

An Assessment of Organizational Factors Affecting Utilization of Monitoring and Evaluation Results in Delivering Government Programs: A Case of Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda

Nobert SSALI

1. Mount Kenya University, P.O Box 342-01000, Thika, Kenya

Correspondence: ssali.nobert@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The field of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is often restricted to the technical aspects of conducting M&E. However, it is increasingly being acknowledged that organizational factors of entities are regularly more influential as far as mainstreaming the adoption and utilization of M&E is concerned. This study sought to assess the organizational factors affecting utilization of M&E results, specifically by analyzing how information availability, information processing skills and organizational culture affect utilization of M&E results in MoES. The study methodology entailed grounded theory and quantitative research methods and covered a sample of 191 respondents. The study's key findings, among others, include: M&E information is often stored as manual paper records which subjects the information to wastage through poor handling and physical deterioration; and, poorly presented M&E results have a negative effect on their utilization. The study generated a number of recommendations, which *inter alia* include MoES should: design and implement a mind-set change programme for all staff of the Ministry to embracing and utilize of M&E results; design and implement regular capacity building and retooling programmes for all staff involved in the generation and utilization of M&E results; and, migrate its M&E records and management procedures from paper-based systems to digital systems. The study's conclusions inform various government MDAs about the relevance of using M&E results for planning, budgeting, and policy making. The study findings will enable MoES appreciate the need for installation of appropriate information management systems necessary for improved uptake of M&E results utilization. The study suggests a number of areas for further investigation, such as, examining the influence of political direction and choices on the application and usefulness of M&E results in government organizations, and analyzing the impact of information dissemination on demand and utilization of M&E results in Government agencies.

Keywords: *M&E results utilization, organizational factors*

INTRODUCTION

Utilization of M&E results in project and programme implementation and management remains a big challenge especially in Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) (Nathalie, 2014). This is largely attributed to the failure to demystify the different skills, computer applications, and resources involved in M&E to the various persons involved in decision making and project management (NDP I Review Report, 2015). As Stephen Porter and Ian Goldman (2013) observed, “when decision-makers want to use evidence from monitoring and evaluation to assist them in making choices, there is demand for M&E”. This situation challenges all practitioners in M&E to review their M&E execution and reporting processes to align them with needs and requirements of decision makers in project management to achieve sustained demand, relevance and utilization of M&E results (Hua & Herstein, 2003).

When it comes to education service delivery, the prominence of utilizing M&E results as a guide for educational interventions can be traced back to the Dakar World Education Forum held in 2000 during which participants agreed upon the Dakar Framework for Action which included six Education for All (EFA) goals, with targets to be achieved by 2015 ((Nathalie, 2014). The mandate of Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is provision of education and sports services to all persons in Uganda whereas its vision is “Quality education and sports for all” (MoES Annual Performance Report, 2022). In execution of the above mandate, MoES endeavors to ensure that it collects the required data to support its decision-making process (MoES Annual Performance Report, 2022). According to Steer and Baudienville (2010), the education sector in Uganda should attract more funding in form of donor aid by making use of evidence, demonstrating results, enhancing aid effectiveness, and using innovative financing mechanisms. To make use of evidence and demonstrate results, strengthening of M&E systems in the education sector is of critical importance, especially in a context of limited resources in which maximizing student learning is one of the greatest challenges (Hua & Herstein, 2003). This demonstrates the importance of generating and utilizing M&E information to inform decision making and other strategic reform efforts in the education sector.

However, it has been revealed that the MoES often ignores the findings and recommendations contained in M&E reports as it undertakes its routine and strategic interventions. This is because several cases have been reported under which the Ministry neglects technical M&E findings in decision making (Holvoet, 2014). As a result, decisions pertaining to education sector projects, programmes and policies tend to be taken based on anecdotal evidence, gut feeling and other considerations save for evidence – based information contained in M&E reports (Tolani-Brown, et al., 2011; Fapohunda, 2012). Relatedly, the field of M&E is often narrowed down to focus on only the technical aspects of conducting M&E (Bedi, et al., 2006). However, it is increasingly being acknowledged that the organizational and institutional dimensions of respective organizations are often more influential and difficult to organize as far as mainstreaming the adoption and utilization of M&E is concerned (Bamberger, et al., 2010; Wood, et al., 2011). As Patton (1997) observed, the strength of M&E is determined by the degree of utilization of the various M&E findings and recommendations. Therefore, if concerted efforts are not undertaken to utilize the various M&E results to arrest the identified gaps in project implementation, then perpetually low performance levels are likely to be registered (Kabuye, et al, 2017).

For the identified implementation gaps in execution of its mandate to be addressed, it is incumbent upon the MoES to utilize the generated M&E results to inform decision making but unfortunately this is not happening as expected (Holvoet, 2014). The existing literature that has been reviewed on this subject clearly indicates that majority of the previous research efforts were focused on analyzing the technical and competence-related factors which affect M&E in MoES with little work being done to inquire into the organizational factors affecting the uptake of M&E results, particularly in the context of education service delivery (Nathalie, 2014). As a result, there is an information gap as far as assessing the organizational factors affecting utilization of M&E results in delivering Government programs in the Ministry of Education and Sports is concerned (Nasambu, J., 2016).

In order to address the information gap identified above, this project study was conceptualized and undertaken to examine how information availability, information processing skills and organizational culture affect utilization of M&E results in the Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

In the process of conducting this study, the researcher relied on grounded theory research methods as advanced by Charmaz (2003) as well as quantitative research methods. In this context, grounded theory refers to a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed towards theory development (Charmaz, 2003). This helped the researcher to probe the various influencing variables and build a theory on how these variables affect utilization of M&E results in delivery of Government programs. In addition, the quantitative aspect of this study relied on descriptive analysis which is the process of using current and historical data to identify trends and relationships (Kaushik, M., & Anor, 2014). This was complimented by thematic analysis which was conducted as part of the qualitative aspects of the study.

Relatedly, an Exploratory Research Design was relied upon by the researcher in conducting this study. Exploratory Research is defined as preliminary research which is undertaken to ascertain the exact nature of the problem to be solved (Kumar, et al., 2021). This type of research was deemed appropriate because it is the most feasible research design where the researcher has inadequate past information or few studies have been conducted in the past relating to the research problem (SMstudy, 2016), which was the case being faced in this study. In terms of approach, the researcher adopted a descriptive research approach which defines a matter in question by creating an outline of a set of problems through data collection and tabulation of frequencies on variables (Agutu, 2014).

The target population for the study were drawn from a total of 468 officials comprised of: Top Management officers (Directors, Heads of Agencies and Commissioners); middle level officers (Assistant Commissioners, Heads of Units, and technical heads in Agencies); project and contract staff under the different projects in the sector; departmental staff in the Ministry and representatives of the academia. A sample size was selected using Sloven's formula which has been argued to be the most appropriate method where the population size is smaller than 10,000 (Kothari, 2004). Thus, a sample size of 216 respondents was arrived and targeted for the data collection phase subject to adherence to best practices in social research. During data analysis, the qualitative data collected was organized into a single data pool from where it was transcribed,

synchronized and grouped into themes. A coding scheme was developed in basic terms like frequency (how often a response appears), direction (correlation), intensity (power of content), and quantity (size of content) to enable reduction of themes into major themes. It is these major themes that formed the basis of extrapolating out the emergent issues related to the research questions. Quantitative data generated under this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics and this entailed the tallying and subsequent analysis of responses from filled questionnaires and these were collated, grouped, and categorized using frequency distribution, per centage distribution, and mean or averages of the said responses.

The main ethical consideration during the Project study was the privacy and confidentiality of respondents' information over the course of the study. To guarantee privacy, the respondents were informed prior to participating in the study that they are not required to provide their contact details including names, places of residence, phone numbers etcetera. The participants also were informed that participating in the study is voluntary and they reserve the right to turn down the request to participate in this study.

RESULTS

The study had a target sample size of 216 respondents due to COVID-19 related regulations, the number of persons at the sites of the study was minimized. Consequently, a total of 191 respondents were involved in the study contributing to 83.54% of the envisaged study sample. In addition, some respondents indicated that they were not willing to meet in person and thus preferred to have the questionnaires sent to them on email so that they could participate in the study remotely. Of these, 65% returned the filled questionnaires and others did not thus contribute to the effective sample of respondents standing at 83.54% of the projected sample size.

The primary goal of the study was to evaluate how various organizational factors affect how M&E results are used in delivering Government programs in the Ugandan context. The specific objectives which the study explored to understand were: (i) To examine how information availability affects utilization of M&E results in the Ministry of Education and Sports; (ii) To examine how information processing skills affect utilization of M&E results in Ministry of Education and Sports; and (iii) To examine how organizational culture affects utilization of M&E results in Ministry of Education and Sports. Consequently, the respondents were requested to provide their opinions relating to their agreement or disagreement with the provided statements and these responses were provided on the basis of the Likert scale of 1 to 5 as advanced by Joshi, et al (2015), where: 1 represents 'strongly disagree'; 2 represents 'disagree'; 3 represents 'neutral' response; 4 represents 'agree'; and 5 represents 'strongly agree'. These findings are summarized as follows:

Impact of Information Availability on Utilization of M&E Results in the Ministry of Education and Sports

The study's initial goal was to look at how information availability affects utilization of M&E results in the Ministry of Education and Sports in implementation of projects, programmes and policies, and the findings are summarized as follows:

Table 1:
Impact of Information Availability on Utilization of M&E Results

Statement	N (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
There is routine supervision of the compilation process for M&E data in your organization	6 (3.1)	0	0	156 (81.7)	29 (15.2)
There is access to timely reporting of M&E results in the MoES	0	27 (14.1)	0	150 (78.6)	14 (7.3)
Sufficient funding for M&E activities is always provided by MoES	0	39 (20.4)	0	144 (75.5)	8 (4.1)
Funds for M&E activities are allocated in a timely manner.	0	10 (5.2)	14 (7.3)	100 (52.4)	67 (35.1)
The Ministry makes use of M&E reports while making decisions.	3 (1.5)	17 (8.9)	44 (23.0)	117 (61.3)	9 (4.7)
The various education sector stakeholders consult monitoring and evaluation reports as they design their work plans and activities.	3 (1.6)	14 (7.3)	38 (19.9)	107 (56.0)	29 (15.2)
The culture of utilizing M&E results in routine operations is very low in the Ministry.	9 (4.7)	100 (52.4)	26 (13.6)	34 (17.8)	22 (11.5)
MoES has got an M&E operational manual.	0	0	18 (9.4)	151 (79.1)	22 (11.5)
Staff always follow the Ministry's M&E operational manual in conducting routine M&E activities for its projects, programs, and policies.	2 (1.0)	9 (4.7)	15 (7.9)	149 (78.0)	16 (8.4)

source: primary data (researcher, 2022)

The findings indicated that there is timely reporting of M&E results as well as timely allocation of adequate funds for M&E activities in MoES. Findings also reveal that MoES makes use of M&E reports while making reports and various education sector stakeholders consult M&E reports as they design their work plans and activities, whereas the culture of utilizing M&E results in routine operations of the MoES is very low. Generally, the findings from analyzing respondents' responses relating to objective 1 of this study reveal that the MoES has systems, culture and resources which are dedicated to generation and utilization of M&E results. This shows the relevance of the evidence – based theory towards efforts to entrench utilization of M&E results in MoES. The findings also reveal the fact that adequate finances are availed by the Ministry to support M&E activities, and this is in line with the conclusions of D.N. Nyamongo (2017), who asserts that financial allocation affects how M&E activities are carried out.

Impact of Information Processing Skills on Utilization of M&E Results in Ministry of Education and Sports

The study's second goal was to look at how information processing skills affect utilization of M&E results in MoES in implementation of projects, programmes and policies, and the findings are summarized as follows:

Table 2:
Impact of Information Processing Skills on Utilization of M&E Results in MoES

Statement	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)
Education information users possess the required competency and knowledge to use M&E results to guide their routine and strategic operations	0(0.0)	3(1.6)	10(5.2)	106(55.5)	71(37.2)
Lack of enough data in Reports presented affects usage of results and findings from the different M&E Reports	0	7(3.7)	11(5.8)	132(69.1)	41(21.5)
The design of M&E reporting systems is easy to use by the various education sector stakeholders	0	16(8.4)	15(7.9)	141(73.8)	19(9.9)
Data collection skills still lack among some staff of the Ministry	24(12.6)	26(13.6)	40(20.9)	65(34.0)	36(18.8)
Skilled and qualified personnel are required for effective management of M&E systems in your organization	0	0	0	148(77.5)	43(22.5)
Collected M&E information that is stored as manual paper records subjects the information to wastage through poor handling and physical deterioration of the paper files	11(5.8)	24(12.6)	4(2.1)	117(61.3)	34(17.8)
The computer applications and software used for M&E data manipulation, storage and interpretation are not readily available, complicated, and highly priced.	16(8.4)	88(46.1)	16(8.4)	61(31.9)	10(5.2)
Late M&E results/data is presented at MoES Headquarters and other management offices	6(3.1)	10(5.2)	9(4.7)	126(66.0)	39(20.4)
The Ministry of Education offers routine capacity development training for its staff in M&E methods and tools for effective information processing and utilization of M&E results	34(17.8)	76(39.8)	5(2.6)	55(28.8)	21(11)
Poorly presented M&E results or data affects its utilization	0	0	0	159(83.3)	32(16.7)
The quality of M&E results in the MoES is poor	23(12)	70(36.7)	28(14.7)	49(25.7)	21(11.0)
Incomplete M&E data cases are experienced at MoES	9(4.7)	55(28.8)	26(13.6)	77(40.3)	23(12.0)

Source: Primary Data (Researcher, 2022)

The study findings reveal that majority of education information users possess the required competence and knowledge to use M&E results to guide their routine and strategic operations and this is consistent with UNAIDS's 2008 study results, which demonstrate that for effective utilisation of M&E results and data, the staff interacting with it must possess the required skills, knowledge, and competencies. However, challenges were also found to be still prevalent specifically when it comes to adequacy of information contained in M&E reports, storage of M&E results / reports, and deterioration of M&E reports kept in physical files. Relatedly, the findings under this objective point to the need for capacity building on M&E results utilization owing to some of the established gaps in monitoring information management such as presentation of incomplete data, poor presentation style of M&E results and late presentation of the results all of which contribute towards the low utilization rate for M&E results in MoES.

Impact of Organizational Culture on Utilization of M&E Results in Ministry of Education and Sports

The study's third objective was to look at how organizational culture affects utilization of M&E results in MoES in implementation of projects, programmes and policies, and the findings are summarized as follows:

Table 3:
Impact of Organizational Culture on Utilization of M&E results

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
MoES lacks motivating incentives to staff during M&E data management activities	43(22.5)	53(27.7)	27(14.1)	58(30.1)	10(5.2)
There are some beliefs that M&E data collected is useless	41(21.5)	47(24.6)	24(12.6)	56(29.3)	23(12.0)
There is poor attitude to M&E data collection at MoES	36(18.9)	43(22.5)	31(16.2)	71(37.2)	8(4.2)
Collecting M&E information that adds no value demotivates me	11(5.8)	23(12.0)	5(2.6)	109(57.1)	43(22.5)
The Ministry understands and appreciates my roles and responsibilities regarding processing and management of M&E data and results.	0	14(7.3)	0	149(78.0)	28(14.7)
Collecting M&E data that is not used for decision making discourages me	0	0	4(2.1)	165(86.4)	22(11.5)
There is a customized way of making decisions in the Ministry that does not take into consideration M&E results.	32(16.8)	47(24.6)	12(6.3)	85(44.5)	15(7.9)

Source: Primary Data (Researcher, 2022)

Findings under the third objective reveal that stakeholders in MoES hold the view that collecting M&E information which adds no value and is not utilized by the Ministry is a major demotivating factor towards efforts to entrench M&E in the Ministry, this affirms the context of the Principal – Agent theory in that agents tend to be demotivated where their input is not valued and subsequently utilized by their Principals. Findings under this objective also reveal that there is a customized way of making decisions in MoES which does not take into consideration M&E results, and this was attributable to the role of political guidance in the decision-making processes at MoES which often do not take into consideration the findings and recommendations of M&E results. Generally, the findings on study objective 3 are aligned with the findings from Jedaman, P., et al, (2022) who postulates that a stable and capable human resource with good beliefs, values and attitude can sustain an organization and push it further through sustainable use of M&E systems in addition to institutionalized uptake of M&E results utilization.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of the study was to evaluate how various organizational characteristics affect utilization of M&E results in delivering Government programs in the Ugandan context. The specific objectives which the study explored to understand were: (i) To examine how information availability affects utilization of M&E results in the Ministry of Education and Sports; (ii) To examine how information processing skills affect utilization of M&E results in Ministry of Education and Sports; and, (iii) To examine how organizational culture affects utilization of M&E

results in Ministry of Education and Sports. The findings from these areas of inquiry are consequently discussed in the paragraphs below.

The study's initial goal was to look at how information availability affects utilization of M&E results in the Ministry of Education and Sports in implementation of projects, programmes and policies. The findings indicated that there is timely reporting of M&E results as well as timely allocation of adequate funds for M&E activities in MoES. Findings also reveal that MoES makes use of M&E reports while making reports and various education sector stakeholders consult M&E reports as they design their work plans and activities, whereas the culture of utilizing M&E results in routine operations of the MoES is very low. This calls for prudent efforts being undertaken to entrench utilization of M&E results to guide the strategic and routine decision making and operations of the Ministry.

The study's second goal was to look at how information processing skills affect utilization of M&E results in MoES in implementation of projects, programmes and policies. The study findings reveal that majority of education information users possess the required competence and knowledge to use M&E results to guide their routine and strategic operations and this is consistent with UNAIDS's 2008 study results, which demonstrate that for effective utilisation of M&E results and data, the staff interacting with it must possess the required skills, knowledge and competencies. However, challenges were also found to be still prevalent specifically when it comes to adequacy of information contained in M&E reports, storage of M&E results / reports, and deterioration of M&E reports kept in physical files. Relatedly, the findings under this objective point to the need for capacity building on M&E results utilization owing to some of the established gaps in monitoring information management such as presentation of incomplete data, poor presentation style of M&E results and late presentation of the results all of which contribute towards the utilization rate for M&E results.

The third objective examined under the study reveals that stakeholders in MoES hold the view that collecting M&E information which adds no value and is not utilized by the Ministry is a major demotivating factor towards efforts to entrench M&E in the Ministry. Findings under this objective also reveal that there is a customized way of making decisions in MoES which does not take into consideration M&E results, and this was attributable to the role of political guidance in the decision-making processes at MoES which often do not take into consideration the findings and recommendations of M&E results.

Conclusion (s)

This study examined how organizational factors affect how M&E results are used to implement government programs. This examination was conducted in an endeavor to establish three objectives, which were to examine how information availability, information processing skills as well as organizational culture affect utilization of M&E results in the Ministry of Education and Sports. In line with the study findings discussed above, several conclusions have been reached and these are aligned with the said study objectives, and are subsequently discussed as follows:

1. When it comes to examining how information availability affects utilization of M&E results, the study established that M&E results are readily available in MoES, and they are often prepared in a timely and user – friendly manner. However, the prevailing environment in MoES does not favor utilization of M&E results by the different staff of the Ministry while undertaking their routine operations. This calls for concerted efforts aimed at enhancing availability and timely access to M&E information as well as changing the organizational attitude of MoES and its affiliate agencies to build an enabling environment which favors ready adoption and utilization of M&E results to inform various operational and strategic activities of MoEs.
2. The study findings relating to examination of how information processing skills affect utilization of M&E results in MoES reveal that cases of inadequate data collection skills among some staff of MoES were identified and these were found to have an adverse impact on the generation, presentation and completeness of M&E results that can be ably utilized by the wider Ministry personnel. Also, despite the existence of a digital Education Management Information System (EMIS), a significant amount of M&E information is still stored in paper – based and manual information management systems within the different departments and agencies of MoES. This exposes the M&E information to wastage and deterioration thus rendering it un-usable by the different MoES actors. In addition, the identified competence gaps call for regular capacity building for the different actors in generation and utilization of M&E results. However, such capacity building interventions are not currently being offered by MoES thereby negatively affecting M&E results generation and utilization.
3. Lastly, when it comes to examination of how organizational culture affects utilization of M&E results in MoES, findings reveal that despite the existence of motivating factors to staff who engage in M&E data and information generation and management activities, negative attitudes towards M&E still exist among some senior staff. Also, it was established that generation of M&E results that are not utilized is a major de-motivating factor on the personnel involved in M&E results generation and preparation. The study also revealed that MoES generally understands and appreciates the roles and responsibilities of personnel involved in generation, processing, and management of M&E results. However, there also exists a customized way of making decisions in MoES which does not necessarily take into consideration the guidance contained in M&E results. This denotes the fact that decision making in MoES takes into consideration other factors like political consideration, social concerns, economic feasibility and generally the prevailing context when given decisions are being made and this partly explains why M&E results are rarely relied upon to guide strategic and operational decision making in MoES.

Recommendation (s)

Several recommendations have been made basing on the findings and conclusions of this project study. These recommendations have been made to the different critical stakeholders, including government authorities, users of M&E information as well as researchers, academia, and other stakeholders. These recommendations are provided subsequently as follows:

1. The MoES should design and implement a mind – set change programme for all staff of the Ministry, especially those at managerial and political leadership levels, to enhance the embracing and utilization of M&E results to inform decision making. This should aim at

creating a nurturing and progressive environment that is supportive towards adoption and utilization of M&E results.

2. The MoES should design and implement regular and sustainable capacity building and retooling programmes for all staff involved in the generation, analysis, preparation, presentation, and utilization of M&E results. In addition, the MoES should embark on a programme to migrate its M&E records and management procedures from paper – based systems to digital systems that are inherently linked to the EMIS as an integrated and all – encompassing system for management and utilization of M&E information / results and other education sector information.
3. The MoES should develop a culture of evidence – based decision making through utilization of research findings as well as M&E results. This will result into more ready application and utilization of M&E results, thereby motivating the personnel engaged in M&E results generation and preparation to continue conducting their duties related to preparation of M&E results in a diligent, effective, timely and sustainable manner.
4. There is need to develop a culture of accountability where the different clients / beneficiaries of the MoES demand for evidence – based information on progress of the different reform and programmes undertaken by the Ministry. This will build an accountable system where the Ministry Embraces M&E results as a guide to justify its actions and reports made to the different stakeholders / beneficiaries that it serves.
5. The different development partners of MoES should design and finance capacity building interventions for staff of the Ministry as part of their technical exchange programmes in the country. This will enable the Ministry to build the required capacity to streamline the development and utilization of M&E results to inform both strategic and operational activities within the Ministry.

The study findings above have highlighted the need to conduct further research in several areas of this field of study and these are as follows:

1. Analyzing the impact of political guidance and decisions on the practice and utility of M&E results in Government institutions.
2. An inquiry into how the Principal – Agent theory influences the acceptance, utilization and mainstreaming of M&E results in Government agencies.
3. The impact of information dissemination on demand and utilization of M&E results in Government agencies.
4. An in-depth analysis of the impact of gender-blind research design on integration of gender equality in M&E.

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