

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION: ROLE OF INDEPENDENT MONITORING UNIT

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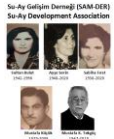
Abstract

The study aims to examine the efficacy of the Independent Monitoring Unit's (IMU) staff on the quality dimension at primary level schools across selected schools in district Swabi, Pakistan. The study takes a positivist approach and deploys a quantitative research paradigm to discover and confirm the role of IMU on quality education. Using proportional stratified sampling, the study collects data from 337 respondents through questionnaire. It utilizes different descriptive and inferential statistical tools to reach the conclusion. The study finds the existence of loopholes in the monitoring of school-level practices which require the attention of policymakers. It concludes that IMU workers monitoring visits, observations, reports, and online reporting management with the help of technology positively influence the advancement of quality education in primary schools and are well supported in line with existing literature. The study contributes to the discussion of IMU interventions in terms of efficacy and offers policy recommendations. IMU personnel must take part in consultations which are arranged by Parent Teacher Council (PTC) and assess the fairness of PTC. IMU personnel should frequently visit schools and spend some productive and fruitful time in schools to sustain a desired degree of quality.

Keywords: Independent monitoring unit, monitoring visits, parent teacher council, primary education, quality education.

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increased recognition that more attention needs to be paid to education which is a cardinal pillar and an important framework for growing economies. Education is one of the basic institutions like others such as family, politics, and economics (Castells, 2011). In recent years, this area has seen significant advances with the introduction of monitoring and evaluation interventions at school levels across the globe in general and Pakistan in particular. In addition, it is highlighted that along with the traditions of family, it is education that helps in learning, acquisition of social skills, and community development through grooming an individual personality. It is well observed that education empowers students with cognitive skills, technical knowledge, and awareness, and builds confidence in living a healthy life (Young & Muller, 2010). This issue was picked up extensively within the research community due to its important nature as it forms the foundation of secondary and tertiary-level education systems (Yousafzai, 2019). Thus, the recent emphasis has been on the education system at the primary and secondary levels as it needs to examine and ascertain the dynamics of holistic performance in achieving sustainable developmental goals (Sallis, 2014).

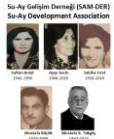


The literacy rate of Pakistan at the time of its creation was 14%, and on the contrary, the literacy rate was 54.4% at the end of 2009 for old age people and likewise, the literacy rate improved up to 70.7% (UNESCO, 2010). Hence, it was seen that there is a considerable change, but it is at a slow pace as compared to the rest of the world. On the one hand, the components like poverty, high dropout rate of students, absenteeism, and low student enrollment hamper the overall performance indicators. Efforts from parents and the government sides are also not enough which is the main contributor to hampering the literacy rate, especially in remote areas of the province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ESED, 2015). It was reported that different policy actions have been formulated since the independence of Pakistan so that education system can be revised (Grindle, 2004). Likewise, it was seen that inaccessibility of Independent Monitoring Unit (IMU) personnel to schools is also creating a major problem because the teacher is marked absent on most occasions and the rate of attendance goes down representing 16, 17, 21, and 16 percents at intermediate, high, middle and elementary levels respectively (Khan et al, 2011). It was reported that the IMU can perform several functions including collecting data regarding school facilities, registration, absenteeism, student to teacher ratios, dropout rate, and inspection of physical infrastructure of the schools (Cotton, 1996). Moreover, monitoring teams also discharge their functions in distributing free textbooks, minor and major repairs, and disbursement of girl's stipends for improving the standard of education leading towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (Mohanty, 2005).

Likewise, it was observed that monitoring is the process of gathering information and collecting data for measuring in due course process to get the objectives of educational setup (Schmoker, 1999; Shin et al., 2009). The monitoring system not only permits educational quality evaluation but has an unquestionable effect on it too. The incidental influence is provided by the reality that consequent management decisions hinge upon monitoring indicators and outcomes. The impact is determined with help of technology by following the monitoring approaches and its scope (Bazhenov *et al.*, 2015). Researchers also stated that the IMU assures to make resources available to schools by expanding admission rate at primary school level and stimulating heads of schools to enroll students for expanding registration rate. However, it didn't encourage the community to stimulate students registration rate and it has no productive role in monitoring stipends initiative and allocation of free textbooks (Khan *et al.*, 2017).

From a policy making point of view, monitoring typology comprises of three fundamental areas, e.g., types of compliance, diagnostic, and performance monitoring (Richards, 1988). Greater emphasis is given in extant literature to compliance monitoring which revolves around resources such as infra and info structure of schools as well as various types of ratios such as student to teacher and graduating versus failing student's ratio (Veriava, 2010). The issue of diagnostic monitoring is evident and mostly prevalent in reports of various government and non-government interventions which paint a rosy picture of schools functioning, oblivious of ground realities (De Hoyos et al., 2021). Finally, the area of performance monitoring in the context of current research affords a complete cyclical assessment loop which is unavailable in the former two types of monitoring for quality improvement (Willms, 2003). A closer look at the literature reveals several gaps and shortcomings due to emergence of educational inflation and credentials which stem out from inefficient quality assurance practices at primary level in schools (Tariq, 2018) constituting a research gap which this study endeavors to examine. More research is needed to understand the impact of IMU's intervention relating to the quality of school as a performance indicator as previous research is inconclusive with mixed results in terms of the impact.

The rest of the paper contains literature review in section 2, section 3 contains data and methodology, section 4 depicts results and discussions, and the last section 5 contains conclusion and policy suggestions.



Literature Review

Researchers of education sectors explored the factors associated with the quality of education which is responsible for monitoring and feedback. It was reported that the most important monitoring mechanism is the stringent, rigorous and inclusive supervision and monitoring enforcement of educational systems (Kayani et al., 2011). Similarly, for operating any education program, it is necessary to build a strong mechanism by which monitoring, and implementation plans can be evaluated and assessed. Therefore, these parameters are called monitoring mechanism and under the domain of education program, independent monitoring units incorporate the whole monitoring actions (Smith & Ngoma-Maema, 2003). In addition, monitoring is classified by different individuals as uninterrupted ascertaining and appraising mechanism in line with approved schedules of input, process, and output by applying feasible infrastructure of project (Mertens, 2014). Moreover, effective feasibility of monitoring education quality system that take into deliberation prerequisite both of the conditions and more social organizations are certain. Nevertheless, under the contemporary situation, only a complex study of conceptual and functional aspects can find the consistency of the education quality evaluation by selecting the most systematic instruments of its achievements for every educational organization (Bazhenov et al., 2015). To put it in another way, monitoring is a deliberate mechanism of data gathering with aggregation of fundamental input indicators used to assess the feedback of educational elements (Mishra, 2005).

Along similar lines, the monitoring theory argues that in the school system, students and teachers must take responsibility to observe the educational processes in true spirit. In contrast, it monitors the role of middle and lower level management in the shape of examining quality (Essén, 2008). In addition, monitoring management steps provide requisite data, and it can be adopted to streamline activities on an ongoing basis that are fundamental to the standard of education. Among masses and public, especially in parents, there is less awareness about the drop out ratio of students; therefore, it is the need of the hour for the monitoring staff to ensure teaching amenities and facilities. In schools, the dropout rates also arise because of the inadequacy of cognizance about education, poverty, lack of awareness and larger distance to school due to lack of in-house accommodation (Franklin et al., 2002). Moreover, the monitoring staff is formed to overcome this threat at primary and secondary school level by using routine and surprise checks, online information sharing with education department, monitoring of attendance register which serve as the prerequisites for improving quality of education in remote areas. It was inferred that monitoring and evaluations interventions follow three stages of information gathering, ongoing examination, and initiating corrective action (Dibbern et al., 2004; Pickard, 2013). On one hand, infrastructure of schools and colleges in shape of stationery, chairs, tables, and classroom setting need to be properly maintained by monitoring teams taking corrective actions. Similarly, the process of monitoring must be executed in a continuous way so that its desired outcomes can be obtained for a longer time. Furthermore, performance of schools can be ensured and measured through four sources of information categorized as schools self-evaluation reports, inspection visits, school result in board exams, school indicator system, and through conduct of teaching staff achievement tests (Ehren & Visscher, 2008). A good number of teachers acknowledge the declaration of the IMUs and endeavors to arrange cognizance projects to expand registration, allocation of funds, co-curricular activities, accumulate details about student's daily attendance, assessing student's dropout and the efficacy of IMU to motivate parents to enroll their children in government schools (Khan et al., 2017). In addition, a centralized culture is prevailing in the education sector in the shape of District Education Officers (DEO) who are bestowed the authority of evaluating and monitoring the operations at primary schools (Abbas et al., 2015). A large and growing body of literature suggests a variety of problems at teachers level such as lack of qualifications and training as most of them hold certificate or diplomas (Dean Nielsen, 1997). In contrast, the quality of education is improved, if qualified teachers impart subject knowledge in synchronization with quality guidelines at micro, macro, and meso levels of curriculum which blends co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (Junaid, 2016). In addition to this, weaknesses can be

overcome periodically in the shape of teacher training and acquisition of pedagogues to improve existing practices and procedures. In the contrary, Willms (2003) maintains that the monitoring and evaluation is mostly under the control of principals at primary and secondary education levels. As previously stated, there are a variety of challenges in education sectors in the shape of infrastructure, teaching staffs, IT embedded technologies, CDs, DVDs, and many more as these things are left behind every time due to shortage of resources. There is growing acknowledgment for the claim among teachers that intervention of IMU had resulted a rise in terms of registration, allocation of funds, conduct of co-curricular activities, attendance levels and reduction in student's dropout in government schools (Khan *et al.*, 2017).

On the basis of the evidence available regarding the role of independent monitoring system in other countries, the prime objective is to have access for reliable and justifiable data driven decision making (Clancy & Cronin, 2005). In other words, the purpose of IMU is to have a fair and accountable view of the educational apparatus (Wilcox, 2000). The fundamental advantage of investigation and accountability improves judicious spending of tax payer money (Ehren & Visscher, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). A greater number of parents acknowledge that owing to monitoring system in place, teacher absenteeism has been decreased considerably giving credence to aims of IMU interventions in Pakistan (Ali *et al.*, 2019). However, the most significant element of the evaluation and monitoring in Pakistan regarding IMUs functioning is not only parent's satisfaction alone as stakeholders. Moreover, tracing the quality of the education through "feedback loops" allows to respond quickly to the challenges unfolding on ground in schools to formulate educational procedures (Kotane and Hushko, 2019). Considering the potential gaps in existing literature and to better understand the impact of IMU intervention in primary schools, the study makes the following hypothesis.

- H1:** The monitoring visits of IMU workers positively influences the quality of primary schools.
- H2:** The monitoring remarks of IMU workers positively influence the improvement of quality.
- H3:** The monitoring reports of IMU workers positively influence the advancement of quality primary education.
- H4:** The online action reporting management of IMU workers positively influences the advancement of quality in schools.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In current study, quantitative research technique is applied with the help of questionnaires as a data collection tool. A proportional allocation method was applied for choosing a sample across all groups. The total number of boys' primary schools were 450 in tehsil Razar, and among them primary school teacher (PST) of grade BPS 15 were 180, PST teachers of grade 14 were 320, and PST teacher of grade 12 were 2,265. Hence, for this study the aggregate targeted population was 2,765. The respondents were selected with the sample size of 337 by use of Krejcie and Morgan sample size tabular calculations (Morgan, 2012) to give adequate representation of population in line with proportional allocation formula of $n_i = n/N (N_i)$, where N is the entire population, n is sample size and N_i is strata of population chosen. Hence, a representative sample should include 276 respondents as shown by putting values in equation is $337/2765 (2265) = 276$. A key problem with much of the literature on monitoring of schools in terms performance is a mismatch between reported and actual quality of education on ground (Scheerens *et al.*, 2001). This raises many questions as to whether reality should be objectively measured with researchers taking a neutral stance or otherwise. On the one hand, many experts contend that monitoring improves the performance of schools (Cilliers *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, there is still a need for firsthand data as the existing evidence is inconclusive when compared to the overall situation on the ground in schools. The data generated for this study was stored in Microsoft Excel database from primary sources and analyzed with SPSS 20.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section outlines the results of the study and analysis of the data was performed using SPSS. Table 1 below summarizes demographic data of the respondents in terms of gender, education, age, and experience presenting different descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation etc.

Table 1. Demographics of current study.

Demographic Variables	Categories	Responses	Response Rate (%)	Mean	Std.Dev.
Gender	Male	337	100	1.74	.438
	Female	13	3	2.29	.679
Education	Graduation	44	13.1		
	Master	262	77.7		
	MPhil	18	5		
Age	25-30 Years	133	39	1.75	.883
	31-35 Years	80	51.6		
	36-40 Years	30	2.7		
	41-45 Years	36	44		
	46-50 Years	32	10.7		
	Above 50	26	7.7		
Experience	5- 10 Years	226	67.1	2.01	.709
	11 - 15 Years	26	7.7		
	16-20 Years	46	13.6		
	21-25 Years	18	5.3		
	26-30 Years	20	5.9		
	Above 30	1	.3		

Regression analysis is utilized to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables used in the study. In this research, predictor variables (independent variables) are monitoring visits, reports, observations, and online action management while the quality primary education is used as dependent variable (criterion variable). Table 2 shows the regression analysis of all four hypotheses that monitor observations, online management system, visits and reports has significant influence on quality of school's education. The value of adjusted *R* square and *R* square is .665 and .666 respectively that exemplify the explicated section of the forecasted variable towards dependent variable. The value .666 presents that monitoring visits of independent monitoring unit officials explicated the 66% in the direction of quality of primary education. In the same way, other independent variables like monitoring reports, observations, and online action management have a satisfied value of adjusted *R* square and *R* square as it shows that these predictor variables (independent variables) have a significant relation with quality of school education.

Table 2. Regression model summary.

Predictors	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Significance Value
Monitoring visits	.666	.665	.000*
Monitoring reports	.543	.503	.001*
Monitoring observation	.479	.502	.002*
Monitoring online action management	.701	.690	.005

*p<.05

Predictor variables: Monitoring visits, Observations, Reports and Online action management.

Outcome variable: Quality of Primary schools

Similarly, the *F* change and associated change statistics values in *R* square also forecasts the correlation between predictor and outcome variables. Likewise, Table 3 shows the co-efficient statistics in the pattern of "standardized Co-efficient (Beta)" which expresses that .816-unit modification in outcome variable results due to one-unit modification in predicted variables. In

addition, the significance value is less than .05, while t value is higher than 02 that shows the independent monitoring unit workers monitoring visits has a significant influence on the advancement of quality in primary schools which confirms the associated hypothesis. Taken as a whole, with a few exceptions, our results show that our independent variables like monitoring reports, observations, and online action management also have significant relationship with primary schools' quality. Notwithstanding the lack of agreement occasionally with prior studies (Willms, 2003), we believe our findings compare well substantiated and supported.

Table 3. Standardized coefficients.

Predictors	Significance Value	Std Coefficient (Beta)	T-Value
Monitoring visits	.000*	.816	22.20
Monitoring reports	.001*	.512	19.05
Monitoring observation	.002*	.718	20.10
Monitoring online action management	.001*	.631	17.01

* $p < .05$

Predictor variable: Monitoring visits, Observations, Reports, Online action management.

Outcome variable: Quality of primary schools.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The main purpose of the current study is to evaluate the role of IMU and its impact on quality of primary schools' performance in the targeted area of study. In addition, current study serves as a background study for profound understanding of IMU intervention at the primary level education schools in Pakistan. The results from this study and published data support this conclusion that IMUs intervention cascades a positive impact on the quality of education in primary schools in Pakistan. Specifically, the IMU workers monitoring visits, observations, reports, and online action management with the help of technology positively influence the advancement of quality education in primary schools. There are several notable strengths of this study such as the use of quantitative approach and collection of real time data from respondents as part of Government intervention. However, the work also suffers from several limitations - notably related to teacher's behavior modification in the aftermath of introduction of IMU project to be consistent with compliance monitoring standards and perceptions of IMU evaluation workers. This may be attributed to prevalence of Hawthorne effect (Frey, 2018) and inwardly biases the outcomes of study and school principals likely to revert to old and time worn practices of quality assurance in primary schools of Pakistan. To carry on with improvements brought down by IMUs intervention considering literature review and analysis, the following policy suggestions are made as input to policy and practice:

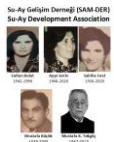
The IMU personnel must take part in consultation which are arranged by PTC and assess the fairness of PTC, should ensure provision of appropriate school apparatus and other misplaced services like freshness and neatness of classrooms, playgrounds, lawns and buildings. They should frequently visit schools and spend some productive and fruitful time in a school for sustaining degree of quality. The IMU workers should have mandatory training to appraise the schools and keep a close liaison with district level education officers. They are required to examine and ensure the presence of teacher's involvement in training and development program. Moreover, the IMU personnel must express good moral gesture and sense of respect with schoolteachers, similarly all head teachers need to collaborate with IMU staff throughout their visit.

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Ethics and Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that he acted in accordance with ethical rules in all processes of the research. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.



Author Contribution

All authors made equal contributions to the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Data Availability

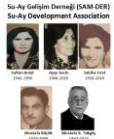
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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