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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Effect of Stakeholder Engagement Strategies on the Timely Completion of Construction Projects in North-Central Nigeria: A Conceptual and Theoretical Perspective

Mohammed Abba TOR[1], Nasamu GAMBO[2], Frank Alaba OGEDENGBE[3]

[1,2,3] Department of Business Administration, Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja

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***Corresponding Author:**

20222034@nileuniversity.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Delays in construction projects remain a significant challenge in North-Central Nigeria, often resulting in cost overruns, resource inefficiencies, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. This study examines the effect of stakeholder engagement strategies on the timely completion of construction projects through a conceptual and theoretical review. Using thematic, comparative, and contextual analyses, the study identifies key stakeholder engagement strategies such as early stakeholder identification, regular communication, participatory decision-making, conflict resolution, and regulatory compliance as critical to project success. Findings reveal that effective stakeholder engagement enhances project completion rates, mitigates risks, improves cost efficiency, and fosters collaboration. However, Nigeria's bureaucratic bottlenecks, weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and poor feedback mechanisms hinder engagement effectiveness. Unlike developed economies, where technology-driven engagement models and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms are widely used, Nigerian construction projects still rely on manual communication and traditional conflict resolution approaches, exacerbating delays. The study recommends strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing capacity building for project managers, leveraging digital engagement tools, improving community participation, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and integrating ADR mechanisms to optimise stakeholder engagement in construction projects. By aligning engagement strategies with global best practices while addressing local socio-political dynamics, construction firms and policymakers can significantly reduce project delays, enhance regulatory compliance, and improve overall project sustainability. Future research should empirically investigate the direct impact of stakeholder engagement on project performance metrics, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is one of the most dynamic and complex sectors globally, contributing significantly to economic development through infrastructure development, employment generation, and technological advancements. However, project delays remain a persistent challenge in the industry, affecting cost efficiency, resource allocation, and stakeholder satisfaction. According to the Global Construction 2030 Report, the construction sector is projected to grow by 85% to $15.5 trillion worldwide by 2030, with developing economies accounting for a significant share of this expansion. Despite this growth, studies indicate that over 70% of construction projects globally experience delays, primarily due to inadequate stakeholder engagement, poor project planning, and unforeseen risks (Ofori, 2021). In developed nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognised as a critical component in mitigating

project delays, ensuring timely decision-making, and fostering collaboration among project owners, contractors, government agencies, and local communities (Eskerod & Huemann, 2018).

In emerging economies, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, construction delays are even more prevalent due to funding constraints, regulatory bottlenecks, and inefficient stakeholder communication. Studies in South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana highlight that stakeholder conflicts and poor engagement strategies significantly impact project completion timelines, leading to cost overruns and contract disputes (Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2017). These findings emphasise the growing need for robust stakeholder management frameworks to enhance efficiency, reduce project risks, and ensure alignment with project goals.

In Nigeria, the construction industry is crucial in national development, contributing approximately 9% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing millions of people directly and indirectly (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). However, project delays remain a critical issue, with over 60% of public and private sector construction projects experiencing significant time overruns (Aibinu&Jagboro, 2020). Several high-profile projects, including the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway rehabilitation and the Abuja-Kaduna railway project, have faced substantial delays due to inadequate stakeholder coordination, government bureaucracy, and financial constraints. The challenges in stakeholder engagement in Nigeria stem from weak communication channels, lack of early involvement of key players, political interference, and inconsistent regulatory policies (Oyewobi et al., 2021).

Timely completion of construction projects is critical for cost efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, and overall project success. Globally, stakeholder engagement has been identified as a key driver of project performance, ensuring effective communication, conflict resolution, and alignment of objectives (Eskerod & Huemann, 2023). In Nigeria, construction delays remain persistent due to inadequate stakeholder involvement, poor coordination, and regulatory challenges (Oyewobi et al., 2022). Major infrastructure projects in North-Central Nigeria, such as roads and bridges, have experienced significant setbacks, leading to cost overruns and abandonment. This study investigates the effect of stakeholder engagement strategies on timely project completion, addressing gaps in literature and providing practical solutions. Findings will contribute to optimising project management practices and improving infrastructure delivery efficiency in Nigeria's construction sector (Aibinu&Jagboro, 2023).

Despite the critical role of stakeholder engagement in ensuring the successful delivery of construction projects, there is a notable scarcity of empirical studies focusing on the North-Central region of Nigeria. While research has been conducted in other regions, such as the study by Tor and Gambo (2024) in Katsina State, which identified low levels of stakeholder engagement and challenges like leadership selection problems and improper communication, similar comprehensive analyses are lacking for North-Central Nigeria. This gap is significant given that factors influencing stakeholder engagement can vary across geopolitical zones due to cultural, economic, and social differences. Addressing this research gap is crucial for developing tailored strategies that enhance stakeholder engagement and improve the timely completion of construction projects in North-Central Nigeria.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge regarding stakeholder engagement in the construction industry, particularly in North-Central Nigeria. Effective stakeholder engagement has been widely recognised as critical in ensuring project success, reducing delays, and mitigating conflicts (Ogunlana & Agyekum, 2023). However, existing studies have primarily focused on developed economies, with limited research addressing stakeholder engagement strategies in Nigeria's construction sector (Adewuyi et al., 2024). Given the increasing number of delayed and abandoned projects in Nigeria, particularly in the North-Central region, this study will provide empirical insights into how stakeholder involvement can enhance project delivery timelines. The findings will offer valuable recommendations for policymakers, project managers, and construction firms, improving overall project efficiency and economic growth.

Given the critical role of stakeholder engagement in achieving successful project execution, this study examines the effect of stakeholder engagement strategies on the timely completion of construction projects in North-Central Nigeria. The region, which includes states such as Abuja (FCT), Niger, Kogi, Nasarawa, Benue, Kwara, and Plateau, is experiencing rapid urbanisation and increased infrastructural development. However, persistent project delays threaten the economic viability of

construction investments. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement strategies in mitigating delays, enhancing project coordination, and ensuring the timely delivery of construction projects in the region. Identifying best practices and key challenges will provide valuable insights for construction firms, policymakers, and project managers seeking to improve project performance and stakeholder collaboration in Nigeria's construction industry.

Timely project completion is a critical factor in the success of construction projects, particularly in developing economies where delays can lead to cost overruns, resource wastage, and economic inefficiencies (Agyekum & Ogunlana, 2023). Stakeholder engagement strategies—such as early involvement, effective communication, and conflict resolution mechanisms—are essential for aligning project expectations, managing risks, and ensuring smooth execution (Adewuyi et al., 2024). Thus, this objective aims to assess how these strategies influence project timelines, identify key engagement practices that enhance efficiency, and provide recommendations for improving stakeholder collaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stakeholder engagement is essential to construction project management, particularly ensuring project success within stipulated timelines. Effective engagement strategies facilitate communication, mitigate risks, and enhance stakeholder satisfaction. This section explores existing literature on stakeholder engagement strategies, their theoretical foundations, and their impact on the timely completion of construction projects in North-Central Nigeria.

Stakeholder engagement involves individuals, groups, and organisations with a vested interest in a project to ensure their needs, concerns, and expectations are adequately managed (Freeman, 1984). In construction projects, stakeholders include owners, contractors, suppliers, government agencies, local communities, and financial institutions. These stakeholders' engagement level determines the smooth execution of projects and minimises disruptions.

Timely completion is the ability to finish a construction project within the scheduled timeframe without compromising quality, cost, or scope (Ogunlana, 2019). Several factors contribute to project delays, including poor communication, financial constraints, regulatory issues, labor shortages, and unforeseen circumstances (Aibinu&Jagboro, 2002). Effective stakeholder engagement can address these challenges and enhance efficiency.

Stakeholder engagement strategies are essential for ensuring the smooth execution of construction projects. Early stakeholder identification and analysis help map key stakeholders to understand their interests and influence at the inception stage. Regular communication and feedback mechanisms establish open dialogue channels to address concerns before they escalate. Participatory decision-making enhances project buy-in and cooperation by involving stakeholders in planning and execution. Conflict resolution mechanisms prevent project delays by swiftly addressing disputes. Compliance with regulatory requirements ensures adherence to government policies and environmental standards, reducing the risk of legal interruptions.

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organisations that affect or are affected by a business or project. Clarkson (1995) describes them as those with claims on an organisation's ownership, rights, or interests, while Freeman (1984) and Adeola (2019) offer a broader view, including anyone influencing or being influenced by a project's success. Israa (2017) adds that stakeholders are those impacted by a decision or activity, emphasising their role in project success. Scholars like Kujala et al. (2022) continue to explore stakeholder theory, recognising its growing importance.

Freeman (1984) categorises stakeholders into customers, suppliers, employees, communities, and financiers, each with distinct interests. Sustainability (2007) expands this list, distinguishing between primary (employees, owners, investors, creditors, suppliers, contractors) and secondary stakeholders (government, NGOs, trade unions, industry associations, media, academia, and competitors). Some stakeholders hold more influence than others, depending on their power, capacity, or interest in the project (Olander, 2007). Stakeholder analysis tools, such as stakeholder mapping, help assess power dynamics and influence decision-making (Israa, 2017; Dwivedi & Dwivedi, 2021).

Stakeholder management involves strategically identifying, analysing, classifying, and engaging stakeholders (Dinsmore & Cabanis-Brewin, 2014). This is especially crucial in the construction industry, where projects are unique and involve many diverse stakeholders (Bourne, 2016). Construction project stakeholders include managers, owners, designers, legal authorities, community representatives, banks, subcontractors, suppliers, competitors, government agencies, environmental bodies, and regional development agencies (Newcombe, 2003). Their involvement and engagement significantly influence the success of construction projects.

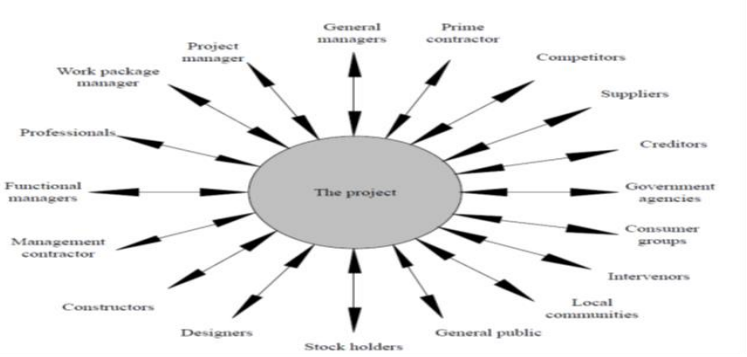


Figure 2. 1: Construction project stakeholders (Adopted from Nabil, 2013)

Figure 2.1 represents various stakeholders involved in a construction project, each influencing or being affected by its execution and outcomes. It includes project managers, general managers, functional managers, and contractors responsible for execution. Designers, professionals, and suppliers contribute expertise and resources, while creditors and stockholders provide financial backing. Government agencies, consumer groups, local communities, and the public ensure compliance and social impact considerations. Competitors and intervenors also shape the project's success through industry dynamics and external pressures.

Stakeholder engagement enhances policy implementation and governance effectiveness. Research by Sahal and Bett (2022) in Kenya and Olowu and Sule (2019) in Nigeria emphasised its role in advancing sustainable development. Yadua et al. (2024) found that transparent communication in Nigerian government agencies improves resource allocation. The absence of adequate public engagement has led to protests againstsignificant policy changes, such as the fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria (2023).

Engaging farmers and cooperatives enhances project outcomes. Kamau et al. (2024) reported a strong correlation (72.1%) between stakeholder engagement and the success of donor-financed agricultural programs. Arowosegbe (2020) found that collaboration with farmers fosters sustainable agriculture. Ojo and Ayanda (2021) confirmed that stakeholder engagement drives innovation in Nigeria's private sector. Businesses leveraging engagement strategies gain competitive advantages and build trust with host communities. Iheanacho (2020) argued that engaging stakeholders helps reduce gender disparities. Women's participation in education, healthcare, and economic development remains a critical area requiring targeted engagement.

Stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognised as a competitive advantage. Mandongwe and Murairwa (2022) found that it enhances profitability in Zimbabwean firms. Sarpong et al. (2023) reported that digitalised stakeholder engagement improves financial performance in Ghana's rural banking sector. In the construction industry, stakeholder engagement is integral to project success. Karimi and Mungai (2024) found that engagement positively impacts rural electrification projects in Kenya. Studies by Durdyev et al. (2017) and Waris et al. (2019) showed that insufficient engagement leads to project failures. Research in Nigeria (Ogunde et al., 2017) revealed that involving project managers enhances construction performance. Stakeholder participation in planning, tracking, and financing directly correlates with construction project success (Magassouba et al., 2019; Githinji et al., 2020). Okonkwo and Eze (2020) found that community engagement significantly influences project success in South Africa, while Olatunji (2020) demonstrated the positive impact of supplier engagement in Nigeria.

Customers/clients are the backbone of construction businesses, ensuring sustainability and growth (Musafir, 2017). Their satisfaction drives repeat patronage and financial stability (Agbonasevbaefe,

2019). Employees' engagement enhances productivity, organisational performance, and customer satisfaction (Vani & Babu, 2018; Winkler et al., 2018). Local communities influence project success through trust-building and environmental concerns (Sufri et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2018). Suppliers' participation ensures the timely delivery of quality materials, impacting overall project outcomes (Proforest, 2017). Governmental organisations provide technical and legal permits essential for project execution (Pauna et al., 2023). Trade unions are key in labor relations, affecting project stability and workforce conditions (Kenen, 2020).

Stakeholder engagement is critical to construction project success, influencing cost, schedule, quality, and sustainability. Digital tools such as GIS, 3D visualisation, and social media can enhance engagement (Toukola& Ahola, 2022). While external stakeholders are sometimes seen as more critical (Chan & Oppong, 2016), stakeholder importance depends on project-specific needs. Effective engagement strategies contribute to project performance, risk mitigation, and long-term sustainability.

Figure 2. 2: Main components of stakeholder engagement (Rogers et al., 2022; adopted from IFC, 2007)

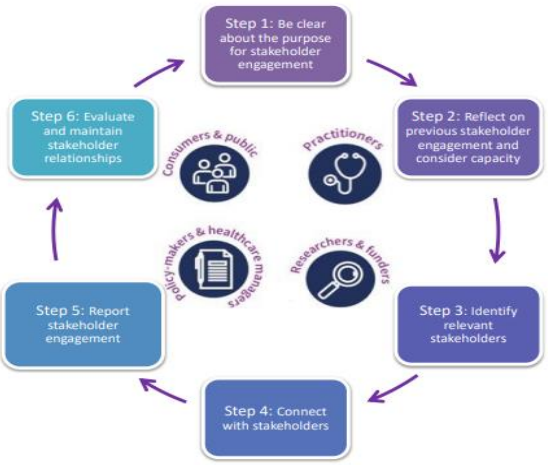
A systematic stakeholder engagement framework involves identifying, analysing, and implementing strategies to achieve engagement objectives (Uraiwong& Watanabe, 2011). The first stage entails identifying stakeholders using tools like work breakdown structures and literature sources. Key parameters include project end-users, beneficiaries, and those impacted by the project (Caribbean Natural Resource Institute, 2004). The second stage focuses on stakeholder analysis to understand their influence and interests using tools such as power/interest grids and the salience model (PMBoK, 2017). An example of a stakeholder matrix is shown in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Stakeholder Matrix

Power/influence	High	*Keep satisfied*	*Close cooperation*
	Low	*Minimal supervision*	*Keep informed*
		Low	High
		Interest	

The last stage of successful engagement of stakeholders is developing an implementation strategy to meet the stakeholder's expectations for the overall benefits of the projects (Uraiwong & Watanabe, 2011). Stakeholder engagement should increase as projects progress, considering conflicting stakeholder interests (Taylor &Bancilhon, 2019). Engagement methods vary, including public displays, surveys, consultations, social media, workshops, briefings, and online forums. A structured approach involves identifying, analysing, mapping, and selecting engagement strategies using brainstorming and mind mapping tools. The Centre for Effective Services (2019) highlights levels of

engagement such as informing, consulting, and collaboration. Multiple frameworks exist, including those by Endeavour Energy (2020) and Tomlinson & Parker (2021).The framework is presented in Figure 2.3 below.



Stakeholder engagement benefits organisations by improving collaboration, risk management, innovation, and customer satisfaction (Desai, 2018; Du &Kadyova, 2015). It enhances project success (Urtom& Murray, 2021), strengthens public trust (Richards et al., 2004), and mitigates adverse outcomes (Newig, 2007). Construction ensures timely, cost-effective, and high-quality project completion (Abiodun et al., 2017), reducing conflicts and enhancing cooperation (Ekung et al., 2014).

Relying on the above literature review, a conceptual framework for this study can be developed. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework explains the fundamental issues to be researched in a graphic or narrative form, the critical elements or variables, and their possible relationships. The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 2.4 below.

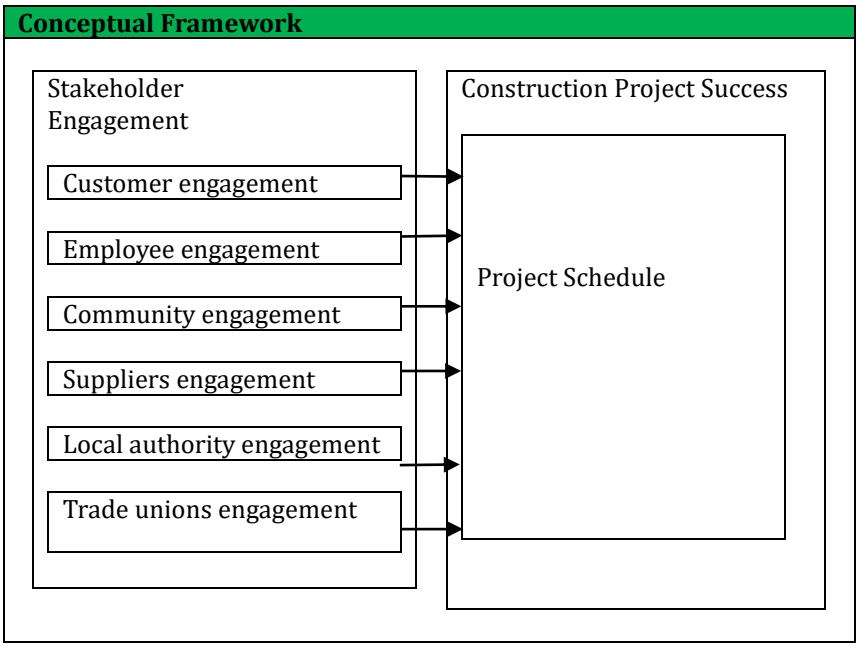


Figure 2. 3: Conceptual framework (adapted from Ndungu&Karugu, 2019; Wamugu&Ogollah, 2017).

It can be observed from Figure 2.4 above that the conceptual framework indicates the interface between stakeholder engagement and project schedule. The stakeholder engagement is conceptualisedvia stakeholder engagement represented by the proxies, i.e. customer engagement, employee engagement, community engagement, supplier engagement, local authority engagement and trade unions engagement. The dependent variable – construction project success was measured with the project schedule.

This study reviews and applies four significant theories relevant to stakeholder engagement: Stakeholder Theory, Resource Dependence Theory, Agency Theory, and Stewardship Theory. Each

theory has specific proponents, underlying assumptions, strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for inclusion or exclusion from this study.

Stakeholder theory, developed by Edward Freeman in 1984, posits that businesses should create value for all stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and regulatory bodies. It provides a practical, ethical, and comprehensive framework for managing stakeholder relationships in competitive environments. Engaging stakeholders strategically enhances corporate reputation, project success, and long-term sustainability. When stakeholders are positively engaged, they respond favorably—customers patronise products, employees show loyalty, and communities offer support. Freeman et al. (2020) emphasised that systematically engaging individuals or groups interested in a business leads to superior value creation. The theory has been applied in construction to enhance decision-making and improve project delivery. Breesam and Jawad (2020) demonstrated its relevance in developing maintenance work procedures for government buildings. However, stakeholder theory has limitations, such as difficulty measuring stakeholder influence and prioritising conflicting interests (Kobusingye et al., 2017). Freeman (2017) also noted that it lacks clear metrics for defining business performance beyond financial terms. Despite these challenges, stakeholder theory is chosen as the primary framework for this study because it best aligns with evaluating the impact of stakeholder engagement on construction project success.

Resource dependence theory, developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), explains how organisations rely on external resources to operate effectively. It emphasises the importance of leveraging stakeholders' resources to complement internal capabilities. Organisations cannot possess all the resources needed for success, and forming strategic alliances reduces uncertainty and enhances operational efficiency. This theory is particularly relevant to construction firms, which often depend on suppliers, financial institutions, and regulatory approvals. Sproul (2017) and Frączkiewicz-Wronka &Szymaniec (2012) stressed that reducing environmental dependence can improve organisational stability. The theory has practical applications in construction, especially for firms handling capital-intensive projects where leasing equipment or engaging subcontractors is more economical than full ownership. Zehir et al. (2018) empirically demonstrated that RDT significantly impacts producer-supplier relationships. However, the theory assumes that external resource acquisition is always beneficial, which may not account for an organisation's internal capabilities. It also focuses more on securing resources than on stakeholder relationships. While resource dependence theory is relevant to this study, stakeholder theory is preferred because it provides a broader perspective on managing stakeholder engagement beyond resource acquisition.

Agency theory, proposed by Jensen and Meckling (1976) and later refined by Zogning (2017), examines the principal-agent relationship, where shareholders (principals) delegate decision-making to managers (agents). The theory assumes that agents may act in their self-interest rather than in the business's best interest. It is widely used in corporate governance to align management incentives with organisational goals. Bendickson et al. (2016) noted that agency theory is rooted in finance, accounting, and economics, providing a foundation for executive compensation and performance evaluation. Namazi (2013) highlighted its role in managerial control, resource allocation, and organisational monitoring. However, agency theory has limitations. It focuses primarily on financial performance, overlooking broader stakeholder concerns. It assumes that individuals are rational and self-interested, which does not always reflect real-world business dynamics. Furthermore, it is less applicable in construction projects, where stakeholder relationships extend beyond owners and managers. Since this study aims to assess the impact of stakeholder engagement on project success rather than internal governance, agency theory is not chosen as the primary framework.

Stewardship theory, introduced by Donaldson and Davis (1991), challenges agency theory by proposing that managers act as stewards prioritisingorganisational goals over personal gain. Unlike agency theory, which assumes inherent conflicts between principals and agents, stewardship theory emphasises shared decision-making and collaboration. De Falco and Renzi (2007) argued that it accounts for the interests of multiple stakeholders, including employees, shareholders, and communities. Kelly (2021) described organisations as collections of individuals with varying interests that collectively shape corporate decisions. Stewardship theory suggests combining CEO and board chair roles enhances shareholder returns and fosters more decisive leadership (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). However, it assumes that managers will always act in the best interest of

stakeholders, which is not always the case. Madison (2014) pointed out that stewardship theory lacks empirical evidence compared to agency theory. While the theory advocates for ethical leadership and stakeholder inclusion, it does not fully capture the complexities of stakeholder engagement in construction projects. Stakeholder theory provides a more comprehensive approach and is therefore preferred for this study.

Among these theories, stakeholder theory is selected as the primary framework because it best captures the dynamics of stakeholder engagement in construction projects. Unlike agency theory, which focuses on shareholder-manager relations, stakeholder theory acknowledges the diverse interests of employees, suppliers, local communities, and regulatory bodies. While resource dependence theory highlights the importance of external resources, it does not address stakeholder interactions beyond resource acquisition. Similarly, stewardship theory assumes managers will always act ethically, which may not always be held in complex project environments. Stakeholder theory offers a holistic perspective that aligns with this study's objective of assessing the impact of stakeholder engagement on construction project success. Construction firms can enhance efficiency, reduce risks, and improve long-term sustainability by systematically engaging key stakeholders.

This empirical review examines six key studies providing robust evidence of the relationship between stakeholder engagement and construction project success. These studies explore various dimensions of stakeholder involvement, including its role in cost control, risk management, schedule performance, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Smith (2020) used a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, to examine the association between stakeholder engagement and construction projects. The study aimed to understand the influence of stakeholder engagement on key project performance indicators. The findings strongly correlate with stakeholder engagement, improved project completion schedules, budget compliance, and stakeholder satisfaction. The study recommended that project managers actively engage with stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle to ensure better project outcomes.

Johnson (2019) investigated the role of stakeholder engagement in mitigating risks and uncertainties in construction projects. The study assessed how proactive engagement contributed to the early identification and resolution of risks, reducing project delays and cost overruns. Findings provided strong evidence that robust stakeholder engagement practices enhance risk management effectiveness. The study recommended that project managers actively involve stakeholders in risk management processes, foster open communication, and encourage collaboration to improve risk identification and resolution.

Patel (2022) explored the impact of stakeholder engagement on construction project cost management. The study analysed cost data from projects with varying levels of stakeholder engagement to determine if higher engagement leads to improved cost management outcomes. The results strongly correlate with stakeholder engagement and enhanced project cost control. The study emphasised the importance of integrating stakeholder input into cost management practices, fostering collaboration, and promoting transparent communication to optimise cost efficiency.

Gonzalez (2021) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of stakeholder engagement on project scope clarity and cost overruns in public sector projects. Interviews with 40 stakeholders, including government officials, contractors, and community representatives, confirmed that inadequate stakeholder involvement during scope definition leads to misunderstandings, misaligned objectives, and cost escalations. The study underscored the importance of early and continuous stakeholder involvement in defining project scope to mitigate risks and maintain budgetary discipline. It recommended the development of comprehensive stakeholder engagement plans with integrated feedback mechanisms.

Nguyen (2019) examined the relationship between stakeholder engagement practices and construction project schedules using data analysis techniques applied to project schedules and stakeholder engagement metrics. The findings confirmed a strong association between high stakeholder engagement levels and favorable project schedule performance. The study recommended developing stakeholder engagement plans aligned with project schedules, involving stakeholders in scheduling decisions, fostering collaboration, and leveraging diverse perspectives to optimize project timelines.

Mambwe et al. (2020) assessed the impact of stakeholder engagement on construction project performance in Lusaka District. Using a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design, the study examined the relationships between stakeholder engagement and project cost, schedule, and specifications. Findings revealed a strong and positive correlation between stakeholder engagement and project schedule and specifications. However, stakeholder engagement was negatively correlated with project costs, suggesting possible inefficiencies when engagement is not well managed. The study recommended refining stakeholder engagement processes to balance cost efficiency with project quality and timeliness.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a conceptual and theoretical review methodology to examine the effect of stakeholder engagement strategies on the timely completion of construction projects in North-Central Nigeria. The research is based on a systematic review of existing literature, theories, and conceptual frameworks, drawing insights from scholarly articles, reports, books, and policy documents relevant to stakeholder engagement in construction project management. The conceptual and theoretical review approach is suitable for establishing a structured understanding of how stakeholder engagement strategies influence project completion timelines.

A comprehensive desk review of academic literature, industry reports, and policy guidelines was conducted to synthesise key themes related to stakeholder engagement and project completion. The selection of sources was based on the following criteria:

Relevance – Studies focusing on stakeholder engagement, project completion, construction management, and related topics.

Recency – Priority given to publications from the last two decades, with foundational theories included irrespective of publication date.

Scholarly Rigor – Preference for peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and reports from reputable institutions.

Geographical Context—Studies focusing on Nigeria, other developing economies, and global best practices are included for comparative analysis.

This study relies on existing literature and theoretical models rather than primary data collection to evaluate stakeholder engagement effectiveness. The analysis is qualitative and interpretative, using a multi-dimensional approach to synthesise insights. Thematic analysis identifies key stakeholder engagement strategies such as communication, participatory decision-making, and conflict resolution. Comparative analysis examines multiple studies to highlight common findings, inconsistencies, and best practices in stakeholder engagement. Contextual analysis assesses the applicability of these strategies within Nigeria's construction industry, considering regulatory frameworks, socio-economic conditions, and stakeholder dynamics, ensuring both local relevance and alignment with global best practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis identifies crucial stakeholder engagement strategies vital for timely project completion. Early identification of stakeholders enhances project success by mapping their interests and influence (Freeman et al., 2020; Githinji et al., 2020). Effective communication and feedback mechanisms prevent misunderstandings and cost overruns (Smith, 2020; Gonzalez, 2021). Participatory decision-making nurtures stakeholder buy-in and minimises delays (Nguyen, 2019; Johnson, 2019). Conflict resolution strategies, such as alternative dispute resolution (ADR), help mitigate legal disputes and project disruptions (Patel, 2022; Karimi & Mungai, 2024). Lastly, regulatory compliance diminishes bureaucratic delays, ensuring smooth execution (Mambwe et al., 2020; Bahadorestani et al., 2020).

Study	Key Findings	Commonalities	Differences/Gaps

Smith(2020)	Stakeholder engagement improvesproject completion timelines and budget compliance.	Emphasises the role of stakeholder involvement in reducing delays.	Lacks discussion on cultural and socio-economic influences on engagement.
Johnson (2019)	Proactive stakeholder engagement enhances risk identification and resolution.	Supports the idea that early and continuous engagementprevents costs	Focuses primarily on risk management without considering project scope alignment
Patel (2022)	Higher stakeholder engagement levels correlate with improved cost management.	Affirms that transparent communication and collaboration optimise cost control.	Does not explore the impact of conflicts and dispute resolution mechanisms.
Gonzalaz (2021)	Lack of stakeholder engagement during scope definition leads to misalignment and cost overruns.	Agrees with studies emphasising early-stage involvement.	Primarily focuses on public sector projects, limiting generalizability to private construction.
Nguyen (2019)	Effective stakeholder engagement leads to better project schedule performance.	Supports findings that stakeholder engagement enhances the project	Does not address the challenges of stakeholder conflicts.
Mambwe et al. (2020)	Strong correlation between stakeholder engagement and project success regarding schedule and specifications.	Aligns with studies linking engagement to performance metrics.	Finds a negative correlation between stakeholder engagement and project cost, differing from Patel (2022).

Key Comparative Insights

Studies agree that stakeholder engagement enhances project success by improving cost management, schedule adherence, and risk mitigation. However, findings on cost implications are mixed—while Patel (2022) links engagement to cost efficiency, Mambwe et al. (2020) suggest it may increase costs if mismanaged. Research also varies on timing of stakeholder involvement, with Gonzalez (2021) emphasising early-stage engagement, while Johnson (2019) and Nguyen (2019) advocate for continuous engagement throughout the project lifecycle. Additionally, most studies overlook socio-cultural, political, and economic influences, especially in Nigeria, highlighting a gap in localised stakeholder engagement research.

Contextual Analysis

Stakeholder engagement in the Nigerian construction industry faces several challenges, including bureaucratic bottlenecks, political interference, and inconsistent regulatory policies (Olatunji, 2020). Community engagement is also influenced by ethnic, cultural, and economic factors, with projects often encountering resistance due to inadequate stakeholder participation (Ndungu &Karugu, 2019). Communication gaps and weak feedback mechanisms hinder effective engagement, leading to misunderstandings between project managers and local communities (Ebekozien et al., 2023). Additionally, prolonged legal disputes due to the limited adoption of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms contribute to project delays (Magoola et al., 2023).

The challenges unique to stakeholder engagement in Nigeria include poor institutional frameworks, regulatory agencies lacking effective enforcement mechanisms, and corruption and bureaucracy, which introduce bribery and political interference in project execution. Furthermore, the limited use of technology hampers engagement efficiency, as many Nigerian projects still rely on manual

communication methods, unlike developed countries that leverage Building Information Modeling (BIM) and digital platforms.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to improve stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's construction sector. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks will help establish clear engagement guidelines and ensure compliance. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives for project managers can enhance communication skills, participatory decision-making, and conflict resolution strategies. Leveraging digital engagement tools such as GIS, social media, and mobile applications can facilitate real-time stakeholder feedback, fostering greater transparency and collaboration in project execution.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of stakeholder engagement strategies in ensuring the timely completion of construction projects in North-Central Nigeria. A conceptual and theoretical review reveals that early stakeholder identification, regular communication, participatory decision-making, conflict resolution, and regulatory compliance are key determinants of project success. Findings from thematic, comparative, and contextual analyses confirm that effective stakeholder engagement enhances project completion rates, mitigates risks, improves cost efficiency, and fosters collaboration. However, challenges such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and poor feedback mechanisms hinder engagement effectiveness in Nigeria's construction industry.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for improving stakeholder engagement through stronger legal frameworks, enhanced capacity building for project managers, and leveraging digital tools to streamline communication and participation. The study highlights the need for context-specific stakeholder engagement models incorporating Nigeria's socio-political and economic dynamics to ensure more effective project execution. By aligning engagement strategies with global best practices while addressing local realities, construction firms and policymakers can significantly reduce project delays and cost overruns, improve regulatory compliance, and enhance overall project sustainability. Future research should focus on empirical investigations to quantify the direct impact of stakeholder engagement strategies on project performance metrics, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Recommendations

1.Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks – The Nigerian government should develop and enforce standardised policies for stakeholder engagement in construction projects. Clear guidelines should define stakeholder roles, responsibilities, and participation mechanisms to ensure accountability.

2.Capacity Building for Project Managers and Stakeholders – Training programs should be institutionalised to equip project managers, contractors, and stakeholders with effective communication, conflict resolution, and participatory decision-making skills to foster better engagement outcomes.

3.Leveraging Digital Tools for Stakeholder Engagement – Construction firms should adopt technology-driven solutions such as Building Information Modeling (BIM), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and stakeholder management software to enhance transparency, real-time communication, and feedback mechanisms in project execution.

4.Enhancing Community Engagement and Awareness – Construction companies and policymakers should engage local communities early in project planning through public consultations, town hall meetings, and participatory forums to ensure community buy-in, reduce resistance, and prevent delays.

5.Reducing Bureaucratic Bottlenecks and Corruption—Regulatory agencies should streamline approval processes and introduce transparent monitoring systems to curb bureaucratic delays and corruption and ensure construction projects progress smoothly.

6.Integrating Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mechanisms—Mediation, arbitration, and negotiation should be encouraged as primary dispute resolution methods to mitigate conflicts swiftly and prevent project delays caused by prolonged legal battles.

7.Improving Communication and Feedback Systems – A structured stakeholder engagement framework should be institutionalised across all project phases, ensuring regular consultations, feedback loops, and documentation of stakeholder concerns to enhance collaboration and prevent misunderstandings.

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