enabling border schools to strengthen human capital, improve educational quality, and foster inclusion. By precisely matching strategic HRD actions with EQA indicators and local needs, the suggested model provides a **replicable and scalable framework** for empowering educators and transforming learning environments in border and underserved areas.

7 IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

7.1 Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces the necessity of integrating performance assessment tools like EQA into human capital development models. It provides empirical evidence supporting the relevance of data-informed and locally adaptive HRD strategies in complex border regions, thereby strengthening the literature on inclusive education and capacity-building.

Practically, the study offers a replicable framework for educational stakeholders seeking to operationalize equity goals in complex sociopolitical contexts. Participatory stakeholder feedback and expert evaluation firmly ground the proposed HRD strategies in real-world conditions.

7.2 Study limitations

The study has several limitations, mostly concerning generalizability, as the evaluation was restricted to provinces along the Thai borders. The reliance on expert and stakeholder viewpoints, despite rigorous methodology, may foster subjectivity or bias. The absence of a longitudinal analysis signifies that the study failed to assess the lasting, long-term impacts of the recommended strategies (Time Frame). Ultimately, the limited internet availability in many remote areas constrained data collection, potentially rendering the data obtained via online dashboards less comprehensive.

7.3 Recommendations for future research

Future research should focus on four key areas: expanding the geographic scope to include diverse ASEAN border contexts for thorough comparative analysis; employing longitudinal designs to assess the medium- and long-term impacts of HRD strategies on school improvement and workforce sustainability; creating localized human resource management models that accurately represent the complexities of stateless and multilingual educational systems; and integrating multidimensional metrics, such as

student learning outcomes and community involvement, to improve the assessment of HRD effectiveness.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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