



**MONITORING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCE OF  
COUNTY GOVERNMENT FUNDED EDUCATION PROJECTS IN MACHAKOS  
COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Monitoring and evaluation are critical elements of a project's cycle because they help project managers enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of projects. However, the implementation of M&E practices for county government-funded projects still needs improvement, with many education projects funded by the county government of Machakos experiencing late completion, cost overruns, or failing to achieve set targets. The general objective of this study was to examine the impact of select monitoring and evaluation practices on the effectiveness of county government-funded education projects in Machakos County. The specific objectives of this study were to examine the impact of M&E capacity building on the performance of County government-funded education projects in Machakos County and to evaluate the effect of utilization of M&E findings on the sustainability of County Government funded education projects in Machakos County. This study focused on 27 county-government funded education projects implemented during the 2018-2022 Term Plan under CDIP II, within the eight (8) sub-counties in Machakos County. The target population were 243 project staff in the education projects who constituted the Project Managers from the county headquarters, Ward administrators, M&E Officers, Village administrators and Community Project Committee members. This study used a descriptive survey research design, while stratified random sampling was used to select a sample. A pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility and reliability of the study instruments, utilizing 15 respondents who made up 10% of the sample size. Data collected was cleaned, edited, coded and analyzed using SPSS. The study findings significantly benefit county and national governments and future researchers. The regression analysis revealed that all M&E practices significantly influence project performance, with the utilization of M&E results showing the highest impact ( $\beta = 0.315$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), followed by M&E capacity building ( $\beta = 0.285$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The findings conclude that continuous capacity building and effective utilization of M&E results are critical for enhancing the performance of education projects. The study recommends investing in targeted capacity-building programs, and ensuring the timely and strategic use of M&E findings to drive evidence-based decision-making and project sustainability.

**Key Words:** Monitoring and Evaluation Practices County Government-Funded Education Projects, M&E Capacity Building, Utilization of M&E Findings

## Background of the Study

Project monitoring is continuously tracking a project to ensure it is implemented according to the plan. At the same time, evaluation is an occasional process that involves assessing a completed or ongoing project's impact, relevance, and effectiveness (Aubry *et al.*, 2022). The authors emphasize that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a significant process in the management of projects as it enables project managers to improve the performance and success of a project by assessing how it is designed and implemented and the resulting impact. The ultimate goal of M&E is to improve both the current and future management of project outputs, outcomes, and implications (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). The trio asserts that monitoring involves systematically collecting data about specific indicators in development projects, forming a significant element of the evaluation process.

M&E relies on data collected against specific indicators and helps project teams and the main project stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions about a project's implementation, relevance, and impact. While the monitoring process runs through the project period to ascertain whether its implementation adhered to the plan and account for deviations, evaluation involves assessing the design, implementation, and results of an ongoing or completed project, program, or policy (Aubry *et al.*, 2022). According to Alonso and Andrews (2020), the M&E of public projects is generally divided into three main stages: stating a commitment intention, developing an M&E system, and communicating the M&E information.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite monitoring and evaluation being globally recognized as a significant driver in achieving project goals, many organizations still regard it as a donor requirement, and its execution is perceived in some studies as a result of donor pressure rather than a significant process. A study published by Nyirenda and Chituku (2020) explains that monitoring and evaluation are majorly regarded as a donor's requirement rather than a tool meant to aid project management. Previous studies reveal that many African national governments have established and documented the frameworks to guide how M&E should be conducted but are yet to institutionalize and integrate it into their public activities fully. A report by UNDP (2022) reveals that some African government's view M&E as a complex procedure, which indicates a lack of institutional and human capacities, political goodwill, bureaucratic procedure and lack of resources.

Machakos County has an approved and working Monitoring and Evaluation policy developed during the 2018-2022 development. As reported in the CIDP 2023-2027 in the analysis of the performance of the previous leadership under CIDP II (2018-2022), there was a remarkable achievement in several projects under various sectors. However, some challenges affecting the performance of projects were identified, leading to low attainment of projected targets, cost and time overruns and lack of stakeholder support leading to vandalism of some projects. The report indicates that at the beginning of the financial years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, the sector aimed at training 59 and 2000 employees on M&E practices but only managed to train 12 and 1858 employees, respectively. Under the Education Sub-sector, the target was to increase the enrollment of ECDE and VTC from 60% and 40% to 95% and 80%, respectively in the Plan period 2018-2022. On the contrary, an enrollment rate of 87% and 70% was achieved, registering another failure to achieve objectives.

Although the cause of the project failure in specific sectors is scantily explained in the county, from the overall plan challenges overview, project failure in Machakos County may be linked with delayed disbursement of funds by the national exchequer, low performance of own resource revenues, lack of proper institutional and human capacities, political interferences, inflation, low stakeholder involvement leading to vandalism of some project structures and sub-standard structures. With the proper application of M&E practices, these challenges could

be overcome leading to enhanced project performance. Previous studies have also not focused on education projects in Machakos County leaving a gap for further studies. For instance, a study by Wambua (2019) on M&E practices and performance of county government-funded education projects in Makueni. However, this study was done outside Machakos County. Another study was done by Ngaruiya and Mungai (2023) on M&E systems and performance of education projects in NGOs in Nairobi City County. It, however, does not focus on county government funded education projects and its was done in Nairobi City County. This study aimed at filling the gap by examining the influence of Monitoring and Evaluation practices on the success of County government-funded education projects in Machakos County, Kenya. The study analyzed M&E capacity building and Utilization of M&E findings.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study focused on the following specific objectives;

- i. To examine the impact of M&E capacity building on the performance of County government-funded education projects in Machakos County.
- ii. To evaluate the effect of utilization of M&E findings on the sustainability of County government-funded education projects in Machakos County.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Organizational Learning Theory**

Various literatures have focused on organizational learning theory from different perspectives, giving rise to varying but related definitions of the theory that depend on an organization's nature. Berta *et al.* (2015) describes organizational learning theory as a meta-theory that examines the socio-organizational structure of new knowledge acquisition, individual elements that influence the absorption of new knowledge, macro-environmental factors that influence learning and knowledge application, and the effect of the knowledge on future developments. In addition, a study by Castaneda, Manrique, and Cuellar (2018) gives a historical overview of the origin of organizational learning by explaining that Cyert and March established it in the 1960s. The trio asserts that Cyert and March brought out the relevance of organizational learning to decision-making through an organization's learning through experiences and the ability to adapt to the dynamic environments in which firms operate.

Therefore, organizational learning can be defined as an undertaking through which organizations modify their mental frameworks, policies, procedures or perceptions to adjust organizational procedures through earmarked activities (Basten & Haamann, 2018). Akwaowo and Kalio (2021) support this definition by detailing that organizational learning is a change that occurs in the learning base of an organization, which is attributed to the organization's past experiences. Knowledge acquisition for an organization can be pivotal in giving it a competitive advantage in the changing environments in which it functions. Castaneda *et al.* (2018) stress that there has been a shift from physical capital to knowledge capital, necessitating institutions to create a learning culture in their organizational structures by establishing a holistic learning strategy and adapting their tools, social networks and routines. This concept of organizational learning culture is also emphasized in research by Berta and co-authors (2015), where they indicate that organizational learning is not a sum of the individual cumulative learning but prevails beyond the individuals' tenancy by being recorded in organizational policies or systems or being reserved in the organization's memory, the culture of behavioral standards.

Organizational learning alone is not enough to warrant a competitive advantage to an organization; its integration into the organization's management practices can improve service

delivery. Organizations only learn when they process information to extract beneficial knowledge and maintain organizational memory (Akwaowo & Kalio, 2021). According to the duo, organizational learning follows four distinct procedures: collection, distribution, interpretation and storage of information for future reference and utilization.

Berta *et al.* (2015) also brings out the concept of learning or adaptive capacity, which they explain as the ability of an institution to be aware of the newly acquired knowledge and utilize it in coming up with better decisions to assimilate the latest innovations and improve organizational performance. Central to this approach (Oswald, 2019) acknowledges that organizational learning should be structured and established through formative monitoring and evaluation, which majorly helps project personnel learn and make amendments based on identified knowledge gaps, promoting their competence and the effectiveness of future projects. Oswald (2019) further adds that organizational learning can happen when organizations conduct facilitated training, strategic reviews, or seminars, or they could occur informally through observation or social interactions.

The processes and systems influence organizational learning based on M&E outcomes within three organizational ecosystems: intra- and inter-organizational ecosystem, which refers to the enabling systems, cultures and processes within and between organizations, M&E ecosystem, which is the general organization, analytical frameworks and data collection tools that enhance learning outcome and the research ecosystem which includes the principals of a participatory M&E and how they can be institutionalized to enhance learning potential (Berta, *et al.*, 2015). It is through M&E practices that organizations' managers can analyze project quality, identify gaps and support learning opportunities for the project personnel and the organization to bridge identified capacity gaps. This theory was critical in explaining how M&E capacity building influences the performance of county-government-funded projects.

### **Utilization-focused Evaluation Theory**

The utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) theory is usually concerned with how stakeholders experience evaluation processes and how they make use of evaluation findings, that is, "intended use by intended users" (Patton, 2015). Patton clarifies that UFE necessitates a shift from the general and abstract evaluation based on possible audiences and potential uses to a more actual and specified evaluation with defined audiences and concrete uses. This ensures stakeholders are involved in the evaluation processes to utilize the findings and implement recommendations for improved efficiency.

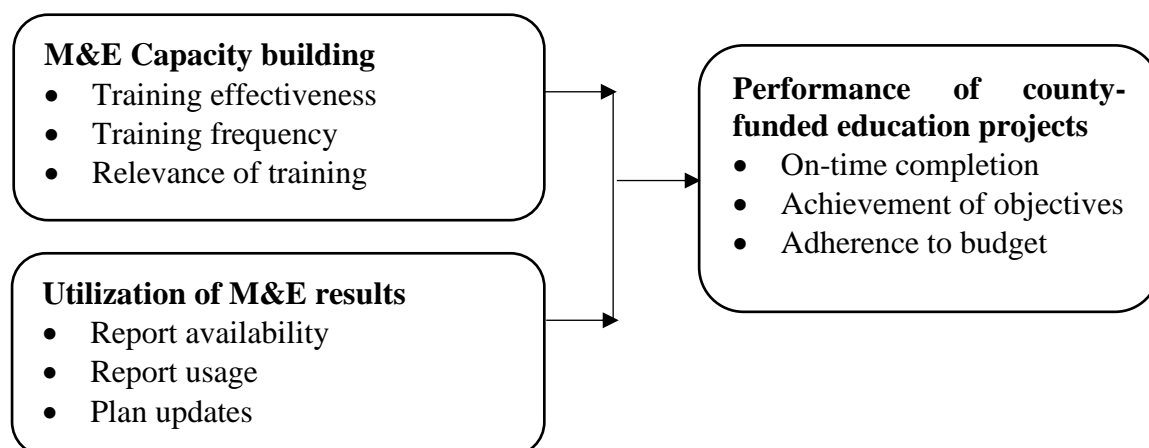
Evaluation findings play an essential role in informing evidence-based decision-making. They state what worked and what did not and the reasons behind it while offering recommendations that, if adopted, can enhance an organization's efficiency. However, Alkin and Christie (2023) asserted that stakeholders can only utilize evaluation results if they have a sense of ownership of the process. The duo, who suggest that the first edition of UFE was established in 1978 by Michael Quinn Patton, recommend that evaluation facilitators engage stakeholders in every step, tailor the evaluation process according to the organization's needs and orient the stakeholders on utilizing the findings. On this basis, the authors present five principles that should guide UFE and make it more efficient. The first principle is that UFE should be guided by personal factors, meaning that it should be based on the participants' knowledge, motivations, interests and concerns. Secondly, UFE participants ought to be engaged in exploring available options and selecting the most appropriate approach to the evaluation, enhancing their understanding and ownership of the agreements. Thirdly, UFE facilitators should observe emerging issues, interpret their implications, and make necessary amendments based on changing stakeholder preferences. The fourth principle indicates that evaluative thinking should be lodged throughout the process to conceptualize the method. Lastly, the facilitator needs to rejuvenate the evaluation process with emergent trends, renovations,

opportunities and thinking, which should be presented to the stakeholders for unanimous agreement.

According to Ramírez *et al.* (2022), UFE is a guiding framework for evaluation instead of an evaluation methodology, implying that the methods and tools used depend on the needs and interests of the stakeholders and the organization. Although UFE emphasizes the aspect of stakeholders' involvement, the authors in their study bring another side of the coin by stating that stakeholder involvement is determined by the readiness and commitment of the organizational stakeholders to fully participate in the design, planning and implementation of the evaluation. It is also indicated that during stakeholders' involvement, power dynamics kick in. The facilitators of the assessment need to consider that by grouping and engaging them according to their level of influence. According to a study by Lane and Sanders (2019), stakeholders in the context of county government projects include employees, experts, funders, beneficiaries and project managers, while evaluation findings could be strategic planning, budgeting or economic development. Lane and Sanders also affirm that UFE benefits county governments because it helps them streamline their annual strategic plans and budget-making processes with the national plans, as well as aligning with the evolving needs of the public, reducing the chances of lack of linkages and delayed financing. The duo acknowledges that UFE can be a critical tool to facilitate stakeholder participation processes. It helps identify the priority needs competing against the limited resources towards which planners can tailor their interventions. The reviews show that utilizing M&E results should be the core goal of evaluation. This theory was, therefore, appropriate for analyzing its impact on the performance of county-government-funded education projects.

### Conceptual Framework

Kivunja (2018) defines a conceptual framework as a logical demonstration of the association between anything that constructs the fundamental thinking, plans, structures and implementation of research in its totality. A conceptual framework serves to illustrate how independent variables affect the dependent variable. The literature review on identified indicators generated information for establishing the conceptual model. Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationship between the study's independent variables (capacity building, and utilization of M&E results), and the dependent variable, performance of county-funded education projects.



### Capacity building

Capacity building is an undertaking through which the staff and organizations improve their expertise and ability to work better, with an adequate supply of the equipment required to accomplish their mandates (Matsiliza, 2019) efficiently. On the same account, it is stated that both the evaluation facilitators and actual users of evaluation results require suitable capacity

in the form of skills and information. The team mandated to monitor and evaluate projects is a significant driver of success for any organization because it determines the efficiency of how evaluation lessons are generated, disseminated, and utilized within the organization's planning framework (Mushori, 2015). Mushori asserts that building the capacity of the M&E team through training should be the focus of any organization, and this should be done continuously to ensure that the team adapts to the dynamic environment in which projects operate.

Wanjiku (2015) adds weight to the importance of M&E capacity by affirming that a team that possesses the required capacity in M&E enhances the success of a project by delivering an efficient M&E plan, which promotes control of the project by the concerned team. The author specifies that some areas that require M&E include data collection, recording, interpretation and analysis. County governments have implemented policies and frameworks to guide the M&E process. Still, the reported project failure raises questions about whether their projects are hinged on research from monitoring evaluation implemented by qualified personnel. M&E capacity is critical to successfully implementing projects because it leads to proper M&E plans, effective project implementation, achievement of desired impact, transparency and stakeholder satisfaction (Mutuma, 2018). Mutuma suggests that organizations can utilize available training manuals, handbooks and tool kits to conduct capacity-building workshops. Such training is critical in imparting the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences needed to implement M&E activities effectively.

Mushori *et al.* (2020) suggest that evaluators can enhance their skills, knowledge and experiences through formal training programs or learning on the job but advise that organizations should explore more structured training options offered by public and private sectors, learning institutions, professional associations, mentorship programs or job assignments. On the other hand, the trio argues that developing capacity goes beyond a basic technical approach and focuses on influencing behaviour change through knowledge acquisition, instilling right attitudes and introducing new individual and structural values.

All the reviewed literature agrees that capacity building is essential for the effective planning and implementation of M & E processes, which in turn translates to the implementation of suitable projects within the allocated budgets, with adherence to schedule and achievement of desired results. If county governments focus on employing the right expertise and continuous training while providing the right equipment, then cases of stalled projects, late completions and lack of stakeholder satisfaction would be a thing of the past. Moreover, capacity building should be considered something other than an event but rather a continuous effort that should be integrated into the organizational culture and the right attitudes to adopt change. This is critical in ensuring project evaluation produces the right results to be adopted into future project plans to enhance efficiency and sustainability.

### **Utilization of M&E Results**

Begovic *et al.* (2017) note that one goal of the UNDP is to support the transformation of country interventions to achieve the SDGs by being innovative, value learning and scaling up to enhance effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency. The trio further acknowledges that the significant driver identified by the UNDP to facilitate the achievement of this goal is documenting evaluation findings and internalizing lessons in the scaling and replication of piloted interventions to avoid repeating mistakes. This indicates the importance of utilizing evaluation in improving projects by integrating lessons in organizational systems to inform project plans. M&E results are usually articulated as outputs and outcomes, and their progress is measured on identified indicators; therefore, project management teams should utilize them to better future planning processes and create budgets based on evidence other than mere approximations (Mwatsefu, 2020).

Kiumbe *et al.* (2018) indicated in their study that the performance of public projects needs to meet the expectations of the significant stakeholders, who see the lack of utilization of evaluation results as the primary cause of this failure. While the authors acknowledge that the sole aim of evaluation should be to disseminate findings to the relevant stakeholders for use in decision-making processes, they insist that utilization is only possible if the stakeholders are involved in all stages of the projects, from planning to drafting objectives and identification of indicators, as well as in implementation activities. On these grounds, the trio advises the focus of M & E to shift from just analyzing what worked to checking if the evaluation results were integrated into plans, as this has been lacking in many government-funded projects.

In a study by Ongare (2020), it is explained that the usability of M&E results depends on several factors, such as the channels used to disseminate the information, the frequency of dissemination and the involvement of the stakeholders. Ongare suggests that the data needs to be shared promptly in a form that suits the targeted stakeholders to allow for integration within project plans during decision-making activities. They also add that the involvement of stakeholders throughout the project makes it easy to comprehend the disseminated information, increasing the chances of its utilization. Finally, the author gives an example of a community-based organization that adopted the sharing of newsletters with project funders, beneficiaries, and teams. This allows them to follow up on project implementation and seek their input on the project's progress apart from cases of emergencies, expert input or minor decisions.

It is paramount that both public and private agents of development prioritize laying down strategic communication systems to allow for efficient and timely dissemination of information to the relevant stakeholders. Involving all stakeholders in project activities is essential to enhance their commitment to and support utilizing the evaluation results. This ensures decisions are based on research, which in turn promotes the performance of an organization. As for county-funded projects, utilization of M&E results ensures that lessons are integrated into future planning, recommendations are implemented, and mistakes are not repeated. This reduces incidences of stalled, poorly completed project that miss targets, and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

## **Empirical Review**

### **M&E Capacity Building and Performance of projects**

Bell and Marais (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of different training approaches in building M&E capacity for maternal and newborn health programs. Using a mixed-method study involving surveys and interviews with M&E staff and project managers, the research revealed that hands-on and practical training approaches significantly enhance the skills and competencies of M&E personnel. The study underscored the importance of interactive and practical training methods in improving M&E capabilities, leading to better project outcomes.

Smith (2018) quantitative study assessed the impact of blended training approaches on M&E capacity building. A survey of M&E professionals participating in education projects worldwide indicated that combining online and in-person training sessions is effective in enhancing M&E skills and knowledge. Smith concluded that blended training approaches offer flexibility and accessibility, leading to better capacity-building outcomes.

The benefits of participatory training methods in M&E capacity building were explored by Davis *et al.* (2015) in a qualitative study involving focus groups and interviews with M&E practitioners in health projects. The study found that participatory training methods, such as workshops and group exercises, lead to better retention and application of M&E skills. Engaging trainees in active learning processes significantly enhances their understanding and ability to implement M&E effectively.

A case study analysis by Grogan and Chester (2018) of education projects in Latin America focused on continuous professional development programs for M&E staff. Data from document analysis and interviews with project managers and M&E personnel concluded that ongoing professional development programs are crucial for maintaining high M&E standards. Continuous learning and skill enhancement keep staff updated with the latest methodologies and tools, leading to more effective monitoring and evaluation practices.

A survey-based study by Leeuw and Vaessen (2020) investigated the effectiveness of context-specific training programs in M&E capacity building. The survey, targeting M&E professionals working on various projects, highlighted that training programs tailored to the unique challenges and requirements of specific projects are more effective in building relevant skills. The study emphasized the importance of designing training programs that address specific project needs to enhance M&E capacity.

In Botswana, a study by Kang'ethe and Manomano (2018) explored the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives for M&E professionals in the health sector. Using qualitative methods including interviews and focus group discussions, the study revealed that hands-on training and continuous professional development significantly improve the skills and competencies of M&E personnel. This leads to more effective evaluation practices and better project outcomes.

The impact of training frequency on M&E capacity in educational projects was examined by Nguyen and Park (2019) through a survey distributed to M&E staff in various schools. The findings indicated that regular training sessions enhance the proficiency and confidence of M&E personnel, thereby improving the quality of monitoring and evaluation activities. Regular and systematic training ensures continuous skill development and better project performance.

Tshabalala (2021) study in South Africa used a longitudinal design to evaluate the long-term effects of capacity-building programs on M&E performance. Data collected over three years from M&E professionals in educational projects showed that continuous professional development is crucial for maintaining high standards and adapting to evolving evaluation methodologies (Tshabalala, 2021).

A mixed-method study by Smith and Karanja (2019) assessed the relevance of M&E training programs in enhancing project outcomes in East Africa. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, the study found that context-specific training tailored to the needs of the projects significantly improved M&E capacity and project success rates. The tailored approach ensures that training is relevant and effective in addressing specific challenges faced by projects.

### **Utilization of M&E Results and Performance of projects**

A study by Mphahlele and Papanastasiou (2020) in South Africa used a quantitative approach to examine the correlation between M&E report accessibility and project success. A survey of M&E professionals in various educational projects revealed that accessible reports significantly contribute to project improvements by providing critical insights and facilitating evidence-based decision-making. Accessible reporting mechanisms enhance accountability and project outcomes.

The impact of user-friendly report formats on accessibility and comprehension was examined by Mutuku (2018) in Kenya. Using a mixed-method study involving surveys and interviews with project managers and M&E personnel, the study found that projects with easily comprehensible reports experienced higher levels of engagement and utilization of M&E findings. Well-designed reports significantly improve the effectiveness of M&E utilization.

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professionals in various educational projects revealed that accessible reports significantly contribute to project improvements by providing critical insights and facilitating evidence-based decision-making.

Nkuna (2021) research in Tanzania involved a case study analysis of the impact of timely M&E report dissemination on project effectiveness. The study used document analysis and interviews to find that projects that disseminate M&E findings promptly to relevant stakeholders are more likely to adjust their strategies effectively and achieve their objectives.

Conducting a mixed-method study in Uganda, Kagendo (2018) examined the impact of M&E report utilization on the sustainability of education projects. Data collected through surveys and interviews indicated that projects that actively use M&E findings to inform their strategies and operations are more likely to achieve long-term sustainability and success.

In Kenya, Mutuku (2018) conducted a mixed-method study to investigate how accessible M&E reports impact project decision-making. Using surveys and interviews with project managers and M&E personnel, the study found that projects with accessible and user-friendly M&E reports experienced more timely and effective decision-making processes. The study highlighted the importance of making M&E findings easily available to all stakeholders to enhance their utility.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used a descriptive research design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The study focused on current county-government funded education projects being implemented under the 2023-2027 Term Plan under CDIP III, within the eight (8) sub-counties in Machakos County as indicated in the Machakos County Development Integrated Development Plan 2018-2022. The respondents are the project staff who are involved in the project activities because they bear clear information about the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education projects in Machakos. This study used a stratified random sampling to select a sample. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula with a confidence of 95%. Therefore, the sample size, was 151. The researcher used a structured questionnaire to collect primary data. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software version 28.0. Descriptive statistical analysis, such as means, percentages, standard deviations, and frequencies, were used to describe the principal characteristics of the data. Inferential analysis was applied to examine the correlation between monitoring and evaluation practices (independent variable) and the performance of projects. Specifically, multiple regression was used to show the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

For this study, 136 questionnaires were distributed to project staff involved in M&E practices within county-funded education projects in Machakos County. Out of these, 121 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 88.97%. The response rate of 88.97% is considered excellent based on Mugenda and Mugenda (2023) guidelines, which classify response rates above 70% as very good. Therefore, the response rate was considered excellent, enhancing the generalizability of the study findings, indicating that the data collected is representative of the target population.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive statistics summarize respondents' levels of agreement with statements related to each M&E practice. A 5-point Likert scale was used, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The findings were interpreted as: mean value of 1-1.4 was strongly disagree, 1.5-2.4 disagree, 2.5-3.4 neutral, 3.5-4.4 agree and

4.5-5 strongly agree. On the other hand, a standard deviation greater than 1.5, suggests that the responses were more diverse, with a wider range of scores across the participants.

### M&E Capacity Building

The second objective of the study was to examine the impact of M&E capacity building on project performance. The descriptive statistics for M&E capacity building are presented in Table 1

**Table 1: Descriptives Statistics for M&E Capacity Building**

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
The project team members are provided with technical skills and expertise in M&E.	4.013	0.612
The training of project staff has increased to enhance their understanding and capacity for monitoring and evaluation.	3.897	0.634
There is an increase in awareness of monitoring and evaluation practices.	4.022	0.585
Regular employee evaluation and feedback help identify areas that need capacity building.	3.938	0.602
Training in M&E has enhanced my understanding of M&E approaches and contributed to successful project implementation.	3.951	0.643
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>	<b>3.964</b>	<b>0.615</b>

The findings for M&E Capacity Building indicate that respondents generally agree that capacity-building initiatives positively impact the performance of county-funded education projects. Specifically, respondents agreed that project team members are equipped with the necessary technical skills and expertise in M&E (M= 4.013, SD= 0.612), and that training programs have increased to enhance staff understanding and capacity for effective monitoring and evaluation (M= 3.897, SD= 0.634). The results also highlight that there is a noticeable increase in awareness of M&E practices among project staff (M= 4.022, SD= 0.585), and that regular employee evaluations and feedback effectively identify areas needing capacity enhancement (M= 3.938, SD= 0.602). Furthermore, respondents agreed that training in M&E has significantly enhanced their understanding of evaluation approaches, contributing to the successful implementation of projects (M= 3.951, SD= 0.643).

The aggregate mean of 3.964 reflects a general consensus that capacity-building efforts, including training and feedback mechanisms, are crucial for improving the skills and effectiveness of M&E personnel. These findings underscore the importance of continuous professional development in strengthening M&E capabilities, leading to improved project outcomes and sustainable performance. This suggests that enhancing the skills of M&E staff through relevant training improves their ability to conduct effective evaluations. Bell and Marais (2015) support this, emphasizing that hands-on training approaches significantly enhance M&E competencies, leading to better project outcomes. Additionally, Smith (2018) found that blended training methods, including both online and in-person sessions, are effective in enhancing M&E skills, contributing to improved performance.

### Utilization of M&E Results

The fourth objective was to evaluate the effect of the utilization of M&E findings on project sustainability. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4.7.

**Table 2: Descriptives Statistics for Utilization of M&E Results**

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reports from M&E activities are shared promptly for decision-making.	4.025	0.605
M&E reports act as a reference point when making decisions concerning project plans	3.980	0.611
M&E reports have supported the improved effectiveness of county government-funded education projects	4.002	0.623
Education project plans are reviewed to reflect recommendations made in M&E reports.	3.992	0.596
Data collection tools are effective in collecting credible and reliable data.	3.978	0.628
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>	<b>3.995</b>	<b>0.613</b>

The findings for the Utilization of M&E Results indicate that respondents generally agree that the effective use of M&E results positively impacts the performance of county-funded education projects. Respondents strongly agreed that reports from M&E activities are shared promptly, facilitating timely decision-making (M= 4.025, SD= 0.605). There was also agreement that M&E reports serve as essential reference points when making decisions concerning project plans (M= 3.980, SD= 0.611), and these reports have significantly supported the improved effectiveness of the projects (M= 4.002, SD= 0.623). Additionally, respondents agreed that education project plans are regularly reviewed and adjusted to incorporate recommendations from M&E reports (M= 3.992, SD= 0.596), and that data collection tools are effective in gathering credible and reliable data (M= 3.978, SD= 0.628).

The aggregate mean of 3.995 reflects a strong consensus that the timely and strategic utilization of M&E findings is crucial for enhancing project decision-making and overall performance. These results underscore the importance of integrating M&E insights into the project planning and implementation phases, ensuring that evaluations are not only conducted but actively used to drive improvements and sustainability in county-funded education projects. Respondents emphasized that making M&E reports accessible and actionable enhances their impact on project performance. This aligns with the findings of Mphahlele and Papanastasiou (2020), who noted that accessible M&E reports significantly contribute to project improvements by facilitating evidence-based decisions. Similarly, Nkuna (2021) highlighted the importance of timely dissemination and use of M&E findings in ensuring project success and adaptability.

### Performance of County-Funded Education Projects

The performance of county-funded education projects in Machakos County was assessed by evaluating respondents' levels of agreement with key performance indicators such as on-time completion, achievement of objectives, and adherence to budgetary allocations. The descriptive statistics for the performance of these projects are presented in the table 3.

**Table 3: Descriptives Statistics for Performance of County-Funded Education Projects**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
On-time completion of county-funded education projects.	3.892	0.624
Achievement of objectives in county-funded education projects.	3.935	0.610
Adherence to budget in county-funded education projects.	3.885	0.638
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>	<b>3.904</b>	<b>0.624</b>

The respondents generally agreed that county-funded education projects are completed on time, with a mean score of 3.892. This suggests that project timelines are largely adhered to, reflecting effective project scheduling and management practices. Respondents also agreed that the education projects are generally successful in achieving their set objectives, with a mean of 3.935. This indicates that the goals set out at the start of the projects are largely being met, pointing towards effective implementation strategies and M&E practices. The findings further show that adherence to the budget is another area where respondents showed agreement, with a mean score of 3.885. This reflects effective financial management and monitoring practices, ensuring that projects are delivered within the allocated budget.

The aggregate mean of 3.904 indicates that respondents generally agree that the county-funded education projects perform well across key performance indicators, including timely completion, achievement of objectives, and budget adherence. This overall positive assessment implies that the current M&E practices employed by the county are effective in guiding project performance towards desired outcomes. The findings highlight that the performance of education projects funded by the county government of Machakos is satisfactory according to key performance measures. The respondents' agreement on these aspects suggests that M&E practices are contributing positively to project management and execution. This supports the importance of robust M&E processes in ensuring project timelines, objectives, and budgets are well managed, leading to improved project performance. These results align with studies like Adu and Ado (2021), which found that projects with adequate resource allocation for M&E experienced higher success rates and sustainability. Additionally, the consistent performance across these metrics reflects well-planned and executed M&E activities, underscoring their critical role in enhancing project outcomes in the public sector.

### Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis examined the relationships between the independent variables (capacity building and utilization of M&E results) and the dependent variable (project performance). The correlation was considered small if  $\pm 0.1 < r < \pm 0.29$ , medium if  $\pm 0.3 < r < \pm 0.49$ , and strong if  $r > \pm 0.5$ . The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Correlations**

Variable		Performance	M&E Capacity Building	Utilization of M&E Results
Performance	Pearson Correlation	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
M&E Capacity Building	N	121		
	Pearson Correlation	0.682**	1.000	
Utilization of M&E Results	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
	N	121	121	
Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.725**	0.513	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.156	
M&E Capacity Building	N	121	121	121

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

M&E capacity building demonstrated a strong positive correlation with project performance ( $r = 0.682$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This strong correlation suggests that efficient capacity-building practices are crucial in boosting the effectiveness of M&E activities. Bell and Marais (2015) emphasized that hands-on and continuous professional development significantly improve the skills of M&E personnel, leading to better evaluation outcomes.

Utilization of M&E results exhibited the strongest correlation with project performance ( $r = 0.725$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating a statistically significant and positive relationship. The strong influence of report utilization highlights the critical role of accessible and actionable M&E findings in driving project sustainability. Mphahlele and Papanastasiou (2020) emphasized that timely use of M&E findings enhances project adaptability and long-term success.

## Regression Analysis

**Table 5: Beta Coefficients of Study variables**

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.720	0.118		6.102	0.000
M&E Capacity Building	0.285	0.061	0.288	4.672	0.000
Utilization of M&E Results	0.315	0.059	0.321	5.339	0.000

Based on the findings, the following regression model was fitted:

$$\text{Project Performance} = 0.720 + 0.285(\text{M\&E Capacity Building}) + 0.315(\text{Utilization of M\&E Results})$$

The beta value for capacity building is 0.285 ( $p = 0.000$ ), showing that it significantly influences project performance. A one-unit improvement in capacity-building practices increases performance by 0.285 units. This result aligns with Garba (2020), who found that continuous professional development is critical in maintaining high M&E standards and achieving project success.

Utilization of M&E results had the highest beta value of 0.315 ( $p = 0.000$ ), indicating it is the most influential factor affecting project performance. Mwangi (2020) also found that effective use of evaluation findings significantly enhances project adaptability, supporting the critical role of actionable M&E reports in driving project sustainability.

## Conclusions

The study concludes that capacity-building initiatives are crucial in enhancing the performance of county-funded education projects. Continuous training and development of M&E personnel equip them with the necessary skills and expertise to conduct thorough evaluations. The findings indicate that investments in capacity-building programs directly contribute to the effectiveness of M&E practices, leading to better project outcomes.

The study concludes that the utilization of M&E results is the most critical factor influencing the performance of county-funded education projects. Making M&E findings accessible and integrating them into decision-making processes significantly enhances project sustainability and effectiveness. The findings highlight the importance of using evaluation insights to inform project adjustments, ensuring that M&E activities directly impact project performance.

## Recommendations

The study recommends that Machakos County invest in targeted capacity-building programs specifically designed for project staff involved in M&E activities. These programs should focus on both technical and practical aspects of M&E, such as data collection, analysis techniques, and the application of evaluation findings. To enhance the skills of M&E personnel, the county should introduce continuous professional development initiatives, including workshops, on-the-job training, mentorship programs, and access to up-to-date resources on M&E best practices. Special emphasis should be placed on hands-on training that enables staff to apply

learned concepts directly to ongoing education projects, thereby enhancing the quality of evaluations. The county should also establish a regular feedback system that identifies specific areas where staff need further training, ensuring that capacity-building efforts are responsive to the evolving needs of the projects.

The study recommends that the Machakos County government enhance the accessibility and utilization of M&E results by ensuring that M&E reports are promptly shared with all relevant decision-makers and stakeholders. The county should establish a clear protocol for the dissemination of M&E findings, ensuring that reports are not only comprehensive but also presented in user-friendly formats that facilitate easy interpretation and application. It is crucial that M&E findings are systematically integrated into project planning and decision-making processes, enabling the county to make informed adjustments to project strategies based on empirical evidence. The county should also invest in improving the quality of data collection tools to ensure that the M&E results are credible and reliable, thereby enhancing their impact on project decisions. By actively using M&E findings, the county can improve project performance, address challenges promptly, and ensure the long-term sustainability of education projects funded by the government.

### Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should explore the long-term impact of M&E practices on the sustainability of county-funded projects beyond the education sector to determine the broader applicability of these findings. Additionally, research could focus on the challenges faced in implementing M&E practices and the strategies that can be employed to overcome these barriers. Comparative studies between different counties could also provide insights into best practices and areas for improvement in M&E processes across varying contexts.

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