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PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND THE INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KITUI COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate how project management practices influence the institutional performance of public secondary schools in Kitui County. The specific objective was to determine how quality management practices, stakeholder engagement, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) influence the performance of public secondary schools in Kitui County. In this study, Systems Theory and Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory were used, with Systems Theory serving as the anchor theory. Systems Theory emphasizes that schools, as complex organizations, consist of interdependent subsystems – administration, teaching staff, students, and the community – that must function cohesively to achieve the overall performance of the school. RBV Theory emphasizes the internal resources of an organization as critical for achieving competitive advantage and sustainability. The study was conducted using a descriptive research design, with a target population of 374 public secondary schools in Kitui County and a sample size of 332, selected through stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire was used as the main research instrument, and data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of SPSS software. The presentation of analyzed data was done using percentages, means, and standard deviations, with results displayed in frequency tables. The study findings showed that project management practices significantly affect the performance of public secondary schools in Kitui County. A positive linear relationship between project management practices (such as quality management, stakeholder engagement, and risk management) and school performance suggests that adopting formal project management frameworks enhances school efficiency, project completion rates, and academic outcomes. The study recommends that school administrators and project managers should adopt formal project management frameworks, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, risk management strategies, and quality assurance practices to improve resource allocation and ensure successful project outcomes in Kitui County.

Keywords: *Project Management Practices, Institutional Performance, Public Secondary School, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Public secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya, face numerous challenges that affect their ability to deliver quality education. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and insufficient management practices, which undermine the performance of these schools (Macharia, 2016). Project management, when effectively applied, can help address these challenges by ensuring that educational projects are efficiently planned, implemented, and evaluated. However, despite its recognized benefits in the education sector, many schools in Kitui County still lack structured project management frameworks, which has led to delays in infrastructure development, suboptimal academic outcomes, and poor resource management (Ochieng, 2022).

The objective of this study was to assess how project management practices – specifically quality management, stakeholder engagement, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) – influence the performance of public secondary schools in Kitui County. By evaluating these practices, the study aims to provide insights into how structured project management can improve school performance and contribute to the sustainability of educational projects (PMI, 2022). Previous research has shown that integrating project management practices into school operations leads to better resource utilization, project completion rates, and improved educational outcomes (Brown & Svensson, 2020).

In this study, Systems Theory and Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory were used, with Systems Theory serving as the anchor theory. According to Systems Theory, schools, as dynamic systems, require coordinated efforts across various subsystems – administration, teaching staff, students, and the community – to achieve optimal outcomes (von Bertalanffy, 2008). The RBV Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes that managing internal resources such as human capital, infrastructure, and financial resources effectively leads to improved performance and sustainability (Barney, 1991).

The study employed a descriptive research design, targeting a population of 374 public secondary schools in Kitui County. A sample size of 332 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different school categories. Respondents included school principals, teachers, and Board of Management members, all of whom are key stakeholders in the planning, execution, and monitoring of educational projects. A structured questionnaire was the primary data collection instrument, and data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study are expected to provide valuable insights into the relationship between project management practices and school performance. The study will also offer practical recommendations for improving school project

management in Kitui County, with implications for policy, school leadership, and educational practices in other rural settings.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a critical practice in the project management lifecycle, involving the active participation of all individuals or groups who are affected by or can influence the outcomes of a project (Freeman, 1984). In the context of public secondary schools in Kitui County, stakeholder engagement ensures that key parties—such as parents, teachers, students, local communities, and government agencies—are included in the planning, execution, and evaluation of educational projects. Effective stakeholder engagement leads to improved decision-making, increased resource mobilization, and the successful implementation of school projects.

In Kenya, stakeholder engagement has often been identified as a key determinant of the success of educational projects. Ochieng (2022) highlights that schools in rural areas, including Kitui County, face significant challenges due to low levels of stakeholder involvement, which results in inefficient resource utilization and delays in project execution. Limited involvement from key stakeholders such as parents and local communities has led to a lack of ownership and insufficient support for school projects, thereby hindering their success. Additionally, the failure to actively engage local government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has compounded these issues, limiting the resources available for school projects and exacerbating delays.

In Uganda, a similar trend has been observed, where low stakeholder engagement in educational projects has led to resource misallocation and project delays. According to Mugisha & Habimana (2023), the involvement of local communities, school boards, and parents significantly improved project outcomes in the education sector. They found that when stakeholders were engaged from the outset, projects were completed on time, within budget, and with high community support. These findings underscore the importance of stakeholder engagement in achieving successful educational outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

Kitui County, like many rural areas in Kenya, faces challenges in involving key stakeholders in the decision-making processes for school projects. Kaula (2020) emphasizes that in Kitui, many school projects suffer from poor communication between school administrators, parents, and local government bodies. This lack of effective engagement results in poor project outcomes, including delayed infrastructure development and inefficient use of resources. Stakeholder disengagement often leads to unmet expectations, project conflicts, and a lack of community ownership, which further impedes the success of educational initiatives.

This study assesses the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in the performance of public secondary schools in Kitui County by examining the involvement of parents, teachers, local communities, and government agencies in school projects. The study will evaluate indicators such as the level of stakeholder participation, the quality of communication between stakeholders, and the degree of stakeholder influence in decision-making. These indicators will be drawn from the work of Freeman (1984) and Ochieng (2022), with a focus on identifying best practices for stakeholder engagement in educational projects in Kitui County.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Public secondary schools in Kitui County often face challenges that hinder their ability to effectively manage projects, resulting in delayed infrastructure development, inefficient use of resources, and suboptimal academic performance. These issues are primarily attributed to insufficient stakeholder engagement, a critical factor that has not been adequately addressed in previous studies of school project performance in the county. Stakeholders such as parents, local communities, government agencies, and NGOs have traditionally played minimal roles in the planning, execution, and monitoring of school projects, leading to poor project outcomes and lack of community ownership (Kaula, 2020).

In Kitui County, several school infrastructure projects, such as the construction of classrooms, staff rooms, and sanitation facilities, have experienced significant delays and cost overruns. For instance, a number of schools have faced challenges in completing infrastructure projects within the allocated budget and time frame, with some projects extending beyond their expected completion dates by several months (Ochieng, 2022). Additionally, many of these projects have been completed with subpar quality, often requiring repairs and rework, which further drains resources and delays the benefits expected from improved educational facilities (Mugisha & Habimana, 2023).

The root cause of these issues is the limited involvement of stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. Without active participation from all relevant parties – such as teachers, parents, local government, and community members – school projects in Kitui County often lack the necessary support, resources, and oversight required to ensure successful outcomes. This lack of engagement results in a misalignment between project objectives and community needs, leading to delays, cost inefficiencies, and poor-quality outcomes (Kaula, 2020).

Moreover, there is a limited understanding of how specific stakeholder engagement practices influence the performance of school projects in Kitui County. Most research on stakeholder engagement in education has focused on general project management principles without addressing the unique dynamics of stakeholder involvement in school projects (Freeman, 1984). There is a conceptual gap in understanding how different

stakeholders – such as parents, local communities, and government agencies – contribute to the successful completion of educational projects in rural settings like Kitui County.

The issue is compounded by the fact that there is a lack of targeted studies focusing on Kitui County, which faces unique socio-economic challenges that impact stakeholder engagement and project outcomes (Kaula, 2020). While studies in other regions have highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in educational projects (Mugisha & Habimana, 2023), there is insufficient research that examines how these practices specifically influence the performance of school projects in Kitui County.

Given the challenges of resource constraints, poor project outcomes, and limited stakeholder participation, there is a pressing need for research to explore the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the performance of school projects. Addressing this gap will help inform policies and strategies for improving stakeholder involvement and project management practices in public secondary schools, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for students in Kitui County.

OBJECTIVE

To establish the influence of stakeholder engagement on the performance of public secondary school projects in Kitui County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systems Theory

This study is guided by Systems Theory, developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1960s. The theory conceptualizes organizations, including schools, as complex systems composed of interdependent subsystems (von Bertalanffy, 2008). In the context of public secondary schools in Kitui County, Systems Theory emphasizes that effective project management requires the synchronization of various functions – such as administration, teaching, student services, and infrastructure development – towards a common goal. When these subsystems work cohesively, they can significantly improve the performance of school projects, leading to enhanced academic outcomes and improved resource utilization (Angela, 2024).

In educational settings, the success of a school project depends on how well the subsystems are integrated, with stakeholders playing a crucial role in this process. For instance, when teachers, parents, students, and local communities collaborate, the synergy between these groups contributes to the successful implementation of educational projects. Systems Theory helps in understanding how stakeholder engagement impacts school performance, as it views the school as a dynamic system where the participation of all relevant stakeholders is essential for achieving sustainable educational outcomes.

However, the application of Systems Theory in rural areas like Kitui County faces challenges, as the lack of resources, infrastructure, and communication can hinder the effective integration of these subsystems. This study explores how Schools in Kitui can adapt their systems to ensure that various components, especially stakeholders, are actively engaged throughout the project lifecycle.

Resource-Based View Theory (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, which focuses on the internal capabilities of organizations, serves as another guiding framework for this study. Developed by Barney in 1991, RBV emphasizes the importance of leveraging a school's internal resources—such as human capital, physical assets, and organizational culture—to gain a competitive advantage and achieve sustainable success. According to this theory, public secondary schools in Kitui County can optimize their available resources to improve project implementation, thereby enhancing school performance (Barney, 1991).

RBV suggests that the key to successful project management in schools lies in utilizing internal resources efficiently. This includes leveraging the knowledge and expertise of teachers, school administrators, and other internal stakeholders, as well as effectively managing financial and physical resources to ensure successful project execution. In the case of Kitui County, where resources are limited, schools that can optimize these internal resources—by adopting strategic planning, enhancing staff capacity, and mobilizing community support—are more likely to successfully manage educational projects and improve overall school performance (Ngesa, 2023).

One limitation of RBV is that it often overlooks the importance of external factors, such as government policies and community engagement, which can also influence the success of educational projects. However, in Kitui County, where external resources are scarce, the emphasis on optimizing internal resources is particularly relevant, as schools can make the most of their existing assets to mitigate the challenges posed by limited external support.

Both Systems Theory and Resource-Based View Theory provide a robust framework for understanding how stakeholder engagement and internal resource optimization can enhance the performance of public secondary schools in Kitui County. The application of these theories in this study helps in examining how schools can synchronize their subsystems (administration, teaching, community involvement) and optimize their internal resources (capacity building, financial management, stakeholder involvement) to improve the success and sustainability of educational projects.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent Variable

Stakeholder Engagement
Parental Involvement
Teacher Participation
Community Engagement
Government and NGO Support

Dependent Variable

Performance of Public Secondary School Projects
Academic Performance (KCSE Results)
Project Completion Rates (Infrastructure)
Resource Mobilization and Utilization
Efficiency in Project Execution

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design to explore the impact of stakeholder engagement on the performance of public secondary school projects in Kitui County. As Cooper and Schindler (2018) explain, research design is the blueprint for conducting a research study, guiding the overall process, and setting the framework within which the study is carried out. Descriptive research is useful for examining relationships between variables and provides a clear understanding of how stakeholder engagement influences the success of educational projects.

Target Population

The study targeted a population of 374 public secondary schools in Kitui County. These schools were selected because they represent the full spectrum of secondary education in the region, including schools in urban, semi-rural, and rural areas. The target respondents included school principals, teachers, and Board of Management (BoM) members, all of whom play key roles in managing and overseeing school projects.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Target Population	Percentage
School Principals	50	13.4%
Teachers	200	53.5%
Board of Management (BoM)	124	33.1%
Total	374	100%

The sample size for the study was 332 respondents, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different school categories (urban, rural, and semi-rural). The stratified sampling approach ensures that each subgroup is adequately represented, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how stakeholder engagement impacts school projects in different contexts.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study used stratified random sampling to distribute the sample size across various categories of respondents. The sampling method ensures that each group of respondents—school principals, teachers, and members of the Board of Management (BoM)—is adequately represented in the sample, thus allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of stakeholder engagement on school project performance. The sample size of 332 respondents was derived using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination. This formula ensures a statistically valid sample, given the target population of 374 schools.

Table 2: Sample Size

Category	Proportion	Sample Size
School Principals	$50/374 * 332$	44
Teachers	$200/374 * 332$	177
Board of Management (BoM)	$124/374 * 332$	111
Total	$374/374 * 332$	332

Source: (Ministry of Education, Kitui County, 2023)

Data Collection Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions formulated using a Likert scale, allowing respondents to express their degree of agreement with statements related to stakeholder engagement practices and their impact on school project performance. This type of questionnaire was chosen to ensure uniform responses, making it easier to quantify the level of stakeholder involvement and its relationship to project outcomes.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the structured questionnaires were coded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 for analysis. The analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** This was used to summarize the quantitative data, providing a meaningful description of the distribution of scores. Descriptive statistics included frequency counts, means, and standard deviations to summarize responses related to stakeholder engagement practices.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Correlation analysis was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between stakeholder engagement practices and

school project performance. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the impact of stakeholder engagement on various school project performance indicators, such as academic outcomes, infrastructure development, and resource mobilization.

The results were presented using percentages, means, and standard deviations. The analyzed data were displayed in frequency tables, which allowed for easy interpretation of the responses and identification of trends related to stakeholder involvement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

A total of 332 questionnaires were distributed to respondents across the target schools, with 310 completed and returned. This resulted in a response rate of 93.37%, which is considered excellent. According to Kothari and Garg (2015), a response rate above 70% is exceptional, indicating that the data collected is both reliable and representative of the population. The non-response rate was approximately 6.63%, with 22 questionnaires not returned. This high response rate ensures that the findings are robust and reflective of the views of the stakeholders involved in the study.

Table 1: Response Rate

Response Status	Frequency	Percentage
Response	310	93.37%
Non-response	22	6.63%
Total	332	100%

Descriptive Statistics on Stakeholder Engagement

The study findings indicate that stakeholder engagement has a significant positive impact on the performance of public secondary school projects in Kitui County. The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that involving stakeholders such as parents, local communities, teachers, and government bodies during the planning, implementation, and monitoring phases of school projects improved project outcomes.

A majority of respondents (85%) agreed that active parental involvement in school projects contributes to better academic outcomes and timely project completion. This is consistent with findings from previous studies that emphasize the importance of involving parents in school activities and decision-making (Ochieng, 2022).

Around 78% of respondents indicated that engaging local communities in school projects helps mobilize resources and ensures that the projects meet the needs of the community. This is consistent with Systems Theory, which suggests that schools, as systems, need to integrate local knowledge and resources to improve performance (von Bertalanffy, 2008).

72% of respondents acknowledged that government support, particularly through funding and policy guidance, significantly enhances the successful completion of educational projects. However, some respondents noted that delays in government funding and bureaucratic hurdles often hindered project implementation.

Analysis of Stakeholder Engagement Practices

The data also highlighted specific areas where stakeholder engagement practices could be improved. For example, communication barriers between school administrators, parents, and local authorities were frequently mentioned as challenges. These barriers often result in misunderstandings about project objectives and delays in project execution. Additionally, teacher participation in project planning was found to be low, with only 60% of respondents indicating that teachers were actively involved in school project management. This finding suggests a gap in stakeholder engagement, particularly in involving teachers who directly contribute to the educational outcomes of the school.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.78$) between the level of stakeholder engagement and the performance of school projects. The data suggests that higher levels of involvement from key stakeholders, such as parents, local communities, and government agencies, lead to improved project performance in terms of completion rates, resource mobilization, and academic results. Multiple regression analysis further confirmed that stakeholder engagement is a significant predictor of school project performance, accounting for 62% of the variance in project outcomes. This result aligns with previous research, which has demonstrated the positive impact of stakeholder engagement on project success in educational settings (Freeman, 1984; Ochieng, 2022).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are consistent with the Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes that the engagement of all relevant stakeholders is essential for project success. When stakeholders are involved, schools are more likely to achieve project goals, improve resource utilization, and enhance community support (Freeman, 1984). However, the study also identified some challenges, particularly in the communication and coordination among stakeholders. These challenges often hinder the effective implementation of school projects and delay their completion. Systems Theory highlights that the lack of integration between different subsystems (e.g., school administration, teachers, parents, and local communities) can lead to inefficiencies in project execution (von Bertalanffy, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The study sought to assess the impact of stakeholder engagement on the performance of public secondary school projects in Kitui County. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that stakeholder engagement plays a significant role in the success of school projects. Schools that involved key stakeholders, such as parents, local communities,

teachers, and government bodies, reported higher project completion rates, better resource mobilization, and improved academic outcomes.

The study revealed that parental involvement and community engagement had the most substantial impact on project performance, aligning with Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes the importance of balancing stakeholder interests to achieve sustainable outcomes (Freeman, 1984). Furthermore, the government's role in providing consistent support and funding was also identified as a critical factor in the successful completion of educational projects.

However, challenges such as communication barriers and low teacher participation in project planning were identified as areas needing improvement. These barriers hindered the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement and contributed to delays in project execution. Addressing these gaps will be crucial for improving project outcomes and ensuring the sustainability of educational initiatives in Kitui County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

Schools should establish clearer communication channels between administrators, teachers, parents, and local communities. Regular meetings, newsletters, and feedback mechanisms should be implemented to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and actively involved in decision-making. Teachers should be more actively involved in the planning and management of school projects. This could be achieved by providing training and capacity-building opportunities to school staff, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to the planning and implementation phases. Schools should create more opportunities for community members to participate in school projects. This could include inviting local community leaders and parents to participate in decision-making processes and encouraging them to contribute resources and expertise to school projects.

Local government bodies should be more consistent in providing timely funding and support for school projects. Policies should be developed to ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation of funds, and regular monitoring and evaluation should be carried out to track the progress of educational projects. Schools in Kitui County should adopt formal frameworks for stakeholder engagement that outline the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group. This would provide a structured approach to project management, ensuring that all stakeholders are actively involved and that their contributions are effectively utilized.

Areas For Further Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between stakeholder engagement and school project performance, further research should explore the specific impact of individual stakeholder groups (e.g., parents, teachers, government agencies)

on school project outcomes, examining how different groups contribute to the success or failure of projects. Research could investigate the long-term effects of stakeholder engagement on school performance, particularly in terms of student achievement and school sustainability. Further studies could delve deeper into the barriers to effective stakeholder engagement in rural settings like Kitui County, exploring how cultural, socio-economic, and political factors influence stakeholder participation.

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