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Research Article

Monitoring and Evaluation Practices: Implication to Education Policy Implementation in Gambella Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the practice of monitoring and evaluation in promoting effective policy implementation in the education sector of the Gambella Regional Sate. It also attempted to identify key challenges facing the current monitoring and evaluation system, and suggests ways to enhance the monitoring and evaluation system in education policy implementation in the region. Case study design was used to conduct the study. Primary data were collected through interview guides that targeted the bureau leader and experts in the Gambella region education bureau. Secondary data were collected through desk reviews. The results showed that the required monitoring, and evaluation framework, for effective monitoring, and evaluation are not in place. It was also found that the Gambella region education bureau has not fully established a system that can enhance a successful monitoring and evaluation system in the education sector of the region. The current staffs do not have adequate knowledge and skills, there is no proper monitoring, and evaluation coordination among stakeholders, and the bureau does not allocate adequate funds required for monitoring and evaluation activities. To undertake monitoring and evaluation, the Gambella bureau of education there needs a greater understanding of the value of monitoring and evaluation and there is a requirement for the bureau of education and the stakeholders to develop proper a legislative framework that considers the key performance indicator stetted in the education sector development program six for the effective implementation of monitoring and evaluation in the education sector for effective decision-making.

Keywords

Enhancing, Monitoring and Evaluation, Policy Implementation, Education Sector Gambella Regional State, Ethiopia

1. Introduction

The education sector plays a crucial role in societal development, necessitating effective policy implementation and monitoring. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) play a crucial role in gathering relevant data from past and ongoing pro-serving as a foundation for project refinement, reorientation, and future planning [9]. Without proper planning, monitoring, and evaluation, it becomes challenging to determine the progress and success of work and identify areas for improvement [31].

Globally, the focus on tracking a nation's progress towards development goals has led to the establishment of results-oriented M&E systems and frameworks. The adoption

and utilization of monitoring and evaluation in both public and private sectors have influenced the development of M&E practices [3]. Initiatives such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, and Country Assistance Strategies have emphasized the importance of results (World Bank, 2003c). Given the prevalence of poverty in many African countries, the development and maintenance of credible M&E systems are crucial for policy formulation, budgeting, and good governance [3].

The evolution of M&E systems is not a one-dimensional process but rather a dynamic one, with varying responses to different contexts, societies, cultures, and countries worldwide [28]. The significance of M&E in theory and development has grown significantly over time, as it is increasingly recognized as a platform for accountability and learning in various sectors [11]. The importance of M&E is closely tied to the desire for good governance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability in development [5, 10, 13, 21]. Consequently, the evolution of M&E systems should be seen as a dynamic process that responds to changing needs in different country contexts, rather than a linear progression.

Monitoring and evaluation within the education sector, like other development sectors, has undergone several stages of evolution. It has transitioned from broad input-output monitoring to project-based monitoring systems tailored to donor agencies, and now emphasizes the provision of timely and reliable data on evidence-based indicators of progress at various levels of implementation, including local schools and communities [30]. As development concerns and the understanding of good development practice have evolved, the focus of monitoring, measurement, and evaluation has also shifted.

Monitoring and evaluation have become increasingly important in gauging the quality of education and ensuring its improvement. M&E systems assist in the development, implementation, evaluation, and enhancement of educational projects, policies, and programs [1]. By systematically measuring activities and outcomes, M&E plays a critical role in assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning programs and their ability to achieve goals and meet the needs of the target audience [8]. The level of M&E involvement in an organization significantly influences the success of educational reforms, initiatives, or activities, as M&E directly impacts the quality of services provided. Therefore, designing an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the achievement of educational objectives, including baseline data and performance indicators, is vital [7].

Several studies have documented factors that determine the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation. These factors include staff's understanding of M&E, stakeholder knowledge and understanding, planning field visits, budgeting and resource allocation, team comprehension of monitoring and evaluation types, and communication of monitoring and evaluation results. Additionally, the methods used,

M&E structure, availability of human resources, data quality, and the overall structure of the M&E system impacts its effectiveness [25]. Other factors influencing M&E effectiveness include budget allocation, M&E training levels, stakeholder participation, technical capacity/expertise of staff, choice of tools and techniques, management's role, and political influence [27].

However, many previous studies have focused on specific projects, and there remains limited research on the overall effectiveness of educational monitoring and evaluation in developing countries. Examining the effectiveness of educational monitoring and evaluation in achieving overall educational objectives remains a global concern. In the context of the Gambella Regional State Ethiopia, there is a lack of studies on educational monitoring and evaluation to inform policy-making in the education sector. Therefore, this study explores the practice of monitoring and evaluation in promoting policy implementation within the education sector of Gambella Regional State. The research identifies existing challenges, proposes recommendations, and emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive legislative framework aligned with key performance indicators outlined in the Education Sector Development Program VI.

2. Towards Conceptual Framework

2.1. Formation of the Legal Framework

M&E is turning into a dependable instrument in ensuring that the right data is gathered to enable evidence-based decision-making and implementation processes in the establishment of effective policy development in education. According to [20], evidence-based data help to create a more efficient approach that can help accomplish the intended objectives in the process of implementing educational activities.

The education sector needs to make sure that it starts with the establishment of an efficient M&E framework that can collect the desired data, as monitoring and evaluation become more important in the gathering of the required data for policymaking and decision-making processes. All development stakeholders are now taking into account the incorporation of M&E policies for efficient monitoring of educational activity [19]. Stakeholders generally agree that education activity monitoring should be evidence-based and should be supported by thorough, timely, relevant, and trustworthy data.

The development of a trustworthy M&E framework that can guarantee the accomplishment of the needed objective is necessary before M&E in education policy can be effectively implemented. A precise legal and implementation framework is built when creating an effective M&E. The creation of a logical framework with indicators of education in the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to combine indications of all the targeted objectives in response to bathe line data is one of the key steps toward an effective M&E

framework [17]. To this end, the education sector needs to inculcate a culture of results-based management in its policy implementation. This ensures that M&E systems are established to yield timely and more frequent reporting on results and that evaluations are conducted that can inform policies and programs in the education sectors. The bureau uses interim results to modify interventions to increase their chances of success, thus demonstrating that the sector is a true learning organism.

2.2. Technical Capacity and Knowledge of the Staff

Monitoring and evaluation is a technical activity and therefore the technical capacities of an M&E unit and its staff/team are important as these underpin the effective implementation of M&E [26]. Technical expertise is a special kind of practical knowledge that the project team possesses, whereas training is a structured activity that helps people learn new abilities, attitudes, and approaches to dealing with developmental issues. M&E practices cannot function effectively without the presence of skilled people who successfully execute the M&E tasks for which they are responsible [16].

It is, therefore, necessary to have officials or consultants who are highly skilled in M&E to ensure the effective practice of M&E. Understanding the skills required and the capacity of people involved in the M&E practices including addressing capacity gaps through structured capacity development programs is the heart of the M&E system [6]. Therefore, a monitoring and evaluation system's staff, who play a key role in the system, must possess an in-depth understanding of the procedures for monitor and evaluating projects and programs to function at the levels anticipated. Additionally, the employees must keep informed of developments in the field. This can be accomplished by evaluators joining organizations for professionals where they can network with other experts in the industry.

2.3. Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholders are groups of people or organizations that will influence or be influenced by the project [24]. Participation from all people concerned is crucial for monitoring and evaluation because it fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment to executing different programs in companies. This is something to keep in mind when creating a document for monitoring and evaluation. Stakeholder participation is viewed as a strategy for empowering participants in the program and making them feel like a part of the program [2].

As a result, the project managers, government, donors, monitoring and evaluation experts, and beneficiaries may become less cooperative or even engage in conflict. This is accepted by [29]. which claims that one of the primary reasons programs fail is a lack of stakeholder engagement.

Therefore, every effort should be taken to encourage widespread and engaged participation of stakeholders in the processes of planning, monitoring, and assessment.

2.4. M&E Budgetary Allocation

Allocating adequate financial resources for M&E during budgeting is imperative to achieve the effectiveness of M&E [15]. The successful implementation of M&E is firmly rooted in the provision of adequate financial resources (Bonareri,) [4]. The budget for the project or program should provide forth clear and sufficient guidelines for monitoring and evaluation procedures. To give the monitoring and evaluation function the proper prominence it deserves in project management, a monitoring and evaluation budget can be explicitly specified within the overall project or program budget [12]. Several authors support a monitoring and evaluation budget that amounts to between 5 and 10 percent of the overall budget. By allocating a budget for monitoring and evaluation, it is ensured that these tasks are completed by the due date. Additionally, it makes sure that monitoring and assessment are not viewed as ancillary tasks. To guarantee that budgeting is done correctly and efficiently, the need for periodic auditing (internal/external) of the M&E budget will ensure budget allocations are sustained and rightly so, influence the M&E of projects effectively.

2.5. Utilization of M&E Results

M&E implementation satisfies the sector of education's desire for successful policy implementation. Utilization of M&E data can assist stakeholders and the education sectors in understanding the program's performance, the degree to which it is accomplishing its goals, and whether there are any areas where advancement might be improved. Results can be used to help assure social, financial, and political support for education projects so they can build or strengthen their network with people and groups with similar objectives [14].

Effective use of M&E results through stakeholder sharing also aids in emphasizing education policy strengths and accomplishments, advancing program administration and planning, identifying weaknesses of education program implementation, assessing the need for policy adjustment or expansion, improving the quality of education delivery, identifying future research needs, and strengthening funding applications for the education programs [22, 23]. Therefore, a smart approach to reporting and data sharing for the project implementation process should be part of the monitoring and evaluation of the procedures and should focus on enhancing the policy implementation process's communication, feedback, and reporting processes.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to investigate the practice of monitoring and evaluation in education policy implementation. Qualitative research was chosen as it allows for a comprehensive exploration of complex questions that cannot be adequately addressed through quantitative methods [32]. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its real-life context.

The study focused on the Gambella Education Bureau as the case under examination, utilizing an instrumental case study design. This approach involved a detailed evaluation of a single case to enhance understanding of the subject matter. Participants for the study were purposefully selected using a sampling technique to ensure their knowledge and familiarity with monitoring and evaluation in the education sector of the Gambella Education Bureau. The sample consisted of eight respondents, including one deputy bureau head, five directorates, one plan officer, and one education in emergency representative.

Data collection involved individual key informant interviews and document analysis. An interview guide questionnaire, developed based on the conceptual framework, was used for the interviews, which were conducted face-to-face in English and Amharic languages with participants' consent obtained for audio recording. On average, each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Additionally, relevant documents such as the Education Sector Development Program VI plan, ten-year strategic plans, statistical abstracts, and annual reports on the education sector were analyzed.

Data analysis commenced after data collection, involving a thorough review and comprehension of the interview transcripts and documents. The researcher focused on identifying important ideas, themes, patterns, and trends in the data. Field notes were taken, and selective transcription was employed to exclude extraneous information [18]. The data from the interviews and document analysis were manually analyzed to derive meaningful interpretations and summaries. The analysis included organizing and grouping similar themes, patterns, and trends identified across participants' descriptions. Major themes were predetermined and utilized to structure the data analysis process. The researchers ensured a clear presentation of the study findings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding by summarizing and presenting the data in a meaningful manner.

4. Results and Discussions

The presentation and analysis of the collected data were categorized into pre-determined themes, which served as a framework for classifying the results. Welman et al. (2005), as cited in [24], proposed these themes to encompass various aspects of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices in the education sector. These themes include M&E practice, technical capacity and knowledge of the staff, stakeholder par-

ticipation, budgetary allocation for M&E, readiness and utilization of M&E results, and challenges in M&E implementation.

4.1. The Presence of M&E Legal Framework

The presence of a legal framework for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is crucial for guiding the monitoring and evaluation process in the education sector. A well-designed framework provides a clear understanding of program goals and objectives, defines the relationships between key factors, and identifies the internal and external elements that may impact program success. During the study, respondents were asked to describe the M&E framework used in the Gambella region for measuring policy implementation in the education sector. One respondent, R1, emphasized the importance of applying an M&E framework in monitoring and evaluating educational objectives but noted a lack of awareness regarding its significance. Another respondent mentioned the use of checklists as a tool, with different checklists being employed based on the specific needs of the local community, such as during times of disaster or emergency. This suggests that the region did not have an effective and standardized M&E framework for measuring policy implementation in education.

Furthermore, respondent R5 acknowledged that while there is a plan to follow up on teaching and learning progress in the education sector, the bureau lacks a permanent legal framework. Instead, checklists are prepared by the planning department and approved by the bureau management, indicating a lack of a comprehensive and formal M&E framework.

The study also revealed that the data collection process in the Gambella education sector relies on the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is carried out by education offices directly at the school level once a year. However, the manual method used by the Gambella education bureau is deemed inadequate for reporting purposes as it hinders the accumulation of reliable and timely data. This highlights that, the M&E system in the Gambella education sector lacks an effective and standardized framework for evaluating policy implementation.

4.2. Technical Capacity and Knowledge of the Staff

Insufficient technical capacity, knowledge, skills, and competencies in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) present significant constraints that hinder its effective application in various sectors, including education. This study aimed to assess the level of staff training in M&E implementation and their overall understanding of the M&E system within the education sector. The participants provided the following perspectives: Respondent 5 highlighted the diverse educational backgrounds and differences among staff members, which influence the application of their skills and knowledge in the M&E program. While some staff members possess

adequate knowledge to utilize policy programs as implementation guides, the majority struggle to fulfill their assigned tasks. Individual differences further contribute to the disparity in staff capabilities. Thus, the technical capacity, knowledge, skills, and competencies of staff members in the education sector do not meet the required standards.

Respondent 3 emphasized that the staff in each department lacks sufficient knowledge, skills, and capabilities, and there is a lack of commitment to implement M&E within the education sector. Additionally, accountability issues were identified as a significant problem, along with inappropriate staff assignments driven by political factors. The organizational culture was also highlighted as more human-oriented than work-oriented.

Respondent 1 expressed a mixed perception, stating that at the bureau level, there is a belief that the staff has some level of knowledge, while at the local level (zonally and woreda), the staff lacks the required technical capacity and proficiency. This indicates a need for further capacity building as structures for M&E implementation are established.

Respondent 6 mentioned that there is a capacity gap among office workers, with some experiencing difficulty in explaining information-gathering forms to other entities. Moreover, capacity training is often sporadic, resulting in trained staff being replaced by new personnel. This highlights the need for ongoing capacity building efforts.

The secondary data sources consulted also indicated a lack of appropriate technical capacity and proficiency among the staff members. Effective implementation of M&E in the education sector necessitates not only having an adequate number of staff members in the M&E unit but also ensuring that they possess the necessary technical know-how and experience in M&E. The study revealed that the education bureau does not have dedicated staff members solely focused on monitoring activities. To ensure effective M&E implementation, staff members need to possess skills in data collection, analysis, and reporting to accurately represent project or program performance. Therefore, additional capacity building is necessary as structures for M&E implementation are established.

4.3. Level of Awareness and Participation of Various Actors

The study aimed to assess the level of awareness and involvement of different stakeholders in the education sector regarding the utilization of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the existing awareness campaign activities tailored to the region. Effective M&E coordination among all stakeholders in the education sector is crucial for its application in policy implementation.

Respondent 5 noted that the coordination program in the Gambella education bureau is weak, with stakeholders lacking equal participation in the coordination process. While some stakeholders occasionally participate in specific pro-

grams to collaborate on their tasks, the majority do not have a common coordination program. This lack of coordination is problematic as education tasks often require teamwork and collective efforts.

Respondent 3 highlighted the weak coordination among all stakeholders in the education sector, both within the department and among the stakeholders. The lack of effective coordination can be attributed to inadequate leadership capacity and a limited understanding of the importance of M&E. additionally, the assignment of leadership positions is not based on merit, and there is a high turnover of leadership at all levels within the education sector.

Respondent 6 emphasized that the Gambella regional education bureau has loose coordination in conducting joint monitoring and evaluation tasks due to a significant budget shortage. Consequently, it is challenging to ensure proper joint follow-up on monitoring and evaluation activities at the circuit level. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge regarding participatory approaches to M&E across all departments.

The findings from document analysis also revealed that planning work is often prepared without the involvement of various stakeholders at all levels. This indicates weak participation of stakeholders within the department and among other relevant parties in the education sector. To this end, the study underscores the weak level of awareness and participation of various actors in the education sector regarding the use of M&E. Insufficient coordination among stakeholders hinders the effective application of M&E in policy implementation. The lack of leadership capacity, limited understanding of the importance of M&E and high turnover of leadership further contribute to the coordination challenges. Additionally, the shortage of budget allocation poses obstacles to conducting joint monitoring and evaluation tasks.

4.4. The Trends of Financial Allocation for M&E

The provision of a budget for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is essential to ensure the timely and effective implementation of M&E activities in measuring education policy implementation. When asked about financial allocation practices for the M&E system, respondents highlighted the lack of proper financial allocation for M&E within the Gambella education bureau.

Respondent 2 emphasized that there are often delays in conducting M&E activities due to various issues, with budgetary constraints being a major factor. The bureau plans to monitor the performance of woredas (districts) and assess their educational activities on a monthly basis, which requires a budget. However, due to budget limitations, the bureau faces challenges in carrying out these activities. Even if there is a budget, insufficient resources such as vehicles and fuel further hinder the monitoring efforts at the local level.

Respondent 4 added that while M&E is acknowledged as crucial for identifying challenges, opportunities, weaknesses, strengths, and overall performance, it has not received adequate attention and proper financial allocation.

Respondent 5 highlighted that financial resources play a vital role in the functioning of an organization, including the education bureau. However, in the case of the Gambella education bureau, the financial resources are insufficient to support the entire planned education program, including M&E activities.

Respondent 6 pointed out significant problems with the budget allocation for M&E in the Gambella region. The lack of understanding and attention from leaders, as well as inadequate understanding of M&E at the top leadership level, contribute to the limited financial resources allocated for monitoring and evaluation.

The findings clearly indicate that the education bureau does not allocate sufficient funds for M&E activities. It is crucial for the M&E budget to be clearly defined within the comprehensive budget of the education sector to enhance the functioning of the M&E system. In this regards, the trends of financial allocation for M&E in the Gambella education bureau are characterized by inadequate budgetary provisions. Insufficient financial resources pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of M&E activities. Addressing this issue requires a greater understanding of the importance of M&E among leaders and the inclusion of appropriate budgetary allocations for M&E within the education sector's overall budgeting process.

4.5. Readiness and Utilization of M&E Results

The study examines the readiness and preparedness of the Gambella education bureau and its staff in utilizing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) results.

Respondent 5 stated that M&E is included in the annual plan of the bureau, allowing for M&E activities to be conducted on a quarterly basis, four times a year. However, the utilization of M&E findings is not uniform across departments and woredas (districts), indicating variations in the utilization of M&E results.

Respondent 7 expressed doubts about the utilization of M&E results in the region. While donors may support the education bureau in conducting M&E activities at the woreda level, there seems to be a lack of significant change resulting from these efforts. The absence of clear agreements and action points between local-level education personnel and higher-level experts hinders the effective utilization of M&E results. Secondary data also revealed that the Gambella education bureau faces challenges in utilizing M&E results due to limited resources and an unstable administrative structure, particularly at the woreda and school levels.

Monitoring and evaluation provide opportunities for organizations to learn from previous experiences, make informed decisions, and improve future program performance

and accountability. However, the findings indicate that M&E has not significantly contributed to better decision-making or improved performance and accountability within the education sector in Gambella. Therefore, the readiness and utilization of M&E results in the Gambella education bureau appear to be limited. While M&E activities are included in the annual plan and conducted quarterly, there is variation in the utilization of M&E findings across departments and woredas. The lack of significant change resulting from M&E efforts and the absence of clear agreements between different levels of personnel hinder the effective utilization of M&E results. Additionally, limited resources and an unstable administrative structure further impede the utilization of M&E results in the education sector. Efforts should be made to address these challenges and enhance the utilization of M&E findings to improve decision-making, performance, and accountability in education.

4.6. The Challenges of M&E for Policies Implementation in the Education Sector

The researcher wanted to know the challenges that the current M&E practice in the bureau of education of Gambella region faced regarding monitoring, and evaluating education sector performance. In their responses, various participants had the following views:

Respondent R1's sentiments were: Lack of relevant policies and regulations; poor accountability and culture of eroded commitment; low capacity among the civil servants; overall instability of the leadership at all levels of education sectors. (R1)

Respondent R3: There is the absence of commitment from top leadership, poor coordination among the staff, focus on routine issues rather than strategic ones, lack of understanding of the unique nature of education organization, and assignment of appropriate manpower. (R3)

Similar sentiments were uttered by respondent R4, who said, "Budget limitation and lack of logistics, the absence of M&E structure at woreda level, poor coordination among the staff, high turnover of the qualified staff, and low knowledge of the staff on M&E concepts." Other challenges from these respondents included; a lack of qualified personnel; little budget allocation; improper training and lack of autonomy. (R4)

The researcher sought measures that could be taken to address the challenges cited by the respondents and they had this to say, "The department needs more funding and staff. Staff needs more training to carry out their jobs more effectively. Support has to come both from the senior management and education donors". (R7)

Respondent R2 said, ", train the staff on the use of the M&E System, capacitate the M&E Section including human resource capacity, workspace, and equipment, harmonize the existing ESDP VI in the regional plan and to develop a regular, follow up plan to achieve their goals and objectives for

proper implementation of M&E.(R2). Addressing these challenges will contribute to the improvement of M&E for policy implementation in the education sector.

Discussion

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practice in the education sector of the Gambella region. It examines various aspects such as the presence of an effective M&E framework, the technical capacity and knowledge of staff, stakeholder participation, financial allocation, utilization of M&E results, and challenges in implementation.

In terms of the M&E framework, the study reveals that a well-designed framework is lacking in the education bureau. M&E is primarily conducted through checklists and the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which are limited in their ability to provide a holistic and comprehensive evaluation. The paper highlights the importance of having a clear M&E framework that defines the objectives, indicators, and methodologies of the M&E system.

Regarding the technical capacity and knowledge of staff, the findings indicate that there is a lack of proficiency among the staff members. The education bureau lacks dedicated personnel for monitoring activities, and there is a need for capacity development programs to enhance the technical skills of the staff. The study emphasizes the significance of skilled individuals in executing M&E tasks effectively.

Stakeholder participation is identified as another area of weakness within the education sector. The involvement of stakeholders at all levels is crucial for successful M&E. The paper emphasizes the need to engage stakeholders and share M&E responsibilities to meet their expectations and ensure the effectiveness of the M&E process.

Financial allocation for M&E activities is found to be inadequate. The study suggests that a clearly defined M&E budget within the education sector's overall budget is essential to strengthen the M&E function. Sufficient funding is necessary to support data collection, analysis, and reporting processes effectively.

The utilization of M&E results is identified as a significant challenge. The paper reveals that M&E has not contributed to informed decision-making and improved performance in the education sector. It emphasizes the importance of utilizing M&E reports to drive better decision-making processes and foster a culture of accountability and learning.

In terms of challenges in implementation, several key issues are highlighted. These include the absence of commitment from both leadership and staff, a weak culture of accountability, inadequate coordination among staff and stakeholders, a focus on routine issues rather than strategic ones, limited understanding of the unique nature of education organizations, budget limitations, and high turnover of qualified staff. The study underscores the need to address these challenges to ensure effective implementation of the M&E system in the education sector.

To enhance the M&E practice in the Gambella region's education sector, the paper suggests several recommendations. These include the development of a robust M&E framework, capacity development programs for staff, increased stakeholder participation, adequate financial allocation, improved utilization of M&E results, and addressing the challenges through measures such as fostering commitment, strengthening accountability, promoting coordination, and reducing staff turnover.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study highlights that the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices in the Gambella education bureau are not as effective as outlined in the regional education sector development plan. The absence of a proper M&E framework is a significant limitation, as it provides guidance on how the program should operate and achieve desired results. The current data collection process lacks adequacy, relevance, and timeliness, resulting in a lack of necessary data for planning, management, and decision-making. The education bureau also faces challenges in staffing, with a lack of dedicated personnel for monitoring activities. M&E capacity development programs are necessary to enhance the technical skills of staff members.

Stakeholder participation at all levels is weak, which undermines the potential contributions of various stakeholders in the education sector. Financial allocation for M&E activities is insufficient, indicating a lack of understanding of the significance of M&E from the leadership side. Clear budgetary provisions for M&E within the education sector's budget are crucial to strengthen the M&E function.

The study identifies multiple challenges in the implementation of M&E policies, including a lack of commitment from both leadership and staff, a weak culture of accountability, inadequate coordination among staff and stakeholders, a focus on routine issues rather than strategic ones, limited understanding of the unique nature of education organizations, budget limitations, and a high turnover of qualified staff. These challenges need to be addressed to ensure effective implementation of the M&E system.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve the M&E practices in the education sector of the Gambella region. Firstly, there is a need to develop a comprehensive M&E framework that aligns with the key performance indicators outlined in the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP). This framework should clearly define the components of the M&E system and the steps required to achieve desired results.

Secondly, capacity development programs should be implemented to provide staff members with the necessary technical skills for effective M&E implementation. Special attention should be given to training personnel dedicated to monitoring activities.

Thirdly, stakeholder participation should be enhanced through the establishment of a coordinated approach. Engaging stakeholders at all levels will ensure their contributions are considered and valued.

Fourthly, financial allocation for M&E activities should be prioritized. The education bureau should define a specific budget for M&E within the overall education sector budget to support data collection, analysis, and reporting processes effectively.

Lastly, the identified challenges in M&E implementation, such as commitment issues, weak accountability culture, coordination gaps, and high staff turnover, need to be addressed. This can be achieved through measures such as fostering commitment from leadership and staff, strengthening accountability mechanisms, promoting coordination among staff and stakeholders, and providing adequate support and incentives to retain qualified personnel.

Future Research Implications:

The study suggests future research directions for a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of an effective M&E system in promoting policy implementation in the education sector of the Gambella region. Subsequent studies could employ quantitative methodologies to calculate the effects of each identified determinant using statistical techniques. This would provide more robust evidence on the factors influencing the success of M&E and policy implementation.

Abbreviations

EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Author Contributions

Chala Ayele: Formal Analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing

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Mebratu Tafasse: Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing - review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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