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Critical Success Factors and Performance of NGO Education Projects in Rwanda: A Case of USAID Soma-Umenye, Early Grade Reading Project

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Abstract

The general objective of this study was to establish the influence of critical success factors on the project performance of a non-governmental organization's education project in Rwanda USAID's Soma-Umenye project. This study was carried out using qualitative and quantitative methods because combining both methods provided the necessary triangulation. It has been noted that many projects end up failing in most cases. This issue of poor performance of projects is not a new phenomenon. More often than not, this frustrated project proponent like the stakeholders and their beneficiaries. The literature review does not reflect the relationship between key critical success factors and project performance; this research aims to fill this gap because it is critical for project practitioners to understand the degree of relationships between critical success factors and project performance in order to focus on the right factors at the right time to achieve the desired project success. The study used a sample of 96 respondents from the target population of 2,278 USAID Soma-Umenye employees and clients. SPSS was used to analyze the data, which was then presented in the form of tables and other graphic presentations of frequencies, means, deviations, correlations, and regressions. A strong positive relationship between management support and project performance was discovered, with a correlation coefficient of .850**. Second, a positive relationship between project planning and project performance was observed with a correlation coefficient of .540**; however, a negative relationship between trained personnel and project performance was observed with a correlation coefficient of -.389**. Similarly, the study found that effective communication is positively related to project performance, with a correlation coefficient of .294**, and that all findings are statistically significant because the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value obtained was less than 0.01. The study findings concluded that critical success factors such as management support, project planning, trained personnel, and effective communication have a significant impact on project performance, as evidenced by the strong correlation between the two variables. The research recommended that staff should be trained in the technical aspects of the projects they are working on in order to ensure the sustainability of the NGO's project performance.

Keywords: *Critical success factors, Management support, Project performance, Project planning, Training*

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1.0 Introduction

According to Pinto & Slevin (2016), project success is a result of both intrinsic and extrinsic project factors. The issue of poor performance has been characteristic of many projects. For more than three decades, project management scholars and enthusiasts have tried to seek and explain the reasons for project success. Hughes (2016) conducted a study whereby he interrogated the factors that impact on project performance. During his study, he found out that projects fail because of inadequate management systems, lack of congruence between rewards and actions plus poor communication about the intended goals of the project. On the other hand, Hughes (2016) asserts that success factors in the program should be acknowledged besides being replicated as the best approach to refining program success as disparate to investing in capital projects and why projects fail. The purpose of this study is to establish the influence of critical success factors on project performance of NGO education projects in Rwanda.

1.1 Problem Statement

It has been observed that the majority of projects fail. Poor project performance is not a new phenomenon. This has frequently frustrated project proponents, such as stakeholders and beneficiaries. Even though research on critical success factors is common, no consensus has been reached on the definition of program performance or how to quantify it (Baker *et al.*, 2014). The success of a program is dependent on one's observation and viewpoint. Belassi and Tukel (2016) acknowledge that program performance cannot be completely achieved; projects fail due to insufficient management systems, a lack of congruence between rewards and actions, and poor communication about the project's intended goals. It's difficult to say that everyone involved in a project has the same point of view (Belout & Gauvreau, 2014). There is a scarcity of consistent research on the relationship between key success factors and project performance in the literature (Belout & Gauvreau, 2014; Cooke-Davies, 2012; Culler, 2019). Project practitioners, on the other hand, must understand the degree of relationships between critical success factors and information technology in project performance in order to focus on the right factors at the right time to achieve the targeted project success.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to establish Influence of critical success factors on project performance of NGO education project in Rwanda.

2.1 Literature Review

Project achievement has lengthy been taken into consideration the cap potential to fall inside time, fee, and high-satisfactory constraints. However, tasks have frequently been introduced inside time, fee, and high-satisfactory, most effective to be taken into consideration failures. At the identical time, different tasks which have surpassed time or fee constraints are typically taken into consideration efficaciousness (Pinto & Slevin, 2016). Management support ensures strategic development, which leads to good performance (Baccarni, 2013). Support for project management is critical because it enables proper planning, organization, and coordination that are prerequisites for project performance (Baccarni, 2013). Management support helps

motivate employees to work hard to reach their project goals (Deakin, 2019). Without proper management support, proper coordination and success of the project cannot be guaranteed. Poor management practices and the general lack of effective monitoring are cited as some of the main causes of project failure by poorly trained staff (Le-Hoai, Lee & Nguyen, 2013).

Carvalho and Rabechini (2015) checked out the effect of risk control on venture performance: the significance of gentle capabilities. This clarifies the connection among hazard manipulate and project achievement, at the same time as reflecting the incidental results of project complexity. This approach additionally combines the additives of gentle capabilities and tough capabilities. This methodical approach consists of literature evaluations and empirical verification surveys helping the conceptual framework, and the usage of structural equation models. These assumptions are especially primarily based totally on authentic investigations regarding 263 obligations in eight industries. An on-web website online painting consists of interviews with project managers and hazard managers, in addition to an assessment of inner files on project performance. The established model supplied in this text presents a manner to partner the tough and gentle elements of hazard manipulate with project achievement, and to recognize the adjustment impact of project complexity. The gentle component of hazard manipulate appears to be emphasized the most, explaining 10.7% of the effect on project achievement.

The success of a project is related to establishing specific criteria or criteria for measuring results. In their study, Pinto and Slevin (2018) looked for a broader framework for the success of the project. They assumed that the success of the project was based on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The essential factors they identified were time, cost, and performance. It is managed by the project manager. External factors were considered for the usefulness, satisfaction and effectiveness of the project results. It should be noted that according to Pinto and Slevin (2018), these factors cannot be evaluated before the project is completed. This can be easily assured during the execution of the project up to a specific point in time by understanding the customer's needs and converting them into project service specifications. Critical success factors are the critical factors needed to achieve the project goals and are essentially static (Roorda, 2019). Naeem, *et al.* (2018) have considered a challenge plan to achieve the challenge through an intermediate position in hazard control and a coordinated position in corporate culture. The survey was used to collect data from 100 Challenge Managers. Regression analysis and related strategies were used to investigate this relationship, demonstrating the excellent effects of welfare programs. Observations show that predictors have a significant effect on response variables. Onzález *et al.* (2018) examine the relationship between plan security and project performance. This study found that there was an affirmative association among plan, security as well as project success at the level of interest and challenges. Finally, this study applies lean manufacturing methods to assist in the creation and management of project planning and management, while predicting the impact of planning reliability on overall performance.

2.2 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presents; the independent variable that comprise of management support, project planning, training and information technology and communication. The dependent variable is project performance which is measured by three indicators: on time schedule, within the budget and the beneficiaries’ satisfaction. The intervening variable includes the government policies and the project size.

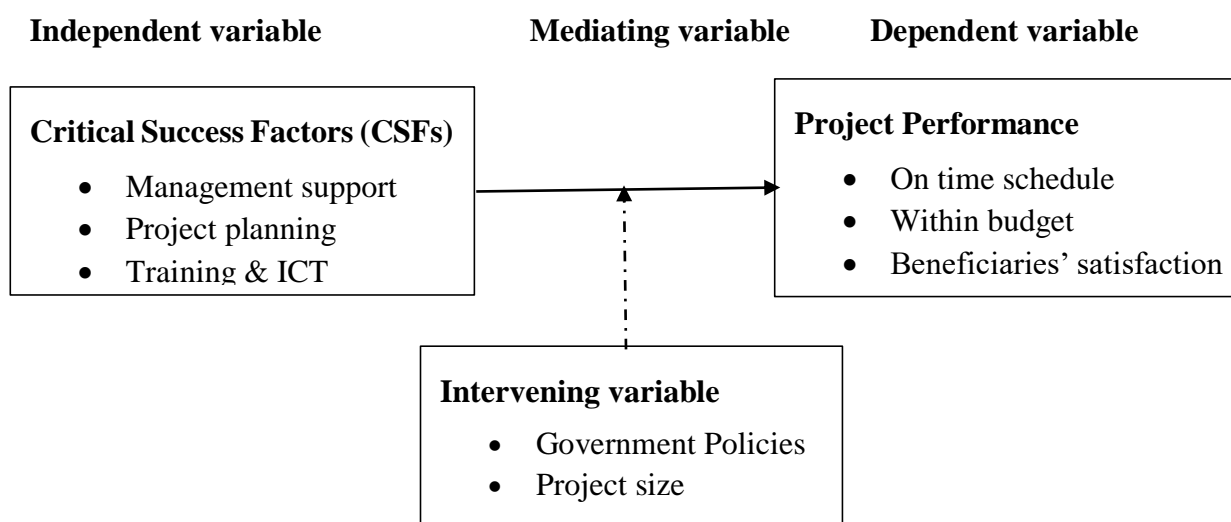


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.0 Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used in this study helped to explore and describe the critical success factors and their influence on project performance. The target population of this study comprised of 2,278 employees and clients of USAID Soma-Umenye. The sample size for this study was arrived at 96 through the use of Slovin’s formula. According to Fisher (2017) this formula is used when nothing about the behavior of a population is known at all.

Slovin’s formula is written as:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

n = sample N = Total population e = Error tolerance

Fisher (2017) further contends that in by the method, the error of tolerance is initial resolute which can a proportion of amid 90 as well as 99. The target population of USAID Soma-Umenye employees and clients is 2,278. The sample size therefore was:

$$n = 2278 / (1 + 2,278 * 0.1 * 0.1) = 96, \text{ hence a total 96 respondents.}$$

For this study, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to get the right samples from the entire population. Simple random sampling helped in reducing the biasness posed by purposive sampling. To conduct this study, a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ)

was employed to gather the required data. The questionnaire for this particular study was composed of closed-ended items. A research assistant was appointed to help in delivering the questionnaire to respondents and collecting them. After data collection, the researcher analyzed the data and draw conclusions from them. The gathered information was finally compiled into a research project ready for presentation. To ensure that the instrument for this particular study is valid and reliable, pretesting was conducted by the research. This was administered to a few people – before administering it to a bigger sample. The collected data was processed for analysis and then later actually analyzed. First of all, the collected data was edited, categorized or coded and then computerized using SPSS software. The influence was demonstrated by multiple regression equation and inferential statistics were captured.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

This part presents the findings according to objectives of the study. It shows the finding on the status of Critical success factors and project performance of NGO education projects in Rwanda: a case of USAID SOMA-UMENYE, Early Grade Reading Project and relationship between these two objectives. It describes the perception of respondents from items related to study objectives. Information in this section was presented in form of tables and statistical techniques to discuss the findings for each object.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The study sought to establish the influence of critical success factors on project performance of NGO education project in Rwanda.

4.1.1 Management support and project performance

Objective one determined the management support and its impact on project performance. To gather information on this variable, the researchers asked questions to the respondents

Table 1. Management support and project performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management support is very crucial in the proper performance of any given project	96	2.00	5.00	4.2917	.81971
Management support ensures strategy development and this results into positive performance	96	3.00	5.00	4.4688	.61478
Management support facilitates proper planning, organization and coordination	96	2.00	5.00	4.5208	.63211
Management support motivates people to work hard towards achieving the goals of the project	96	2.00	5.00	4.3438	.79244
Without good management support in place, proper coordination and success of projects cannot be assured	96	1.00	5.00	4.0521	1.11798

It is clear that a great number of participants were in agreement that management support is very crucial in the proper performance of any given project as shown by high mean of 4.29 and homogeneous perception as the standard deviation was 0.81. These findings indicated that the more the management support NGOs workers get, the more their performance increases; also many of respondents were in agreement about the items that management support ensures strategy development and this results into positive performance as shown by high mean of 4.46 and homogeneity in responses as indicated by standard deviation of 0.61. Furthermore, many of respondents agreed about the item that management support facilitates proper planning, organization and coordination, showed by low mean of 4.52 and standard deviation 0.63 and they agreed also on management support motivates people to work hard towards achieving the goals of the project on high mean of 4.34 and standard deviation of 0.79.

In examining whether without good management support in place, proper coordination and success of projects cannot be assured, findings in Table 1 indicated a mean of 4.05 which is high mean, indicating that a great number of respondents were in agreement about the item and heterogeneity in responses as shown by standard deviation of 1.11.

4.1.2 Project planning and project performance

Objective two determined the project planning and its impact on project performance. To gather information on this variable, the researchers asked questions to the respondents.

Table 2. Project planning and project performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Project planning is the cornerstone to achieving success	96	1.00	5.00	4.3333	1.06293
Effective planning ensures project performance	96	1.00	5.00	4.2292	.90005
Set plans are implemented and adhered to ensure project performance	96	3.00	5.00	4.5417	.54128
Planning process helps in bringing the project through its lifecycle	96	1.00	5.00	4.1667	1.10183
Planning and determination significantly affect the success of that project	96	2.00	5.00	4.6562	.62959

It is clear that a great number of participants were in agreement that project planning is the cornerstone to achieving success as shown by very high mean of 4.33 and heterogeneous perception as the standard deviation was 1.06; also many of respondents were in agreement about the items that effective planning ensures project performance as shown by very high mean of 4.22 and homogeneity in responses as indicated by standard deviation of 0.90. Furthermore, many of respondents agreed about the item that set plans are implemented and adhered to ensure project performance, showed by very high mean of 4.54 and standard deviation 0.54. This implies that the more NGOs plan their activities well, the more their projects performance increases.

In examining whether planning process helps in bringing the project through its lifecycle, findings in Table 2 indicated a mean of 4.16 which is high mean, indicating that a great number of respondents were in agreement about the item and heterogeneity in responses as shown by standard deviation of 1.10. When the researcher asked if planning and determination significantly affect the success of that project, statistics in Table 42 indicated a very high mean of 4.65 and the standard deviation of 0.62.

4.1.3 Trained personnel and project performance

Objective three was to determine the trained personnel and its impact on project performance. To gather information on this variable, the researchers asked questions to the respondents

Table 3. Trained personnel and project performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Usually, large proportions of project failures arise as a result of poorly trained personnel	96	1.00	5.00	3.7292	1.30971
Poor management practices leads to project non-performance	96	2.00	5.00	4.3438	.85628
Lack of effective supervision leads to project non-performance	96	1.00	5.00	3.4067	1.29506
Training leads to acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards work related tasks	96	1.00	5.00	4.4688	.92853
Training is an important motivator which yield results in the short and long-term benefits for individuals and projects	96	1.00	5.00	3.5417	1.21323

As trained personnel and project planning is concerned, the findings in table 3 revealed that usually, large proportions of project failures arise as a result of poorly trained personnel as shown by high mean of 3.72 and heterogeneous perception as the standard deviation was 1.30. Again many respondents were in agreement about the item ‘poor management practices lead to project non-performance’ as indicated by very high mean of 4.34 and homogeneity in responses as the standard deviation was 0.85.

In assessing whether lack of effective supervision leads to project non-performance, findings in Table 3 showed respondents were in disagreement about these items as shown by moderate mean of 3.40 and standard deviation of 1.19.

The results in Table 3 further indicated training leads to acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards work related tasks and training is an important motivator which yield results in the short and long-term benefits for individuals and projects, many of respondents were in agreement as it is shown by very high mean of 4.46 and high mean of 3.54 and 0.92 and 1.21 standard deviation respectively.

4.1.4 Effective communication and project performance

Objective four determined the effective communication and its impact on project performance. To gather information on this variable, the researchers asked questions to the respondents and their answers are in this Table 4

Table 4. Effective communication and project performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication should be a two-way process	96	1.00	5.00	3.7083	.86956
Effective communication should not be a unilateral process	96	1.00	5.00	4.2500	1.04630
Objectives and priorities of a project should be decoded	96	3.00	5.00	4.6458	.63211
Knowledge sharing fosters team relationships	96	1.00	5.00	3.8021	1.02207
Varying modes of communication media provoke different varying responses	96	3.00	5.00	4.5625	.61237

About the effective communication and its impact on project performance, the findings in table 4 revealed that communication should be a two-way process as shown by high mean of 3.70 and homogeneous perception as the standard deviation was 0.86. Again many respondents were in agreement about the item ‘effective communication should not be a unilateral process’ as indicated by very high mean of 4.25 and heterogeneity in responses as the standard deviation was 1.04.

In assessing ideas on whether objectives and priorities of a project should be decoded, findings in table 4 showed respondents were in disagreement about these items as shown by a very high mean of 4.64 and standard deviation of 0.63.

The results in Table 4 further indicated that knowledge sharing fosters team relationships and varying modes of communication media provoke different varying responses, many of respondents were in agreement as it is shown by high mean of 3.80 and a very high mean of 4.56 and 1.02 and 0.61 standard deviation respectively.

4.1.5 Evaluation of project performance

To determine the project performance of NGOs, this variable was assessed through its indicators. After a selection of suitable indicators of project performance, the researcher went ahead to request respondents to provide their opinion on each indicator. The below table describe the views of respondents on each indicator of project performance.

Table 5. Project performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The project cost is within the budget	96	3.00	5.00	4.4167	.64346
The works are as per specification	96	3.00	5.00	4.5625	.61237
The project delivery is on schedule	96	2.00	5.00	4.3542	.75365
The project has minimum change of scope	96	1.00	5.00	4.0208	1.10481
The project stakeholders are satisfied	96	3.00	5.00	4.4167	.53639

Results presented in Table 5 indicated project cost is within the budget with the very high mean of 4.41 and homogeneity responses of 0.64, the works are as per specification with the very high mean of 4.56 and the homogeneity in responses of 0.61 and the project delivery is on schedule with a very high mean of 4.35 and standard deviation of 0.75 while the project has minimum change of scope respondent’s agreement was at 4.02 as high mean and 1.10 of heterogeneity in responses. Finally, respondents evidenced a very high mean of 4.41 and homogeneity in responses of 0.53 about the statement ‘project stakeholders are satisfied.

4.1.6 The relationship between critical success factors and project performance

To establish the nature of how variables are related, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used and it is based on the following rules: when the Pearson correlation value is positive, it is to say that the relationship is positive, and when it is negative the relationship is said to be negative, and the Pearson correlation is 0, it is to say that there is no correlation. The relationship was tested basing on the significance level or p- alpha of 0.01.

When the p-value in table is less than or equal to 0.01 the relationship is statistically significant, and when the p-value or Sig. (2-tailed), is greater than 0.01 the relationship is said to be not statistically significant.

Table 6. Correlation between critical success factors and project performance

Critical success factors	Project performance	
Management support	Pearson Correlation	.850**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Project planning	Pearson Correlation	.540**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Trained personnel	N	96
	Pearson Correlation	-.389**
Effective communication	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	96
	Pearson Correlation	.294**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
	N	96
	N	96

Table 6 shows that a positive strong relationship between management support and project performance on the correlation coefficient of .850** and that is positively correlated since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value .000 is less than 0.01. Secondly, there is a positive relationship between project planning and project performance on the correlation coefficient of .540** and it is statistically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is .000 which is less than 0.01. Moreover, negative relationship between trained personnel and project performance due to the correlation coefficient of -.389** and that is statistically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value of .000 is less than 0.01. In addition, the study showed the effective communication was positively correlated to the project performance since it is on the correlation coefficient of .294** and it is statistically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is .004 which is less than 0.01. The implication is that critical success factors in terms of management support, project planning, trained personnel, and effective communication greatly influence project performance.

4.2 Regression analysis

Regression analysis between independent and dependent variables was done

Table 7. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.950 ^a	.901	.896	.29023

Table 7, indicates the value of adjusted R Square was .896 and demonstration that there is modification of .901 on project performance to the modification in independent variable (management support, project planning, trained personnel, effective communication)

Table 8. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.323	4	17.581	208.708	.000 ^a
	Residual	7.666	91	.084		
	Total	77.990	95			

Source: Primary data, 2022

Calculated value of level of significance was 70.323. While a mean square at regression level was 17.581. The above consideration show that the general approach was significant and that the indicators of independents variable and all have a positive impact on the project performance.

Table 9. Regression analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	.266	.165		1.616	.110
	Management support	.039	.101	.029	.388	.099
	Project planning	.068	.091	.074	.747	.057
	Trained personnel	.454	.106	.299	4.284	.000
	Effective communication	.539	.081	.668	6.680	.000

The finding revealed that holding independent variables constant (management support, project planning, trained personnel, effective communication) to a constant zero, trained personnel would be at .454, and, effective communication at .539 can improve project planning limited by a factor of 0.068.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, the results of the study indicated that critical success was at satisfactory level as indicated by the findings. There is a little room for improvement in order to achieve high performance of NGOs projects. Lastly, the study findings concluded that critical success factors in terms of management support, project planning, trained personnel, and effective communication greatly influence project performance as justified by strong correlation between the variables.

6.0 Recommendations

In light of the above findings, the following are the recommendations:

The study recommends that the information gained from the monitoring and evaluation of NGOs projects should be used to guide the project supervisors where more planning and management is needed and recommend any action required. There is therefore a need to make sure that staffs are trained in the technical aspect of the projects they are undertaking to realize the sustainability of donor funded project.

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