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Impact of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices on Project Performance

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Abstract

Globally growing competition demands the organizations based on social development to stay head in their performance by meeting deadlines of their projects. However, performance of theses project is found weak in the developing countries like Pakistan. This study investigated the impact of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Technical Capacity and M&E Stakeholder Participation on Project Performance using a structural equation model guided by a conceptual framework to provide the solution to the organization to improve the level of project performance. 215 respondents shared the data. The data was run on SPSS and analysis was made on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through AMOS software. The results show that both M&E Technical Capacity and M&E Stakeholder Participation significantly have positive impact on Project Performance.

Key words: M&E Technical Capacity, M&E Stakeholder Participation Project Performance

Introduction

In today's globalized world, organizations feel pressure from stakeholders to keep getting abreast for managing projects and to stay competitive internationally (Wu et al., 2021). The success of social development projects is crucial for them for addressing socio-economic and cultural challenges. These social development projects are the key to addressing various social, economic, and cultural issues by providing essential goods and services (Amin et al., 2023). Initiatives as social development projects lead the way in encouraging community involvement (Picciotto, 2020). These projects come in different sizes, ranging from small to big, and can be carried out by either a government agency or a private organization. (Volden & Welde, 2022).

Further, these projects involve many different people and groups, like organizations giving money, the government, groups doing the work, community organizations, and the people who benefit from the projects (Amin et al., 2023). The stakeholders involved in the projects, like donors, government, and others, give important ideas that help the projects succeed (Parker et al., 2018). The project success is conceived as finishing on time, staying within budget, making users happy, and reaching the goals (Pereira et al., 2022). According to Korhonen et al., (2023) the project success depends on meeting its deadlines, staying within budget, and achieving its goals. Likewise Zwikael & Huemann, (2023) reveal that a project's impact depends on meeting the needs of the people it's meant to help and following what the community wants and needs.

Likewise, the sustainable Development Goals have become center of attraction in social sector development which requires a shift in the attitude, values and the culture to impact on society and environment (Hariram et al., 2023). However, figuring out through literature review about what makes projects successful is still an area that researchers need to explore more about (Picciotto, 2020) especially in developing countries. Social development projects face significant challenges, with a high failure rate and only 36% achieving their intended results (Sabet & Khaksar, 2024). Measuring impact is difficult, and performance is often questioned (Golini & Landoni, 2014). Institutional problems, weak risk analysis, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, ineffective stakeholder management, and implementation delays contribute to project failure (Ika & Donnelly, 2017; Korhonen et al., 2023) and lots of projects, especially in developing countries, are not projected as stakeholders expect, so they do not achieve what they were supposed to do (Eja & Ramegowda, 2020).

In addition, despite the stakeholders, donors, and government’s effort to investigate the reasons, they are not sure about the proper solutions in developing countries. According to Joseph et al. (2023) the projects fail worldwide when operations and planning aren't managed properly and several other issues including managing stakeholders, problems of delays in starting or carrying out the project, over budgeting, and several other administrative problems (Afroze & Khan, 2017). Many donor-funded projects have failed to make a significant impact on the intended beneficiaries. The tight budgets, insufficient policy guidelines, a shortage of skilled personnel, and inadequate knowledge of M&E tools among project staff lead to ineffective monitoring and evaluation (Mwangi & Mbugua, 2023). The literature highlights three categories

of challenges faced by social sector projects that have a drastic influence on project process and impact: contextual, institutional, and management challenges (Ahsan & Kumar Paul, 2018). Contextual issues are related to host country problems such as political situation, socio-cultural issues, demographic and environmental aspects (Ika & Donnelly, 2017). Institutional issues include project governance, corruption, insufficient support in project delivery, insufficient implementation capacity between donor and recipients, and incompatibility between host country and donor management system (Youker, 2003). Organizational challenges include improper project management (Ika, 2015), imperfect project design, unclear project objectives (Ika & Hodgson, 2014), and project delays (Ahsan & Kumar Paul, 2018).

Similarly, social development projects in Pakistan often fail to achieve sustained impact due to inadequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices, poor stakeholder engagement, and a lack of technical capacity. While effective M&E is critical for enhancing project performance, its implementation is hindered by resource constraints and institutional challenges. This undermines the ability of projects to deliver sustainable outcomes, address community needs, and contribute to national development goals. Addressing these gaps is essential for improving the efficacy and longevity of social development initiatives in the country.

Therefore, effective monitoring and evaluation should be prioritized as a decision-making tool to enhance project performance, rather than merely fulfilling donor requirements, and is a crucial aspect of development projects (Joseph et al., 2023; Picciotto, 2020). The literature on monitoring and evaluating development projects posits that effective monitoring and evaluating development projects can help fix problems, and guide how the organizations work, and show that projects are being done responsibly (Mwangi & Mbugua, 2023). Therefore, most of the donor agencies demand for monitoring and evaluation to report how well a project is doing. (Korhonen et al., 2023). Project evaluation tries to figure out why the goals are not reached, and looks at how the project activities help or give advice for making decisions in the future. (Umugwaneza & Kule, 2016) while project monitoring is all about regularly collecting data on specific things related to the project, done by the project team themselves. (Amin et al., 2023).

As a result, many organizations still view M&E as a tool for donors rather than for management to track progress, and identify and fix problems during project planning and implementation (Armstrong & Baron, 2013; Zhang et al., 2022). The Technical Monitoring

Management System (TMMS) plays a crucial role in shaping project performance by serving as a tool for organizing project data (Beynon Davies et al., 2008). Anita & Wairimu (2023) suggest monitoring and evaluation practices can be examined as two distinct components: M&E planning and stakeholder participation. Similarly, studies of Joseph et al., (2023) and Mutai & Musembi, (2024) have highlighted two key components of effective monitoring and evaluation systems: M&E planning and M&E technical capacity. The study of Okafor (2021) claims that M&E practices consists of M&E skills, and M&E MIS (i.e. technical monitoring management system).

Based on the above discussion this study heeds the call of Picciotto's (2020) to investigate the utilization of project evaluation in addressing contemporary issues and aims to examine how Monitoring and Evaluation Practices M&E as Technical Capacity and M&E Stakeholder participation affect the performance of social development projects, in the light of developing countries like Pakistan

Literature Review

The literature review provides a strong theoretical foundation and a clear roadmap for the research that follows M&E Technical Capacity & M&E Stakeholder Participation and independent variable whereas Project Performance is dependent variable.

Perceived Relationship of M&E Technical Capacity & Project Performance

Monitoring and evaluation provide a vital feedback loop helps the projects to stay on track and make data-driven decisions to achieve their goals (Teddy & Faith, 2022) and helps to measure their immediate and long-term impact. It also provides clear answers on why interventions are necessary and how they contribute to national goals (Teddy & Faith, 2022). Effective monitoring and evaluation requires skilled professionals, whereas developing countries face a shortage of qualified experts and lack access to relevant training and technical guidance (Mutai & Musembi, 2024) which hinders the development of reliable, relevant, and timely reporting mechanisms. Monitoring and evaluation reports desire the logical framework and work plan which requires significant pressure on management and consuming a substantial amount of staff time (Okafor, 2021). The monitoring and evaluation department bears the sole responsibility for providing project results. The overburdened staff often overlooks results or leads to duplicate requests that represent the inefficiencies (Okafor, 2021). In developing

countries, project staff often lacks the necessary reporting skills, leading to a reluctance to utilize monitoring and evaluation tools (Anita & Wairimu, 2023; Coleman, 1990; Eja & Ramegowda, 2020). The reluctance to use monitoring and evaluation tools is further exacerbated by a limited understanding of these tools (Coleman, 1990; Iram et al., 2016). As a result, only management teams have access to these tools, while field staff and project beneficiaries, who are directly involved in project activities, are excluded from the assessment process (Coleman, 1990). According to Lei et al. (2017) Chinese contractors face challenges in international projects due to unfamiliarity with foreign standards, particularly in the Middle East. They suggest that improving understanding of these standards and adopting strategies like active learning and inter organizational cooperation can enhance project efficiency. Studies concluded that enhancing technical capacity among road contractors in several developing countries like Kenia, significantly improved project performance therefore there is continuous need for monitoring and support to ensure sustained improvements (Zhang et al., 2022).

Similarly, research on M&E posits the crucial role of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff competency in the performance of community (Maalim & Mungai, 2024) and developing specific competency profiles for project personnel to strengthen M&E practices and enhance project outcomes. The research of Mushori et al. (2020) found that rigorous process monitoring impacts on capacity evaluation and the performance of road construction projects in Nairobi County, Kenya and it emphasizes the importance of effective monitoring to bolster contractors' abilities and improve road infrastructure outcomes. The Human Capital Theory, developed by Schultz (1961) and extended by Becker (1964), also supports the technical capacity of resources in organization to positive impact their performance. According to the Human Capital Theory the, employees' intellectual, social, and organizational capital training and experience, plays a key role in adding value to the organization and ensures its success. In the context of social development projects, the technical skills and expertise of the project team in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential for improving project performance. Therefore, based on the literature review and theoretical discussion it is inferred that enhancing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) technical capacity optimizes the project performance. Thus:

H1: M&E Technical Capacity has a positive impact on Project Performance

Perceived Relationship of M&E Stakeholder Participation and Project Performance

Stakeholder participation is crucial for the success of social development projects, which involves a complex network of stakeholders. According to Kananura et al., (2017) the importance of participatory monitoring and evaluation involves stakeholders in addressing project issues and informing decision-making and they are essential to meet the success criteria of the projects (John & Pallangyo, 2024). The effective stakeholder consultation and engagement are critical factors in project success while ensuring the diverse perspectives are considered and needs are met (Amin et al., 2023). The success of social development projects largely depends on the contribution of key stakeholders (Njiru & Thoronjo, 2024) These stakeholders evaluate project performance and participate at different stages, contributing to project success (Parker et al., 2018). Government bodies also play a crucial role in project implementation, regulation, and monitoring. They work as focal persons, and assisting in project activities (Mukhammadjonovna, 2024). Government representatives on steering committees oversee ID projects, with a limited role in regulation, monitoring, and security. The government bodies, authorities, and regulatory agencies are highly influential stakeholders and beneficiaries (Sallinen et al., 2013). NGOs are also accountable to deliver benefits to these beneficiaries and to donors for fund utilization. The Social accountability and downward accountability practices aim to identify beneficiary needs and improve fund utilization (Eja & Ramegowda, 2020). Key stakeholders comprise direct beneficiaries, individuals accountable for resources, national policymakers, donors, and development partners. Stakeholder engagement in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) extends the goal of promoting participatory development, helps maintain stakeholders' interests, and achieves project success (Ilyas et al., 2021). Stakeholders have the right to know project progress, be informed of corrective action, and learn from M&E reports. By participating, stakeholders can directly access project relevance, performance, and success. Organizations must consider individual and group matters that may influence their activities (Njiru & Thoronjo, 2024).

Likewise, Tengan and Aigbavboa (2017) examined the influence of stakeholder participation on the success of public construction projects in Ghana. Their findings indicate that stakeholders are minimally engaged, primarily due to ignorance, inadequate community awareness, and insufficient time allocated for project monitoring and evaluation, which leads to low performance of the project (Tengan & Aigbavboa, 2017). Based on stakeholder the stakeholder participation has a positive impact on the performance. This theory asserts that

organizations must consider the interests of all parties affected by their decisions, not just shareholders. In the context of social development projects should go beyond financial metrics and should take into account the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, including beneficiaries, funders, employees, and the broader community. By engaging these stakeholders in project monitoring and evaluation (M&E), organizations can enhance transparency, accountability, and sustainability. Therefore, the theory supports the idea that M&E stakeholder participation can lead to improved outcomes by ensuring that diverse perspectives and interests are integrated into project planning, execution, and evaluation, which ultimately contributes to the success of social development projects. Therefore, based on the aforementioned discussion regarding the relationship between stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and project performance, the study proposes that:

H2: M&E Stakeholder Participation has a positive impact on Project Performance

Theoretical Framework

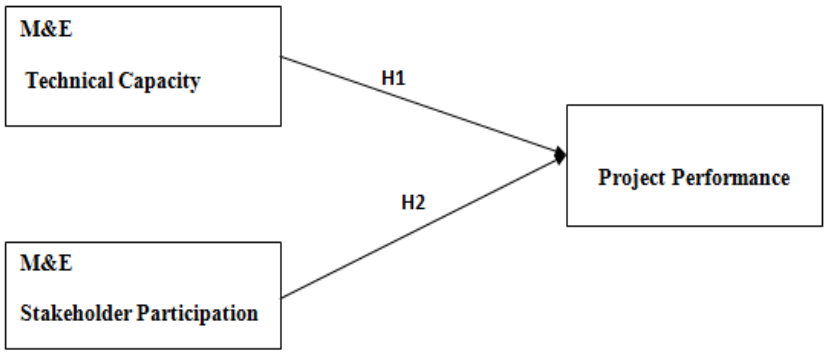

Fig.1: Theoretical Model

Research Methodology

In the scientific realm, the choice of research paradigms is crucial. The questionnaire of monitoring and evaluation practices including Technical Capacity of 6 items and Stakeholder Participation 5 items were adopted from Galgallo (2019) while Project Performance of 5 items was adopted from Nyakweba, (2019). The data was gathered through a structured adopted questionnaire of Likert Scale ranging 1 to 5 strongly disagree to strongly agree among a diverse

group of employees, including both male and female participants. The targeted respondents were professionals with experience in the social development sector in Pakistan. The selected roles include Project Directors, Quality Assurance (QA) Leads, M&E Specialists, M&E Officers, Program Managers, Regional Managers, Management Information System (MIS) Officers, Project Coordinators, and Program Officers. These individuals were chosen because they are responsible for overseeing various stages of project development, from planning and implementation to monitoring and assessment.

Correlation Analysis

Table 1

Correlation Analysis

	M&E Technical Capacity	M&E Stakeholder Participation	Project Performance
M&E Technical Capacity	1 220		
M&E Stakeholder Participation	.393**	1 220	
Project Performance	.417**	.557**	1 220

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The study received 245 respondents out of 400 questionnaires distributed via Google Forms, whereas 30 out of it were found incomplete and total 215 was left as sample size used for analysis. The respondents represented a wide array of sectors projects within social development, which added depth and diversity to the data. These sectors projects include education, health, child rights, women's rights, interfaith harmony, rule of law, governance, voice and accountability, electoral reform, democracy, and relief efforts. Additionally, some participants were involved in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) initiatives, rehabilitation, poverty alleviation, mother and child care, and family planning. The data was analyzed using AMOS 22.0 software with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

The first latent variable M&E Technical Capacity was originally measured using five factors: MNETC_1, MNETC_2, MNETC_ MNETC_4, and MNETC_5. However, fifth factor (MNETC_5) was excluded from the final model due to weak factor loading. The results of the fit indices showed that the measurement model fit with CMIN/DF= 6.1, GFI= 0.97, AGFI= 0.85, CFI= 0.97, and RMSEA= 0.10

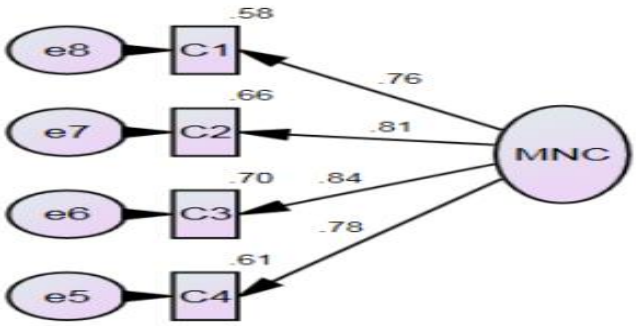

Figure 2. CFA M&E Technical Capacity

The second latent variable in the analysis is M&E Stakeholder Participation (denoted as MNESP), which represents the engagement and involvement of stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation processes. Initially, the construct comprised five observed items (i.e., M1, M2, M3, M4, M5). However, M4 was excluded from the final model due to its low factor. The results of the fit indices showed that the measurement model fit as CMIN/DF= 1.9, GFI= 0.89, AGFI= 0.93, CFI= 0.95, and RMSEA= 0.06.

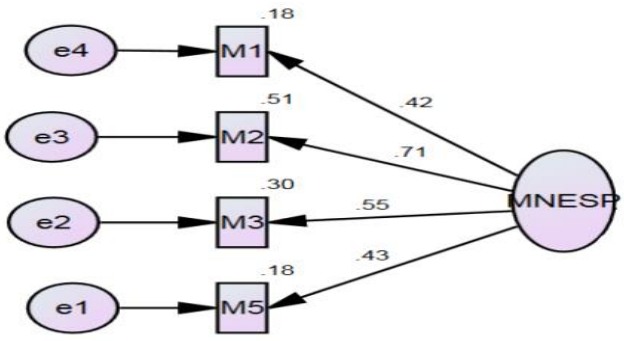

Figure 3. M&E Stakeholder Participation

The latent third variable Project Performance denoted as dependent variable was initially measured using five factors: PP1, PP2, PP3, PP4, and PP5. However, due to weak factor loading

PP5 was excluded from the analysis The results of the fit indices showed that the measurement model fit as CMIN/DF= 5.4, GFI= 0.97, AGFI= 0.87, CFI= 0.97, and RMSEA= 0.14

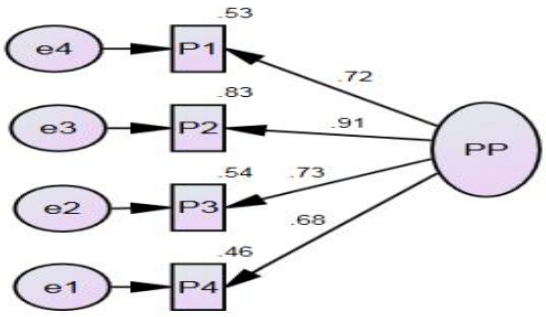

Figure 4. Project Performance

Measurement Model

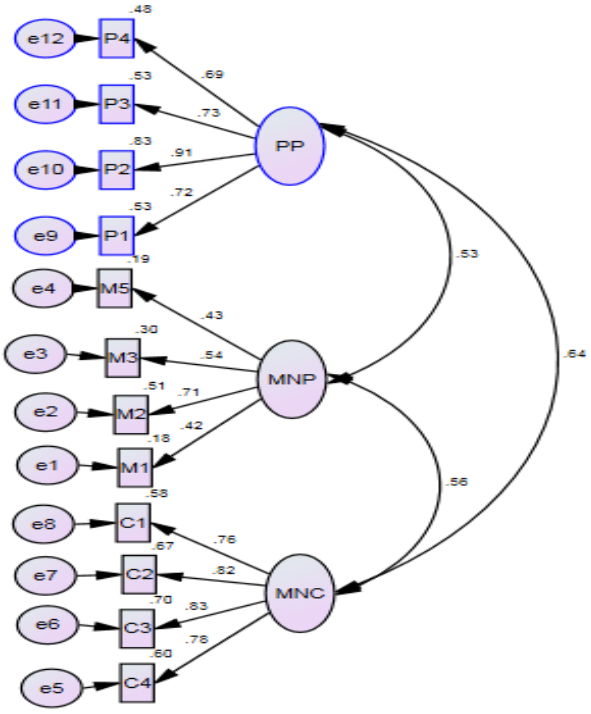

Figure 5. Measurement Model

The results of the fit indices in figure 5. Showed that the measurement model fits the data adequately, with values within acceptable ranges as Chi-square/degree of freedom ratio

(CMIN/DF) 2.2, which is below the upper threshold of 3.0, indicating a good fit. Other fit indices, such as the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.92) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.88), are both close to and above the acceptable cut-off points. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.94) also et the general requirement for a well-fitting and Root Mean Square Error of is (RMSEA (0.07).

Structural Model

The structural model demonstrated significant relationships between the independent variables and the mediating and dependent variables. M&E Technical Capacity (TCI) and M&E Stakeholder Participation (SPI) both showed strong positive effects on the Project Performance (PP), with standardized regression weights (β = 0.58 and β = 0.23, respectively). This indicates that as the participation of stakeholders in M&E activities and the technical capacity for M&E improves the effectiveness of the Project Performance.

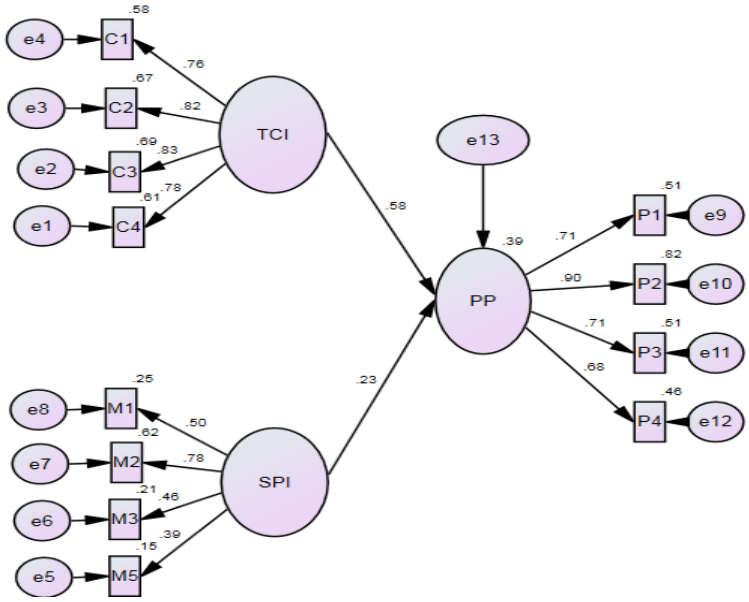

Figure 6. Structural Model

The results of the fit indices showed that the measurement model fits the data adequately, with values within acceptable ranges. The Chi-square/degree of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) is 2.9, Goodness of Fit Index is (GFI = 0.90), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.85), and

Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.90) with Root Mean Square Error of Approximation is(RMSEA = 0.09).

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the practice of managing social development projects by offering insights into key areas for improvement. One notable contribution is the emphasis on enhancing stakeholder involvement. The study highlights how donors and implementing partners can more effectively engage stakeholders, which can improve collaboration, ensure that all parties are aligned with project objectives, and lead to better measurement of progress. By involving stakeholders at all stages of the project, especially during goal formulation and evaluation, projects can be more responsive to community needs and challenges. Additionally, the study promotes the adoption of robust monitoring and evaluation tools, which can help mitigate agency issues and provide a clear framework for managing project information. By utilizing various monitoring and evaluation tools, organizations can better align their objectives and avoid conflicts that may undermine the project's effectiveness. The study also suggests that continuous evaluation not only improves project management but also enhances accountability, making projects more adaptable and sustainable in the long term.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the study provides valuable insights into the impact of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices on project performance, several limitations should be acknowledged. The most crucial limitation is the study's sample was limited to a specific set of projects and stakeholders due to finance constraints, which may not fully represent the diversity of social development projects or stakeholders across different regions and sectors. The focus on projects in Pakistan and participants was selected non-randomly, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other developing countries or contexts. Research could benefit from a broader sample that includes projects from different geographic locations and sectors to enhance the generalizability of the results. Moreover, the study utilized a cross-sectional research design, which captures data at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors influence project outcomes over extended periods. The study also does not account for all relevant variables that could affect project

performance, such as the level of stakeholder trust, the quality of project planning, or external shocks (e.g., economic crises). Including additional variables in future research could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing project success. Future studies could also employ mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative insights could provide deeper context and understanding of the mechanisms through which M&E practices and project performance.

Theoretical and Practical

Despite some limitations, this study presents several valuable theoretical and practical contributions. This study makes several significant contributions to the body of knowledge, particularly in the fields of project management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and the application of technical systems in social development projects. By empirically testing two hypotheses related to M&E practices and project performance, this research fills critical gaps in the existing literature. The study confirms that both M&E Technical Capacity (H1) and M&E Stakeholder Participation (H2) positively impact project performance. These findings align with existing research that emphasizes the importance of technical skills and stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluation processes (Joseph et al., 2023; Njiru & Thoronjo, 2024).

However, by focusing specifically on social development projects in Pakistan, the study contributes to the literature by providing evidence from a developing country context, which is relatively underexplored (Nisa et al., 2018). This contextual focus enriches the global understanding of how M&E practices can be effectively implemented to enhance project outcomes, particularly in regions with resource constraints and institutional challenges. This study is particularly valuable for local policymakers, development agencies, and NGOs aiming to improve the performance and sustainability of social sector initiatives. The findings of this study also offer actionable insights for practitioners involved in the management of social development projects, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. By understanding the practical implications of M&E practices and project performance the project managers and stakeholders can make informed decisions to enhance project performance.

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