

Strategizing for project success in multifaceted public-sector stakeholder environments

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Accepted 1st December, 2015

Abstract. Projects have various stakeholders whose expectations are diverse in nature and therefore the environment in which they operate is an issue of concern. This is achieved by knowing who these stakeholders are, understanding their interests or perceptions regarding the project and determining their level of influence towards the project in terms of power and above all the environments in which they operate. This study sought to examine the extent to which project stakeholder environments influenced project success of Universal Primary Education project in Uganda. It notes that the Universal Primary Education project in Uganda is categorized by poor quality performance and thus calls on strategies aimed at improving project success. Quantitative research methods were used. Questionnaires were used as the preferred data collection tool. Frequencies, means, correlations and regression data analysis techniques were used to draw inferences from collected and cleaned data. Data were collected from a sample of 181 Universal Primary Education schools operating in Central Uganda. Findings revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between the nature of stakeholder environments and perceived project success ($r = .367, p < .01$). Results also reveal that stakeholder environments predicted perceived project success (Beta = .453). The regression model was valid (sig. $< .01$). This means that the more supportive the Stakeholder environments are, the more successful Universal Primary Education project will be perceived to be by stakeholders. Thus, in order to ensure that Universal Primary Education is successfully implemented, there is need to provide better environment for various stakeholders. This could be in terms of improved working conditions of teachers, provision of teaching materials, and good classrooms among others.

Keywords: Perceived project success, strategy, stakeholder environments, Universal Primary Education, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, the Government of Uganda embarked on the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) project whose major objective was to enhance the quality of primary education as one of the strategies to alleviate poverty (Ministry of Planning and Economic development, 1997). More still, UPE was captured as one of the goals listed among the eight Millennium Development Goals that defined the countries major strategies for development. Ward et al. (2006) posits that the introduction of UPE in Uganda in 1997 resulted into a near doubling of enrolments of students over the next years. The enrolment in primary education tripled from

about 2.7 million in 1996 to 8.2 million in 2009. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), which is a key MDG indicator and measures the share of children in school-going age who are actually in school, even hovered above 90% by around the year 2010 (UNDP, 2010). Much as the government implemented UPE in 1997, evidence shows that the project is not yet sustainable. Inadequate facilities in terms of buildings plus text books have been cited and neither has the government fully decided on whether it should not provide food nor determined the actual contribution from parents (Bategeka and Okurut, 2005). The education sector faces challenges in accomo-

dating more learners and trying to eliminate disparities in terms of access and performance. To overcome some of these challenges, the Ugandan government sent grants to districts primarily for the UPE; it also registered support funds for Uganda's UPE programme from the World Bank, the Netherlands government, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Denmark and Britain (Elwana, 2015). With all the above interventions, it is surprising that the failure of these projects has over the years remained high along some dimensions (Rosacker and Olson, 2008; Ssenkaaba et al., 2015). Indications are that the Ugandan public sector has embarked on several projects such as UPE whose implementation has often been painted with a lot of inefficiencies. According to Ssenkaaba et al. (2015) ill-prepared graduates, hungry pupils, frustrated parents, angry teachers is the depiction of the Universal Primary Education the programme which started to extend access to education to all Ugandan children over a decade ago. Indications are that even the environment put up to enable conducive learning have not been tenable probably due to corruption. For instance, most of the classrooms and teachers houses built under the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) project of Uganda government did not survive rain for more than two years and were destroyed, most of the laboratories built in secondary schools were incomplete and most of them have been turned into students dormitories for accommodation (Uganda Impact Evaluation, 2008). In a situation where a multiplicity of environmental factors tends to drive the success of an envisaged project, it is pertinent that salient factors are identified and scientifically tested so as to inform project efforts towards success.

Theoretical underpinning

This study is underpinned by the stakeholder theory as seminally discussed by Freeman (2002), augmented by scholars like Phillips (2003) and Donaldson and Preston (1995), and later popularized by a diversity of scholars and institutions like PMI (2013). According to Vos and Achterkamp (2006), a stakeholder is conceptualized as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the outcomes of the project while Donaldson and Preston (1995) added that stakeholders are people or institutions that have legitimate interests in the project's activities. Projects have various stakeholders whose expectations are diverse in nature and therefore the management of these project stakeholders is an issue of concern. This is achieved by knowing who these stakeholders are, understanding their interests or perceptions regarding the project and determining their level of influence towards the project in terms of power. This leads to perceived success of the project by the different stakeholders in terms of service delivery and the quality of service. Along the lines of PMI (2013), this study presumes that a

Project Stakeholder is an individual, group, or organization who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project. Therefore within the confines of this study, the success of the Universal Primary Education projects in Uganda, affect and are affected by a variety of stakeholders who may be internal like the teachers, learners and or external. We make a case for the fact that environmental factors surrounding these stakeholders shape the success of UPE Projects. We argue that concerned parties need to consider the interplay between the stakeholders in their environment and the resulting impact on the project during efforts to enhance the success of educational Projects like UPE.

Stakeholder environments

Projects need not only to satisfy their clients but also a number of other stakeholders whose wants and expectations are often disparate, in conflict and subject to change (Wreder et al., 2009). According to Vos and Achterkamp (2006), a stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the outcomes of the project while Donaldson and Preston (1995) added that stakeholders are people or institutions that have legitimate interests in the project's activities. Newcombe (2003) argues that project stakeholders include clients, project managers, designers, subcontractors, suppliers, funding bodies, users and the community at large. The implication of these definitions is that a stakeholder is any individual or group with the power to be a threat or a benefit to the project (Gibson, 2000).

However, Arca and Prado (2008) note that projects have various stakeholders whose interests are multiple, diverse and often contradicting, hence the need to be integrated through stakeholder management. Manowong and Ogunlana (2006) agrees that conflicts do occur in projects and are usually caused by differences in expectations of different project stakeholder groups and that such opinion diversities can be alleviated via stakeholder management activities since it is advocated to build stakeholder consensus. To Coomes and Liew (2007), managing stakeholders concerns identifying stakeholders and their interests, ranking them by their importance to the project and managing relations with them accordingly. However, Yang et al. (2009) note that despite several studies, a comprehensive critical review of the stakeholder management has not yet appeared.

Perceived project success

Moe and Pathranarakul (2006) describe a project as an endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service while Turner (1993) emphasizes that project as an endeavor in which human, material and financial resources are organized in a novel way, to undertake a

Table 1. Reliability test results of the study variables.

Variable	Cronbach alpha value
Stakeholder environments	.733
Perceived project success	.826

Source: Primary Data

unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change in terms of quantitative and qualitative objectives. According to Baccarini (1999), the concept project success is a matter of perception and of divergence perspectives and that there is no absolute success but only perceived project success. The way project success is evaluated changes over time; a project may be perceived successful at its launch and turns into a catastrophe some time after. Project success means different things to different stakeholders at different times as the point of view is not the same for all the stakeholders (Lim and Mohamed, 1999). A project may be perceived as a success by the client but as a failure by the management, if they hold differing perspectives on the project results (Belassi and Tukel, 1996). This implies that project success becomes therefore a subjective evaluation that reflects the specific needs and agenda of each stakeholder.

Hence project success remains an ambiguous, inclusive, and multidimensional concept and its definition and measurement are bound to a specific context (Ika, 2009). It is common to look at project success in terms of time, cost and quality; however, projects have often been delivered within time, cost, and quality standards, only to be considered failures some time later. Also, other projects that exceeded time or cost constraints can be considered successful (Dvir et al., 1998). While to Baccarini (1999) and Ika (2009) project success becomes a hexagon of time, cost, quality, and achievement of strategic objectives of the client organization that initiated the project, satisfaction of final users, and satisfaction of other stakeholders in terms of service delivery. Andersen et al. (2006) emphasizes that the success criteria of a project should reflect the immediate short term, predefined project goals (completion on time and to budget) as well as the longer-term contribution in form of impact, service delivery and quality.

METHODOLOGY

The study design was exploratory in nature and used quantitative data mainly. The researchers adopted a cross sectional survey approach and the study aimed at getting responses on stakeholder management of UPE in Wakiso District. Wakiso District is one of the districts in Uganda which provides a rich ground for this kind of analysis since it has a number of UPE Project undertakings. Target respondents were teachers, deputy

teachers, head teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) Executives and PTA (Parent Teacher Association) Executives.

A population of 342 UPE schools in Wakiso district according to the annual schools' census (2009), was considered and a sample of 181 in line with Morgan and Krejcie (1970) was used and these were selected using convenient sampling. Based on the 181 schools above, the researchers distributed a total of 350 questionnaires and 247 were returned giving a response rate of 71% which was considered high enough to make predictions on the study variables. The research used both primary and secondary data as one source would have limited investigations in this study. Secondary data was obtained from published documents especially newspapers while primary data was obtained by administering questionnaires to the respondents in UPE Schools. A questionnaire survey is one of the most cost effective ways to involve a large number of respondents in order to achieve better results, as recommended by Andi and Minato (2003). The questionnaire instrument was designed through modifying the framework by Jergeas et al. (2000), Smith et al. (2001) and Takim (2009) whose psychometric scales had 15 statements to measure stakeholder management on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to not sure. The reliability of the research instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. This measured the internal consistency among the items on each factor and varied from 0 to 1; the higher the alpha, the greater the internal consistency reliability of the scale. A Cronbach Alpha Test was done on the instrument and the results ranged between 0.748 and 0.827 as summarized in Table 1.

According to Pallant (2001), the value for alpha should be greater than 0.7 for the instrument to be reliable. This implies that the instrument used for the study was reliable basing on the results shown in Table 1.

Measurement of variables

For all the variables of the study, a structured standard questionnaire was used.

Stakeholder environments

This was measured on a 5 point likert scale of 15- items suggested by Jergeas et al. (2000), Smith et al. (2001) and Takim (2009).

Perceived project success

This was measured using 43 items based on the works of Munene (2009) to capture service delivery and quality service dimensions. The respondents answered on a 5-

Table 2. Regression results.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.824	.225		6.452	.000
	Stakeholder environments	.562	.071	.453	6.563	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived project success. Source: Primary data.

point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). For instance, a respondent scored an item such as "The school timetable is adhered to by teachers".

RESULTS

Our study was based on results from a sample of 242 with the following characteristic. Majority of the respondents (87.1%) have attained a tertiary or University level of education compared to secondary (4.2%) and primary levels (8.8%). It was also established that 43.4% of the respondents had worked in their roles for over 10 years, 41.3% with 5 to 10 years and 14.7% for less than 5 year of service. The implication is that most of the UPE project stakeholders (teachers and SMC) are very experienced although this may suggest that few people are joining the teaching profession at the primary level. Inferential data findings in form of correlation analysis were used to determine the relationship between study variables. Results revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between stakeholder environments and perceived project success ($r = .367$, $p < .01$). This means that the better the stakeholder environments are, the more successful UPE project will be perceived by stakeholders.

Results from Table 2 indicate that stakeholder environments predicted perceived project success (Beta = .453). The regression model was valid (sig. $< .01$). This suggests that stakeholder environment is a key factor in influencing perceived project success. As the environment surrounding the activities and interest of the various stakeholders improve, they are more likely to perceive the project as successful. In the UPE project, as more parents became capable of sending their children to school, many perceived this as project success. However, for teachers who consider their environment as poor and unbecoming, the UPE project is still far from success.

DISCUSSION

A bilateral correlation analysis indicated that stakeholder environment ($r = .367$, $p < .01$) is significant and positively correlated with perceived project success ($r = .367$, $p < .01$). This means that the better the stakeholder environments are, the more successful UPE project will

be perceived successful by stakeholders. In the UPE project, stakeholder environment covered issues relating to the working and study environment of teachers, SMC and students respectively. The government as the owner of the project has been increasing investment and funding for UPE project. It has trained more teachers, constructed more classrooms, added new schools reduced the parents burden of fees and sensitized parents of the need to educate their children. All these initiatives have brought about improvement in the environment in which the other stakeholders operate.

Although much effort has been put in the improvement of the stakeholder environment and the sector at large during the implementation of the project, a lot is still desired. Teachers still complain of poor salaries (many industrial actions have been staged in protest to this in the recent years). Pupils still complain of teacher absenteeism, insufficient classrooms and facilities and parents are not impressed by the deteriorating quality of education their children are getting.

It has also been found out that stakeholder environment in the urban area tend to be better than that of those in rural areas. This could explain the inconsistency, difference and the great divide that exists in the perceived success of the UPE project between urban and rural areas. The project is perceived to be more successful in urban areas than in rural areas.

In most of the rural areas for example, the UPE project is perceived to be less successful due to the inadequate facilities in terms of buildings, textbooks, and other needed materials and the fact that the government has not fully decided on whether it should or should not provide food nor determined the actual contribution from parents. This has led to unfavorable environment for both students learning and other stakeholders working environment. With this kind of environment, much of the project is perceived to be unsuccessful. However, given the increase in funding by government, the increase in the enrollment of pupils, and increase in the number of trained teachers and schools, the UPE project is perceived to be a success by other stakeholders like government, school management committees and local authorities. As part of the positive strides towards enhancing the success of UPE, in 2014 government increased the teachers' salaries and is also boosting of over 8.4 million pupil enrollment which is more than three times higher than the pupil enrollment at inception of the UPE project at the start of 1997. Thus, currently,

enrollment is no longer a challenge but the challenge is how to encourage stay and love for school at all levels. To the government and SMC these numbers characterizes a significant improvement and great performance of the UPE project.

As earlier noted, projects have various stakeholders whose expectations are dissimilar in nature and therefore the environment in which they operate is an issue of concern. This leads to differing levels of perceived success of the project by the different stakeholders in terms of service delivery, achievements and sustainability. We therefore conclude that stakeholder environment should be improved as it will always affect the success of the project.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study established a positive significant relationship between stakeholder environments and perceived project success. This implies that in order to ensure that the UPE is successfully implemented; there is need to provide better environment for various stakeholders. This could be in terms of improved working conditions of teachers, provision of teaching materials, and good classrooms among others.

Areas for further study

The study focused on stakeholder environments and perceived project success. There is need for research in the following areas: Factors that affect perceived project success besides stakeholder environment; Relationship between stakeholder management and stakeholder engagement.

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