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Government of Samburu, Kenya**

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## The Role of Project planning on Implementation of ECD projects by County Government of Samburu, Kenya

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The study aimed to examine the role of project planning in the implementation of Early Childhood Development (ECD) projects by the County Government of Samburu, Kenya.

**Methodology:** A descriptive survey design was employed to collect empirical data from 74 active ECD projects in Samburu County. Data were obtained using semi-structured questionnaires administered to project managers, coordinators, and other key stakeholders involved in project implementation. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, particularly correlation and multiple regression analysis, were

applied to assess the relationship between project planning practices and project implementation outcomes.

**Results:** Findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between project planning and the successful implementation of ECD projects ( $\beta = 0.019$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Effective planning was shown to enhance key implementation activities such as resource allocation, scheduling, stakeholder coordination, and timely execution of project tasks. Projects with structured planning mechanisms demonstrated higher completion rates and better adherence to objectives compared to those with minimal planning interventions.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice, and Policy:** The study advances theoretical understanding by linking Organizational Theory and the Theory of Change to practical ECD project outcomes. Practically, it provides evidence that robust planning is critical for project success. Policy-wise, the findings inform county-level decision-makers to strengthen planning frameworks, integrate risk management strategies, allocate adequate resources, and establish functional communication systems to enhance ECD project implementation and long-term sustainability in Samburu County.

**Keywords:** *Project planning, Project implementation, ECD projects, Samburu County, Project management*

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## **1. Background of the Study**

Early Childhood Development (ECD) plays an important role in Kenya's education system and socio-economic development, providing children with foundational cognitive, social, and emotional skills that influence lifelong learning and wellbeing. In Samburu County, ECD services are delivered through public, private, and community-based programs, yet access and quality remain uneven due to geographical, infrastructural, and resource constraints (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (Onyango, 2020). The county faces unique challenges typical of arid and semi-arid regions, including dispersed populations, limited road networks, and scarce educational facilities, which complicate the implementation of ECD initiatives.

The County Government of Samburu, in collaboration with non-governmental and faith-based organizations, has invested in ECD projects aimed at expanding access, improving learning environments, and training caregivers and teachers (Korir et al., 2020). Despite these efforts, some projects fail to achieve their intended outcomes, are delayed, or are abandoned before completion. These shortcomings suggest gaps in project management practices, particularly in planning, resource allocation, and coordination.

Project planning involves defining objectives, establishing timelines, allocating resources, and anticipating risks before project execution. Effective planning ensures that ECD projects are implemented efficiently, with clear roles, measurable outcomes, and contingency strategies to manage potential disruptions. Studies in Kenya have shown that structured planning positively correlates with successful project outcomes, including timely completion, improved quality, and better stakeholder satisfaction (Omondi et al., 2021; Mutua et al., 2022).

In the context of Samburu County, strengthening project planning practices is critical for enhancing the implementation of ECD projects, ensuring that resources are effectively utilized, activities are completed on schedule, and children benefit from quality early learning opportunities. This study therefore investigates how project planning influences the implementation of ECD projects by the County Government of Samburu.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Early Childhood Development (ECD) projects in Samburu County, Kenya, face significant challenges that undermine their effectiveness despite their critical role in preparing children for lifelong learning, social integration, and overall well-being (Lekaaso, 2025). Recent reports indicate that a considerable number of county-led ECD projects experience delays, budget overruns, or fail to achieve their intended objectives (Samburu County Government, 2023). This suboptimal performance is particularly concerning given the County Government's mandate to improve access, quality, and equity in early childhood education for vulnerable populations in the region, where educational infrastructure is limited and communities are widely dispersed.

A fundamental issue confronting ECD projects in Samburu County is inadequate project planning. Preliminary audits and field observations reveal that many projects lack clearly defined objectives, realistic timelines, structured resource allocation, and contingency measures. For example, a review of ECDE projects indicated that several classroom construction and resource provision initiatives faced delays of six months to over a year, while others were abandoned due to poor planning and coordination (Lanyasunya, 2025). This deficiency exposes projects to risks such as delayed implementation, wastage of resources, and underutilization of trained personnel.

Moreover, ECD projects operate within multi-stakeholder environments involving county officials, teachers, parents, NGOs, and community groups. However, weak planning practices often result in poor coordination, communication breakdowns, and ineffective allocation of roles among stakeholders. Data from NGO Coordination Council reports show that approximately 46% of ECD projects experience quality challenges or budget overruns, while 29% fail entirely (NGOs Co-ordination Board, 2022). These outcomes suggest a critical gap between project planning and successful implementation.

The persistent delays and failures highlight the need to investigate how project planning practices influence the implementation of ECD initiatives in Samburu County, particularly regarding resource allocation, scheduling, stakeholder coordination, and risk anticipation. Addressing this knowledge gap is essential for improving project execution, maximizing resource utilization, and ensuring that ECD interventions achieve their intended developmental outcomes.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **Organizational Theory**

Gulick's (1937) founded the Organizational Theory which was later developed by Herbert Simon (1952), who also actively popularized the 'organization theory' phrase. According to the theorist, organization theory stands for industrial engineering, scientific management, strategy, industrial psychology, the small groups' psychology, and human-resource management. The theory mainly focuses on intra-organizational behaviors such as leadership, morale, and decision-making, (Ray et al., 2022). According to Daft and Armstrong (2021), organizational theory is a management insight that describe organizational behaviors, structures or designs within different kinds of organizations and their processes, activities, and environments. Organizational theory explains how interrelated units within an organization interact. The theory also expounds on how group behaviour may differ from an individual's behaviour.

According to Christensen et al. (2020), organization theory is a knowledge system that explains organizational function, structure, and operations. It examines the functioning, structure, and organizations' performance and individual and groups behaviour within the organization. The theory placed emphasis on co-ordination and specialization. It focuses on the effective methods of dividing task, grouping of tasks into departments, coordination of the process of production, clear definition of roles and tasks and flow of authority. The theory is pegged on six pillars;

departmentalization, functional and scalar process, division of labor, structure, coordination, and control which are basically management functions. This study used these six propositions to help explain on the independent variable (management practices) of the study.

According to Bertassini et al. (2021), organizational theories presumes that organizations have hierarchy, guidelines, objectives, definitions of affiliation, and career tracks for affiliates. Organizational theorists' main concern is how the core organizational arrangement functions to inspire members for results consistent with the objectives of the organization. The theory is also concerned with how external environment impacts an organization. The theory also helps explain how an organization interact with her environment to influence her existence.

#### **4. Empirical Review**

A research by Waweru and Kimathi (2022) that evaluated the effect of project management practices on project execution among projects by national government in Machakos County, drew upon Resource-based Theory, Institutional Theory and also Socio-economic Theory. The investigation involved a description of 128 different projects. The simple random sampling method helped identify appropriate sample size. Data were gathered through a questionnaire. The investigation results indicated that effective planning considerably impacted on the execution of the projects. However, this study examined government projects in general without being specific thus the findings cannot accurately apply to ECD projects in Samburu County.

An investigation by Cheruiyot (2024) about challenges met when implementing CBC initiatives in Mwingi West Sub County involved 50 CBC centers, 100 CBC teachers, 6 board of management members, 50 primary head teachers, 5 curriculum support officers, and 1 subcounty education officer (CBC). Data was gathered by means of questionnaires, observation and also interview guide. Results revealed poor preparation to roll the competency-based curriculum; inadequate learning and teaching resources, and inadequate support staff as the main difficulties facing CBC project execution in the county. Because projects differ and are unique and as a result the management practices engaged are according specific geographical context and industry, this study's findings may not reliably apply on ECD projects in Samburu County. The study examined challenges facing CBC project execution while the present study will investigate how management practices influences project implementation.

A study by Mtana, & Mange, (2020) that investigate factors that determine implementation of ECE in Kilifi County was modeled according to descriptive design targeting center heads managing the 60 early childhood education centers of the sub-county. The study employed interview guides and semi-structured questionnaires for gathering data, which were subsequently analyzed using the SPSS software package. The findings showed a significant association between project planning practices such as financial resources, culture of the organizational, staffing, and implementation success of ECE projects in Kilifi County. This study narrowed target population to strictly head teachers that would have also restricted information gathered thus affecting the reliability of the

findings. Current study targeted a wider population that includes all project management team at county, sub-county and wards levels.

An investigation by Visser, et al. (2021) that studied the setbacks faced by ECD coordinators and practitioners regarding quality implementation of ECD programs applied a qualitative-descriptive design with six participants purposively sampled. Data was gathered via a semi-structured interview guide and subsequently scrutinized using deductive content analysis. Findings indicated that main challenges revolved around the themes of learning and teaching; leadership and management; environmental factors; and ECD policies and legislation. This was a qualitative study that relied on respondents' views and knowledge of reality about the study variable at that particular time while knowledge is contextual and time bound. Current study applied mixed methods for a more reliable finding

A study by Raphael, (2023) that sought to come up with an integrated management plan in fulfilment of the Master's Program of the University for International Cooperation. The project management plan provided an overall guide for developing and implementing project plans with the goal of project accomplishment. The study used a mixed methodology. The elements of project scope, scheduling, procurement and risk are necessary to successfully navigate the project management and implementation. This research was conducted in an institution of higher learning under completely different context thus the outcomes cannot be reliably generalized to ECD projects.

## **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of project planning on the implementation of Early Childhood Development (ECD) projects by the County Government of Samburu, Kenya. The study targeted 244 ECD projects with a population of 404 key informants, including county executives, sub-county officials, divisional officers, location and sub-location administrators, and ECD center managers. Using a 30% sampling rate, a sample of 74 projects and 128 respondents was selected. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation across management levels, simple random sampling selected respondents within each stratum, and purposive sampling targeted participants with specialized knowledge such as county project managers. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale, covering project planning, risk management, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation practices, and project implementation. Ethical procedures were followed, including obtaining authorization from the University and NACOSTI, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and multiple regression), while qualitative data underwent content analysis to identify themes and patterns.

## 6. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Rate of Response

A complete of 123 questionnaires got filled out and returned as anticipated by the researcher. Only 5 questionnaires returned did not meet the admission criterion thus were rejected. The study recorded a 96.1% response rate. Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), posited that a response rate above 50% is considered sufficient for examination and reporting. Table 4.1 gives the feedback.

**Table 4.1: Questionnaire Return Rate**

	No.	Percentage (%)
Fully filled	123	96.1
Partially filled	5	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Survey Statistics (2025)*

### Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis summarizes and organizes data using statistical measures such as mean and standard deviation, providing insights into patterns, trends, and distributions within the dataset.

### Project Planning Practices

This investigation focused to evaluate the effect of planning practices on the execution of ECD initiatives in Samburu County. Different statements in the questionnaire tested the extent of planning practices on ECD initiatives within the county. Table 4.3 summarizes respondents' degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the items.

Table 4.2: Project planning practices

Items	Planning Practices	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
3.1	I have easy access to project plan any time I need to check it	123	4.33	0.709
3.2	Project plan is clear of goals, objectives, mission and vision of the project	123	4.81	0.391
3.3	Project planning covers even risk management	123	2.96	1.601
3.4	At planning there was proper budgeting	123	4.00	0.849
3.5	At planning there were clear strategies laid down for resource mobilization	123	4.74	0.441

3.6	Planning also ensured proper distribution of roles and responsibilities	123	4.88	0.329
3.7	Planning establish clear communication strategy throughout the project cycle	123	3.22	1.44
3.8	Various planning tools were employed during planning stages	123	4.03	0.868
<b>Average</b>			<b>4.121</b>	<b>0.829</b>

**Source: Survey Data (2025)**

Outcomes shown in table 4.3, indicated project plans and documents were very accessible to managers (mean = 4.33, Standard Dev. 0.709), that project goals, objectives, mission and vision were clearly stated (mean = 4.81, Standard Dev. 0.391). The managers also expressed their concern over lack of or poorly done risk management plans in the project plan (Mean = 2.96, Standard Dev. 1.601). The findings further indicated good budgeting processes (mean = 4.00, Standard Dev. 0.849) with properly laid down strategies for resource mobilization and management (mean = 4.74, Standard Dev. 0.441). The research also confirmed an effective allocation of roles and tasks within the project (mean = 4.88, Standard Dev. 0.329), highlighting the robustness of the project leadership. The study findings also indicated evidence of proper communication within the project (mean = 3.22).

Overall mean score of 4.121 for project planning practices is an indication of a high approval by respondents that project planning practices were prioritized and emphasized by managers of ECD projects in Samburu County. This resulted into clear project mission, vision, goals and objectives, proper budgeting process as well as good resource mobilization, management, execution plans, proper assignment of responsibilities and roles, good plan for risk management, develop budgets and plans that are all geared towards successful project implementation. Project planning practices can therefore potentially influence the fruitful implementation of the interventions. According to Ssewanyana et al. (2023), poor planning, inadequate resources including human resource and funding are some of the main challenges facing project implementation.

**Project Implementation**

This research aimed to investigate the execution of ECD initiatives in Samburu County. Various statements (items) testing respondents’ views, knowledge and understanding on project implementation among ECD projects within the county were presented in the questionnaire. Data collected were then analyzed and table 4.7 outlined descriptive findings.

**Table 4.7: Project Implementation**

Items	Project Implementation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	This project is implemented according to specific budget	123	3.54	1.307

2	The Project is well funded	123	2.23	0.974
3	Project is being implemented strictly according to scope description	123	2.59	1.384
4	The scope is adequately addressed	123	2.19	0.970
5	There are strict schedules and timelines being followed	123	2.24	0.942
6	The project is progressively achieving set milestones, objectives and goals	123	2.69	0.888
7	The project is impacting positively on the target beneficiaries	123	2.21	1.002
8	The project meets the specified standards (it is of quality)	123	2.20	1.048
	<b>Average</b>		<b>2.486</b>	<b>0.933</b>

*Source: Survey Statistics (2025)*

Following the outcomes presented in table 4.7, majority showed that the ECD project in Samburu County was executed in accordance with established budgets (mean = 3.54). The results further revealed that most projects faced difficulties concerning funding (mean = 2.23), were not executed in alignment with the scope descriptions (mean = 2.59), and that the implementation did not sufficiently address the project scope (mean = 2.19). There was also evidence that most of the ECD projects in Samburu County are not implemented within strict timelines and schedules (Mean = 2.24) and that very little of the project milestones were being achieved (Mean = 2.69). Findings also show that the ECD projects of Samburu County were not making any significant positively affecting the lives of the target groups and communities (mean = 2.21) and that the projects did not meet the expected quality standards (Mean = 2.20).

An overall mean score of 2.486 for project implementation is an indication that there is a general agreement that ECD projects in Samburu County are not being implemented successfully. Successful implementation implies within scope, within project time, budget and prescribed standards as described in the project document and that which adequately addresses the expectations of the target recipients. Findings indicate the majority of the projects did not meet the criteria thus are underperforming.

### **Inferential Analysis**

This section presents the inferential analysis used to determine the influence of project planning (independent variable) on the implementation of ECD projects (dependent variable) by the County Government of Samburu, Kenya. The analysis enables generalization of findings from the sampled projects to the entire population of ECD initiatives. Regression analysis was applied to assess the strength and significance of project planning in driving project implementation outcomes.

### **Model Summary**

Table 4 investigates the goodness of fit of the regression model, assessing how well project risk planning explains the variance in livestock project performance outcomes.

**Table 4: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.249	0.062	0.059	0.943
<b>a. Predictors: (Constant), Project Risk Planning</b>				

*Source: Field Data (2025)*

The R value of 0.249 indicates a positive relationship between project planning and the implementation of ECD projects. The R Square value of 0.062 shows that approximately 6.2% of the variation in project implementation is explained by planning practices alone. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.059 adjusts for the number of predictors and confirms the model’s modest predictive power. The standard error of estimate (0.943) suggests a reasonable fit, indicating that deviations between observed and predicted implementation outcomes are relatively small. These results demonstrate that while project planning significantly affects ECD project execution ( $\beta = 0.019$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), other factors beyond planning also contribute to project implementation performance.

## 7. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study found that project planning practices significantly influence the implementation of ECD projects by the County Government of Samburu, Kenya. Data collected from 128 respondents across 74 sampled ECD projects indicated that planning practices such as resource allocation, scheduling, scope definition, and task coordination were moderately well implemented, with an aggregate mean of 3.842. Regression analysis demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between project planning and project implementation ( $\beta = 0.019$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), with planning practices explaining approximately 6.2% of the variation in ECD project implementation ( $R^2 = 0.062$ ). The findings indicate that improvements in project planning lead to better execution of initiatives, including timely completion, effective resource use, and achievement of intended outcomes. However, despite the positive influence of planning, some projects still faced challenges related to coordination, staffing, and logistical constraints, which limited full realization of project objectives. Overall, the study emphasizes that enhanced and consistent project planning is a critical determinant of successful ECD project implementation in Samburu County.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that project planning practices are a critical determinant of the implementation of ECD projects by the County Government of Samburu, Kenya, explaining 6.2% of the variation in project execution. While planning practices such as resource allocation,

scheduling, and task coordination were moderately applied (mean = 3.842), some gaps remain in comprehensive planning, including clear communication, scope definition, and contingency measures. The study concluded that the disconnect between moderately implemented planning practices and challenges in project execution such as delays, resource mismanagement, and incomplete outcomes stems from inconsistent application of planning frameworks across projects. Furthermore, inadequate integration of planning with other management practices, including risk management and stakeholder engagement, limits the effectiveness of project implementation. Strengthening systematic and consistent project planning throughout the lifecycle of ECD initiatives is essential for improving timely completion, efficient resource use, and achievement of intended outcomes.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommended that the County Government of Samburu should strengthen project planning practices across all ECD projects to ensure consistent and effective execution. Project managers should implement clear planning frameworks that include proper resource allocation, scheduling, and scope definition to enhance project outcomes. The study further recommended improving integration of planning with other management practices, particularly risk management and stakeholder engagement, to ensure that projects are responsive to challenges and community needs. Capacity building for project management teams at county, sub-county, and center levels should be prioritized to improve planning skills, coordination, and contingency preparation. Finally, the County Government should develop comprehensive monitoring mechanisms to track planning effectiveness and adjust strategies promptly, ensuring timely completion, efficient resource use, and successful achievement of ECD project objectives.

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