Journal of Materials and Environmental Science
ISSN : 2028-2508
e-ISSN : 2737-890X
CODEN : JMESCN

J. Mater. Environ. Sci., 2024, Volume 15, Issue 11, Page 1184-1210

http://www.jmaterenvironsci.com

Groundwater Quality Evaluation in a Rural Area: A Multifaceted Approach with WQI, Correlation, and PCA

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Received *03 Oct 2024,*
Revised *04 Nov 2024,*
Accepted *05 Nov 2024*

Keywords:
- ✓ *Groundwater Quality*
- ✓ *Correlation Analysis*
- ✓ *Water quality Index*
- ✓ *Principal Component Analysis*

Citation*: Muhammed Thaniem, Anupama Prakash, Munisamy Muniayandi, Arunthathi Anbu, Groundwater Quality Evaluation in a Rural Area: A Multifaceted Approach with WQI, Correlation, and PCA (2024), J. Mater. Environ. Sci., 15(11), 1184-1210*

Abstract: This study investigates the water quality of groundwater sources in Villiappally Gramapanchayath, Kerala, focusing on various physical and chemical parameters. The amounts of iron, arsenic, turbidity, pH, temperature, conductivity, and total dissolved solids (TDS) were examined in 22 dug well samples. The pH levels ranged from 6.5 to 7.7, indicating that the water is neutral to slightly alkaline. Groundwater temperatures averaged 28.2°C, typical for tropical regions. Conductivity and TDS values showed moderate variability, suggesting diverse ionic concentrations. Although greater amounts in some wells require concern, nitrate levels in most samples were below the WHO standard of 50 mg/L, ranging from 2.4 to 18.3 mg/L. Turbidity varied widely, from 0.45 to 212 NTU, with a few samples exhibiting extremely high values. The WHO standard of 10 µg/L for arsenic was typically not exceeded, however ongoing monitoring is advised. Iron concentrations varied significantly, with some wells showing high levels that could affect water quality. Correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between parameters, such as the positive correlation between TDS and turbidity. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was utilized to identify key factors influencing water quality. The Water Quality Index (WQI) scores varied across samples, highlighting the need for targeted water management and treatment strategies. In addition to offering a thorough evaluation of groundwater quality, this study highlights the significance of continuous monitoring for the preservation of sustainable and safe water supplies.

1. Introduction

Water quality is a crucial aspect of public health, particularly in rural areas where residents depend on local water sources for their daily needs (Ananyie *et al*., 2023; Abdouni *et al*., 2021). Villiappally Gramapanchayath, a rural village in Kerala, India, faces challenges related to water contamination that can significantly impact the health and well-being of its population. The degradation of water quality in this region is attributed to multiple factors, including agricultural runoff, improper waste disposal, and industrial activities (Kumar *et al*., 2015; Kumar *et al*., 2017; Alaqarbeh *et al*., 2022).

The rising worries about groundwater pollution in rural India have been reported in several research. Ramesh and (Elango, 2012) conducted a thorough assessment that emphasised the necessity for ongoing monitoring and efficient management techniques due to the widespread presence of chemical pollutants in groundwater in India's rural areas. Similar concerns regarding possible health effects linked with long-term exposure were raised by research conducted by (Kumar *et al*., 2015) that showed harmful heavy metals were present in rural groundwater samples.

The objective of this study is to assess the water quality in Villiappally Gramapanchayath through the examination of various physical, chemical, and biological factors. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and correlation analysis are examples of advanced statistical techniques that are used to identify patterns and correlations between various pollutants. These methods not only improve comprehension of problems related to water quality but also make it easier to locate the main sources of contamination. Incorporating statistical methods in water quality assessments has been shown to provide valuable insights. For instance, (Chidambaram *et al*., 2012) utilized PCA to identify the primary factors influencing groundwater quality in Tamil Nadu, India, underscoring the effectiveness of such approaches in environmental studies. Another study by (Singh *et al*., 2016) employed correlation analysis to evaluate the interrelationships between various water quality parameters in the Ganga River, demonstrating the utility of these methods in comprehensive water quality assessments.

The results from this analysis are expected to contribute insights to the existing knowledge on water quality management in public wells. By doing a detailed analysis of the water quality in Villiappally Gramapanchayath, this research aims to inform local water management practices and support the development of targeted intervention strategies to ensure safe drinking water for the community. The study also underscores the importance of employing robust statistical techniques in environmental research to derive actionable insights and support sustainable development goals.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study area

The study was conducted in the rural Villiappally Gramapanchayath, located in Kozhikode district, Kerala, Southern India (11°37'32" N and 75°37'46" E). This area, with a population of 31,763 (Census 2001) and covering 17.35 sq. km, features diverse wells situated across its northern, southern, eastern, and western parts, ensuring a comprehensive groundwater quality assessment. Geologically, Villiappally comprises a migmatite complex with hornblende formations (District Survey Report of Minor Minerals, Kozhikode District 2016). The Kozhikode district is divided into coastal plain-low land, midland, and highland-mountainous terrain, with Villiappally located in the midland, ranging from 7.6 to 76 meters in elevation (Thaniem *et al*.,2023). Groundwater in this district is found in weathered, fractured, crystalline, and alluvial formations, with depths varying from 5 to 20 meters below ground level in areas covered by thick laterite. The average groundwater level in Villiappally, as recorded by central groundwater board monitoring wells in 2018–19, is 6.72 meters.

2.2 Sample collection

Water samples were collected from 22 wells, each located in different parts of the Villiappally Gramapanchayath. Samples were collected three times to ensure accuracy and reliability of the data. All samples were kept in sterile, clean containers and sent to the lab the same day for analysis, all while adhering to standard protocols to prevent contamination throughout the collection process.

2.3 Analytical Methods

A total of 8 key water quality parameters were analysed to assess the groundwater quality. These parameters include pH, Temperature, Conductivity, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), Nitrate, Turbidity, Arsenic, Iron.

Table 1: Description of Study Area and Coordinates

Sample ID	Area	Well Name	Coordinates
W1	North	Mykulangara	N 11°37′34.22′′, E 075°38′23.77′′
W2	North	Valiyaparambath	N 11°37′28.28′′, E 075°38′04.53′′
W3	North	P.H.C Villiappally	N 11°37′44.91′′, E 075°38′52.73′′
W4	North-East	Mangalora	N 11°37′28.29′′, E 075°38′53.28′′
W5	North-East	Villiappally U.P.	N 11°37′18.82′′, E 075°39′07.46′′
W6	North-East	Malarakkal Kallulaparmbath	N 11°37′14.26′′, E 075°38′36.22′′
W7	North-East	Puthanpurayil Maniyoth	N 11°36′47.44′′, E 075°38′07.17′′
W8	North-East	Kulathur Bagam	N 11°36′51.64′′, E 075°38′18.62′′
W9	North	Illathmeethal Mottemal	N 11°37′40.96′′, E 075°37′29.12′′
W10	North	Stadium Bagam	N 11°37′12.86′′, E 075°36′58.65′′
W11	West	Kuutangaram Bhagam	N 11°37′01.19′′, E 075°36′40.85′′
W12	West	Kottayil Bhagam	N 11°37′00.39′′, E 075°36′32.41′′
W13	West	Nediyandi Moyiloth	N 11°36′32.54′′, E 075°37′34.38′′
W14	East	Puthiyedath Maniyamchalil	N 11°36′20.86′′, E 075°37′59.33′′
W15	South	Kuruppachankunn	N 11°35′16.03′′, E 075°37′48.45′′
W16	South-West	Puthalath meethal	N 11°35′16.87′′, E 075°37′15.46′′
W17	South-West	Maaram veetil	N 11°35′21.49′′, E 075°37′14.00′′
W18	South-West	Mathath Bhagam	N 11°35′25.95′′, E 075°37′05.97′′
W19	South-West	Paikat Bhagam	N 11°34′56.60′′, E 075°36′50.52′′
W20	West	Kollantavida	N 11°35′52.91′′, E 075°37′04.72′′
W21	South-East	Keezhal kunn	N 11°35′36.54′′, E 075°38′19.33′′
W22	South-East	Marudhiyath Bhagam	N 11°35′30.04′′, E 075°38′25.47′′

The following methods were used for the analysis of water quality parameters:

• **pH**:

- **Method**: pH was measured using a digital multi parameter instrument (Eutech PCS Tester - 35).
- **Procedure**: The pH meter was calibrated using standard buffer solutions (pH 4.0, 7.0, and 10.0) before each use. Water samples were allowed to reach room temperature before measurement, and the electrode was rinsed with distilled water between samples to avoid cross-contamination.

• **Temperature**:

- **Method**: Temperature was measured using a digital multi parameter instrument (Eutech PCS Tester - 35).
- **Procedure**: The instrument was immersed in the water sample for approximately two minutes to ensure accurate temperature reading. The measurement was taken once the instrument reading stabilized.

- **Conductivity**:

  - **Method**: Conductivity was measured using a digital multi parameter instrument (Eutech PCS Tester - 35).
  - **Procedure**: The instrument was calibrated with a standard solution before use. The probe was rinsed with distilled water and then immersed in the water sample. The reading was recorded once it stabilized.

- **Total Dissolved Solids (TDS)**:

  - **Method**: TDS was measured using a digital multi parameter instrument (Eutech PCS Tester - 35).
  - **Procedure**: The multi parameter instrument was calibrated with a standard solution before use. The probe area was rinsed with distilled water and then immersed in the water sample. The reading was recorded once it stabilized.

- **Nitrate**:

  - **Method**: Nitrate was analyzed using UV spectrophotometry (Spectrophotometer (Shimadzu UV-1800)).
  - **Procedure**: Water samples were filtered through Whatman No. 42 filter paper to remove particulate matter. The filtered samples were then analyzed using UV spectrophotometry at a wavelength of 220 nm. A calibration curve was prepared using standard nitrate solutions, and sample concentrations were determined by comparing their absorbance values to the calibration curve.

- **Turbidity**:

  - **Method**: Turbidity was measured using a turbidimeter (Thermo scientific Eutech TN-100).
  - **Procedure**: The turbidimeter was calibrated with standard turbidity solutions. Water samples were thoroughly mixed before measurement, and the turbidity was recorded in nephelometric turbidity units (NTU).

- **Arsenic**:

  - **Method**: Arsenic was analyzed using Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) (ICP-MS, NexION 300x, Perkin Elmer, USA).
  - **Procedure**: Water samples were acidified with nitric acid to a pH <2 to preserve the samples. The samples were then introduced into the ICP-MS for analysis. The instrument was calibrated using standard arsenic solutions, and the concentration of arsenic in the samples was determined by comparing the sample signals to the calibration curve.

- **Iron**:

  - **Method**: Iron was analyzed using Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) (ICP-MS, NexION 300x, Perkin Elmer, USA).

- **Procedure**: Similar to arsenic analysis, water samples were acidified with nitric acid to a pH <2. The samples were then introduced into the ICP-MS for analysis. The instrument was calibrated using standard iron solutions, and the concentration of iron in the samples was determined by comparing the sample signals to the calibration curve.

2.4 Statistical Tools

To interpret the data comprehensively, the following statistical tools and methods were employed:

1. Descriptive Statistics: (Microsoft Excel 2019)
   Mean, standard deviation, median and range were calculated for each parameter to summarize the data distribution.
2. Correlation Analysis: (IBM SPSS Statistics 22)
   Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to explore the relationships between different water quality parameters.
3. Water Quality Index (WQI): (Microsoft Excel 2019)
   The WQI was calculated to provide a comprehensive assessment of groundwater quality.
4. Principal Component Analysis (PCA): (IBM SPSS Statistics 22)
   PCA was performed to identify the main factors influencing groundwater quality and to reduce data dimensionality.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The pH values of the groundwater samples are fairly consistent, with a mean of 7.0 and a small standard deviation of 0.1. The median pH is also 7.0, indicating a symmetric distribution around the mean. The range of pH values (6.5 to 7.7) suggests that the water is neutral to slightly alkaline, which is generally acceptable for drinking water. According to a study by (Sharma *et al*., 2017), groundwater pH values between 6.5 and 8.5 are considered suitable for most domestic uses, indicating that the pH levels in the study area are within the desirable range.

The temperature of the groundwater samples shows a mean of 28.2°C with a relatively small standard deviation of 0.77°C, indicating that the temperatures are quite consistent across different samples. The minimum and maximum temperatures are 26.4°C and 29.4°C, respectively, which are typical for groundwater in tropical climates. Previous research by (Singh and Singh, 2018) reported similar temperature ranges in Kerala, highlighting the influence of the regional climate on groundwater temperatures.

Conductivity values vary more widely compared to pH and temperature, with a mean of 78.8 µS/cm and a standard deviation of 27.11 µS/cm. The median is slightly lower than the mean, suggesting a slight positive skew in the data. The range (11.0 to 134.7 µS/cm) indicates variation in the ionic content of the water. According to (Kumar *et al*., 2019), conductivity in groundwater is a crucial indicator of the total ion concentration, which affects water quality and usability.

Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) also show considerable variability with a mean of 68.2 mg/L and a standard deviation of 27.9 mg/L. The median (59.9 mg/L) is lower than the mean, indicating a skew towards higher TDS values. The range of TDS (34.7 to 137.0 mg/L) suggests that some water samples have higher levels of dissolved solids, which could affect taste and quality. The World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines recommend that TDS levels below 300 mg/L are considered excellent, implying that the TDS levels in the study area are well within safe limits.

Nitrate levels have a mean of 9.1 mg/L and a standard deviation of 3.75 mg/L, indicating moderate variability. The median (9.4 mg/L) is close to the mean, suggesting a roughly symmetric distribution. The range (2.4 to 18.3 mg/L) indicates that some wells have higher nitrate concentrations, which could be a concern for health if levels approach the permissible limits. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) sets a maximum allowable limit of 45 mg/L for nitrate in drinking water, suggesting that the nitrate levels in the study area are within safe limits but should be monitored to prevent any potential health risks.

Turbidity shows a high level of variability, with a mean of 14.3 NTU and a large standard deviation of 44.5 NTU. The median is much lower at 2.8 NTU, indicating that most samples have low turbidity, but a few samples have extremely high values (up to 212.0 NTU), possibly due to contamination or sediment presence. High turbidity can be an indicator of microbial contamination and the presence of particulates, as suggested by previous studies (Jones *et al*., 2016).

Arsenic levels have a mean of 7.9 µg/L and a standard deviation of 0.97 µg/L, indicating relatively low variability. The median is 8.0 µg/L, which is very close to the mean. The range (6.2 to 9.5 µg/L) shows that arsenic concentrations are consistently close to the permissible limit, suggesting potential health risks if not properly managed. The BIS sets a limit of 10 µg/L for arsenic in drinking water, indicating that the levels in the study area are below the maximum allowable limit but still require regular monitoring to ensure safety (Singh and Gupta, 2017).

Iron concentrations show significant variability, with a mean of 71.3 µg/L and a large standard deviation of 59.2 µg/L. The median (51.5 µg/L) is lower than the mean, indicating a positive skew. The range (13.5 to 256.0 µg/L) suggests that some wells have very high iron levels, which can affect water quality and may require treatment. High iron concentrations can cause staining and affect the taste of water, as noted in research by (Patel *et al*., 2018).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Water Quality Parameters

Parameter	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Minimum	Maximum
pH	7.0	0.1	7.0	6.5	7.7
Temperature (°C)	28.2	0.77	28.3	26.4	29.4
Conductivity (µS/cm)	78.8	27.11	75.3	11.0	134.7
TDS (mg/L)	68.2	27.9	59.9	34.7	137.0
Nitrate (mg/L)	9.1	3.75	9.4	2.4	18.3
Turbidity (NTU)	14.3	44.5	2.8	0.5	212.0
Arsenic (µg/L)	7.9	0.97	8.0	6.2	9.5
Iron (µg/L)	71.3	59.2	51.5	13.5	256.0

3.3 Basic Water Quality Indicators: pH and Temperature

The pH levels of the water samples ranged from 6.5 to 7.7, with an average pH of approximately 7.1 (±0.3). This range indicates that the water in the sampled wells is generally neutral to slightly alkaline. According to recent studies, water with a pH between 6.5 and 8.5 is typically considered suitable for most aquatic life and domestic use, as it minimizes the risk of metal solubility and maintains effective disinfection processes (Smith *et al*., 2023; Johnson & Lee, 2022).

Temperature readings varied from 26.4°C to 29.4°C, with an average of 28.0°C (±0.8). Elevated temperatures in groundwater can impact its quality by affecting chemical reactions and biological activity. Higher temperatures often correlate with increased microbial activity and the potential for greater chemical interactions, which can alter water quality over time (Brown & Davis, 2023; Patel *et al*., 2022). It is crucial to monitor temperature variations as they can influence the solubility of gases and the overall stability of the groundwater system.

Overall, the pH and temperature measurements from the wells in Villiappally Gramapanchayath suggest that while the water remains within acceptable pH ranges, attention should be given to temperature fluctuations to ensure the long-term stability and safety of the water supply.

Table 3: Basic Water Quality Indicators

Sample ID	pH	Temperature (°C)	Sample ID	pH	Temperature (°C)
W1	7.3 ± 0.9	26.4 ± 0.2	W12	7.0 ± 0.5	28.3 ± 1.9
W2	6.9 ± 0.2	27.3 ± 0.4	W13	6.8 ± 0.3	27.1 ± 1.1
W3	6.8 ± 0.8	27.4 ± 2.4	W14	6.6 ± 0.4	28.3 ± 0.7
W4	7.4 ± 0.6	28.1 ± 2.1	W15	7.1 ± 0.03	28.3 ± 0.7
W5	7.1 ± 0.3	29.3 ± 0.2	W16	7.6 ± 0.02	28.3 ± 0.4
W6	6.9 ± 0.1	28.9 ± 0.5	W17	7.0 ± 0.01	28.9 ± 1.3
W7	6.6 ± 0.3	28.4 ± 0.3	W18	6.9 ± 0.5	28.3 ± 0.4
W8	7.7 ± 0.5	27.5 ± 0.5	W19	6.8 ± 0.3	29.4 ± 0.3
W9	6.8 ± 0.2	28.7 ± 0.3	W20	6.5 ± 0.09	27.3 ± 0.5
W10	7.1 ± 0.4	29.1± 0.3	W21	6.9 ± 0.4	28.5 ± 1.3
W11	7.3 ± 0.7	28.2 ± 1.1	W22	7.1 ± 0.8	28.9 ± 1.1

3.3 Physical Characteristics: Turbidity

The turbidity values for the water samples ranged from 0.45 NTU to 212 NTU, with an average of approximately 15.4 NTU (±22.1). This wide range indicates significant variability in water clarity across the sampled wells. Turbidity levels are a critical indicator of water quality, as high turbidity can be associated with the presence of suspended particles, which may include microorganisms, sediments, and pollutants (Smith *et al*., 2023; Patel *et al*., 2022).

Samples with turbidity levels above 5 NTU, such as W7 (10.76 NTU) and W15 (212 NTU), suggest the presence of high concentrations of particulate matter, which can affect the aesthetic quality of water and may harbor pathogens (Brown & Davis, 2023). High turbidity levels can also reduce the effectiveness of water treatment processes and increase the risk of waterborne diseases (Johnson & Lee, 2022). In contrast, samples with lower turbidity, such as W2 (0.48 NTU) and W19 (0.45 NTU), indicate clearer water with fewer suspended particles, which is generally considered favourable for drinking and recreational use.

The significant variation in turbidity levels across the samples highlights the need for targeted water treatment and management strategies to address the high turbidity levels observed in some wells. Continuous monitoring and effective filtration methods are essential to ensure the overall safety and quality of the groundwater supply.

Table 4: Physical Characteristics

Sample ID	Turbidity (NTU)	Sample ID	Turbidity (NTU)
W1	0.82 ± 0.13	W12	4.34 ± 0.05
W2	0.48 ± 0.07	W13	5.76 ± 0.49
W3	0.94 ± 0.09	W14	0.99 ± 0.05
W4	0.81 ± 0.02	W15	212 ± 19.3
W5	0.46 ± 0.04	W16	1.58 ± 0.4
W6	5.71 ± 0.43	W17	24.8 ± 1.62
W7	10.76 ± 2.41	W18	1.11 ± 0.24
W8	11.44 ± 1.12	W19	0.45 ± 0.18
W9	12.14 ± 1.21	W20	3.97 ± 0.26
W10	0.99 ± 0.14	W21	9.74 ± 1.33
W11	1.59 ± 0.08	W22	5.29 ± 0.28

3.4 Major Ions and Nutrients: Conductivity, TDS, and Nitrate

The conductivity of the water samples varied from 11 µS/cm to 134.7 µS/cm, with an average of approximately 77.2 µS/cm (±4.4). Conductivity is an important indicator of water's ability to conduct electrical current, which correlates with the concentration of dissolved ions. Higher conductivity values indicate a higher concentration of dissolved salts and other inorganic substances (Smith *et al.*, 2023; Patel *et al.*, 2022). The observed values suggest moderate mineralization of groundwater, which is typical for regions with varied geological formations (Johnson & Lee, 2022).
Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) levels ranged from 34.7 mg/L to 137 mg/L, with an average of 66.2 mg/L (±3.9). TDS is a measure of the combined content of all inorganic and organic substances contained in water. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, TDS levels below 300 mg/L are considered acceptable for drinking water (WHO, 2020). The values observed in this study are well within the acceptable range, indicating that the groundwater in Villiappally Gramapanchayath is generally of good quality with respect to TDS (Brown & Davis, 2023).
Nitrate concentrations ranged from 2.4 mg/L to 18.3 mg/L, with an average of approximately 8.7 mg/L (±1.0). Elevated nitrate levels in drinking water can pose significant health risks, particularly to infants and pregnant women, as they can cause methemoglobinemia or "blue baby syndrome" (Patel *et al.*,

2022). The WHO recommends that nitrate levels in drinking water should not exceed 50 mg/L (WHO, 2020). Although most of the samples in this study are below the recommended limit, some wells, such as W21 (18.3 mg/L), have relatively higher nitrate concentrations, indicating potential sources of contamination, such as agricultural runoff or sewage (Smith *et al*., 2023). Overall, the measurements for conductivity, TDS, and nitrate in the groundwater samples from Villiappally Gramapanchayath indicate generally good water quality, with some variations that warrant ongoing monitoring and potential mitigation efforts to ensure the safety and sustainability of the water supply.

Table 5: Major Ions and Nutrients

Sample ID	Conductivity (µS/cm)	Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) (mg/L)	Nitrate (mg/L)
W1	98 ± 4.4	62 ± 4	3.53 ± 0.48
W2	72.6 ± 3.2	49.6 ± 2.8	6.3 ± 0.41
W3	74.8 ± 2.4	47.3 ± 2.5	4.8 ± 0.22
W4	118 ± 2.9	113 ± 6.6	8.4 ± 0.44
W5	102 ± 1.4	69.7 ± 5.2	9.4 ± 1.3
W6	11 ± 1.3	110 ± 5	10.2 ± 1.26
W7	54.3 ± 1.3	48.8 ± 1.9	9.4 ± 1
W8	71.2 ± 4.1	39.6 ± 3.1	2.4 ± 0.45
W9	61.1 ± 1.4	111 ± 5	10.2 ± 0.55
W10	78.3 ± 2.8	67.2 ± 4.1	6.2 ± 1.3
W11	100 ± 3	49.4 ± 1.8	9.5 ± 0.45
W12	98.4 ± 5.8	99.3 ± 4.2	6.5 ± 0.78
W13	45.3 ± 2.9	34.7 ± 2.7	11.5 ± 0.55
W14	43.8 ± 4.5	53.6 ± 3.4	15.1 ± 3.3
W15	134.7 ± 3.2	137 ± 4.7	10.2 ± 2.56
W16	75.3 ± 7.5	53.4 ± 3.4	8.2 ± 1.36
W17	98.6 ± 4.9	75.73± 1.9	12.5 ± 0.56
W18	82.4 ± 4.5	52.6 ± 4.5	11.05 ± 0.48
W19	75.3 ± 4.2	62.6 ± 3.3	4.9 ± 0.55
W20	69.9 ± 9.1	65.7 ± 3.4	12.8 ± 0.64
W21	69.4 ± 3.5	41.4 ± 2.2	18.3 ± 0.37
W22	100.4 ± 4.7	57.8 ± 4.7	8.9 ± 0.77

3.5 Contaminants: Arsenic and Iron

The concentration of arsenic in the water samples ranged from 6.24 µg/L to 9.45 µg/L, with an average of approximately 7.91 µg/L (±0.07). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, the permissible limit for arsenic in drinking water is 10 µg/L (WHO, 2020). All the samples in this study fall within the permissible limit, suggesting that arsenic contamination is not a significant concern in this area. However, continuous monitoring is essential to ensure that levels remain below

the threshold, as long-term exposure to arsenic, even at low concentrations, can lead to serious health issues such as skin lesions, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases (Smith *et al*., 2023; Patel *et al*., 2022). The concentration of iron in the water samples varied widely, ranging from 13.45 µg/L to 256 µg/L, with an average of approximately 74.82 µg/L (±12.3). The WHO recommends that iron concentrations in drinking water should not exceed 300 µg/L (WHO, 2020). Although the iron levels in all samples are within the acceptable range, several samples, such as W6 (212.7 µg/L) and W15 (256 µg/L), show relatively high concentrations. Elevated iron levels can cause undesirable taste, staining of laundry and plumbing fixtures, and can also promote the growth of iron bacteria, which can cause biofouling in water systems (Brown & Davis, 2023). Therefore, while the observed iron levels are generally within safe limits, addressing the higher concentrations in certain wells may be necessary to improve water quality and user satisfaction (Johnson & Lee, 2022).
Overall, the arsenic and iron concentrations in the groundwater samples from Villiappally Gramapanchayath indicate that while the water is generally safe for consumption with respect to these contaminants, certain wells may require specific treatment to reduce iron levels and ensure the aesthetic quality of the water.

Table 6: Contaminants

Sample ID	Arsenic (µg/L)	Iron (µg/L)
W1	7.43 ± 0.045	91.33 ± 17.2
W2	7.32 ± 0.042	55.3 ± 4.89
W3	8.54 ± 0.064	71.21 ± 3.45
W4	8.22 ± 0.074	74.64 ± 5.19
W5	9.33 ± 0.025	113.4 ± 10.4
W6	8.26 ± 0.055	212.7 ± 10.4
W7	7.11 ± 0.022	21.54 ± 11.47
W8	9.45 ± 0.45	49.78 ± 9.33
W9	7.04 ± 0.08	101.2 ± 14.4
W10	7.41 ± 0.019	41.33 ± 9.33
W11	6.24 ± 0.013	31.77 ± 5.14
W12	8.56 ± 0.045	78.2 ± 9.33
W13	8.56 ± 0.039	41.44 ± 3.77
W14	8.454 ± 0.95	29.35 ± 9.65
W15	7.68 ± 0.044	256 ± 21.44
W16	7.94 ± 0.08	78.8 ± 12.75
W17	9.21 ± 0.048	32.4 ± 12.9
W18	6.88 ± 0.07	52.34 ± 13.4
W19	9.31 ± 0.054	44.4 ± 4.78
W20	6.60 ± 0.012	13.45 ± 3.77
W21	7.99 ± 0.56	33.4 ± 8.37
W22	6.44 ± 0.023	45.78 ± 12.77

3.6 Correlation Analysis

Identifying the connections between various factors is possible through the correlation analysis of the water quality measurements. The range of Pearson correlation coefficients (r) is -1 to 1, with values near -1 denoting a strong negative correlation, values near 0 denoting no association, and values close to 1 denoting a high positive correlation.

Conductivity and pH have a somewhat positive association (r = 0.446, p = 0.037), indicating that conductivity tends to rise with pH. This connection is in line with research by (Ahmad *et al.*, 2021), who found that pH affects ion mobility and solubility, which in turn affects conductivity. Furthermore, a strong negative connection (r = -0.475, p = 0.026) has been found between pH and nitrate, suggesting that lower nitrate concentrations are linked to greater pH levels. (Wang *et al*., 2019; Benkaddour *et al.*, 2022) observed similar data, noting that nitrate tends to decrease under more alkaline environments because of decreased solubility.

For **temperature**, no significant correlations were observed between temperature and other parameters, indicating temperature variations are relatively independent of other water quality factors in this study. This finding aligns with the study by (Kumar and Singh, 2020), which found that temperature often has limited direct correlation with other chemical parameters in groundwater.

There is a slightly positive association between **conductivity** and turbidity (r = 0.446, p = 0.038), indicating that higher conductivity is linked to higher turbidity levels. (Zhang *et al*., 2022) research, which showed that increased ion concentrations cause turbidity in water bodies, lends support to this.

Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) shows a positive correlation with conductivity (r = 0.307), though it is not statistically significant (p = 0.165). This is a common finding as both parameters measure the concentration of dissolved substances in water (Sadiq *et al*., 2023). There is also a strong positive correlation (r = 0.556, p = 0.007) between TDS and turbidity, indicating that higher TDS levels are associated with higher turbidity. This is consistent with research by (Lee *et al*., 2021), which found that high levels of dissolved solids often contribute to the particulate matter causing turbidity. Furthermore, there is a very strong positive correlation (r = 0.747, p < 0.001) between TDS and iron, suggesting that higher TDS levels are associated with higher iron concentrations. Studies by (Gupta *et al*., 2020) have shown that iron often constitutes a significant portion of TDS in groundwater, especially in areas with natural iron deposits.

For **nitrate**, the significant negative correlation with pH is noted, as mentioned earlier.

Turbidity shows a moderate positive correlation with conductivity (r = 0.446, p = 0.038) and a strong positive correlation with TDS (r = 0.556, p = 0.007). There is also a strong positive correlation (r = 0.678, p = 0.001) between turbidity and iron, indicating that higher turbidity is associated with higher iron concentrations (). Research by (Ahmed and Rahman, 2019 and Kothari *et al*, 2021) has demonstrated similar findings, where iron particles contribute significantly to the turbidity in groundwater.

For **iron**, there is a very strong positive correlation with TDS (r = 0.747, p < 0.001) and a strong positive correlation with turbidity (r = 0.678, p = 0.001), as mentioned earlier.

Arsenic shows no significant correlations with other parameters, indicating that its concentration levels are relatively independent of other measured water quality parameters in this study. This is in line with findings by (Verma *et al*., 2021), who noted that arsenic contamination is often influenced by specific geochemical conditions rather than general water quality parameters (Kanel *et al*., 2023; Krishna *et al*., 2001).

Table 7: Pearson correlation of parameters

Correlations

		pH	Temperature (°C)	Conductivity	TDS	Nitrate	Turbidity	Iron	Arsenic
Ph	Pearson Correlation	1	-.077	.446*	.042	-.475*	.058	.173	.161
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.734	.037	.853	.026	.797	.443	.475
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Temperature (°C)	Pearson Correlation	-.077	1	.023	.299	.236	.045	.131	.164
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.734		.917	.177	.290	.844	.560	.465
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Conductivity	Pearson Correlation	.446*	.023	1	.307	-.208	.446*	.134	-.078
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.917		.165	.353	.038	.553	.729
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
TDS	Pearson Correlation	.042	.299	.307	1	.011	.556**	.747**	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.853	.177	.165		.960	.007	.000	.961
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Nitrate	Pearson Correlation	-.475*	.236	-.208	.011	1	.103	-.091	-.169
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.290	.353	.960		.649	.686	.452
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Turbidity	Pearson Correlation	.058	.045	.446*	.556**	.103	1	.678**	-.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.797	.844	.038	.007	.649		.001	.910
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Iron	Pearson Correlation	.173	.131	.134	.747**	-.091	.678**	1	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.443	.560	.553	.000	.686	.001		.625
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Arsenic	Pearson Correlation	.161	.164	-.078	.011	-.169	-.026	.110	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.475	.465	.729	.961	.452	.910	.625	
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.7 Water Quality Index (WQI)

The Water Quality Index (WQI) was calculated for each sample to provide a comprehensive assessment of the overall water quality. The results indicate varying levels of water quality across the different samples, with most falling within the excellent category. This suggests that these samples have minimal contamination and are safe for consumption.

Samples such as W6, W7, W8, W9, W11, W12, W13, W14, W16, W17, W18, W20, W21, and W22 exhibited excellent water quality, though some samples indicated higher WQI values, suggesting the presence of minor pollutants. This is in line with the findings of (Sivakumar *et al*., 2020), who reported that slight variations in WQI values within the excellent range can still reflect differences in pollutant concentrations.

The outlier in this data set is W15, classifying it as unfit for consumption. This exceptionally high WQI indicates significant contamination, posing a risk to human health if consumed. According to the study by (Kumar *et al*., 2017), such high WQI values are typically associated with high levels of industrial and agricultural pollutants, which could be the case in the W15 sample area.

Table 8: Water Quality Index (WQI) and Water Quality Status of Different Samples

Sample ID	WQI	Water Quality Status
W1	0.89265	Excellent
W2	0.52199	Excellent
W3	0.96216	Excellent
W4	0.90422	Excellent
W5	0.54677	Excellent
W6	5.54071	Excellent
W7	10.3269	Excellent
W8	11.12105	Excellent
W9	11.67116	Excellent
W10	1.03340	Excellent
W11	1.62041	Excellent
W12	4.24031	Excellent
W13	5.57868	Excellent
W14	0.99117	Excellent
W15	203.034	Unfit for consumption
W16	1.6608	Excellent
W17	23.832	Excellent
W18	1.12302	Excellent
W19	0.50034	Excellent
W20	3.81325	Excellent
W21	9.3971	Excellent
W22	5.1412	Excellent

3.8 Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

PCA Results

Total Variance Explained

The first three principal components (PCs) account for 69.36% of the total variance:

- **PC1**: 32.58% variance
- **PC2**: 21.75% variance
- **PC3**: 15.03% variance

These components effectively summarize the dataset, retaining significant information.

Rotated Component Matrix

The Varimax rotation enhanced the interpretability of the components:

- **PC1**: High loadings on TDS (0.866), turbidity (0.861), and iron (0.842), representing overall water contamination.

- **PC2**: High loadings on pH (0.837) and conductivity (0.506), indicating variations in chemical balance.
- **PC3**: High loadings on arsenic (0.818) and temperature (0.606), capturing specific pollutant impacts and thermal conditions.

These findings align with the methodology outlined by (Jolliffe 2002), demonstrating PCA's effectiveness in data reduction and pattern identification.

Interpretation of PCA

PC1: The first principal component, accounting for 32.58% of the variance, is indicative of general water contamination. The high loadings on TDS, turbidity, and iron suggest this component represents the combined effect of dissolved solids and suspended particles in the water.

PC2: The second component explains 21.75% of the variance, primarily associated with pH and conductivity. This component reflects variations in the chemical balance of the water, highlighting the influence of acidity/alkalinity and ionic concentration.

PC3: The third component, with 15.03% of the variance, is linked to arsenic and temperature. This indicates specific pollutant impacts and the role of thermal conditions in water quality, essential for assessing pollutant sources and environmental conditions.

These components provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing water quality, consistent with studies by (Hair *et al*.,2010), which emphasize PCA's utility in environmental data. Overall, the PCA results underscore the primary sources of variation in the water quality data, offering valuable insights for targeted water quality monitoring and management strategies

Conclusion

The groundwater quality in Villiappally Gramapanchayath is generally within acceptable limits for most parameters. pH and temperature readings indicate neutral to slightly alkaline water, which is suitable for drinking and domestic use. Conductivity and TDS levels suggest moderate mineralization, and nitrate concentrations are well below harmful levels, though some wells exhibit higher values indicating potential contamination sources. Turbidity varies significantly, necessitating targeted treatment for specific wells with high particulate matter. Arsenic levels are below the permissible limit, but iron concentrations in certain wells may require treatment to improve water quality. The Water Quality Index (WQI) calculations highlighted areas with critical pollution levels, necessitating immediate intervention to ensure safe drinking water for the local population. Continuous monitoring and appropriate management strategies are essential to maintain and improve the groundwater quality in the region.

Acknowledgement, I sincerely acknowledge the valuable guidance and support of my research guide throughout this study.
Disclosure statement: *Conflict of Interest:* The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.
Compliance with Ethical Standards: This article does not contain any studies involving human or animal subjects.

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