



The Challenges in Monitoring and Evaluation System of Iranian Universities: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Higher education constitutes the system of producing, transferring, and applying knowledge in every country, and establishing the necessary mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation enhances its efficiency and effectiveness. Despite the efforts made, there is still no appropriate national structure for monitoring and evaluating the higher education system in Iran.

The present study aims to systematically identify and analyze the challenges and problems of monitoring and evaluation in Iran's public non-medical universities during the years 2011 to 2023. The research method was a systematic review, and data were collected from seven reputable databases. After screening and final selection, 33 relevant studies were subjected to content analysis. In the first stage, 221 open codes were extracted from the selected texts, which were then organized into 26 axial codes and finally consolidated into eight main categories.

The findings indicated that the most important challenges include: lack of standardization and benchmarking, inefficiency in implementation and use of results, challenges in human resources, weaknesses in policymaking and strategic direction, limited information infrastructures, shortcomings in macro-structural design, insufficient culture-building and stakeholder engagement, and organizational fragmentation. Among these, the two most frequent were "lack of coherence in evaluation frameworks and processes" and "underutilization of evaluation results."

The novelty of this study lies in the fact that, for the first time, it systematically synthesizes over a decade of domestic research in this area and, through qualitative content analysis, provides a comprehensive and structured picture of the persistent challenges of monitoring and evaluation in Iran's higher education system. Based on these results, updating evaluation policies, investing in human resources, and developing professional institutions can serve as a basis for reform and transformation in this domain.

Keywords: Iran, Monitoring and Evaluation, Higher Education, Universities.



Introduction

The higher education system, as one of the fundamental pillars of cultural, social, political, and economic development in any country, plays a vital role in the production, dissemination, and application of knowledge, training of skilled human resources, and enhancement of a nation's scientific standing. A developed higher education system is of value both as an industry and as a source of trained and educated citizens required for boosting the nation's economy (Cao & et al. 2023). In this context, monitoring and evaluation are recognized as key instruments for ensuring quality and improving the performance of higher education systems. The efficacy of higher education programs relies mainly on monitoring and evaluation practices (Aziz, Mehmood, & Hina, 2021). Various institutions are globally responsible for assessing universities and higher education institutions, and multiple models have been designed and implemented for monitoring and evaluation.

According to Bazargan and Ferasatkah (2017), supervision and evaluation in higher education focus on four main elements: "input," "process," "output," and "outcome," aiming to enhance efficiency and align higher education with predetermined goals. Comparative studies demonstrate that successful universities adopt a university life-cycle system, including planning and development, implementation, maintenance, evaluation, quality assurance, and accreditation. Parvin and Rigi (2023) also show that evaluation is one of the most powerful tools for strategic development in higher education environments. However, Rashidi (2018) argues that supervision and evaluation in Iran's higher education system are perceived as merely ceremonial and ineffective activities. In recent years, Iran's higher education supervision and evaluation system has faced multiple challenges, including the absence of an independent and specialized supervisory body, fragmentation and inconsistency in implementing evaluation policies, excessive focus on quantitative rather than qualitative indicators, weak implementation of modern information and statistical technologies, and lack of transparency in presenting evaluation results. These issues potentially hinder the system's efficiency.

Given the significance of the subject, numerous domestic studies have examined the performance of Iran's higher education supervision and evaluation system. A systematic and comprehensive review of these studies can provide a holistic understanding of the current situation and pave the way for designing a more efficient system.

Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to identify the challenges of the monitoring and evaluation system in Iranian higher education institutions and universities. As a secondary goal, the study categorized these challenges and provided a comprehensive overview of the findings from the reviewed studies.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted using a systematic review approach, covering the period after the establishment of the Higher Education Supervision and Evaluation Center as a national body for continuous evaluation in 2011. Researchers' findings on the challenges and problems of supervision and evaluation in Iranian public and non-medical universities from 2011 to 2023 were extracted, compiled, and synthesized. Data collection involved searching seven reputable databases, identifying 756 relevant articles and sources. After screening based on defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 33 final studies were selected for analysis.



Findings

The results indicate that numerous studies have been conducted on Iran's higher education monitoring and evaluation system. Data analysis reveals that this system faces multiple challenges. The challenges of the higher education monitoring and evaluation system in Iran, ranked by frequency, are as follows:

1. Weaknesses in standards, indicators, and accreditation
2. Inefficiency in process implementation and utilization of results
3. Human resource issues and lack of specialized skills
4. Weaknesses in policymaking, strategy, and authority
5. Insufficient informational and support infrastructures
6. Deficiencies in the overall structural design of the monitoring and evaluation system
7. Weaknesses in fostering evaluation culture and stakeholder participation
8. Lack of coordination and weak organizational communication.

Conclusion

The results of this systematic review demonstrate that the challenges facing the higher education monitoring and evaluation system extend beyond administrative and technical dimensions. Several of these challenges are rooted in macro-level structures, organizational culture, and the lack of contextually grounded conceptual frameworks. Furthermore, the substantial alignment with prior research underscores the enduring nature of these problems, which have remained persistent for more than a decade.

Recommendations

The revision of monitoring and evaluation policies, coupled with investments in human capital and the institutionalization of professional bodies, can provide a critical foundation for transformative change in this domain.

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