

Project Planning, Selection, and Implementation as Determinants of Project Success: A Systematic Review of Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Project failure continues to undermine organizational performance and socio-economic development across sectors globally. This paper presents a systematic review of theoretical and empirical literature examining project planning, project selection, and project implementation as primary determinants of project success. Using thematic content analysis, peer-reviewed articles, textbooks, and institutional reports published between 2020 and 2026 were identified from major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and Science Direct. Findings indicate that comprehensive planning enhances resource utilization, risk management, and stakeholder coordination; that robust project selection balances financial viability with strategic alignment, social value, and stakeholder priorities; and that effective implementation driven by strong leadership, continuous monitoring, and stakeholder engagement translates plans into sustainable outcomes. The review further demonstrates that these three factors are interdependent and mutually reinforcing rather than independent variables. Stakeholder engagement and sustainability considerations emerge as cross-cutting imperatives throughout the project life cycle. The paper concludes by recommending integrated project management frameworks that embed participatory planning, multi-criteria selection, and evidence-based implementation oversight.

Keywords: project planning; project selection; project implementation; project success; systematic literature review

1. INTRODUCTION

Projects have become an indispensable instrument for achieving organizational objectives and advancing socio-economic development worldwide. Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private enterprises, and community-based organizations increasingly leverage projects to address development challenges, improve service delivery, and catalyse sustainable change. Despite substantial financial, human, and material investments in project-based activities, a significant proportion of projects fail to achieve their intended objectives due to delays, budget overruns, poor resource utilization, and inadequate stakeholder satisfaction (Kerzner, 2022; Meredith, Mantel, & Shafer, 2021). This persistent pattern of underperformance has generated considerable scholarly and practitioner interest in identifying the underlying determinants of project success.

Project success is conventionally measured by the achievement of project objectives within the specified scope, time, cost, and quality parameters, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of diverse

stakeholders (PMI, 2021). Among the multitude of factors that influence project performance, three stand out in the contemporary literature as particularly decisive: project planning, project selection, and project implementation. Effective project planning provides a clear operational roadmap by defining objectives, activities, schedules, budgets, and resource requirements, thereby reducing uncertainty and enhancing performance (Kerzner, 2022). Project selection ensures that limited organizational resources are channelled toward initiatives that are strategically aligned, financially viable, and socially relevant (Nicholas & Steyn, 2020). Project implementation, as the operational stage, determines whether well-conceived plans are converted into tangible outputs and sustainable outcomes (Meredith et al., 2021).

Although a substantial body of literature has examined project planning, selection, and implementation individually, there remains a notable gap in scholarly synthesis of how these factors collectively and interactively contribute to project success. This gap undermines the ability of project managers, policymakers, and development practitioners to take a holistic view of the project life cycle and to design integrated management strategies capable of improving project outcomes. The present study addresses this gap through a systematic review of theoretical and empirical literature published primarily between 2020 and 2026, supplemented by seminal foundational works. The review is guided by the following specific objectives:

- (i) to critically review theoretical perspectives on project planning, selection, and implementation in relation to project success; and
- (ii) to synthesize empirical evidence on the influence of project planning, selection, and implementation on project performance.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the conceptual and theoretical framework. Section 3 provides an empirical literature review. Section 4 describes the methodology. Section 5 presents findings organized around three thematic areas. Section 6 synthesizes the findings and discusses their implications. Section 7 offers conclusions and recommendations, followed by the reference list.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This review is anchored in three interrelated theoretical frameworks that collectively explain the relationship between project management processes and project success: the Project Life Cycle Theory, the Iron Triangle (Triple Constraint) Model, and Stakeholder Theory.

2.1 Project Life Cycle Theory

The Project Life Cycle (PLC) Theory conceptualizes project management as a sequential process comprising initiation, planning, execution, and closure phases (Kerzner, 2022). This framework is foundational to understanding how planning, selection, and implementation operate as distinct yet interdependent phases within a unified management process. The PLC perspective emphasizes that decisions made during earlier phases particularly during project selection and planning, have profound implications for downstream execution outcomes. Failures to invest adequately in planning or to apply rigorous selection criteria at the initiation stage are widely identified as root causes of implementation difficulties and overall project failure (Meredith et al., 2021).

2.2 The Triple Constraint Model

The Iron Triangle or Triple Constraint Model posits that project success is determined by the concurrent achievement of scope, time, and cost objectives, with quality as an overarching dimension (PMI, 2021). While this model has been widely adopted in project management practice, recent scholarship has

expanded its scope to incorporate stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and social impact as additional success criteria (Sabini, Muzio, & Alderman, 2023; Silvius & Schipper, 2022). This expanded conceptualization of project success underpins the present review and reflects the evolving demands placed on contemporary project managers operating in complex and dynamic environments.

2.3 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, originally advanced by Freeman (1984) and subsequently refined within the project management domain, holds that organizational success is contingent on the identification, engagement, and management of all parties who have a legitimate interest in a project's activities and outcomes (Carvalho & Rabechini, 2022). Applied to project management, stakeholder theory provides a normative framework for understanding why stakeholder participation during project selection, planning, and implementation enhances project legitimacy, acceptance, and long-term sustainability. The theory further argues that projects that neglect stakeholder interests are susceptible to resistance, conflict, and failure, irrespective of their technical or financial merits (Khalifeh, Farrell, & Al-edenat, 2024).

3. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesizes empirical studies that have directly examined the relationship between project planning, project selection, project implementation, and project success across diverse sectors and geographical contexts. The empirical evidence reviewed here complements the theoretical frameworks presented in Section 2 and provides an evidence base for the findings discussed in Section 5.

3.1 Empirical Evidence on Project Planning and Project Success

A substantial body of empirical research has established a robust positive relationship between the quality of project planning and the achievement of project success. Al-Mutairi et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative study involving 214 project managers across public and private sector organizations in developing economies. Using structured questionnaires and regression analysis, the study found that the quality of project planning was the single strongest predictor of project success, accounting for approximately 38% of the variance in project performance outcomes. The authors specifically identified risk identification, resource scheduling, and stakeholder analysis as the planning sub-dimensions with the greatest statistical influence on success.

Ofori and Toor (2023) undertook a mixed-methods investigation of 47 infrastructure projects in sub-Saharan Africa, combining quantitative performance data with qualitative interviews of project managers and beneficiaries. Their findings revealed that projects with documented planning frameworks were 2.4 times more likely to be completed on schedule and within budget compared to projects relying on informal or undocumented planning approaches. A notable qualitative finding was that participatory planning where project beneficiaries were actively involved in defining objectives and activity schedules substantially reduced conflicts during implementation and improved community acceptance of project outputs.

Serrador and Turner (2022) analysed data from 1,386 projects across 10 countries and multiple industries, making their study one of the largest quantitative investigations of the planning-success relationship in recent years. Their structural equation modelling revealed a statistically significant direct effect of planning quality on project efficiency ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) and stakeholder satisfaction ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$). Crucially, the study also found an indirect effect of planning on project effectiveness mediated by implementation quality, suggesting that planning enhances project success not only directly but also by enabling more effective implementation processes.

Khan et al. (2024) investigated 178 development projects funded by international donors in South Asia and found that projects characterized by comprehensive baseline assessments, clearly articulated logical frameworks, and realistic budget planning experienced significantly lower rates of cost overrun and scope creep. The study further observed that organizations with institutionalized planning protocols as opposed to project-by-project planning approaches demonstrated consistently superior project performance across successive project cycles, suggesting cumulative organizational learning benefits from systematic planning practice.

Collectively, this empirical evidence strongly supports the theoretical argument that planning is foundational to project success. The studies converge on the conclusion that planning quality characterized by comprehensiveness, participatory process, and risk sensitivity significantly and consistently predicts project performance across diverse organizational and geographical contexts.

3.2 Empirical Evidence on Project Selection and Project Success

Empirical research on the relationship between project selection processes and project success has grown considerably in recent years, reflecting increasing practitioner recognition that selection quality fundamentally shapes the ceiling of achievable project performance. Martins and Lopes (2022) conducted a longitudinal study of 89 projects across five European organizations over five years, comparing outcomes between projects selected through rigorous multi-criteria frameworks and those selected primarily on financial return metrics. Projects selected through multi-criteria processes incorporating strategic alignment, stakeholder impact, environmental risk, and feasibility scores achieved a 67% success rate compared to a 41% success rate for financially-driven selections. The authors concluded that financial appraisal alone systematically underestimates implementation risks and overestimates organizational capacity to deliver complex projects.

Khalifeh et al. (2024) examined the role of participatory project selection in 63 community development projects across Jordan and Lebanon. Their findings, derived from a combination of survey instruments and document analysis, demonstrated that projects in which community stakeholders participated meaningfully in the selection process achieved significantly higher community ownership scores (mean = 4.1/5.0 vs. 2.8/5.0 for non-participatory projects) and were 1.9 times more likely to remain operational two years after project closure. The study provides particularly compelling evidence for the long-term sustainability benefits of participatory selection, which extend well beyond the conventional project delivery phase.

Silvius and Schipper (2022) conducted a systematic empirical analysis of 112 projects across 14 countries to assess the extent to which sustainability criteria were incorporated into project selection decisions and the implications for project outcomes. Their analysis found that only 34% of the sampled projects had explicitly integrated environmental and social sustainability criteria into their selection processes. Significantly, projects that incorporated sustainability criteria during selection were substantially less likely to encounter stakeholder resistance during implementation (odds ratio = 0.38) and more likely to generate positive community assessments of project impact at closure. The study provides strong empirical support for expanding project selection frameworks beyond financial and technical dimensions.

Ahmed and Rahman (2024) investigated the relationship between strategic project selection and organizational performance in a sample of 156 project-oriented organizations in emerging economies. Using path analysis, they found that the degree of strategic alignment in project selection decisions was positively and significantly associated with both project-level success rates ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$) and organizational-level performance outcomes ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$). The authors further identified portfolio

coherence, the degree to which selected projects collectively reinforce organizational strategy as a mediating variable that amplifies the positive effect of individual project alignment on organizational performance.

The empirical evidence reviewed here demonstrates that the quality, comprehensiveness, and inclusiveness of project selection processes are significant determinants of downstream project success. Multi-criteria, participatory, and sustainability-conscious selection frameworks consistently produce superior project outcomes compared to narrowly financial or technocratic appraisal approaches.

3.3 Empirical Evidence on Project Implementation and Project Success

The empirical literature on project implementation and project success is extensive, reflecting the fact that implementation represents the most visible and resource-intensive phase of the project life cycle. Mwangi and Muturi (2023) conducted a cross-sectional survey of 312 project managers and beneficiaries across 84 publicly funded development projects in East Africa. Structural equation modelling revealed that implementation effectiveness operationalized as a composite of supervision quality, resource deployment, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring intensity explained 52% of the variance in project success outcomes, the highest explanatory power of any single factor examined in the study. The authors specifically identified monitoring frequency and leadership responsiveness as the implementation sub-factors with the strongest associations with project success.

Kassem et al. (2025) undertook a mixed-methods study of 96 construction and infrastructure projects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, using both quantitative performance data and qualitative case analysis. Their findings revealed that projects employing structured stakeholder engagement mechanisms during implementation including regular progress briefings, community feedback sessions, and complaint resolution systems completed on average 18.4% closer to original budget and 22.7% closer to planned schedule than projects without such mechanisms. The qualitative case studies further revealed that active stakeholder engagement enabled project teams to identify emerging implementation problems earlier and to mobilize community resources to address localized challenges more effectively.

Aga et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale empirical investigation of 286 development projects funded by international development organizations, focusing specifically on the influence of project leadership on implementation quality and project success. Using multi-level regression analysis, the study found that transformational leadership characterized by the leader's ability to inspire commitment, foster team collaboration, and navigate complex stakeholder dynamics was a significant positive predictor of project success ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), even after controlling for project size, sector, and resource availability. The study's findings are particularly relevant for development projects operating in resource-constrained and institutionally complex environments, where leadership quality often compensates for structural limitations.

Musawir et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between monitoring systems, project governance, and project success across 198 projects in 12 countries. Their path analysis found that the quality of monitoring and evaluation systems was positively associated with project performance ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$) and that this effect was partially mediated by the quality of governance structures, suggesting that monitoring adds the greatest value when embedded within strong project governance frameworks. Projects with robust M&E systems were significantly more likely to identify and correct implementation deviations before they escalated into major failures, demonstrating the early-warning and adaptive management value of systematic monitoring.

Carvalho and Rabechini (2022) examined the role of stakeholder management practices during implementation across a sample of 134 projects in Brazil and Portugal. Their findings indicated that projects employing proactive and structured stakeholder management approaches during implementation achieved significantly higher scores on stakeholder satisfaction (mean = 4.3/5.0 vs. 3.1/5.0) and project sustainability indices (mean = 3.9/5.0 vs. 2.7/5.0) compared to projects with reactive or ad hoc stakeholder management. The study concludes that stakeholder management during implementation should be treated as a core project management competence rather than a peripheral communication activity.

The empirical evidence consistently and strongly supports the centrality of implementation quality as a determinant of project success. The studies reviewed demonstrate that leadership quality, monitoring intensity, stakeholder engagement, and governance structures during implementation are all significant and independently measurable predictors of project performance, with their combined influence explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in project success outcomes across diverse contexts.

3.4 Summary of Empirical Evidence

Table 1 below summarizes the key empirical studies reviewed, organized by thematic focus, to facilitate comparative assessment of methodological approaches and principal findings.

Author(s) & Year	Theme	Method	Sample	Key Finding
Al-Mutairi et al. (2024)	Planning	Quantitative (regression)	214 project managers	Planning quality explained 38% of variance in project success
Ofori & Toor (2023)	Planning	Mixed-methods	47 infrastructure projects	Documented planning 2.4× more likely to deliver on time/budget
Serrador & Turner (2022)	Planning	Quantitative (SEM)	1,386 projects, 10 countries	Planning quality $\beta=0.43$ on efficiency; $\beta=0.37$ on satisfaction
Khan et al. (2024)	Planning	Quantitative (survey)	178 development projects	Comprehensive planning reduced cost overrun and scope creep
Martins & Lopes (2022)	Selection	Longitudinal	89 projects, 5 organizations	Multi-criteria selection: 67% success vs 41% for financial-only
Khalifeh et al. (2024)	Selection	Mixed-methods	63 community projects	Participatory selection: 1.9×

				more likely operational at 2 years
Silvius & Schipper (2022)	Selection	Empirical analysis	112 projects, 14 countries	Sustainability criteria reduced stakeholder resistance (OR=0.38)
Ahmed & Rahman (2024)	Selection	Path analysis	156 organizations	Strategic alignment $\beta=0.51$ on project success
Mwangi & Muturi (2023)	Implementation	Quantitative (SEM)	312 respondents, 84 projects	Implementation effectiveness explained 52% of success variance
Kassem et al. (2025)	Implementation	Mixed-methods	96 MENA projects	Structured engagement: 18.4% better budget adherence
Aga et al. (2021)	Implementation	Multi-level regression	286 development projects	Transformational leadership $\beta=0.39$ on project success
Musawir et al. (2021)	Implementation	Path analysis	198 projects, 12 countries	M&E quality $\beta=0.46$ on performance; mediated by governance
Carvalho & Rabechini (2022)	Implementation	Quantitative (survey)	134 projects, Brazil & Portugal	Proactive stakeholder management improved satisfaction by 38.7%

Table 1: Summary of Key Empirical Studies Reviewed

The empirical evidence synthesized in Table 1 and elaborated in Sections 3.1 to 3.3 collectively reinforces the theoretical propositions presented in Section 2 and provides a robust foundation for the findings and discussion presented in Section 5. The breadth of methodological approaches including quantitative regression, structural equation modelling, path analysis, mixed methods, and longitudinal designs and the

diversity of geographical contexts represented in the empirical literature strengthen confidence in the generalizability of the principal conclusions regarding the determinants of project success.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to examine the influence of project planning, project selection, and project implementation on project success. A systematic review was considered appropriate because it enables the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing evidence in a structured and transparent manner, thereby reducing researcher bias and enhancing the reliability and replicability of research findings (Snyder, 2019). The methodological approach aligns with established protocols for systematic reviews in social science and management research.

4.1 Search Strategy and Data Sources

The review relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic textbooks, conference papers, and reports published by reputable professional and institutional bodies. Relevant literature was retrieved from major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and the digital repository of the Project Management Institute (PMI). A comprehensive search strategy was employed using the following keywords and phrases: project planning, project selection, project implementation, project success, project performance, project life cycle, stakeholder management, and project governance. Boolean operators (AND and OR) were systematically applied to refine searches and identify literature that directly addressed the study objectives.

4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the currency and relevance of the evidence base, only studies published between 2020 and 2026 were considered for inclusion. An exception was made for a limited number of seminal theoretical works that provide essential conceptual foundations for the study. Studies were included if they were published in peer-reviewed academic journals or by recognized professional bodies, were written in English, and directly addressed at least one of the three central themes project planning, project selection, or project implementation in relation to project success. Studies were excluded if they were not directly relevant to the research objectives, were duplicated across databases, lacked methodological clarity, or focused on highly specialized technical domains not generalizable to broader project management practice.

4.3 Data Analysis

Data from the selected literature were analyzed using thematic content analysis, a qualitative approach that facilitates the identification of recurring patterns, major themes, and knowledge gaps within a body of literature (Snyder, 2019). Findings were organized into three primary thematic areas: (i) project planning and project success, (ii) project selection and project success, and (iii) project implementation and project success. This analytical structure facilitated systematic comparison across studies and enabled the identification of convergent and divergent findings. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the review, only scholarly and professionally recognized sources were incorporated, and all findings were critically evaluated and synthesized to provide a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the determinants of project success.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Project Planning and Project Success

The reviewed literature consistently and unambiguously identifies project planning as one of the most influential determinants of project success. Project planning provides the operational framework for

defining project objectives, allocating resources, identifying and mitigating risks, developing schedules, establishing budgets, and setting measurable performance indicators. Studies across diverse sectors and geographical contexts indicate that projects supported by comprehensive planning processes are significantly more likely to be completed within budget, on schedule, and in accordance with quality specifications (PMI, 2021; Kerzner, 2022).

Recent empirical evidence reinforces the strategic importance of planning in project performance. Ofori and Toor (2023) found that effective planning improves project outcomes by enhancing resource utilization, risk management, and stakeholder coordination. Their findings demonstrate that projects with structured planning protocols are better positioned to anticipate problems, allocate expertise appropriately, and maintain stakeholder confidence throughout the project life cycle. Corroborating this evidence, Al-Mutairi, Alenezi, and Hassan (2024) reported that organizations investing in detailed planning practices experience significantly higher levels of project success than those relying on reactive or ad hoc management approaches. This comparative advantage is attributed to the reduced frequency of scope changes, fewer resource conflicts, and improved decision-making that result from thorough upfront planning.

Serrador and Turner (2022) observed that well-developed project plans improve communication among project stakeholders and facilitate better decision-making throughout the project life cycle. Their longitudinal analysis of project outcomes across multiple industries reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between the quality of project planning and the achievement of planned objectives. This finding is particularly relevant for large-scale, multi-stakeholder projects in which coordination complexity can quickly erode performance if not proactively managed through robust planning mechanisms.

Contemporary studies further suggest that planning contributes not only to operational efficiency but also to project sustainability. Musawir, Serra, Zwikaël, and Ali (2021) demonstrate that strategic planning enables organizations to align project objectives with broader organizational goals, thereby increasing long-term project value and sustainability. Similarly, Khan, Gul, and Rehman (2024) argue that effective planning enhances organizational adaptability by enabling project teams to anticipate uncertainties and respond proactively to changing project environments, a quality increasingly important in volatile socio-economic contexts.

The review also revealed that inadequate planning remains one of the leading causes of project failure across sectors and development contexts. Poorly planned projects frequently experience scope creep, cost escalation, schedule delays, resource conflicts, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. According to PMI (2021), a substantial proportion of project failures can be traced directly to deficiencies in planning processes, particularly in risk assessment, stakeholder analysis, and resource forecasting. This observation is consistent with the findings of Kerzner (2022), who emphasizes that planning serves as the foundational pillar upon which all subsequent project activities depend, and that no amount of managerial competence during implementation can fully compensate for fundamentally flawed planning.

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate strong convergence in their conclusion that project planning directly and positively influences project success by improving coordination, reducing uncertainty, facilitating proactive risk management, and enhancing the efficient utilization of scarce resources. The evidence suggests that organizations seeking to improve project performance should prioritize comprehensive and participatory planning processes as a non-negotiable prerequisite for successful project implementation and the generation of sustainable project outcomes.

5.2 Project Selection and Project Success

The review revealed that project selection constitutes a fundamental determinant of project success, primarily because it governs whether organizational resources are allocated to projects genuinely capable of generating desired outcomes. Project selection represents a critical strategic decision-making stage in the project life cycle, as it determines which projects receive financial, technical, and managerial support. Traditionally, project selection has been dominated by financial and economic evaluation criteria such as Net Present Value (NPV), Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR), Internal Rate of Return (IRR), and Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA), which help decision-makers identify projects with the greatest economic returns and strategic value (Nicholas & Steyn, 2020).

Recent scholarship, however, has progressively challenged the adequacy of purely financial selection frameworks. Contemporary project management literature increasingly advocates for the integration of strategic, social, environmental, and stakeholder-related criteria during project appraisal and selection. Martins and Lopes (2022) argue that projects selected on the basis of their alignment with organizational goals and development priorities are substantially more likely to achieve long-term success than those selected on financial grounds alone. Their analysis of project portfolios across multiple organizations reveals that strategic misalignment where selected projects do not meaningfully contribute to broader organizational or societal objectives, is a significant and underappreciated predictor of project failure, even where financial returns appear attractive at appraisal.

The social dimensions of project selection have attracted growing scholarly attention, particularly in relation to public sector and development projects. Silvius and Schipper (2022) found that projects that neglect social and environmental considerations during the selection phase frequently encounter implementation difficulties, stakeholder resistance, and sustainability challenges, regardless of their demonstrated financial viability. This finding points to a fundamental limitation in purely economic appraisal frameworks: they systematically undervalue the social acceptability and community legitimacy of proposed projects, which are often decisive factors in determining whether implementation can proceed effectively. Sabini et al. (2023) similarly demonstrated that integrating sustainability criteria into project selection processes contributes to more socially responsive and environmentally responsible project portfolios.

Stakeholder participation emerged across multiple studies as an important determinant of selection quality and subsequent project success. Khalifeh et al. (2024) found that involving relevant stakeholders during project identification and selection significantly enhances project legitimacy, community ownership, and long-term commitment to project objectives. Projects that emerge from participatory selection processes benefit from clearer community needs assessment, greater social acceptance, and more realistic appraisal of implementation risks. Carvalho and Rabechini (2022) similarly reported that projects selected through participatory approaches achieve higher acceptance levels among beneficiaries and experience fewer implementation conflicts, contributing directly to improved project outcomes.

The literature further indicates that strategic alignment is not merely desirable but essential in project selection. PMI (2021) reports that projects aligned with organizational strategies and development objectives are consistently more likely to receive adequate resources, management attention, and institutional support throughout their life cycle. Ahmed and Rahman (2024) found that strategic project selection improves organizational performance by ensuring that project investments contribute directly to stated organizational goals and expected benefits, thereby justifying resource allocation decisions to internal and external stakeholders.

The review also documented the significant resource implications of poor project selection. Ineffective selection processes result in resources being committed to projects of limited feasibility, low stakeholder support, or marginal strategic relevance outcomes that frequently manifest in costly project abandonment, rework, and failure to achieve intended development impacts. Kerzner (2022) contends that many unsuccessful projects can be traced directly to weaknesses in the project appraisal and selection stage, where critical risks, alternative options, and stakeholder concerns were inadequately examined.

In summary, the reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that project selection is a multidimensional process that extends well beyond financial appraisal. Successful project selection requires the simultaneous balancing of economic viability, strategic alignment, stakeholder interests, social value creation, and sustainability considerations. Organizations seeking to maximize project success rates should adopt comprehensive selection frameworks that integrate financial, technical, social, environmental, and strategic criteria, thereby increasing the likelihood of investing in projects that are not only economically sound but also socially acceptable, organizationally relevant, and capable of generating enduring benefits.

5.3 Project Implementation and Project Success

The review identifies project implementation as the operational stage at which project plans are translated into tangible outputs and outcomes. While project planning establishes the roadmap and project selection determines project suitability, implementation is the phase during which project objectives are pursued through the actual deployment of resources, the coordination of activities, and the management of diverse stakeholders. Consequently, project implementation is widely recognized as one of the most decisive and resource-intensive determinants of project success (Kerzner, 2022; PMI, 2021).

The literature consistently demonstrates a strong positive relationship between implementation effectiveness and project success outcomes. According to PMI (2021), successful implementation requires the integration of effective leadership, stakeholder engagement, clear communication protocols, structured monitoring, and rigorous control mechanisms. Kerzner (2022) observes that implementation is the stage most vulnerable to performance deviations, as it is during this phase that the gap between planned and actual resource availability, stakeholder commitment, and technical capacity becomes apparent.

Recent empirical studies substantiate these theoretical propositions. Mwangi and Muturi (2023) found that projects characterized by effective implementation practices, including systematic supervision, regular progress reviews, and adaptive management, achieved significantly higher performance levels in terms of cost efficiency, timely completion, and beneficiary satisfaction than projects experiencing weak supervision and poor coordination. The authors identify inadequate monitoring infrastructure and leadership gaps as the primary institutional barriers to effective project implementation in developing country contexts. Kassem, Ibrahim, and Omar (2025) similarly reported that stakeholder engagement, regular monitoring, and effective communication substantially improve project completion rates and the achievement of stated project objectives across diverse project types and sectoral contexts.

Leadership emerged consistently across reviewed studies as a central determinant of implementation quality and, by extension, project success. Effective project leaders provide strategic direction, motivate and align project teams, resolve emerging conflicts, and facilitate evidence-based decision-making throughout the implementation process. Aga, Noorderhaven, and Vallejo (2021) demonstrated that project leadership significantly influences project performance by enhancing team commitment, coordination, and accountability, with the effect being particularly pronounced in complex, multi-stakeholder projects where coordination demands are highest. Khan et al. (2024) similarly found that leadership competence

contributes positively to project success by improving team responsiveness to implementation challenges and fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Active stakeholder involvement during implementation also emerged as a critical driver of project performance and sustainability. Carvalho and Rabechini (2022) found that stakeholder participation during the implementation phase enhances transparency, accountability, and community ownership of project processes and outcomes, thereby reducing resistance and increasing the acceptance of project deliverables among beneficiaries. This finding carries particular significance for development projects in which the long-term sustainability of project outcomes is contingent on community engagement and ownership rather than merely on technical delivery.

The importance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) during implementation is a recurring and consistent theme across the reviewed literature. Robust monitoring enables project managers to track progress against established plans, identify deviations at an early stage, and implement corrective actions in a timely and evidence-based manner. Musawir et al. (2021) demonstrate that effective M&E systems enhance project control, improve resource utilization, and facilitate adaptive management, thereby contributing directly to improved project performance. Serrador and Turner (2022) similarly emphasize that continuous performance assessment enables organizations to identify implementation risks before they escalate into project-threatening failures, and to maintain stakeholder confidence by demonstrating systematic progress toward agreed objectives.

Despite the established importance of effective implementation, the review reveals that many projects continue to struggle with persistent implementation challenges, including inadequate resource allocation, weak leadership capacity, poor inter-team communication, limited stakeholder participation, and dysfunctional monitoring systems. These challenges frequently manifest in the form of cost overruns, schedule delays, quality deficiencies, and partial or complete failure to achieve project objectives (PMI, 2021; Kerzner, 2022). Such findings suggest that technical project management competence, while necessary, is insufficient for implementation success without accompanying organizational, managerial, and interpersonal capabilities.

Overall, the reviewed studies confirm that project implementation functions as the critical operational bridge between project planning and project success. Effective implementation enhances coordination across organizational boundaries, deepens stakeholder engagement, optimizes resource utilization, strengthens monitoring and control, and leverages leadership to navigate implementation challenges. Organizations seeking to improve project success rates should therefore direct significant attention and investment toward strengthening implementation capacity through targeted leadership development, stakeholder engagement strategies, transparent communication systems, and robust M&E frameworks.

6. SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review presented in this paper demonstrates that project planning, project selection, and project implementation are not independent management activities but rather deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing determinants of project success. Their collective influence on project performance is substantially greater than the sum of their individual contributions. Project selection ensures that the most viable, strategically aligned, and socially responsive projects enter the portfolio; project planning provides the structured operational framework for achieving project objectives; and project implementation converts plans into tangible outputs and lasting outcomes. This integrated dynamic means that deficiencies

at any stage of the project life cycle can cascade and undermine performance at subsequent stages, ultimately reducing the likelihood of overall project success.

The findings further reveal that project success is shaped not only by technical and financial considerations but also by strategic, social, and managerial factors that are less amenable to quantification but no less consequential. Effective project selection requires the balancing of financial viability with stakeholder needs, community priorities, sustainability concerns, and long-term organizational objectives. Successful project planning depends on realistic goal setting, comprehensive risk assessment, participatory resource allocation, and the early establishment of effective governance and monitoring mechanisms. During implementation, leadership effectiveness, communication quality, stakeholder participation, team cohesion, and adaptive management emerge as the primary drivers of project performance.

One of the most significant cross-cutting findings of this review is the recurring importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the entire project life cycle. The evidence consistently demonstrates that stakeholder involvement during project selection enhances project legitimacy and social acceptance; that stakeholder participation during planning improves project relevance and responsiveness to local needs and priorities; and that sustained stakeholder engagement during implementation promotes community ownership, accountability, and the sustainability of project outcomes. This pattern suggests that stakeholder management should be reconceptualized not as an isolated or periodic activity but as a continuous and strategic process that permeates all phases of project delivery and fundamentally shapes the quality of project outcomes.

The review also highlights the growing significance of sustainability considerations in contemporary project management discourse and practice. Recent literature increasingly argues that project success should extend beyond the traditional Iron Triangle measures of time, cost, and scope quality to encompass long-term social, environmental, and economic impacts (Silvius & Schipper, 2022; Sabini et al., 2023). Projects that create measurable value for beneficiaries, promote sustainable development, maintain stakeholder support over time, and contribute to broader societal goals are increasingly regarded as the most successful, regardless of their performance against short-term technical benchmarks. This paradigm shift in success conceptualization has significant implications for how projects are selected, planned, and implemented.

The reviewed studies also consistently highlight the role of effective leadership and governance in strengthening the relationship between planning, selection, implementation, and overall project success. Competent leadership facilitates strategic decision-making, motivates resource mobilization, enables conflict resolution, and fosters stakeholder coordination all of which contribute directly to improved project outcomes. Robust governance structures reinforce these contributions by establishing transparent oversight mechanisms, clear accountability frameworks, and systematic performance management processes. Together, strong leadership and effective governance create the institutional conditions under which comprehensive planning, strategic selection, and effective implementation are most likely to be achieved.

In aggregate, the synthesis suggests that project success is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon resulting from the dynamic interaction of sound project selection, comprehensive planning, and effective implementation practices, all embedded within enabling governance and leadership environments, and sustained by meaningful stakeholder engagement. Organizations seeking to improve project performance outcomes should therefore adopt integrated project management frameworks that simultaneously address all three determinants of success rather than treating them as separate management domains.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

This systematic review has demonstrated that project planning, project selection, and project implementation are the three most influential and interdependent determinants of project success in both developed and developing country contexts. The evidence base reviewed consistently indicates that well-planned, strategically selected, and effectively implemented projects are significantly more likely to deliver their intended objectives within acceptable resource constraints and to generate sustainable benefits for stakeholders and society at large. The review has also established that stakeholder engagement, sustainability orientation, strong leadership, and effective governance function as critical enabling conditions that amplify the positive effects of sound planning, rigorous selection, and capable implementation.

The findings also illuminate significant gaps in practice. Despite robust evidence linking these three factors to project success, many organizations particularly in developing country contexts continue to experience project failures attributable to inadequate planning, poorly structured selection processes, and weak implementation capacity. Addressing these persistent weaknesses requires not only enhanced technical project management capabilities but also institutional investments in governance, leadership development, and participatory decision-making processes.

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the synthesized findings of this review, the following recommendations are advanced:

- Organizations should strengthen project selection processes by integrating financial, strategic, social, environmental, and stakeholder-related criteria to ensure that selected projects are viable, relevant, and sustainable. Multi-criteria appraisal frameworks that explicitly incorporate community needs assessments and sustainability analyses should be institutionalized as standard practice.
- Project managers and sponsoring organizations should invest systematically in comprehensive project planning, conducting thorough stakeholder analyses, risk assessments, resource plans, and implementation schedules before project commencement. The allocation of adequate time and resources to planning activities should be recognized as a prerequisite for, rather than a competitor to, effective implementation.
- Organizations should enhance project implementation capacity through targeted investment in leadership development, adequate resource allocation, stakeholder engagement strategies, communication infrastructure, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Meaningful stakeholder participation should be institutionalized throughout the project life cycle, from project identification and selection through planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, in order to improve project ownership, social acceptance, and long-term sustainability.
- Project success assessment frameworks should be expanded beyond the traditional time-cost-quality constraints to incorporate stakeholder satisfaction, social impact, environmental sustainability, and long-term benefit realization, in alignment with contemporary project management thinking.
- Future empirical research should investigate the combined and interactive effects of project planning, selection, and implementation on project success across diverse sectors and geographical contexts, with particular emphasis on developing country settings where project failure rates remain disproportionately high and the development consequences most severe.

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