

MONITORING MECHANISM FOR QUALITY PROGRESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF PUNJAB: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is not only based on access but on useful systems that constantly survey the work of the classroom and turn evidence into acts of improvement. This qualitative research examined the quality progress monitoring mechanism of ECE in the secondary schools of Punjab, Pakistan. A total of 36 District Education Officers (DEOs) of Secondary Education in Punjab were used as the population, and nine of the DEOs at Lahore, Kasur, Faisalabad, Chiniot, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Sargodha made the sample which was conveniently selected. The collection of data was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide designed independently based on six questions strong to the indicator of the same name: Monitoring System of Quality Progress of Early Childhood Education. Responses were coded and grouped into themes and sub-themes through thematic analysis and provided in six tables, one per question. The results have shown that the majority of DEOs (Secondary Education) described the existing system of monitoring and feedback as suitable and enhanced with the help of indicators and organized monitoring instruments (e.g., ECCE app). The monitoring was mostly characterized as cooperative and encouraging and was part of teacher instruction and better classroom practices. Nevertheless, one main issue has been identified in which monitoring is in some instances reporting/checklist-based with little time to do classroom observation and mentoring. The internal control by head teachers was found to be present but to an inconsistent degree across schools. DEOs underlined that ECE-oriented visits should be more frequent, that roadmaps/indicators were supposed to be clearer, that feedback (logbooks) should be documented, that the reporting burden should be decreased, that training should be continuous, and that motivation mechanisms should be employed to maintain the quality improvement.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Monitoring and Feedback; Quality Progress; District Education Officers; QAED Guidelines; Punjab, Pakistan

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) offers first structured ways of children to develop language, early numeracy, curiosity, self-regulation, and social competencies that determine future school performance and wellbeing. These profits, however, do not come

on a silver platter. They rely on quality: secure and challenging classrooms, attentive teacher child relationships, meaningful play-based experiences and routines that keep children active. Quality assurance at system-level then needs clear standards, trustworthy indicators,

and feedback loops to get improved and not inspected (OECD, 2022).

ECE in Pakistan and especially in Punjab has grown in state schools to enhance school preparedness. Nevertheless, at scale, quality risks can be predicted. Punjab-based evidence indicates that accountability at various levels of administration and support defines the delivery of ECE, where information is not monitored, is delayed, or used incompletely, the quality of the classroom across schools and districts can vary significantly (Ansari et al., 2024). The broader Pakistani data also signifies the negative impact of staffing lapses, routine disruptions, and resource limitations on continuity of early learning experiences, and quality monitoring becomes particularly important in this situation (Alam et al., 2022).

Experience around the globe indicates that monitoring is best when it is more than episodic inspection and it is a continuous improvement cycle. Global tracking observes that most systems are capable of indicating enrolment but still lack standard information regarding what children face within ECE classrooms and it demands practical equipment and surveillance mechanisms to bridge evidence to action (Raikes et al., 2023). Recent scoping review goes further to claim that to build inclusive and equitable ECE, it is necessary to monitor indicators reflecting the quality of the experiences of children and those of inclusion rather than access (Rad et al., 2022). Supervision on the school level can be used to foster improvement when it is well organized, evidence-based, and focused on professional development (Owan et al., 2023).

One thing which is practically difficult is measurement. Quality improvement should be monitored and noted in a manner that is practical in the normal field visits. The recent studies have covered the development of standardized observation tools, diagnostic of the strengths in the classroom and the professional development needs of the teachers based on the structured observations of the experiences of the children in the classroom and the teacher in their practice (Miranda et al., 2024). Simultaneously, the observational instruments that have passed the test of validity and are aimed at classroom support and children participation may be used to help the

system to track the daily environment of instruction and learning to determine whether it is improving with time (Wolf et al., 2025).

Supervision must also be a capacity building exercise. The research on coaching indicates that coaching can be effective in supporting teaching practice through supportive and targeted coaching when it is based on well-explicit theories of change and the alignment between in-classrooms and programme intentions (Elek et al., 2024; Elek et al., 2022). Fidelity instruments that have been created to assess early childhood implementation, e.g. Montessori implementation measures, also provide an example of how monitoring can describe practice with more precision and inform specific improvement initiatives, instead of using generic compliance checklists (Murray et al., 2025).

Lastly, tracking is being reliant on timely and usable information systems. Education Management Information System (EMIS) Unite indicators, visualize trends, and assist in making decisions on various administrative levels. Current literature demonstrates how contemporary EMIS designs may be used to operationalize conventional indicators to monitor and plan, allowing education data to be used more effectively (Badru et al., 2023).

This background is the setting of the current qualitative research that will focus on the quality progress monitoring mechanism of ECE in the Punjab public secondary schools ECE classes which are a part of the overall school administration. It examines the process of monitoring, the priority of the indicators, limitations of monitoring personnel and school staff, and the conversion of results into feedback, professional assistance, and correction.

Objectives

1. To explore current monitoring practices, tools, and quality indicators used for ECE in public secondary schools of Punjab
2. To identify key barriers and facilitators affecting effective ECE monitoring and the use of monitoring findings for improvement
3. To propose improvement-oriented recommendations for

strengthening the ECE monitoring mechanism (indicators, feedback processes, and reporting)

Research Questions

1. How is ECE quality currently monitored in public secondary schools of Punjab, and which indicators/tools are used?
2. What challenges and enabling factors influence the effectiveness of ECE monitoring and the use of findings for corrective action?
3. How can the monitoring mechanism be strengthened to support continuous quality improvement in ECE classrooms?

Research Design and Methodology

The nature of the research was qualitative, and the study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design. This design was considered appropriate as the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how Early Childhood Education (ECE) quality monitoring and feedback mechanisms are practiced within public secondary schools in Punjab. The study focused on exploring the experiences, perceptions, practices, and contextual challenges related to ECE monitoring, rather than measuring or quantifying variables.

The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility and depth in data collection. The participants included district-level education officers responsible for monitoring educational structures at the secondary school level. This approach enabled the researcher to capture rich, detailed insights into the existing monitoring processes from the perspective of district leadership. The indicator selected by the researcher to facilitate the qualitative inquiry was the indicator Monitoring System of Quality Progress of Early Childhood Education to absorb the monitoring by the practices of the early childhood educators (e.g., routine of monitoring visits, type of feedback, follow-up) and the impact that these processes have on the perceived quality progress.

Ethical issues were managed in terms of voluntary involvement, informed consent prior

to the interviews, responses confidentiality, and anonymity of the participants (e.g., codes P1 -P9 or district-based codes). The interviews were done in a respectful and professional way and the participants were accorded the right to withdraw any time without incurring any penalty.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study comprised all 36 District Education Officers (DEOs) of Secondary Education from all 36 districts of Punjab, Pakistan. These officers were selected as the population because they hold administrative and supervisory responsibility at district level and have direct oversight of monitoring structures and reporting mechanisms that influence ECE implementation within public secondary school settings. The sample consisted of nine DEOs (Secondary Education) drawn from nine districts of Punjab using a convenience sampling technique. The included districts were: Lahore, Kasur, Faisalabad, Chiniot, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, and Sargodha. Convenience sampling was applied due to practical considerations such as accessibility, availability, and willingness of the DEOs to participate within the study timeframe. Despite being convenience-based, the sample included officers from districts with varied administrative and contextual profiles, which supported richer qualitative comparison across settings.

Instrument Development and Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-developed semi-structured interview guide designed specifically for this study. The instrument contained six (6) interview questions, all aligned with the single study indicator: "Monitoring System for Quality Progress of Early Childhood Education." The interview guide was developed to elicit detailed information on: (i) the appropriateness of the current monitoring & feedback system for ECE; (ii) extent of QAED guideline-following by AEOs during monitoring; (iii) friendly environment during monitoring & feedback by AEOs; (iv) head teachers' monitoring frequency and feedback; (v) extent of QAED guideline-following by ECE teachers (vi) suggestions for strengthening

monitoring and feedback for better ECE quality progress.

To strengthen clarity and relevance, the questions were framed in simple, professional language suitable for senior education officers and aligned with ECE monitoring realities at district and school levels. Interviews were conducted with the nine DEOs (Secondary Education) from the selected districts. With consent, responses were documented systematically (through detailed note-taking and/or audio recording where permissible), and each interview followed the same semi-structured sequence to maintain consistency while still allowing probing questions for depth. After data collection, interviews were organized by participant to support later thematic analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The nine DEOs (Secondary Education) interview transcripts (Lahore, Kasur, Faisalabad,

Chiniot, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Sargodha) were read repeatedly to build familiarity, and then coded line-by-line to identify meaningful statements related to the indicator “Monitoring System for Quality Progress of ECE.” Using codes for DEOs (Secondary Education) of districts (DEO Lahore=P1; DEO Kasur=P2; DEO Faisalabad=P3; DEO Chiniot=P4; DEO Gujranwala=P5; DEO Hafizabad=P6; DEO Sahiwal=P7; DEO Pakpattan=P8; DEO Sargodha=P9).

Codes with similar meanings were merged to form sub-themes, and closely related sub-themes were clustered into broader themes. Finally, the themes were interpreted across districts to identify common patterns and differences. Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis and presented question-wise in the form of six (06) tables (one table for each interview question Q1–Q6).

Question #1: Appropriateness of the current monitoring & feedback system for ECE

Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 1

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System is Appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand visits
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System is Better than Before 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting/checklist focus
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System is partially Effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online ECCE app
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System is Helpful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator-based guidance
P5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance for lesson planning & delivery
P6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria-based monitoring
P7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keen classroom observation & guidance
P8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration teaching by AEOs
P9		

The participant P1 responded that system is appropriate and better as compare to previous systems. AEOs should also visit high and higher secondary schools. The respondent P2 replied that AEOs behaves just like a reporting officer and remains in the ECE classrooms for a little time so that they cannot guide properly because of other kinds of workloads. The participants P3 and P8 answered that AEOs are monitoring according to the given indicators through ECCE app. Another participant P4 said that AEOs are guiding in lesson planning and their

delivery because of that he is fully satisfied about this type of monitoring system. The respondent P5 answered that AEOs are monitoring with the help of given criteria by the QAED. The participants P6 and P7 similarly replied that AEOs are visiting keenly and facilitating the head teachers, teachers, caregivers in a proper way. The respondent P9 responded that AEOs give lesson in the classrooms and teachers observe them and in this way the methods of teachers also improved

Most DEOs above indicated the current monitoring and feedback system as being suitable and better than previous systems primarily due to the fact that AEOs observe classrooms and direct staff based on specified criteria/indicators indicating that the system has become more structured and measurable. A number of respondents focused on the fact that the monitoring might be effective when it is facilitated to the head-teachers, teachers and

caregivers as opposed to checking. Nonetheless, a single district (Kasur) showed an opposite picture stating that the system is riddled with reporting/checklist cycles with brief school visits restricting the advisory service and quality enhancement. This contrast denotes that the same monitoring structure can be approached differently based on time allocation, purpose of visit and coaching orientation.

Question #2: Extent of QAED guideline-following by AEOs during monitoring

Table 2

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 2

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines are Followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training-based guidance
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partially Constrained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus only on reporting
P3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedagogical knowledge
P4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow the guidelines in managing, teaching and facilitating
P5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe attendance
P6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check supporting material
P7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> workload for reporting reduces on ECE focus
P8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECCE app supports monitoring
P9		

The respondent P1 responded that AEOs and ECE related staff follow the guidelines during the monitoring provided by QAED. The participant P2 answered that they do not follow the guidelines and focus only on reporting and do not share pedagogical knowledge. The respondent P3 responded that they follow the guidelines in managing, teaching and facilitating. The participants P4 and P5 answered similarly that they are monitoring different tasks related to management, teaching and facilitating. The respondents P6 and P7 replied that they observe attendance, check supporting material and observe the lessons. The participant P8 answered that they are partially following the guidelines because of their reporting function is so busy that they cannot fully focused on ECE. Another respondent responded that P9 they are monitoring all the indicators with the help of given online ECCE App.

The vast majority of the DEOs claimed that the AEOs and the monitoring personnel typically adhere to QAED guidelines when monitoring

ECEs in terms of checking the attendance, learning materials, records of lesson planning, and classroom activities. This implies that QAED directive has been converted to normal monitoring functions and also aids in standardization among districts. Guideline-following was also said to be facilitation-based in a number of districts with monitoring involving guidance to teachers and caregivers in classroom management and instruction. Nevertheless, two significant limitations became evident, one DEO said that the officers have many reporting duties, and it is impossible to thoroughly focus on ECE quality indicators when making visits. One more district said that monitoring is not as complex as reporting in the absence of sharing pedagogical knowledge, i.e. instructions are not fully implemented as professional support. Thus, guideline-following is formal, and its extent and developmental worth lie in the amount of work and the presence of instructional support in the process of monitoring. On the whole, the main interpretation is that QAED compliance exists,

but quality enhancement takes time, mentoring, and decreased reporting load.

Question #3: Friendly environment during monitoring & feedback by AEOs

Table 3

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 3

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly & Supportive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation for teaching/children
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some Time Not Friendly (time constraint) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short stay prevents friendly guidance
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly Improve Performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance for teachers/caregivers
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly Guide and Supervise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more training on Monitoring and &Feedback
P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly environment (training-driven) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe staff at every visit
P6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More visits
P7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on indicators
P8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers should be trained to remain friendly
P9		

The respondent P1 replied that AEOs monitor in a friendly environment and managing teaching and facilitating the ECE children in friendly atmosphere. Another participant P2 replied that the AEOs do not spend enough time in the ECE classrooms they just spend little time because of their workload for reporting purposes. The respondent P3 responded that AEOs guide the teachers and caregivers in a friendly environment. The respondents P4 and P7 responded in the similar way that they behave like a friendly because of that performance of the staff has improved but more ECE trainings should be provided to them. The participant P5 answered that they guide the teachers and caregivers in a friendly environment and they should observe them in every visit. The respondent P6 answered that they treat as kind supervisors instead of rude inspectors. Another participant P8 said that they support the ECE related staff in a friendly way and more visits should be arranged for the monitoring all the indicators related to the quality progress of ECE. The participant P9 said that special instructions should be provided for AEOs to monitor in a friendly environment.

The majority of respondents mentioned monitoring visits to occur in a supportive and friendly atmosphere, where AEOs shape the direction of teachers and caregivers and are meant to make the best out of the classroom practices instead of criticizing. It was seen as a friendly method of promoting cooperation, having better teacher performance, and making feedback tolerable to staff. Other districts made AEOs directly appear as benevolent supervisors rather than uncivilized inspectors, and supportive supervision was more popular. Though this was positive in general, the Kasur interview once more brought out a negative experience saying that friendliness is weak since officers do not spend a lot of time and are preoccupied primarily with reporting. Several answers also indicated that friendliness gets enhanced when monitoring is accompanied by training and capacity-building, which may indicate that the professional development supports shape monitoring climate. It suggests that friendly monitoring culture is experienced to a great extent, but it may be compromised in the case of checklists-free and hurry-based visits, so monitoring process should be the relational, supportive and improvement-oriented.

Question #4: Head Teachers' monitoring frequency and feedback

Table 4

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 4

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily or weekly bases monitoring and feedback
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed Practice 	
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variation in Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and feedback depend on Heads
P4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observed during DEO visits
P5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and feedback as per standards
P6		
P7		
P8		
P9		

The respondent P1 responded that head teachers monitor daily or sometime after one or two days because of other tasks workload. Another respondent P2 responded that the competent and responsible head teachers visit regularly and performing well but some not because of laziness. The participants P3 and P5 said that some monitor at daily bases and some one time in a week but more time is required for it. The participants P4 and P6 replied in a similar way that the head teachers monitor and provide feedback regularly. Another respondent P7 responded that they are monitoring and providing feedback to meet the quality standards. The participants P8 and P9 answered similarly that head teachers monitor at daily bases, weekly bases and some one time in a month to meet the quality standards.

The answers demonstrate that the survey data indicate that head teachers tend to monitor the classes in ECE and provide feedback, however, the rates are uneven across schools and districts. In others, surveillance was termed as

daily or alternate days, particularly in those districts in which the head teacher is enthusiastic and dedicated. Nevertheless, other interviews revealed that in some cases, monitoring occurs weekly or monthly, which is based on the variance in the leadership practices and competing workload. One DEO attributed the difference to competency and motivation some heads are good and others are inconsistent because of laziness or lack of commitment. This implies that school-level leadership, and internal supervision are essential to the further development of the ECE quality, which cannot be only checked by the district. Monitoring by the head teachers can help to strengthen the standards and assist the teachers to enhance routines and learning activities. In general, to enhance the monitoring of ECE, the ability, responsibility, and time management of head teachers should be considered to facilitate the internal following up.

Question #5: Extent of QAED guideline-following by ECE teachers

Table 5

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 5

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines Followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of training manuals/instructions
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly Followed but needs more training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent trainings sustain change
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender-wise Difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interest-area teaching
P4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities and syllabus-aligned teaching
P5		
P6		
P7		

P8
 P9

- Methods/techniques for interest
- Improved children learning
- Use of activity-based material
- Female teachers follow more
- Managing class and training guidelines

The participant P1 said that QAED has provide guidelines and trainings manuals for the teachers so teachers take guidance during teaching process. The other participant P2 answered that teachers are mostly following the guidelines but more trainings at district level are required for it because of frequently trainings changes can be adopted rapidly. The participants P3, P4 and P5 replied similarly that teachers using different kind of activities for creating more and more interest in the children. The participants P6 and P7 answered in a similar way that teachers are following the guidelines to improve teaching-learning process and they are using supporting material and activity-based methods for quality improvement of ECE. Another participant P8 answered that female teachers are following more as compare to male teachers. The respondent P9 replied that they are managing, teaching by following the training guidelines”

DEOs in both districts were generally in agreement that ECE teachers are implementing QAED guidelines, especially by adopting training manuals, organizing interest-based

activities and using activity-based methods of teaching. Guideline-following was associated with the application of the supporting materials and involvement of children into organized activities in many answers. One of the most powerful tendencies in the data is the perceived role of the training: DEOs were raising on several occasions the proposal that more frequent trainings enhance the adherence and classroom performance of teachers. Guideline-following was also seen as evidenced by some districts in better learning and classroom management, which implied that outcomes as well as compliance improved. There was a perceived gender difference in adherence in one district with female teachers reporting that they are abiding by the guidelines more than the male teachers, suggesting staffing and support challenges. On the whole, a positive level of compliance among the teachers can be seen and the quality improvement process can be maintained only with constant training, strict supervision, and specific assistance to the low performers.

Question #6: Suggestions for further improvement of monitoring & feedback

Table 6

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 6

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Monitoring Scope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend visits
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from Reporting to Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus utilization & child learning outcomes
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Accountability & Clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logbook comments
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed indicators
P5	Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical/cooperative behaviour
P6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity-building Supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings roadmap/indicators
P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Planning & Stakeholder Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with stakeholders
P8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation & Continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous monitoring and incentives
P9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Specificity of Supervision • Resource & Training Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More specific visits for focus ECE tasks by DEOs • Continuous trainings

- More funds

The participant P1 answered that visits should be more based on innovating ideas and focus on the improvement of teachers' attitude. Another participant P2 answered that during visits, physical presence and its best utilization should be observed and check how ECE children gained knowledge. The participant P3 responded that the visits should be more and comments should be written in detail in the log book about all the ECE Indicators. The respondent P4 responded that monitoring process should be continuous to improve ethical behaviour. Another participant P5 said that more trainings should be provided related to ECE indicators. The participant P6 replied that more visits and meetings should be planned for the guidance of all ECE stakeholders. The participant P7 answered that visits should be continuous and incentives/rewards should be given to the best teachers and caregivers. Another respondent P8 responded that visits should be more and specific. The participant P9 answered that Trainings should continuous and more funds provided for the trainings.

The recommendations in terms of various districts are highly aligned in the purpose of making monitoring more regular, decentralized, and continuous, instead of periodically making visits with the primary aim of reporting. Other DEOs highlighted that monitoring must determine not just physical presence of activities, but also how the learning spaces are actually being used and whether or not children are learning valuable knowledge and skills. Most of the participants suggested specifications to their guidance by having clear indicators/roadmaps, indicating that they required standard expectations that would be applied consistently. Follow-up and documentation were also emphasized like writing feedback in a logbook so that schools would have a guideline to improve on. Capacity-building solutions were also proposed severally such as sustained trainings, stakeholder meetings, and scheduled visits which involve offering guidance to the teachers

and caregivers. Lastly, motivational and resource-based suggestions (incentives/rewards and additional training funds) indicate that quality improvement is perceived to be associated with human motivation and investment in the systems. The monitoring mechanism requires a change of compliance to supportive improvement, which is supported by obvious standards, regular follow-up, and sufficient resources.

Findings

1. Most DEOs reported that the current monitoring and feedback mechanism is appropriate and better than previous systems, especially when AEOs observe classrooms and guide staff using indicators/ECCE app.
2. One district (Kasur) viewed the system as largely reporting-oriented, arguing that checklist-based reporting and short visits reduce real mentoring, observation, and feedback quality.
3. QAED guideline-following was generally reported as present; however, reporting workload was highlighted as a reason AEOs may not fully focus on ECE indicators during visits.
4. AEO monitoring was mostly described as occurring in a friendly environment, where officers guide teachers in lesson planning, delivery, and caregiver support; the key threat to friendliness was insufficient time in schools.
5. Head teachers' monitoring practices were mostly present but varied widely (daily/weekly/monthly), with variation linked to leadership commitment and competing workload.
6. ECE teachers were perceived as following QAED guidelines through activity-based teaching, supporting materials, and interest-area approaches; districts emphasized that frequent training strengthens sustained adherence.
7. The most repeated improvement suggestion was to conduct more visits that are ECE-specific, focused, and continuous, rather than quick visits for reporting.

8. Several DEOs recommended clearer roadmaps/indicators, stronger documentation (logbook comments), and stakeholder meetings during visits to improve follow-up.

9. Motivation strategies (e.g., incentives/rewards for best teachers/caregivers) and increased funding for training were suggested to strengthen quality progress in ECE.

Discussion

The current research paper discussed the views of District Education Officers (DEOs) of secondary education with respect to the quality progress monitoring system of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Punjab. Altogether, the results indicate that, despite being perceived by DEOs as a necessary and to a large extent functional process of enhancing the quality of ECE, monitoring is characterized by gaps in its implementation, especially the fact that monitoring tends to be reduced to a mere checklist and that the time allotted to classroom observation is insufficient, in addition to the fact that monitoring has to be better organized in terms of the workload put on Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) and the manner in which the results of monitoring are to be converted into instructional change in a more efficient manner. These findings are well-aligned with the latest evidence that the implementation of the ECE reforms needs not only the standards and supervision systems, but also the means of communicating, using data, and encouraging continuous quality enhancement (Ansari et al., 2024).

The majority of DEOs (Secondary Education) saw the current monitoring system as right, particularly since AEO visits provide an element of routinely supervising schools and holding them responsible. The perception aligns with international claims that regular and organized monitoring systems may facilitate the minimum quality standards and detect service delivery gaps (Raikes et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the issue highlighted by the respondents that AEOs emphasize more on registers than on classroom practice is an essential weakness reported in the literature of quality assurance: monitoring systems tend to shift towards administrative compliance, instead of quality improvement in the form of processes (Eadie et

al., 2022). Quality of processes, which occurs in classrooms, takes time, observation, and feedback about the teacher-child interactions, and not paperwork checks only (Wolf et al., 2024).

Besides, the recommendation that monitoring authority be applied where ECE classes fall under other administrative categories presents a system alignment issue, which aligns with the large-scale implementation research, which indicates that fragmented governance and role ambiguity dilute monitoring effectiveness (Ansari et al., 2024). In terms of implementation, these issues are also indicative of inner setting and process constraints in which structures are present, but the operational environment constrains fidelity and impact (Damschroder et al., 2022). DEOs (SE) were in general of the opinion that AEOs are operated in accordance with QAED monitoring guidelines but several times they observed that there is a disparity in implementation, and time and workload limits it. This trend aligns with a larger volume of evidence that the presence of guidelines is required but inadequate; the systems must also make sure that they have capacity, coaching, and meaningful feedback to transform guidelines into practice change (Schachter et al., 2024).

The current studies on coaching are especially up to date. The approach to coaching that is purposeful, observation-based, and incorporates feedback and reflection cycles works optimally (Elek et al., 2024). However, research also indicates that the perceived and the actual actions of coaches may be different in most cases, coaching turns more directive or hasty in a real-world setting (Elek et al., 2022). This corroborates the DEOs observations that monitoring at times turns out to be routine as opposed to proliferative. That is, the guideline cover can exist, but the instructional depth can be low.

Another key result of the cross-district observation (finding) was that monitoring was considered quite friendly, encouraging, and improvement-oriented (DEOs insisted on motivating teachers and maintaining respectful communication). It coincides with the fact that supervision systems that promote professional development are more likely to bolster teacher engagement and minimize resistance

(Lindström et al., 2022). Insecurities on the part of educators in places where monitoring is technology is merely performative or compliance-based, they can be very likely to rudely report what they are doing instead of actually improving, especially in highly regulated systems (Rogers et al., 2025). The positive tone of the DEOs is thus encouraging since it is an indicator of an implementation climate that facilitates quality improvement. Nevertheless, there is also an inverse aspect of the similar results: although interpersonal strategies tend to be helpful, the system will still be compliance-driven in case the time of monitoring tools and reporting expectations prevails. This conflict is well-known on quality assurance discussions- the systems must be accountable, but it is impossible to achieve improvement without coaching-like supervision and feedback (Schachter et al., 2025).

DEOs (SE) explained that these are visits to the classroom, observation of ECE teachers and examination of cleanliness and learning environment that head teachers actively participated in monitoring. It aligns with the literature that school-level supervision and leadership practices are linked to job effectiveness of teachers and can reinforce the implementation of instructional expectations (Owan et al., 2023). Nonetheless, DEOs also suggested that the monitoring of head teachers is usually devoted to structural indices (discipline, cleanliness, registers, basic organization). This is not a new phenomenon: visible compliance features are easier to oversee in schools compared to more profound process-quality ones (Eadie et al., 2022).

Having more validated observation tools and structured rubrics are used to support supervisors and instruct them toward instructional interactions and learning processes to enhance this area (Miranda et al., 2024; Wolf et al., 2024). Provided such tools and even brief training, head teachers can monitor instructionally in a way that supplements external supervision by AEOs. DEOs generally saw that teachers adhered to ECE guidelines when they were regularly monitored, resources were provided and supportive supervision was provided. This is in line with the evidence that teacher practice change is the most likely to occur when

practice-connected, continuous professional learning is supported by training cycles as opposed to a single-time training (Yang et al., 2022).

Besides, extensive evidences on coaching reveal that coaching has the potential to positively affect teacher practice and child outcomes, yet the extent of effect varies with the quality and dosage of coaching and the transparency of active ingredients (Schachter et al., 2025). The interests of DEOs in training refreshers and guidance thus align with the existing literature: teachers might possess the conceptual ideas about standards, but still need more organized coaching to apply them in practice. The use of low-resource professional development models (such as self-assessment-based models) is also supported as viable avenues in the bound system (Mazhar and Sylva, 2025) and this is what DEOs are interested in practical and on-going improvement supports.

One of the most important cross-cutting problems is the burden of reporting and the danger that surveillance data will not be turned into the decisions and support at classes. DEOs also recognized the presence of apps, reporting systems, and documentation systems, yet said that officers have too much work to do at the whole-school level and thus not as much time to dedicate to ECE-specific observation and feedback. This reflects one of the key findings of EMIS studies in developing settings: that when there is a lack of capacity, inadequate incentives, absence of clear use-cases or insufficient integration into decision-making processes, data systems die due to generating large amounts of information (Mazbouh et al., 2025).

Based on the implementation science lens, feedback loops improvement needs to be addressed at both the tool and the workflow levels and accountability of using the data, namely, whether monitoring outputs directly inform the coaching plans, targeted training, or resource allocation (Damschroder et al., 2022). Combined with the previous analysis, it can be proposed that the process of early childhood education evaluation in Punjab also implies the need to improve the communication process, resource management, and the use of data available as the key aspects that should be enhanced to reinforce the entire system of early

education (Ansari et al., 2024). A change towards more classroom observation, coaching-based feedback, manageable reporting, and data-to-action mechanisms is the next step with the help of up-to-date research, as it is necessary to move away from the focus on monitoring as inspection and transition to the focus on monitoring as improvement (Elek et al., 2024; Mazbouh et al., 2025; Raikes et al., 2023).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This qualitative research project explored the quality development tracking system of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) in government secondary schools in Punjab in the outlook of the District Education Officer (Secondary Education). In general, the results show that ECE monitoring is considered to be a necessity and is usually implemented in a systematic way, relying on such tools as the set of established indicators, electronic applications (i.e., the ECCE app), and criteria that correspond to QAED. It is reported that monitoring in most districts will be supportive, which focuses on directing, observing, and giving feedback to enhance classroom practices and boost the learning environment by young children. These characteristics indicate the tendency towards quality assurance practices which emphasise quality improvement instead of quality inspection.

Nevertheless, the study also shows that there are critical implementation loopholes that inhibit the efficiency of monitoring to actual quality improvement. One of the grounds upon which monitoring has been raised as an issue is that in certain settings, monitoring has become more compliance-based whereby the monitoring is more dominated by reporting directives, brief visits, and checklists. The practices minimize the possibilities of meaningful classroom observation, mentoring, and follow-up, which are significant in advancing ECE pedagogy. In addition, head teachers do not carry out regular monitoring in schools consistently: some schools exhibit regular supervision and assistance, whereas others display inconsistent monitoring because of the workload, lack of ECE-specific knowledge, and the commitment of the head to this role. Consequently, the monitoring system is at the risk of generating documentation

which does not guarantee ongoing enhancement in teaching and learning.

To enhance the monitoring mechanism, the conclusion drawn in the study is that the system must shift a lot further towards being more of an improvement-centered system instead of a reporting-centered system, which also involves observation, constructive feedback, documentation, and planned follow-up. Indicators specific to ECE must be elucidated and standardized and monitoring visits should be regular to offer specific feedback instead of shallow analysis. To maintain quality practices, written feedback mechanisms (logbooks), lessened non-essential reporting burden, and practical and ongoing training of school leaders and teachers are also required. Moreover, teacher commitment by incentives, motivation strategies recognition, and sufficient resources can help to increase adherence to recommended standards of ECE. The monitoring system in Punjab is operationally based and its transformation toward supportive supervision, although still growing, requires an effort to overcome the barriers to implementation and to make monitoring convert to actionable and continuous improvement in the classroom setting. The further work can increase the number of stakeholders (teachers, head teachers, parents) and examine the connection between monitoring outcomes and child development and learning indicators.

Based on above findings and conclusions, following recommendations are made:

1. Make more monitoring visits with express ECE focus.
2. Transform monitoring into classroom observation and coaching-oriented feedback.
3. Reduce the avoidable reporting load to enable officers to focus on ECE.
4. Make written feedback (e.g., logbook) follow-up.
5. Empower the ability of the head teachers to conduct regular internal monitoring.
6. More continuous trainings and incentives to enforce quality improvement

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