

# **Can We Comment on Quality: How the M&E Activities Ensuring Quality in Education in the South Asia Sub-Continent**

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## **Summary**

This paper analyses the existing literatures about the Quality Assurance process of primary education in three different countries within the south Asia subcontinent namely, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It argues that the definition of Quality education is still ambiguous in among the systems. However, this article categorises the aspects of quality education from existing literatures and examines the quality assurance systems in the mentioned three countries. Having done so, it shows that the quality assurance systems in all three countries focus differently in various aspects of quality education among which the physical aspects are predominant.

## **Introduction**

Timeline for achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) is now at its final phase. Although in several subsequent policy dialogues and documents it has been said that access to quality education is a right of the children, till now it is often judged unfortunate that the quantitative elements of education have become the main focus of attention (UNESCO, 2005). For instance, many countries attempted to show their success regarding the EFA agenda by providing attractive figures of access.

However, a number of international studies considered the issues of quality, although very superficially. Some international agencies (e.g. UNESCO, UNICEF etc) set a number of indicators of educational qualities. Similarly, Jomtien and Dakar Declaration also defined the

quality of education. Countries are called for setting provision of regular monitoring ensuring the quality of education. Hence, EFA signing countries established and strengthened the capacity of monitoring and evaluation within their systems. In fact, monitoring and evaluation now-a-days are at the core of almost all educational quality improvement policies and strategies in most of the countries(UNESCO, 2002). Yet, parents and policymakers are increasingly concerned about the quality of education and the knowledge and skills obtained by the children through schooling.

Traditionally, in many countries monitoring through inspection is practiced to exercise control over the schools and to offer feedback for improvement. Nevertheless, since quality is less of a priority from the beginning, quality of education is loosely conceptualized and there are controversies about its definition. Moreover, there are numerous pitfalls among the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that are aimed to identify shortcomings of the educational interventions and provide support to ensure quality in different countries. In addition, knowledge about different monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance systems is only fragmentary at best (Lamanauskas, 2012).

In this situation, it is important to synthesis the information available about different M&E and quality assurance (QA) systems in countries under UPE programme. How the countries can comment on the education they are providing and how quality could be ensured through various processes are interesting issues to conceptualize. This knowledge could be used to strengthen the M&E systems which in turn, can help to ensure the quality of education.

Thus this article aimed to analyze the M&E processes of 3 different countries of the South Asian sub-continent namely, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. It also draws upon the available evidence of the effectiveness of the M&E processes in ensuring the quality of primary education in the respective countries.

## **Methodology**

A range of literature was reviewed in order to conceptualize the meaning of 'quality' widely used in primary education. Through desk research a number of studies and relevant information on government websites were analysed. Specifically, the annual M&E reports produced by the

central authority of the above mentioned countries were analyzed to infer the elements which are monitored and arguably influence the 'quality' of education. Data were analyzed thematically.

### **Quality in Primary Education**

The Dakar framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals emphasized on ensuring free and compulsory primary education of good quality by 2015 (UNESCO, 2005, Pigozzi, 2000). In different documents and reports, it has been claimed that the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) fundamentally dependson the quality of education available. Quality education could help to ensure higher retention retain schools. How well pupils are taught and how much they learn can have a crucial impact on how long they stay in school and how regularly they attend classes (UNESCO 2005). Furthermore, parents are also concerned about the cost of schooling and the time they are spending in schools and whether it is worth for what the children are taught.

However, in spite all of these concerns, the definition of 'quality' in education is still ambiguous and the notion is still not fully developed. Different authors identified different indicators of quality education and there is significant lack of consensus on what quality actually entails (Alexander, 2008). Notwithstanding, Jomtien and Dakar conference, UNESCO, UNICEF and some other organizations identified some elements of quality education. Analyzing concepts from these discussions four broad areas related to quality could be found.

Firstly, the World Declaration on Education in the 1990s set four indicators for quality, namely student's desirable characteristics, process of education, contents and finally the system. Health and motivation were mentioned as desirable characteristics of pupils. On the other hand, competent teachers using proper and active pedagogies were identified as a preferred process of education. Similarly, relevant curricula signified desirable content, and good governance and equitable resources were mentioned as indicators of an effective system.

Secondly, UNESCO identified four 'pillars' of education and thus conceptualized the notion of quality (UNESCO, 2005). There are pupils will be able to learn themselves as a result of education and this was labeled as 'learning to know'; education will enable students to apply practically what they learnt in real life and it is denominated as 'learning to do'; as an effect of

the quality of education achieved, life will be free of discrimination and equal opportunity will be established - this process is called 'learning to live together'; and finally, 'learning to be' emphasizes the skills needed for the individuals to develop their full potential.

UNICEF defined *quality* based on the Dakar declaration and on the philosophy of children rights (Unicef, 2000). Five dimensions of quality were identified which emphasized on the learners, environment, content, process and outcomes.

In addition, different philosophies of education acknowledge quality in their own ways. For example, humanist tradition believe that human nature is essentially good and individual behavior is autonomous (Elias and Merriam, 1995). This tradition also acknowledges that all people are born equal and subsequent inequality is the result of the environment around. Thus this concept noted that, in quality education:

- Standardized, prescribed and externally defined or controlled curricula is projected;
- The role of assessment is to give learners information about their progress as well as feedback;
- Teachers play the role of a facilitator rather than instructor; and
- Education is a social practice rather than an individual intervention.

While the pioneer of the behaviorist tradition believe, behavior could be manipulated through specific stimulation (SKYINNER, 1968). According to this tradition, Tyler (1949) suggested:

- Learners are not intrinsically motivated or able to construct meaning for themselves;
- Human behavior can be predicted and controlled through reward and punishment;
- Cognition is based on the shaping of behavior;
- Deductive and didactic pedagogies, such as graded tasks, rote learning and memorization, are helpful;

Thus quality in education in this tradition was defined (UNESCO, 2005) using the following factors.

- Standardized, externally defined and controlled curricula, based on prescribed objectives and defined independently of the learner, are endorsed.
- Assessment is seen as an objective measurement of learned behavior against preset assessment criteria.
- Tests and examinations are considered as central features of learning and the main means of planning and delivering rewards and punishments.
- The teacher directs learning, as the expert who controls the stimuli and responses.
- Incremental learning tasks that reinforce desired associations in the mind of the learner are favored.

Considering the above, it is clear that in order to define ‘quality education’, two socio-psychological theories took significant oppositions. While the humanist theory wanted assessment to inform the learners about their progress, behaviorists said that it should measure learned behavior and examination needs to be the central focus of education. In addition, since the humanist notion considered the teacher as a facilitator, the behaviorists presented the teacher as a director of education. The differences in both school of thoughts raise important fundamental questions such as – what is the purpose of education and how do we want to shape our future. Should we help to create ‘soldiers’ for a nation to perform duties uniformly with predictable patterns or ‘critical thinkers’ who are capable to appreciating the need for a structure of a nation and yet ready to think ‘out of the box’ when necessary. In absence of a consensus about the definition of ‘quality’, developing a strategy to measure quality poses a difficult challenge.

However, after analyzing the above definitions of the four broad criteria, In summary, it could be said that to measure the quality of education, the following are elements need to be addressed.

***Learners’ characteristics and achievements:*** According to Jomtien declaration whether learners are healthy and motivated needs to be measured first in order to comment on the quality of education provided. In addition, learners’ cognitive achievements, intellectual and physical skills and their ethics could be considered as essential.

***Teaching-learning process:*** Whether the teacher’s methods of teaching work well or not is a fundamental concern of quality in education (UNESCO, 2005). A proper teaching learning

process must engage students and motivate them to participate in the learning process. Teacher's characteristics namely, whether the teacher is the provider of knowledge or a facilitator of learning is also an indicator of a quality teaching-learning process. In this element assessment needs to be discussed with the same amount of importance. The role and process of assessment need to be determined as quality assessment system is a prerequisite for quality education. Although different theories defined teachers' role and quality assessment differently but there must be a consensus about these issues in any given context for developing a quality assurance process.

**Content:** Curriculum is the blueprint of an educational plan (Tyler, 1949). It determines what to teach and how to teach. Thus quality of education is at the core of this concept. Furthermore, learning materials e.g. textbooks also influence the quality of education. Almost all theories discussed above emphasized on this criterion as an indicator of quality education. Theories suggest that the curriculum must be standardized, extremely defined and controlled.

**System:** Good governance is highlighted as important for achieving quality education. Similarly, equity is also considered as another prerequisite of quality education in literature. Equity has been one of the most commonly referred terms in any reports regarding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In theory *equity* enables females and males of all races and ethnic backgrounds to develop skills needed to be proactive, empowered citizen (Opheim, 2004). Ensuring equity in classroom is one of the concerns of quality education. Apart from the teaching learning processes, physical facilities e.g. class size, supply of safe drinking water and sanitation) are also crucial factors to consider for quality education.

At a glance, these criteria could be shown as below.

Key indicator	Specific indicator
Learners' characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners' health</li> <li>• Learners' motivation</li> <li>• Cognitive and physical skills</li> <li>• Ethical interest</li> </ul>
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching learning environment</li> <li>• Teachers characteristics (pedagogy)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Teaching materials</li> </ul>
System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance</li> <li>• Equity</li> <li>• Distribution of resources</li> </ul>

### Theoretical Framework

There are hundreds of elements which are monitored by the three countries – Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. For ease of analysis, a comprehensive picture of the elements, categorized according to the key indicators was given above. Definitions of these key indicators are discussed below.

Key indicators	Definition	Examples
Learner characteristics	Elements that are relevant to or have impact on students' physical and mental characteristics	Question or statement about safe drinking water, toilet, students' motivational factors
Teaching-learning process	Elements that are relevant to or have impact on the teaching learning process	Number of absent teachers/ teacher-student ratio etc, following lesson plans, pedagogical elements
Content	Elements that are relevant to or have impact on curriculum or text materials	Lesson plan, teaching aids
System	Elements that are influenced by the system or governance	Issues about ensuring equity i. e.girls enrolment,administrative issues etc.

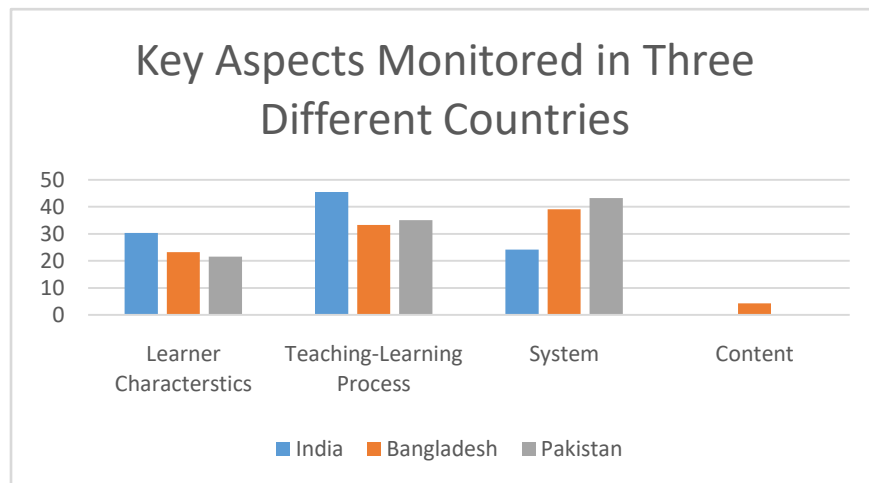
**Are we able to measure quality?**

Mechanisms to monitor the quality of education have already been set up in almost every country (Kayani et al.). However, to what extent, the system can draw upon the evidence quality education is questionable. A quality assurance or monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system needs to address all the elements of quality in education that have already been described above. In this section, how the Monitoring and Evaluation systems in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are measuring those indicators will be discussed. The indicators that are centrally monitored will be analyzed for each country and how those match with the quality indicators described above will be critically discussed. While doing so, firstly, a comparative discussion is given for three different countries, which will be followed by descriptions of the M&E systems of the respective countries' element.

### **A comparative discussion of the elements monitored in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan**

Analysis of the elements monitored by different countries shows that among the three countries, India monitors more elements (30%) related to learner characteristics than other two countries, followed by Bangladesh (23%) and lastly, by Pakistan (22%).

Similar to learners' characteristics, India includes more teaching learning related elements (46%)



in their monitoring than that of the other countries. Pakistan includes 35% of teaching learning related elements in their monitoring while Bangladesh has 33%.

Pakistan focuses mostly on the system or governance

related elements amongst the three countries - 43%, followed by Bangladesh - 40%. This element is least focused in India (24%).

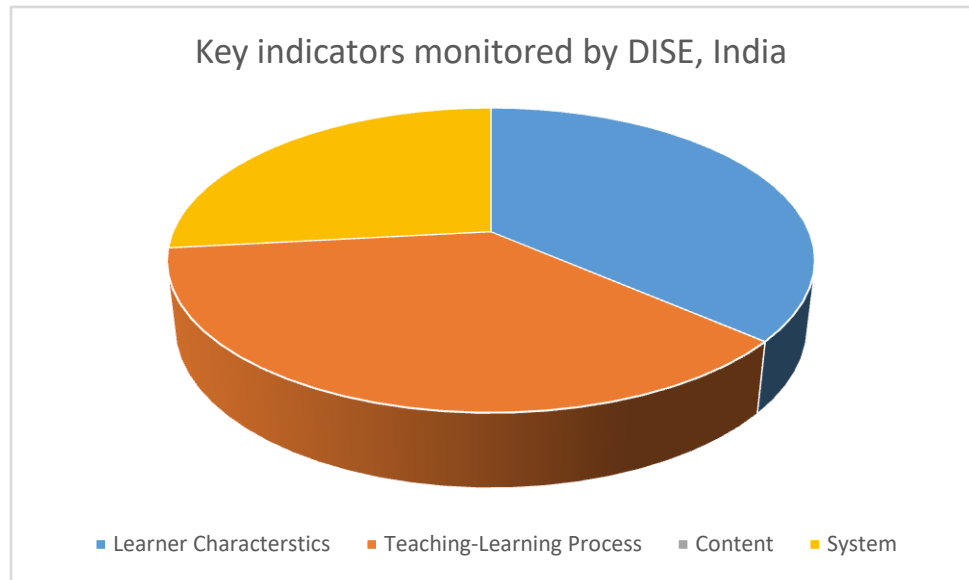


Only Bangladesh covers some elements related to content, though they are very few in number. About 4% of the elements monitored by the Directorate of Primary Education cover content-related items such as.

## **India**

To achieve the Universal Elementary Education (UEE) the Indian local and central government have taken several initiatives. For instance, Operation Blackboard, Non-formal Education, District Institute of Education and Training, Total Literacy Campaigns, National Programme for Nutritional Support (known as Mid-day Meal), Bihar Education Project, LokJumbishParishad, SikshaKarmi, Andra Pradesh Primary Education Project, Uttar Pradesh Basic Shiksha Project, Janshala, Minorities Welfare, MahilaSamakhya, District Primary Education Programme, SarvaShikshaAbhiyan, GyanKalash, Nali kali, Free books, Book Bank Scheme, Uniform to Girl Child, ShishuShiksha Scheme, Health Check-up, Education Guarantee Scheme, Alternative School Scheme, Head Start etc. In order to have community participation in education, Village Education Committee was formed and every village has a VECetc(Jain, 2012).To assess the progress of Elementary Education in India a District Information System for Education (DISE) has been established in 1995 (District Information System for Education, 2001).

DISE monitors about 88 key indicators throughout the primary education system all across the 200 districts (District Information System for Education, 2001). The indicators are categorized into 20 teacher related indicators, in addition to 30 school indicators,15 facilities indicators and23 enrolment based indicators (DISE, 2009-10). After analyzing those indicators,no indicator focused on curriculum or on any teaching learning content was found. Other indicators are, in a broader sense, equally distributed among three categories of quality education. About 20% of those indicators focuses on learners' characteristics, 41% of those on teaching-learning process and classroom facilities and the rest of the 30% indicators are about the system or governance (See appendix A for the list).



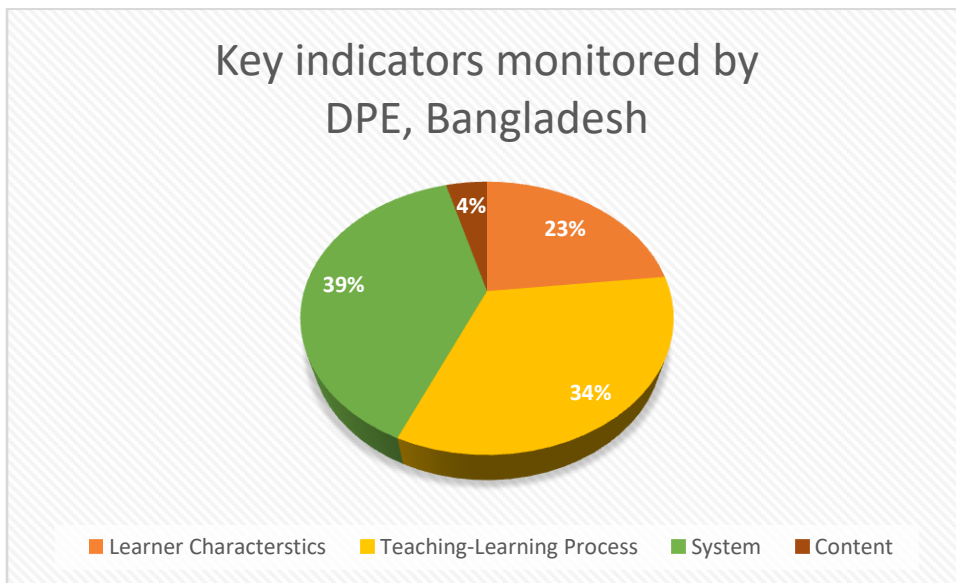
At a first sight of this analysis, it seems that a good range of quality indicators are focused on teaching and learning, however, a closer look reveals that the focus is merely on the physical classroom environment (i.e. student teacher ratio), teachers’ professional qualification etc. No indicator has found that deal with classroom pedagogy.

Similarly, very little amount of attention was given to learners’ motivation, health, ethical issues and school management. However, in India, students’ cognitive assessment is extensively done through public examinations. Nevertheless, the quality of those assessments is not reflected in the monitoring system.

### **Bangladesh**

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) of Bangladesh has a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) division, which is responsible for monitoring all schools activities throughout the country. To do so, the M&E division established Upazila (Sub-district) level education offices lead by the Upazila Education Officer (UEO). Under the supervision of the UEO there are several (around 5 on average) Assistant Upazila Education Officers (AUEOs), who are responsible for visiting 10 classes from 5 different schools in his/her cluster each month. They use a centrally provided observation checklist while visiting the schools.

By analyzing this checklist it was revealed that unlike DISE, India, DPE in Bangladesh monitors a few elements related to content (4%), for example, the use of lesson plans and additional materials etc. However, the quality of the lesson plans and the materials is not monitored by the checklist. This analysis also showed that only 23% of the elements focus on learners' characteristics, while the administrative issues which are considered as system related elements, are heavily focused upon. This amounts up to 39% of all elements monitored. Teaching learning processes are monitored by the rest of the 33% of the elements.



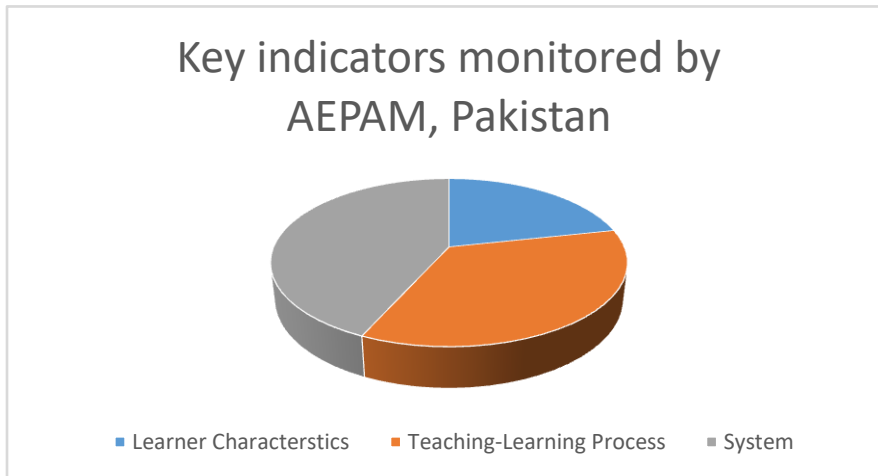
However, similar to Indian M&E system, the elements related to learners' characteristics monitored by DPE are limited within the 'availability of safe environment' including, pure drinking water, trees around the campus, classroom decoration by pupils etc. Nevertheless, students' cognitive achievements are monitored by only collecting Primary School Certificate (PSC) results. Similarly, the teaching learning process monitoring covers predominantly teacher student ratio, whether the teachers are following lesson plans, infrastructural facilities etc. Although some pedagogical elements such as, taking effective measure for weaker students, special care of special-needs students, creating opportunity for students' exercise are included. However, other important elements could have been included, for example, whether the teacher is engaging the students in classroom activities or students are participating in group work etc. Moreover, some of the elements are not clearly defined, for instance, the scope of student exercise.

## **Pakistan**

Data from schools in Pakistan are collected by two different bodies: through the Integrated Performance Monitoring System (IPMS), which was developed in 1996 under the Education Sector Institutional Reform Project (ESIRP)(Kayani et al.).Also, in July 2004, the Chief Minister of Punjab introduced a monitoring programme in four districts of Punjab for the improvement of primary education namely, Jhelum, Chakwal, Attock and Rawalpindi. Four monitoring evaluation assistants (MEAs) used to monitor the schools of the four respective districts. Since it was difficult for them to cover all the schools in the district, later in 2006, the Chief Minister of Punjab introduced a free monitoring programme for the implementation of education reforms and guidance. Its aim is to directly monitor the progress of schools and report it. Monitoring Evaluation Assistants' (MEAs') duty is to report but not to be accountable for the teachers. They check School Council and Faroghe-Taleem Funds, collect data about the School Council meetings held during last three months, District/Deputy District Education Officers' visits, classes, number of students in a class and the number of students present on the day of monitoring, free textbook sets provided to the students, cleanliness of the students, physical facilities in school, cleanliness of the building and lawns, playground, class environment etc.

In addition to the above measures, the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), established in 1982 under the Ministry of Education is responsible for capacity building of the educational planners and managers, consolidating and collating education statistics, maintaining a comprehensive national database, and conducting policy research to facilitate the preparation of educational policies(National Education Management Information System, 2011). Under this academy a National Educational Management Information System (NEMIS) was developed which is responsible for consolidating and collating data regarding education statistics, maintaining comprehensive national education database, setting standards for quality improvement of education data, and providing technical support to the provincial and district EMISs for enhancing their capacity to generate and maintain data about several different elements of education.

In addition to this, there are Divisional, Sub-Divisional Education officers and Learning Coordinators who basically supervise schools and teaching of teachers. However, for several political and bureaucratic issues, they have hardly any contribution in quality assurance (Ali, 1998).



Among the three system described above, NEMIS collects and analyzes data on extensive amount of quality and quantity related elements. Amongst the elements monitored by

NEMIS, 43% are related to governance or the system, 35% about teaching learning activities and 22% about learners' characteristics. There were no elements found related to content. NEMIS compared to the other two countries monitors less number of elements but repeats those elements for different districts.

## Conclusion

The definition of quality is evasive and it is difficult to come to an agreed formal definition for the concept within the field of education (Ankomah et al., 2005). Although, a number of studies have been done by different organizations and scholars on 'quality' yet, one person's idea of quality, often conflicts with another. However, this paper reviewed a wide range of literature and came up with four broad criteria to measure quality in education namely— learners' characteristics, process, content and system. The broad criteria were divided into relevant sub-criteria and then drawing upon the national reports on quality education of three different countries of the South Asian subcontinent, an analysis was conducted. Reports used in this article were obtained from the websites of the respective central government agencies of the above mentioned countries. For instance, data from the District Information System for Education (DISE) for India, Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) for Bangladesh, and the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM) and National Educational Management Information System (NEMIS) for Pakistan were used.

It was apparent that different countries have given different amount of M&E emphasis on different elements of 'quality' in education. However, there is a common pattern within them. All three countries focus mostly on the system related elements of quality education, which includes girl's enrolment, administrative issues etc. followed by teaching learning processes and learners' characteristics. Very little data related to content was found in the national annual reports of the three countries except Bangladesh (only 4%).

Although, it seems that there is a good amount of focus on the teaching learning processes, which is an important indicator of quality education, nevertheless, classroom pedagogy was under-emphasised. The same argument is applicable for the content element.

The findings from this desk research study suggest revisiting the monitoring indicators for all three countries in the primary sector is necessary to ensure quality education. What is being taught and how those are taught must be monitored by the central monitoring and evaluation authority, so that the time and money spent by the students and their parents for schooling is worth it.

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