

# Assessment of Factors that Determine Successful Implementation of School Improvement Projects in Rwanda: A Case of the Whole School Development (WSD) Project in UNICEF Supported Child Friendly Schools

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**Abstract:** *This study sought to examine the determinants of successful project implementation of projects in the Rwanda educational sector by focusing on education quality improvement projects particularly the Whole School Development (WSD) initiative which is implemented by IEE Rwanda with support from UNICEF in selected Child Friendly Schools (CFS). The WSD initiative has implementation challenges such as limited administrative support from school leaders, poor project monitoring and evaluation by the implementer and low levels of school readiness to implement the project. This study hence, sought to assess how these influence successful implementation of the project. The objective of this study is to analyze the role of monitoring and evaluation in successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. A likert scale questionnaire was used for data collection and the data was analyzed by way of SPSS 20 using descriptive techniques such as frequencies. The findings indicate that project monitoring and evaluation influence the successful implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda. Specifically, project monitoring and evaluation was found to have the strongest influence from regression analysis results in terms of contribution to successful implementation of the project when other factors are controlled for. This was followed by organizational readiness to implement while project team training was found to make the least significant contribution to prediction of successful project implementation among all variables in the model. The study recommends among other things that there should also be a fully fledged M&E Staff on the WSD project, the M&E staff should regularly check on project implementation progress in order to ensure successful implementation and that there should be clear guidelines for quality M&E processes on the WSD project as this was found to positively affect successful implementation of the project.*

## 1. Introduction

Burnes (2012) observed that project management is about people getting things done and so entails implementing activities to achieve specific targets. Yet the struggle to identify critical success factors in project implementation is an ongoing topic approached by many researchers especially due to the pressure in a dynamic global market and the ever changing business world where constant innovation is a must in order to achieve competitive advantage (Crisan, Borza, 2014). Project implementation success factors can be thought of as variables that contribute to project success or as levers that can be operated by project managers to increase chances of obtaining a desired outcome (Beleiu, Crisan and Nistor (2015). Globally, theorists have defined effective project implementation to incorporate four basic facets or criteria: completion on schedule, on budget, meeting set objectives/target and it is acceptability by clients. And according to Savolainen (2012) influencing these factors at the right time makes successful implementation more probable.

Since education is critical to economic and social development (Krishnaratre, 2013), there have been efforts internationally to improve education quality through implementing projects. Some of the projects have registered success while others failure. For instance, Lee (2016), reports on a primary education improvement project in Chile

whose aim was to enhance the quality of primary schools as well as pre primary schools and strengthen the institutional capacity of the ministry of education in Chile. The project is said to have reached and exceeded some of the set targets with reason for successful implementation including supportive stakeholders and an excellent project design team. Further, a technical education project in India and an education financing project in Armenia funded by the World Bank were also considered successfully implemented due to continuous government commitment at the highest level, project design which focused on the immediate needs of beneficiaries, stakeholder involvement in project design, preparation and implementation stages as well as the partnership between different ministries (Lee, 2016).

On the other hand, the World Bank funded project that aimed to improve man power training as well as the quality and equity of the education system in Ethiopia was rated poorly implemented due to complex project design and weak implementation capacity (Lee, 2016). Equally so for a secondary education project implemented in Argentina aimed to increase access to quality education and improve equity through school management as its implementation was poor due to poor project design, lack of monitoring and evaluation system and an incomplete risk assessment plan (Lee, 2016). Failed project implementation in educational quality is a challenge in the sub Sahara African countries as well. In Rwanda for instance, the School Based Mentoring

Program (SBMP) that was rolled out in schools in 2012 to improve teacher English proficiency and their pedagogical skills was terminated and restructured short of completion due to implementation challenges (REB, 2015). Despite that, the Rwandan government has made steps to improve education quality through partnering with donors like DFID and UN agencies such as UNICEF (IPAR 2012). UNICEF for instance supports the Whole School Development (WSD) initiative implemented by Inspire Educate and Empower (IEE) Rwanda in 10 Child Friendly Schools in seven districts of Rwanda: Gasabo, Nyarugenge, Bugesera, Bulera, Rubavu, Rwamagana and Rusizi.

The WSD is a school improvement intervention that is based on the premise that there will be better learning outcomes in schools if teacher instructional skills are improved and monitoring capacity built through school leadership management training and increased parental participation. It is built on five pillars which include teaching and learning, school leadership and management, inclusive education, community engagement as well as curriculum and instruction materials (UNICEF, 2013). The project is at implementation stage and according to Ocwija (2010), we can identify problem areas of a project by looking at all the life stages of a project before it is complete. So, as far as the WSD is concerned, there are challenges in its implementation such as a negative attitudes from intended beneficiaries (teachers) who lack a sense of ownership of project activities and deliverables such as trainings to improve their skills (personal observation).

Pinto and Slevin (1987) cited in Anyango (2016) argued that the process of project implementation can present challenges since the stage has complex processes that usually require simultaneous attention to a wide variety of human, budgetary and technical variables. This often presents project managers with a difficult job characterized by role overload, frenetic activity, fragmentation and superficiality since it is the project manager who has responsibility for successful project outcomes. Also, since many projects are initiated in contexts of unpredictable and dynamic environments, project managers would be well served by information about the specific factors critical for successful project implementation (Anango, 2016).

It is from such background that the researcher intends to undertake this study focusing on determinants of successful project implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda. The study was also partly motivated by the existing knowledge gap on determinants of successful project implementation in the education sector of Rwanda despite the sector being awash with many project most of which lack proper implementation.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Project implementation entails a challenging process whereby project specifications have to be satisfied. It also involves coordinating people and resources as well as integrating and performing activities of the project according to the project plan (PMBOK, 2008). The WSD is a school improvement project implemented in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. It is based on the premise

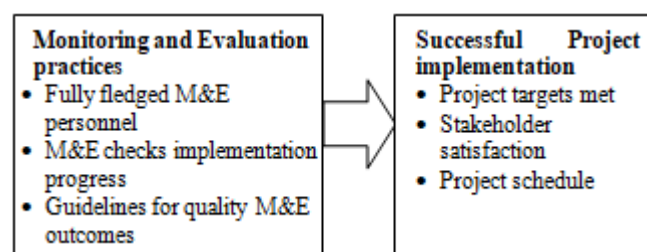
that there will be better learning outcomes in schools if teacher instructional skills are improved and monitoring capacity built through school leadership management training and increased parental participation. To achieve all this, the project approach calls for a radical change in teacher instructional methodology using learner centered teaching methods and activity based pedagogy to develop learner competences. Teachers under the project work on a day to day basis with teacher mentors to build capacity for applying proposed changes in the classroom.

The WSD project however, has implementation challenges, for instance, teacher view the proposed interventions as new practices to be integrated in teaching and learning and are resistant to apply them in their classroom practice. Helfrich, Blevins, Smith, Kelly and Hogan et al. (2011) observed that there is evidence to suggest that educational setups like schools have difficulty to systematically implement new practices and the challenge often involves coordinating change among multiple aspects of practice rather than simply failing to recognize new practice as viable (Helfrich, et al. 2011). Anyango (2016) maintained that the ability to implement a project is more important than the project itself. Herbiniak (2005) in addition observed that without effective implementation, a project cannot be judged as successful. Yet, several theorists like Charan (1999) argue that despite the importance of the project implementation process, little research has been carried out in this area as most literature concentrates on project planning and preparation rather than project implementation process. Hence, there is need to investigate and understand the factors that determine successful implementation of project particularly in the context of Rwanda where there is limited literature highlighting the key determinants of project implementation success especially in view of a multitude of projects implemented in the education sector in the country.

## 3. Objective of the Study

To analyze the role of monitoring and evaluation in successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda.

## 3. Conceptual Framework



## 4. Research Design

Kothari (2009) defines a research design as the arrangement of conditions for data collection and analysis of data in a manner that aim to combine relevance to research purpose with economy in research procedure. Research design can be thought of as the master plan of a research that throws light

on how the study is to be conducted. It shows how all of the major parts of the research study– the samples or groups, measures, treatments or programs work together in an attempt to address the research questions. According to Yin (2009) the research design serves to plan, structure and execute the research to maximize the validity of the findings. This study employed a descriptive case study. A descriptive case study is conducted to describe the present situation, what people currently believe, what people are doing at the moment. Kothari (2009) argues that descriptive case study include fact finding enquiries of different kinds. He added that the major purpose of descriptive research design is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present.

### 5. Study Population

Burns and Grove (2017) described a study population as all the elements that meet the criteria for inclusion in a study. Population is therefore the entire group of individuals, events or objects having a common observable characteristic. The population of this study will include the 10 IEE trainers working in child friendly schools, 7 IEE project managers, 6 school administrators from selected child friendly schools, 88 teachers in the schools selected for sampling and 36 parent teacher committee members. Table 3.1 shows the population of the study.

**Table 1: Sampling frame**

Target group	Number
IEE project managers	7
IEE CFS trainers (project team)	10
CFS school administrators	6
CFS Teachers	88
PTC Members	36
Total	147

### 6. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

According to Polit and Beck (2014), a sample is a proportion of population to be researched, while Kothari (2009) defines a sample as the selected respondents representing the population. The study sample was derived from different segments of the study population by use of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling for the case of IEE management. For this specific research, from the population of 147 people the sample size was determined as follows using Sloven’s formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where; n = the minimum sample size, N = the target population, e = the margin of error estimated at 10%.

**Table 2: Determination of sample size**

Target strata	Sample size determination
IEE project managers	$\frac{7}{1 + 7(0.1)^2} = 7$
IEE CFS trainers	$\frac{10}{1 + 10(0.1)^2} = 9$
CFS school administrators	$\frac{6}{1 + 6(0.1)^2} = 6$

CFS Teachers	$\frac{88}{1 + 88(0.1)^2} = 47$
PTC Members	$\frac{36}{1 + 36(0.1)^2} = 26$
Total	95

### 7. Data collection and instruments

Data collection has to do with the types of information to be collected in the study and the techniques, methods and tools for collecting data. This study focused on both types of data. Primary data which is fresh and collected for the first time from the field was collected by the researcher using a questionnaire. Secondary data was obtained through a review of project documents. Primary data concerning WSD project implementation was sourced from Child friendly Schools where teachers, trainers, and school leaders were required to give responses to questionnaire items. This included information concerning project team training, project monitoring and evaluation as well as information on organization/school readiness for WSD project implementation. Information regarding project team training was mostly sourced from project managers as well as project team members at IEE office.

### 8. Research Findings and Discussion

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics for independent variables**

		N	Min	Max	M	S.D
<b>Project M&amp;E</b>	1) Fully fledged M&E Staff on the project	86	1	5	<b>3.80</b>	0.700
	2) M&E staff constantly checks implementation	86	2	5	<b>3.72</b>	0.746
	3) Guidelines for quality M&E processes	86	2	5	<b>3.80</b>	0.693

As indicated in Table 2, the results of descriptive analysis indicate that project monitoring and evaluation, there were also 3 attributes which inquired whether; there are fully fledged M&E Staff on the project, if the M&E staff constantly checks on project implementation progress and whether there are guidelines for quality M&E processes. The results from descriptive analysis on project M&E indicate an average weighted mean response close to 4 (Agree) for the attributes. This means a majority of the respondents agree that: there is a fully fledged M&E staff on the project (average weighted mean at 3.80), the M&E staff constantly checks project implementation progress (average weighted mean at 3.72) and that there are established guidelines for quality M&E practices on the project with average weighted mean of (3.80). The widest deviation in response to attributes was realized on whether M&E staff constantly checks project implementation progress (S.D at 0.746). Hence, respondents diverged in response to the attribute.

With regard to organization readiness to implement, the three attributes inquired whether the implementing schools had organizational readiness to implement the WSD project, if there were resources available for implementing the project at the schools and whether there was strong organizational leadership to support project implementation. The findings from descriptive analysis on organization



readiness indicate an average weighted mean response of 4 (agree) on the implementing schools having organizational readiness for the WSD project implementation. The findings also reveal an average weighted mean response of (3.71) on resource availability at implementing schools of the WSD project. Finally, the averaged weighted mean response is 4 (agree) on the presence of strong organizational leadership in implementing schools to support the implementation of the WSD project. There were wide deviations in response to all attributes (S.D at 0.7) which suggests respondents were not unanimous on all attribute which may call for further investigation.

The second objective of the study was to analyze the role of monitoring and evaluation in the successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. This implies that having a fully fledged M&E Staff on the project, regular checking on project implementation progress and clear guidelines for quality M&E processes positively affect successful implementation of the WSD project. These results were further triangulated with findings of descriptive analysis on the variable. Hence,

## 9. Conclusion

The study sought to assess factors that determine successful implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda. The specific objective is to analyze the role of monitoring and evaluation in successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. Among the findings, project monitoring and evaluation and organizational influence the implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. Specifically, project monitoring and evaluation was found to have the strongest influence from regression analysis results in terms of contribution to successful implementation of the project when other factors are controlled for. This was followed by organizational readiness to implement while project team training was found to make the least significant contribution to prediction of successful project implementation among model.

## 10. Recommendation

- 1) The study further recommends that there should be regular team training on the WSD project/initiative and similar school improvement interventions
- 2) There should also be a fully fledged M&E Staff on the WSD project as the study finds that this significantly contributes to successful project implementation.
- 3) The M&E staff should regularly check on project implementation progress in order to ensure successful implementation.
- 4) There is also need to have clear guidelines for quality M&E processes on the WSD project as this was found to positively affect successful implementation.
- 5) Finally, there is need for strong organizational leadership to support project implementation in implementing schools for the WSD project and similar education or school improvement projects.

results from descriptive analysis on monitoring and evaluation reveal an average weighted mean response of 4 (agree) on nearly all attributes. Thus, a majority of the respondents agree that there are fully fledged M&E Staff on the project, if the M& E staff regularly checks on project implementation progress and there are guidelines for quality M&E processes on the WSD project.

The above findings are quite consistent with those from previous studies. Karani, Bichanga and Kamau (2014) in their research conducted in twenty six African countries observed a relationship among project management efforts, project success and success criteria, further noting that project success is more sensitive to the use of monitoring and evaluation tools as an early indicator of project's lasting impact. Equally, Waithera and Wanyoike (2015) observed that M&E activities are critical at implementation stage of the project stressing that monitoring was instrumental in tracking performance of a project on a continuous basis in order to ensure that implementation conforms to the project plan (Waithera and Wanyoike, 2015).

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