ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS THAT DETERMINE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS IN RWANDA: THE CASE OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT (WSD) PROJECT IN UNICEF 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 objectives of the study include; to determine the influence of project team training on successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda, to analyze the role of monitoring and evaluation in successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda and to assess the role of organizational (school) readiness in the successful implementation of 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, and means as well as inferential techniques such as Pearson correlation and regression analysis to determine the relationship between the study variables. The findings indicate that project team training, project monitoring and evaluation and organizational (school) readiness to implement were all positively, significantly and strongly influence successful 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 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.

Keywords: Resources, Successful project implementation, schools improvement projects.

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.

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.
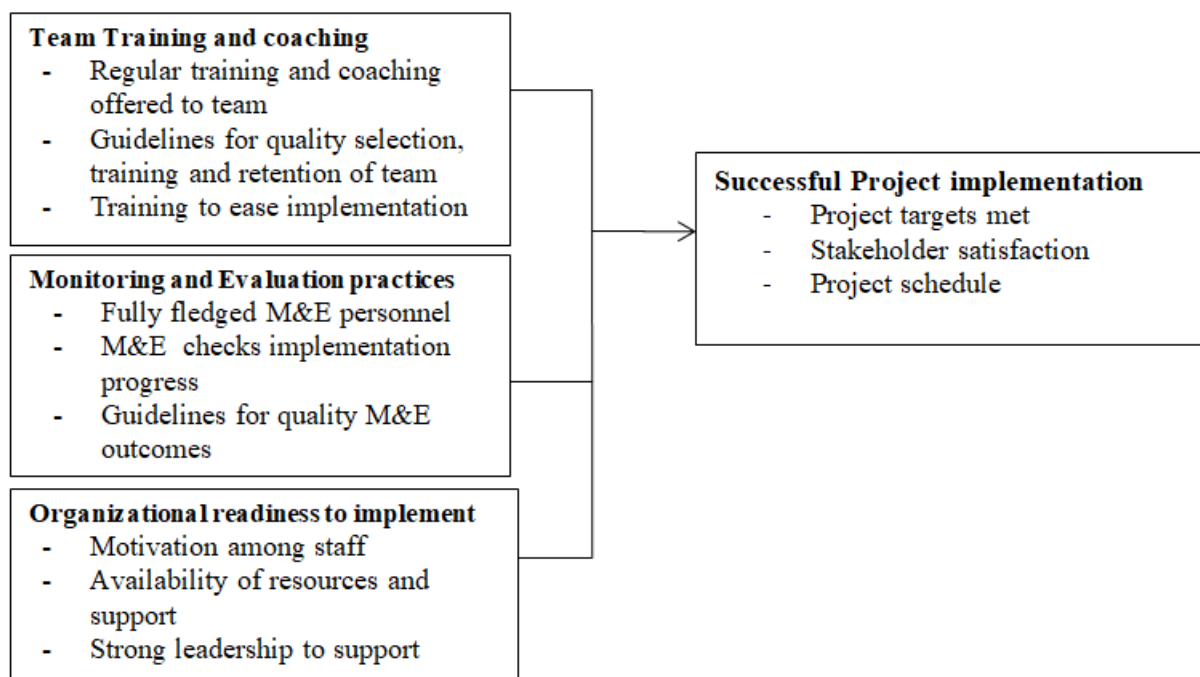
3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

3.1 General objective

The general objective of this study was to analyze the role of resource allocation on performance of agricultural projects in Rwanda.

3.2 Specific objectives

i.   To determine the influence of training and coaching on successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda.

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

iii. To assess the role of organizational readiness in the successful implementation of WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Team Training and coaching
- Regular training and coaching offered to team
- Guidelines for quality selection, training and retention of team
- Training to ease implementation

Monitoring and Evaluation practices
- Fully fledged M&E personnel
- M&E checks implementation progress
- Guidelines for quality M&E outcomes

Organizational readiness to implement
- Motivation among staff
- Availability of resources and support
- Strong leadership to support

Successful Project implementation
- Project targets met
- Stakeholder satisfaction
- Project schedule

5. METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design**: The study used descriptive survey design.

- **Target Population**: The population of this study included 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 which in total equaled to 147 respondents.

- **Sample size**: For the purpose of this research from the population of 147 people the sample size of 95 respondents was determined.

- **Data Collection Instruments:** Data were collected using

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Descriptive statistics

This section presents descriptive statistics of the study. Descriptive of independent variables are first presented as shown in Table1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for independent variables

			N	Min	Max	M	S.D
Project team training	1.	Regular Team Training	86	3	5	**4.00**	0.623
	2.	Guidelines for Quality Team	86	3	5	**3.80**	0.593
	3.	Team Training to simplify Implementation	86	2	5	**3.80**	0.629
Project M&E	1.	Fully fledged M&E Staff on the project	86	1	5	**3.80**	0.700
	2.	M&E staff constantly checks implementation	86	2	5	**3.72**	0.746
	3.	Guidelines for quality M&E processes	86	2	5	**3.80**	0.693
Organization (school) readiness	1.	Readiness of project implementing schools	86	1	5	**4.12**	0.788
	2.	Resource availability	86	2	5	**3.71**	0.780
	3.	Strong organization (school) leadership	86	2	5	**4.10**	0.720

As indicated in Table1, there were 3 attributes under the variable project team training; regular team training, clear guidelines for quality team training and team training with aim to simplify the implementation process. Hence, the results of descriptive analysis indicate a general weighted mean response close to 4 (agree) on all attributes which shows a majority of respondents agree with the attributes on the variable. Thus, respondents generally agree that there is regular team training on the WSD project. They also agree that there are guidelines for quality team training on the WSD project (weighted mean close to 4) and a majority agree that team training on the WSD project aims to simplify the project implementation process. There were however minor deviations in S.D ranging around 0.6 on all attributes hence, respondents were not all unanimous in response to the attributes.

Under 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.

6.2 Descriptive statistics for the dependent variable

Table3 presents descriptive statistics on the dependent variable (successful implementation of the WSD project).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent variable

		N	Min	Max	M	S.D
1.	WSD Project Targets met	86	1	5	4.00	0.833
2.	Project activities implemented per schedule	86	2	5	3.74	0.706
3.	Stakeholders satisfied with the WSD project	86	1	5	3.72	1.002

From Table3, it is indicated that there were 3 attributes under the dependent variable (successful implementation of WSD project). Results of analysis indicate a mean response above (4 = agree) on whether the WSD project targets are met although the wide standard deviation of 0.8 shows respondents were not unanimous on the attribute. Similarly, on whether project activities are implemented per schedule, the average weighted mean stands at 3.74 (close to 4) while on whether stakeholders are satisfied with the WSD project, the average weighted mean is 3.72. Hence, majority respondents agree on the two variables. The widest standard deviation was observed on whether stakeholders are satisfied with the WSD project (SD 1.002). This implies respondents were not unanimous in response on the attribute and there is hence need for further investigation into this attribute.

6.3 Correlation analysis

The researcher undertook a correlation analysis to triangulate the findings of descriptive analysis and those of inferential analysis and the results are depicted in Table4.

Table 4: Correlations Analysis between Project team training, Monitoring and Evaluation, Organizational readiness and successful implementation of WSD project

		1	2	3	4
1. Project Team Training	Pearson Correlation	1			
2. Project Monitoring and Evaluation	Pearson Correlation	0.239[*]	1		
3. Organizational (school) readiness	Pearson Correlation	0.088	0.535[**]	1	
4. Successful implementation	Pearson Correlation	**0.271[*]**	**0.711[**]**	**0.652[**]**	1

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

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

Table 4 shows 3 independent variables; project team training, project monitoring and evaluation and Organizational (school) readiness to implement. The dependent variable of the study was successful implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda. The Pearson correlation values for the independent variables against the dependent are portrayed in the correlations table. The values show the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Testing for influence or relationship between variables is very critical as it forms the basis for making interpretations and conclusions (Pallant, 2014) regarding the study objectives as follows in the next section:

6.4 Discussion of findings guided by study objectives

6.4.1 To determine the influence of training and coaching on successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda.

The first objective of the study was to determine the influence of project team training on successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. The researcher used Pearson correlation analysis as depicted in Table4 to analyze the influence. According to the findings of correlation analysis, project team training positively influences successful implementation of the WSD project with a P value with a magnitude of ($r = 0.271^{**}.p \leq 0.01$).This implies that regular team training, guidelines for quality team training and team training with aim to simplify the implementation process on the WSD project all positively influence successful implementation of the project. The results of inferential analysis were triangulated with those of descriptive analysis and both results are congruent. The findings are consistent with what several theorists observed for instance, Denton, Vaughn, and Fletcher (2003) cited in Fixsen, (2005) in their review on attempts to implement reading programs for students with reading and learning disabilities noted that effective training and coaching was the most critical factor in successful implementation of this project. In addition, Vince, (2009) also argued that providing professional development and ongoing opportunities for training, coaching and peer learning throughout the implementation process is very critical to successful project implementation.

Other theorists such as Basamh, Huq and Dahlan (2013) in their empirical research on project implementation success and change management practices in Malaysian government linked companies couldn't agree more that the project team training represents an important situational variable in the implementation process. Finally, Cushing (2011) reporting on the impact of training on project success observed that research evidence shows an undeniable link between training, team skills and project success (Cushing, 2011). The author observes that projects that met most or all of their objectives provided each of their team members with 40% more training than projects that failed or only partly succeeded. The author also adds that based on research, project allocating more than 6% of the project budget to training were significantly more successful than projects where only 3% or less of the budget went to trainings.

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

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. The researcher also used Pearson correlation analysis as depicted in Table4 for the objective. According to the findings, project monitoring and evaluation positively and significantly influences successful implementation of the WSD project at a P value with strong magnitude of($r = 0.711^{**}$ p≤0.01). 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, 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)

6.4.3 To assess the role of organizational readiness in the successful implementation of WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda.

The third objective of the study was to assess the role of organizational readiness in the successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. Similarly, the researcher utilized Pearson correlation analysis as depicted in Table4 to answer the objective. According to the findings, organizational (school) readiness positively and significantly influence the successful implementation of the WSD project with a P value of a strong magnitude of($r = 0.652^{**}$ p≤0.01).This implies that readiness of the implementing schools for WSD project, availability of resources for the project at implementing school and presence of strong organizational leadership to support project implementation lead to successful project implementation of the WSD project. These results were further triangulated with findings from descriptive analysis and congruence was observed. Hence, most respondents under descriptive analysis agreed that the implementing schools were ready to implement the project, there were resources available for implementing the project at school and there was strong organizational leadership to support project implementation. It was also observed however that there were wide deviations in response to all attributes (S.D at 0.7) which suggests respondents were not unanimous in response to the attribute. Hence this could call for further investigation on the effect of organizational readiness to implement a project on implementation success of a project.

The findings are also congruent with what previous theorists and studies postulated. For instance, Vince (2009) observed that strong leadership and the availability of useful institutional resources can generate individual supportive and receptive organizational climate that improves the stage of readiness with subsequent positive effects on implementation success for a project. Similarly, Razi, Shahriza and Norhidah (2009) undertook a research to assess organizational readiness for change and maintained that organizations cannot expect to implement knowledge management practices successfully and achieve all their goals without an organizational environment which is conducive and supportive to their implementation. Helfrich, Blevins, Smith, Kelly and Hogan et al. (2011) observed that successful implementation efforts are characterized by many organizational factors such as employee and manager attitudes about change, leadership support, slack resources, adequate planning and mechanisms for tracking and reporting progress. According to the authors, organizational scholars maintain that these factors are generally observable at the outset of an intervention and taken together constitute an organization's readiness (Helfrich, et al. 2011).

6.5 The Overall influence of independent variables on successful project implementation

The researcher carried out a regression analysis to establish the overall influence of the independent variables (project team training, project monitoring and evaluation and organizational readiness for implementation) on the successful implementation of the WSD project in child friendly schools in Rwanda. Hence, a standard multiple linear regression (MLR) using the enter method was used to assess the ability of the three mentioned variables to explain variation in the successful implementation of the WSD project. Before conducting the standard multiple regression analysis, preliminary

analyses were undertaken by the researcher to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. The findings of regression analysis are depicted in the tables that follow:

Table 5: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.789[a]	0.623	0.609	1.184

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational readiness, Team Training 2, Monitoring and Evaluation

b. Dependent Variable: Successful implementation

The findings as portrayed in the model summary Table 4.5 reveal that 62 % of the variance in perceived successful implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda, such as the WSD project is explained by Organization (school) readiness to implement, project team monitoring and evaluation as well as training of the implementing team.

6.6 Individual Factor Dimension Analysis and evaluation of the model

The coefficients Table6 reveals standardized beta values that highlight the individual contribution of each study variable to the model assuming all other factors are held constant. This has been illustrated as follows.

Table 4.6: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-2.064	1.646		-1.254	0.213		
1. Team Training	0.228	0.129	.123	1.765	0.081	0.940	1.063
2. Monitoring and Evaluation	0.524	0.091	.474	5.754	0.000	0.676	1.479
3. Organizational readiness for implementation	0.425	0.088	.387	4.816	0.000	0.712	1.405

As shown in the coefficients Table6, all the three variables (project team training, project monitoring and evaluation as well organization readiness to implement) are statistically significant, with project monitoring and evaluation indicating a higher beta value (beta = 0.474, p < 0.000) followed by organizational readiness for implementation at (beta =0.387, p < 0.000) and then project team training at (beta = 0.123, p < 0.081). Therefore, in mathematical terms, the Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) model equation can be depicted as follows:

$Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + e$

Y = successful implementation of the WSD project, X_1 = Project team training, X_2 = project M&E, and X_3= Organizational readiness, a = Constant, b_1, b_2, and b_3= regression coefficients, and e = Error terms

Based on the MLR result above (Table 4.6), the estimated MLR equation is as below:

$Y = -2.064 + 0.123 (X1) + 0.387 (X2) + 0.474 (X3) + e$

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.1 Conclusions

The study sought to assess factors that determine successful implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda. The three specific study objectives were: i) to determine the influence of project team training on successful implementation of the WSD project in UNCEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. ii) to analyze the role of monitoring and evaluation in successful implementation of the WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda and iii) to assess the role of organizational readiness in the successful implementation of WSD project in UNICEF supported child friendly schools in Rwanda. Among the findings, project team training, project monitoring and evaluation and organizational (school) readiness to implement were all generally found to positively, significantly and strongly influence successful 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 all in the model

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the above findings from the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations.

i. The study further recommends that there should be regular team training on the WSD project/initiative and similar school improvement interventions

ii. There should also be established guidelines for quality team training and team training on school improvement projects such as the WSD.

iii. The study further recommends that training on the WSD project should focus on simplifying the implementation process or the project

iv. 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.

v. The M&E staff should regularly check on project implementation progress in order to ensure successful implementation.

vi. 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.

vii. There should be efforts to check organizational or school readiness for implementing school improvement projects such as the WSD project as the stud finds this attribute to positively and significantly contribute to successful implementation.

viii. Equally, schools implementing school improvement projects should be checked for resources availability particularly required resources relevant to the project to be implemented.

ix. 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.

7.3 Suggested areas for further research

This study assessed factors that determine successful implementation of school improvement projects in Rwanda. A further research can be conducted in the following areas for depth and breadth:

i. An assessment of the factors that determine successful implementation of projects in the Rwanda health care sector

ii. An investigation into the role of project team training during implementation of projects since results of the study indicate that this variable makes the least significant contribution in predicting successful implementation of WSD project when other factors are controlled for

iii. A further assessment on the role organizational readiness for implementation in the successful implementation of projects since there were wide deviations from results of descriptive analysis on the variable.

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