

STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT AND PROJECT CLOSURE OF CONSTRUCTION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

Ndubisi, K. A.

Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: kenechukwundubisi@yahoo.com

and

Bagshaw, K. B.

Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: Bagshaw.karibo@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between stakeholders' engagement and project closure of construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The measures of project closure used are project goal attainment, project quality and long-term impact. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The target population was the 26 construction firms in Rivers State as obtained from the updated directory of finelib.com. However, the study elements were 78 which comprised managers from the operations, Human Resource and Finance departments of the respective 26 construction firms. The study adopted a census sampling technique since the population of the study was relatively small. Data for the study was collected through a structured questionnaire, while the four-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses from the respondents. Data was analysed using inferential statistics such as the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient Statistics technique was used to test the hypotheses with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 27. The results of the study showed that there is a significant positive relationship between stakeholders engagement and the measures of project closure. The study concludes that stakeholders engagement has a strong relationship with project success of construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study therefore recommends amongst others that Project managers should ensure that key stakeholders are identified and engaged from the project initiation phase through to completion.

Keywords: Long-term impact, project goal attainment, project quality, project closure, stakeholders engagement

INTRODUCTION

Project closure or project success remains a central concern in project management literature and practice, as projects are increasingly recognized as vehicles for achieving strategic objectives and delivering value to organizations and societies (Morris, 2013). Traditionally, project closure was

measured based on the “iron triangle” of time, cost, and scope (Atkinson, 1999). However, contemporary views have broadened the concept to include other dimensions such as customer satisfaction, quality, sustainability, stakeholder value, and long-term impact (Turner & Zolin, 2012). Despite these advancements, many projects, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, still fall short of delivering successful outcomes due to inadequate planning, misalignment with stakeholder expectations, and weak governance structures (Aibinu & Jagboro, 2002; Oke et al., 2017).

In Nigeria’s construction and development sectors, project failure has become a recurring issue, evidenced by delayed delivery, inflated budgets, abandonment, and stakeholder dissatisfaction (Ogunsanmi, 2013). This raises a fundamental concern: why do projects continue to fail despite advancements in tools, methodologies, and technology? One critical but often underutilized determinant is stakeholder engagement—the systematic inclusion of individuals and groups who influence or are influenced by a project.

Stakeholder engagement refers to the process of identifying, communicating with, and involving relevant stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle to ensure their needs and expectations are addressed (Freeman, 1984; PMI, 2021). Effective stakeholder engagement contributes to project success by reducing resistance, fostering collaboration, clarifying objectives, and ensuring shared ownership (Mok et al., 2015). When stakeholders are actively engaged, they are more likely to contribute positively to decision-making and resource mobilization, leading to improved project performance. However, in many organizational and national contexts, stakeholder engagement remains either superficial or limited to early stages of the project, with minimal continuous interaction, leading to misalignment and eventual failure (Oppong et al., 2017).

Several studies have emphasized the relevance of stakeholder management, but there is still a limited empirical understanding of how stakeholder engagement—as a distinct dimension—impacts project success, particularly in the Nigerian context where stakeholder complexity is intensified by social, political, and institutional dynamics. Moreover, existing research often aggregates stakeholder management under broader governance or communication strategies without isolating its direct influence on specific project outcomes such as goal attainment, quality delivery, or long-term impact (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010). This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by empirically examining the relationship between stakeholders engagement and project success in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. By using measures of project success such as; project goal attainment, project quality and long-term impact.

The specific objectives of the study include.

- i. To examine the relationship between stakeholders engagement and project goal attainment in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the relationship between stakeholders engagement and project quality in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iii. To ascertain the relationship between stakeholders engagement and long-term impact in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

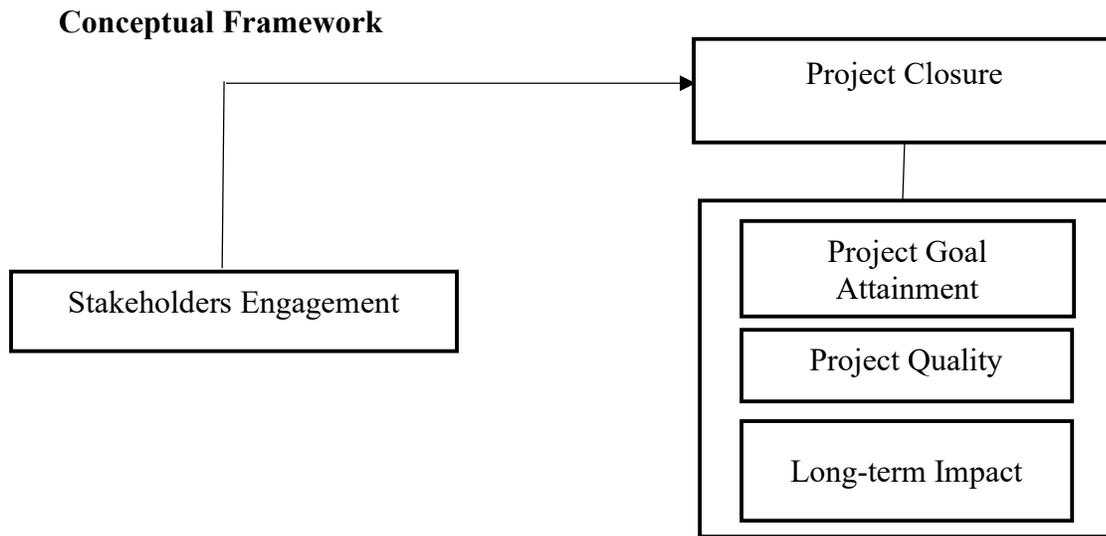


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Indicating the Relationship Between stakeholders engagement and Project Closure.

Source: Researcher’s desk (2025) measures of project closure sourced from (Kerzner, 2002)

Research Questions

The Research questions are as follows

- i. What is the relationship between stakeholders engagement and project goal attainment in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between stakeholders engagement and project quality in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the relationship between stakeholders engagement and long-term impact in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are as follows

- i. There is no significant relationship between stakeholders engagement and project goal attainment in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria
- ii. There is no significant relationship between stakeholders engagement and project quality in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between stakeholders engagement and long-term impact in construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory is a fundamental concept in management and governance that emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders in decision-making processes. First introduced by Freeman (1984), the theory challenges the traditional shareholder-centric approach

by advocating for a broader view that incorporates the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. Stakeholder theory posits that organizations do not operate in isolation but rather within a network of relationships with multiple stakeholders who can affect or be affected by their operations (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives." This perspective recognizes that business success depends not only on financial performance but also on the ability to manage diverse stakeholder relationships effectively.

Types of Stakeholders: Primary Stakeholders – These include individuals and groups essential to an organization's survival, such as employees, customers, investors, and suppliers (Clarkson, 1995). Secondary Stakeholders – These are groups that influence or are influenced by the organization but are not directly involved in transactions, such as media, activist groups, and regulatory agencies (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Internal and External Stakeholders – Internal stakeholders include employees and managers, while external stakeholders consist of entities outside the organization, such as suppliers, customers, and governments (Freeman, Harrison & Zyglidopoulos, 2010). Stakeholder theory serves as a guiding principle in corporate governance by advocating for ethical and responsible management practices. It suggests that organizations should balance the interests of all stakeholders rather than prioritizing shareholders alone (Jensen, 2001). The theory has been widely applied in various domains, including project governance, sustainability, and strategic management (Freeman et al, 2010).

Conceptual Review

Concept of Stakeholders Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial dimension of project governance that ensures the interests, expectations, and influences of various stakeholders are integrated into project decision-making and execution (Bourne, 2016). It involves identifying stakeholders, understanding their needs, and maintaining continuous communication and collaboration throughout the project lifecycle (Freeman, 1984). Effective stakeholder engagement enhances project transparency, accountability, and overall success by fostering trust and mitigating risks (Eskerod & Jepsen, 2013). Stakeholder engagement refers to the systematic approach of interacting with stakeholders to ensure their concerns and contributions are acknowledged and addressed in project governance (Mok et al., 2015). It includes various practices such as consultations, negotiations, information sharing, and participation in decision-making processes (Rowlinson & Cheung, 2008). Effective stakeholder engagement facilitates smoother project implementation by reducing conflicts, improving compliance with regulations, and enhancing stakeholder satisfaction (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2010).

Project governance provides the framework through which stakeholder engagement is structured and managed (Müller, 2017). Governance mechanisms, including policies, processes, and institutional structures, define how stakeholders are identified, prioritized, and involved in decision-making (Olander, 2007). According to Bourne and Walker (2005), stakeholder engagement under project governance improves accountability and strategic alignment by ensuring all relevant parties have a voice in project execution. Identifying stakeholders and assessing their level of interest and influence in the project is the first step toward effective engagement (Mitchell et al., 1997). Establishing clear and consistent communication channels ensures stakeholders are well-informed and can contribute meaningfully (Bryson, 2004). Active participation in decision-making enhances stakeholder buy-in and reduces resistance to project

outcomes (Reed, 2008). Addressing conflicts proactively helps sustain positive relationships and project momentum (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013).

Concept of Project Closure

Project closure or project success is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond mere completion within time and budget constraints. Over time, scholars and practitioners have debated the definition and criteria of project closure, leading to a broad framework that incorporates stakeholder satisfaction, quality deliverables, and long-term impact (Turner, 2016; PMI, 2021). PMI (2021) defines project success as the achievement of objectives within scope, time, cost, and quality constraints while satisfying stakeholder expectations. Baccarini (1999) distinguishes between "project management success" (efficiency-focused) and "project success" (effectiveness and long-term benefits). Shenhar & Dvir (2007) propose a multidimensional approach that includes efficiency, impact on the customer, business success, and strategic alignment. Traditionally, project closure was measured using the "Iron Triangle," which focuses on cost, time, and quality (Atkinson, 1999). However, contemporary studies emphasize additional criteria such as user satisfaction, business impact, and sustainability (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007).

Measures of Project Closure

Project Goal Alignment

Project goal attainment refers to the degree to which a project achieves its predefined objectives and goals. These goals can include delivering the project on time, within budget, and according to specified quality standards. Goal attainment is often viewed as a fundamental criterion for measuring project success, as it determines whether the project has fulfilled its intended purpose and met stakeholder expectations. Project governance plays a critical role in ensuring that the project stays focused on its objectives and that resources are allocated effectively toward achieving these goals (Müller & Jugdev, 2012). Project goal attainment involves assessing the alignment between the project's initial objectives and its actual outcomes. These objectives are typically categorized into: **Scope Goals:** Ensuring the project delivers all defined deliverables. **Time Goals:** Completing the project within the scheduled timeframe. **Cost Goals:** Delivering the project within the allocated budget. **Quality Goals:** Meeting the expected quality standards (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2017). Goal attainment can also include broader organizational outcomes, such as stakeholder satisfaction, long-term impact, and alignment with organizational strategy (Müller, 2017).

Project Quality

Project quality refers to the extent to which a project's deliverables meet the requirements and expectations set by stakeholders, including the customer, team members, and other relevant parties. Quality can be assessed in various dimensions such as functionality, reliability, durability, and performance (Kerzner, 2013). As a measure of project success, quality reflects whether the project has been completed to the standards outlined in the project scope, and it serves as a key indicator of the project's overall effectiveness in meeting its objectives. Project quality encompasses a wide range of elements, but it can generally be broken down into several key components: **Conformance to Requirements:** The degree to which project deliverables meet the defined specifications and standards (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2017). **Customer Satisfaction:** Quality is not only defined by meeting technical specifications but also by ensuring that the final deliverables align with the expectations of the stakeholders, particularly the

customer (Juran & Godfrey, 1999). Continuous Improvement: The commitment to ongoing quality enhancement and the ability to adapt to emerging challenges (Deming, 1986). Process Management: Effective management of processes that ensures consistency and reliability in project execution (Kerzner, 2013).

Project governance provides the framework within which quality management is implemented and enforced. Governance structures define the roles, responsibilities, processes, and decision-making authority necessary for ensuring that quality is maintained throughout the project lifecycle. Effective governance structures not only monitor quality but also enable corrective actions to be taken when deviations from quality standards occur.

Long-Term Impact

Project success is often assessed based on short-term metrics such as cost, time, and scope; however, these factors alone do not fully capture the value a project may bring to an organization or society in the long run. Long-term impact goes beyond the immediate project outcomes, examining the enduring benefits, effects on stakeholders, and contributions to the organization's strategic objectives over time (Baccarini, 1999). As organizations increasingly prioritize sustainability and value creation, the long-term impact of projects has become a critical measure of their success. In the context of project governance, long-term impact is shaped by how well the project aligns with long-term strategic objectives, how effectively resources are allocated, and how governance frameworks ensure that the project delivers enduring value (Müller & Turner, 2010). Long-term impact in project management refers to the enduring value generated by the project over an extended period. It can manifest in several ways: The project's ability to contribute to long-term environmental, social, or economic goals (Elkington, 1998). How well the project aligns with the organization's strategic goals and contributes to the long-term vision (Pinto & Slevin, 1987). The ability of a project to drive transformation or improvement within the organization (Crawford et al., 2006). The benefits that extend beyond the organization to communities or society at large (Dawson, 2000). While short-term project success metrics are vital for assessing immediate project performance, long-term impact provides a more comprehensive view of a project's overall success, particularly in terms of its lasting influence on the organization and its stakeholders (Müller, 2017).

Empirical Review

Stakeholders Engagement and Project Closure

Aaltonen and Kujala (2010) examined how stakeholder engagement affects project goal attainment in large construction projects. It used a mixed-methods approach was employed, including interviews with project managers and quantitative surveys of stakeholders. The survey focused on stakeholder participation in decision-making, expectations, and satisfaction with project goals. The study found that higher levels of stakeholder engagement, particularly in the early planning stages, positively impacted the attainment of project goals. Stakeholder feedback helped align project objectives with actual needs and expectations, leading to more successful goal attainment.

Chand (2018) examined the effect of stakeholder involvement on the quality of IT projects, specifically focusing on software development. The study used a cross-sectional survey method, with 100 IT project managers and their stakeholders responding to questions about engagement practices and project quality. The survey measured the level of stakeholder involvement in the design, development, and testing phases. It was found that active involvement of stakeholders,

particularly during the requirements phase, led to higher project quality. Continuous feedback from clients and users helped detect errors early, resulting in higher functional quality and user satisfaction.

Aaltonen, Kujala and Ojala (2015) examined how stakeholder engagement influences the long-term sustainability of construction projects. The study used a qualitative approach was employed, with case studies of five large-scale construction projects. Data were gathered through interviews with project managers, clients, and community stakeholders. The study focused on environmental and social sustainability outcomes. The study found that stakeholder engagement, especially with local communities and environmental groups, significantly improved the long-term sustainability of projects. Projects that considered stakeholder input regarding environmental impact and community needs resulted in long-term benefits, such as positive community relations and minimal environmental harm.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. Therefore, the target population of this study was twenty-six (26) construction firms as obtained from the updated directory of finelib.com. Participants of the study were selected in line with the unit of analysis which is the organization level study. By virtue of the aforesaid, three (3) representatives from each of the twenty-six (26) construction firms were chosen to make up the study elements. However, the study elements will be (78) which consist of managers from the operations, human resource and finance departments of the respective 26 construction firms.

Census sampling method was adopted because the target population of the study was relatively small. The main data collection instrument for the study was structured questionnaire. A total of seventy-eight (78) copies of questionnaires were distributed, and (70) was eventually used for the study. Data was analysed using inferential statistics such as the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient Statistics technique was used to test the hypotheses with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science version 27.0 for the purpose of examining the nature and proposed association.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Decision rule: The decision rule which applies for all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of insignificant relationship between the variables. The extent of influence is on this basis assessed using the rho interpretations provided by Bryman and Bell (2003).

Table 1: Description on Range of correlation Pearson values and the corresponding level of association

Range of Pearson with positive and negative sign values	Strength of Association
± 0.80 – 0.99	Very Strong
± 0.60 – 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 – 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak

Source: Adopted from Ahaiauzu & Asawo, 2016, *Advance Social Research Methods*

The positive (+) sign in the values of (*B*) indicates a positive relationship, while the negative (-) sign in the value of (*B*) indicates an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. Thus, the sign of the *B* explains the direction of association between the two variables. The above table forms our yardstick for the determination of the level of relationship between the variables of the dimensions and those of the measures as understudied. These relationships range from very weak to very strong.

Relationship Between Stakeholder Engagement and Project Success

Table 2: Correlation Between Stakeholder Engagement and Project Success

			stakeholder engagement	project goal attainment	project quality	longterm impact
Spearman's rho	stakeholder engagement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.773**	.703**	.713**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	70	70	70	70
	project goal attainment	Correlation Coefficient	.773**	1.000	.483**	.598**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
		N	70	70	70	70
	project quality	Correlation Coefficient	.703**	.483**	1.000	.587**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
		N	70	70	70	70
	longterm impact	Correlation Coefficient	.713**	.598**	.587**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
		N	70	70	70	70

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 2 presented the Spearman’s rank order correlation matrix for the relationship between stakeholders’ engagement and the measures of project success (project goal-attainment, project quality and long-term impact) in the construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. From the data given in the table 4.2, the correlation results for **Ho1**, **Ho2** and **Ho3** were given as:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and project goal-attainment in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria.

From the analysis, the result showed the correlation coefficient of rho = 0.773 which shows the direction and strength of this relationship. The coefficient represents a strong positive correlation between stakeholder engagement and project goal-attainment in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria. The test of significance shows that this relationship is significant at p = .001 < 0.05 which makes possible to the generalization of our findings to the study population. Therefore, based on observed findings, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and project goal-attainment in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and project quality in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria.

From the analysis, the result showed the correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.703$ which shows the direction and strength of this relationship. The coefficient represents a moderate positive correlation between stakeholder engagement and project quality in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria. The test of significance shows that this relationship is significant at $p = .001 < 0.05$ which makes possible to the generalization of our findings to the study population. Therefore, based on observed findings, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and project quality in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and long-term impact in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria.

From the analysis, the result showed the correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.713$ which shows the direction and strength of this relationship. The coefficient represents a moderate positive correlation between stakeholder engagement and long-term impact in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria. The test of significance shows that this relationship is significant at $p = .001 < 0.05$ which makes possible to the generalization of our findings to the study population. Therefore, based on observed findings, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and long-term impact in construction firms Rivers State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The first, second and third hypotheses sought to examine the relationship between stakeholder engagement and project success. Hence it was hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and project success. These hypotheses (**Ho1**, **Ho2** and **Ho3**) were tested using the Spearman rank order correlation technique. The study findings reveal that stakeholder engagement has a strong positive and significant relationship with project goal-attainment, project quality and long-term impact.

The finding agrees with previous study by Aaltonen and Kujala (2010) who examined how stakeholder engagement affects project goal attainment in large construction projects. It used a mixed-methods approach was employed, including interviews with project managers and quantitative surveys of stakeholders. The survey focused on stakeholder participation in decision-making, expectations, and satisfaction with project goals. The study found that higher levels of stakeholder engagement, particularly in the early planning stages, positively impacted the attainment of project goals. Stakeholder feedback helped align project objectives with actual needs and expectations, leading to more successful goal attainment.

Again, the findings agree with Chand (2018) who examined the effect of stakeholder involvement on the quality of IT projects, specifically focusing on software development. The study used a cross-sectional survey method, with 100 IT project managers and their stakeholders responding to questions about engagement practices and project quality. The survey measured the level of stakeholder involvement in the design, development, and testing phases. It was found

that active involvement of stakeholders, particularly during the requirements phase, led to higher project quality. Continuous feedback from clients and users helped detect errors early, resulting in higher functional quality and user satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The basis of the findings of this study concludes that stakeholder engagement has a positive strong relationship with project goal attainment of construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. It is also affirmed that that stakeholder engagement has a positive strong relationship with the project quality of construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Furthermore, it is affirmed that that stakeholder engagement has a positive strong relationship with the project long term impact of construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. This means that as construction firms in River State, Nigeria increase and enhance their stakeholder engagement activities, there will be an increase in project goal attainment, project quality and long term impact of projects being delivered throughout the state.

Based on the relationship from the findings, the following recommendations were proffered:

- i. Project managers should ensure that key stakeholders are identified and engaged from the project initiation phase through to completion.
- ii. Open communication channels should be maintained with stakeholders to share progress updates, quality expectations, and changes in design or execution.
- iii. Construction firms should engage stakeholders in long-term planning and post-project evaluation to ensure sustainability.

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