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DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF DONOR-FUNDED PROJECTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

Rachael J. Litei and Dr. Richard B. Nyaoga

Faculty of Commerce, Egerton University, Kenya

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****Corresponding author:***
Rachael Jepkemboi Litei

ABSTRACT

Donor-funded projects are important to public universities in Kenya because they supplement constrained public resources for infrastructure, research, innovation and institutional capacity development. However, completion can be affected by stakeholder, managerial, monitoring and institutional factors. This study examined the determinants of successful completion of donor-funded projects in Kenyan public universities, focusing on stakeholder involvement, project management skills, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and assessed the moderating role of institutional policies. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among project personnel in 21 public universities implementing donor-funded projects. A total of 115 questionnaires were targeted and 98 usable responses were obtained, representing an 85.2% response rate. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis in SPSS version 29 at the 0.05 significance level. All three determinants were positively and significantly associated with successful project completion. In the combined regression model, stakeholder involvement ($B = 0.392$, $\beta = 0.357$, $p < 0.001$), project management skills ($B = 0.344$, $\beta = 0.304$, $p = 0.005$), and M&E ($B = 0.302$, $\beta = 0.269$, $p = 0.002$) were significant predictors, with the model explaining 72.5% of the variance in successful completion ($R^2 = 0.725$). The moderated model increased explanatory power to 79.0%, and the interaction between the composite determinants and institutional policies was positive and statistically significant ($B = 0.198$, $\beta = 0.204$, $p = 0.005$). The study concludes that successful completion is associated with effective stakeholder engagement, project management capability and functional M&E, and that supportive institutional policy environments strengthen these relationships. The findings provide evidence for university managers and project teams seeking to improve delivery of donor-funded initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

Donor-funded projects have become an important source of development financing in education, infrastructure, research and institutional reform. In higher education, external funding can support infrastructure expansion, research capacity, digital transformation and institutional development, particularly where public resources are constrained. The literature reviewed in the study indicates that project performance is influenced by stakeholder engagement, institutional capacity, governance, monitoring and evaluation, and alignment between project objectives and local institutional contexts. Kenya's public university system has expanded substantially, increasing demand for infrastructure, staffing, research facilities and other institutional resources. Donor-funded initiatives have consequently become important in supplementing public financing. These initiatives, however, operate within complex university governance structures, procurement requirements, academic calendars and donor compliance frameworks. The study's literature review identifies delays, procurement bottlenecks, weak coordination, limited technical capacity and inadequate monitoring and evaluation as recurring challenges. The research problem addressed in this study is the continuing difficulty of completing some donor-funded projects within intended scope, cost, schedule and quality requirements. Previous studies cited in the project have mainly examined donor-funded projects in sectors such as health, agriculture, water and general public-sector infrastructure. The higher education context has received comparatively less empirical attention, particularly studies that jointly examine stakeholder involvement, project management skills and M&E while considering institutional policies as a moderating factor. Accordingly, this study investigated the determinants of successful completion of donor-funded projects in public universities in Kenya. It was designed to provide empirical evidence on how stakeholder involvement, project management skills and M&E relate to successful completion and whether institutional policies change the strength of these relationships.

Study objective: To examine the key determinants influencing successful completion of donor-funded projects in public universities in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to: (i) establish the effect of

stakeholder involvement on successful completion; (ii) assess the effect of project management skills on successful completion; (iii) investigate the effect of monitoring and evaluation on successful completion; and (iv) evaluate the moderating role of institutional policies on the relationship between the determinants and successful completion.

Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant relationship between the selected determinants and successful completion of donor-funded projects in public universities in Kenya.

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspective: The study was guided by Stakeholder Theory, Human Capital Theory, Program Theory and Contingency Theory. Stakeholder Theory provides a basis for understanding how participation, communication and alignment of interests can influence project outcomes. Human Capital Theory supports examination of project management competencies as productive organizational resources. Program Theory provides a basis for considering M&E as a mechanism linking project activities, outputs and outcomes. Contingency Theory provides the basis for examining institutional policies as contextual conditions that may strengthen or weaken the effects of the project determinants.

The conceptual model specified stakeholder involvement, project management skills and M&E as independent variables; successful completion of donor-funded projects as the dependent variable; and institutional policies, comprising government and donor policy considerations, as the moderating variable. Successful completion was operationalised using dimensions related to project cost, time, scope and quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stakeholder involvement: Stakeholder involvement refers to participation in project planning, decision-making, resource allocation, communication and other stages of the project lifecycle. The reviewed literature suggests that participation can strengthen ownership, accountability, relevance and sustainability. In donor-funded projects, involvement is particularly important because project objectives must often be aligned among donors, university management, project teams, beneficiaries and regulatory institutions. Prior Kenyan studies cited in the project report positive relationships between stakeholder participation and project performance, while also noting that the degree and form of participation need to be managed within institutional structures.

Project management skills: Project management skills encompass planning, budgeting, scheduling, risk management, communication, leadership, stakeholder management, monitoring and problem solving. The literature reviewed in the study identifies these competencies as important for coordinating project resources and responding to implementation risks. In university environments, project teams may combine academic and administrative personnel with different levels of project-management experience, making capacity development relevant to donor compliance and execution.

Monitoring and evaluation: M&E provides systematic information on progress, resource use, outputs, outcomes and emerging risks. The study's literature review identifies M&E as important for accountability, learning, corrective action and adaptive management. However, the review also indicates that M&E may be treated primarily as a reporting or compliance requirement rather than as an operational management function. This distinction is relevant to donor-funded university projects because timely information can support corrective action before delays or resource problems become difficult to reverse.

Institutional policies and the research gap: Government and donor policies influence procurement, reporting, disbursement, compliance and institutional autonomy. The reviewed studies indicate that bureaucratic procedures and policy misalignment may constrain implementation, whereas clear guidelines and supportive governance arrangements may facilitate delivery. The research gap identified in the source project is therefore both contextual and integrative: there is limited empirical evidence from Kenyan public universities examining the combined contribution of stakeholder involvement, project management skills and M&E and the moderating role of institutional policies.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and study population: The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The population comprised personnel directly involved in planning, implementing and overseeing donor-funded projects in 21 Kenyan public universities. The target respondents included project principal investigators, project officers, project managers and project administrators. The study targeted 115 respondents and obtained 98 usable questionnaires.

Data collection instrument and procedure: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through drop-and-pick procedures and online platforms. The questionnaire measured stakeholder involvement, project management skills, M&E, institutional policies and successful completion using structured Likert-type items. A pilot study was conducted at the University of Eldoret and Moi University to assess clarity and internal consistency. The study reports Cronbach's alpha values of 0.872 for stakeholder involvement, 0.891 for project management skills, 0.846 for M&E, 0.858 for institutional policies and 0.883 for successful completion, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the study scales.

Data analysis and Presentation: Data were analysed using IBM SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data. Pearson correlation was used to assess associations among variables, while simple and multiple regression models were used to estimate the predictive relationships. The moderated model incorporated an interaction term between the composite determinants and institutional policies. Statistical significance was assessed at $\alpha = 0.05$. Diagnostic tests reported in the project included normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation assessments.

Ethical considerations: The source project reports that ethical approval and research authorization were obtained through Egerton University and NACOSTI. Participants were informed about the study purpose, voluntary participation and their right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and data were used for academic purposes. The study also reports alignment with the Egerton University Research Ethics Policy and relevant research-ethics principles.

RESULTS

Response rate

Response status	Frequency	Percentage
Returned questionnaires	98	85.2
Unreturned questionnaires	17	14.8
Total	115	100.0

The study obtained 98 usable responses from 115 targeted questionnaires, giving an 85.2% response rate. This provided the dataset used for the subsequent analyses. Descriptive evidence on successful completion of Donor Funded Projects. The overall mean for successful completion was 3.7194 (SD = 0.81636). Respondents reported comparatively stronger agreement on stakeholder satisfaction and the contribution of high-quality project activities to trust and collaboration, while agreement on completion within estimated timelines and budgets was comparatively lower. These descriptive results indicate that successful completion involves more than physical or administrative closure; it also includes quality, stakeholder satisfaction and continued support.

Correlation analysis

Variable	r with successful completion	p-value	n
Stakeholder involvement	0.787	<0.001	98
Project management skills	0.799	<0.001	98
Monitoring and evaluation	0.748	<0.001	98

All three determinants had strong positive and statistically significant correlations with successful completion. Project management skills had the highest bivariate correlation (r = 0.799), followed by stakeholder involvement (r = 0.787) and M&E (r = 0.748). These associations do not by themselves establish causation, but they provide evidence of substantial relationships in the study sample.
Simple regression models

Predictor	R	R^2	B	β	t	p
Stakeholder involvement	0.787	0.620	0.865	0.787	12.515	<0.001
Project management skills	0.799	0.639	0.904	0.799	13.038	<0.001
Monitoring and evaluation	0.748	0.560	0.842	0.748	11.050	<0.001

Each simple regression model was statistically significant. Stakeholder involvement explained 62.0% of the variance in successful completion; project management skills explained 63.9%; and M&E explained 56.0%. In each model, the predictor coefficient was positive and statistically significant.

Combined regression model

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	0.211	0.254	—	0.831	0.408
Stakeholder involvement	0.392	0.103	0.357	3.817	<0.001
Project management skills	0.344	0.120	0.304	2.858	0.005
Monitoring and evaluation	0.302	0.097	0.269	3.117	0.002

The combined model produced R = 0.851 and R^2 = 0.725 (adjusted R^2 = 0.716), indicating that the three determinants jointly explained 72.5% of the observed variation in successful completion. The overall model was statistically significant, F(3,94) = 82.533, p < 0.001. All three predictors retained positive and statistically significant coefficients when entered together.

Moderating role of institutional policies

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. error
Determinants only	0.851	0.725	0.716	0.43502
Determinants + policies + interaction	0.889	0.790	0.781	0.32645

Adding institutional policies and the interaction term increased the model R^2 from 0.725 to 0.790, an increase of 6.5 percentage points relati**37** | Page ve to the reported combined model. The source project describes the interaction as adding 3.8 percentage points, but the tabulated R^2 values imply a 6.5-percentage-point increase. For journal submission, the underlying SPSS output should therefore be checked before final publication so that the reported moderation effect is internally consistent.

Term	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	0.302	0.187	—	1.615	0.110
Composite determinants	0.229	0.071	0.236	3.225	0.002
Institutional policies	0.307	0.068	0.317	4.515	<0.001
Determinants × institutional policies	0.198	0.068	0.204	2.908	0.005

The interaction term was positive and statistically significant (B = 0.198, β = 0.204, p = 0.005), providing evidence that institutional policies moderated the relationship between the composite determinants and successful completion in the study sample. The moderated model was statistically significant, F(4,93) = 101.254, p < 0.001.

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Test statistic	p-value	Decision
H01: Stakeholder involvement	t = 12.815	<0.001	Reject H01
H02: Project management skills	t = 14.181	<0.001	Reject H02
H03: Monitoring and evaluation	t = 11.925	<0.001	Reject H03
H04: Institutional policies	t = 2.908	0.005	Reject H04

At the 5% significance level, all four null hypotheses were rejected. The results therefore support statistically significant relationships between each of the three determinants and successful completion, and a statistically significant moderating effect of institutional policies.

DISCUSSION

Stakeholder involvement and successful completion: The study found a strong positive relationship between stakeholder involvement and successful completion. The combined model showed that stakeholder involvement remained statistically significant after accounting for project management skills and M&E. This finding is consistent with the stakeholder-oriented perspective adopted in the study and with prior Kenyan evidence cited in the source project. In the university context, participation can help project teams align project decisions with institutional needs, communicate changes, manage expectations and build ownership among beneficiaries and implementing actors.

Project management skills and successful completion: Project management skills were strongly associated with successful completion. The simple regression model showed substantial explanatory power, while the predictor remained significant in the combined model. The finding is consistent with Human Capital Theory: planning, budgeting, scheduling, leadership, communication, risk management and problem solving represent capabilities that can improve how project resources and activities are coordinated. The result also supports prior studies cited in the project that identify managerial competence as relevant to donor-funded project delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation and successful completion: M&E was positively and significantly related to successful completion. Although its explanatory power in the simple model was lower than that of project management skills and stakeholder involvement, M&E remained significant in the combined model. This suggests that tracking milestones, identifying risks, assessing outputs and using evaluation information can contribute to accountability and corrective action. The finding is consistent with the Program Theory perspective used in the study and with the cited empirical literature on M&E in development projects.

Institutional Policies as a Moderator: The significant interaction term indicates that the relationship between the composite determinants and successful completion varied with the institutional policy environment. The finding is consistent with Contingency Theory, which proposes that organizational outcomes depend partly on the fit between management practices and contextual conditions. In practical terms, project-management capabilities and stakeholder or M&E practices operate within procurement, reporting, governance and donor-compliance arrangements. Policy clarity and alignment may therefore affect how effectively these project-level practices translate into completion outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study concludes that stakeholder involvement, project management skills and monitoring and evaluation are statistically significant positive determinants of successful completion of donor-funded projects in Kenyan public universities. The combined model indicates that these factors jointly explain a substantial proportion of the variation in completion outcomes. The study further concludes that institutional policies significantly moderate the relationship between the determinants and successful completion.

Managerial Implications

- Public universities can formalize stakeholder-engagement mechanisms across project planning, implementation, monitoring and completion stages.
- Universities can strengthen project teams through continuous training in budgeting, planning and scheduling, risk management, communication, leadership and problem solving.
- M&E can be embedded as a management function, with clearly defined indicators, milestone tracking, documented corrective actions and systematic use of evaluation findings.
- University management can review project governance, procurement, reporting and donor-compliance procedures to improve policy clarity, reduce avoidable procedural delays and strengthen alignment between institutional and donor requirements.

Limitations and Future Research

The study relied primarily on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be affected by response or social-desirability bias. Access to detailed financial records and donor agreements was also limited, and project performance was therefore assessed largely through respondents' perceptions. Future research could combine survey data with objective project records, compare different categories of donor-funded projects, use longitudinal designs, and examine additional contextual variables such as leadership, procurement efficiency, donor disbursement timing and institutional autonomy.

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