The Impact of Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks on the Performance of Strategic Planning Process at the University of Zambia

Busu Mpepo., Dr Jason Mwanza

Graduate School of Business: University of Zambia

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000027

Received: 24 September 2025; Accepted: 29 September 2025; Published: 03 November 2025

ABSTRACT

Descriptive and inferential statistics frequencies, percentages, and regression analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data, exploring relationships between M and E integration and strategic outcomes (Gichuhi and Nyagah, 2019). According to the report of the Committee of Cabinet Affairs on the Implementation of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy in Zambia (2023), the Government developed the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy to provide a framework to measure and track progress in the implementation of policies, plans, programmes and projects. This arose due to the need for a robust national Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework to guide the National Development Plan implementation and provide mechanisms for objective assessment of programme results (outcomes and impacts) which needed the urgent and coordinated attention of all stakeholders (NAZ, 2023). However, the University of Zambia under the Ministry of Education (MoE) was not familiar with the content of the Policy and the implementation plan. The main purpose of this study was to assess the impact of Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks into the Strategic Planning Process at the University of Zambia. The specific objectives were to evaluate the role of effective integrating monitoring and evaluation frameworks into the strategic planning process at the University of Zambia, to evaluate the involvement of monitoring and evaluation frameworks into the strategic planning process at the University of Zambia., and to determine the impact of integrating monitoring and evaluation frameworks into the strategic planning process at the University of Zambia. The researcher adopted quantitative research designs. The study employed Purposive sampling techniques to mobilise the quantitative and qualitative data. The Purposive method was used to identify and select a homogenous sample of UNZA employees that met the predetermined criterion of importance. The research comprised of questionnaires. The questionnaires were used because they are the main means of collecting quantitative primary data. The questionnaires enabled quantitative data collected in a standardized manner, to ensure the data is consistency and coherent for the analysis. From the findings, the study concludes that the University of Zambia has made significant strides in implementing M&E structures, with 91% of respondents acknowledging the presence of dedicated M&E units. However, the effectiveness of these structures is perceived as lacking by a notable segment of the staff, with 69% of respondents rating the current M&E processes as ineffective or very ineffective. This finding is particularly concerning given that 70% of respondents indicated that M&E processes contribute positively to achieving strategic objectives. The disparity between perceptions of M&E processes and their actual effectiveness suggests a critical need for improvement in engagement practices and the overall M&E framework. The study reveals a significant gap in the allocation of human and financial resources for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, with 60% of respondents indicating that such resources are insufficient. Only 25% believe that adequate resources are in place, while 15% remain uncertain. The study further reveals a notable 25% remain neutral, which may indicate uncertainty or a lack of involvement with the M&E processes. The data indicates a strong consensus on the necessity of mainstreaming a formal Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework in future initiatives. A significant majority, totaling 65%, either strongly agree (35%) or agree (30%) with the need for a formal M&E framework.

Key Words: Monitoring and Evaluation, Strategic Planning, UNZA, Determine.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Most educational development projects want to contribute to an educational change in an educational system, such as increasing student learning by providing textbooks, spreading educational opportunities by providing distance education, or raising the quality of teaching by providing in-service training to teachers. The audiences of educational projects often want to know how far the project is in accomplishing the planned change. Monitoring and evaluation activities can help project management with keeping the audience informed about the progress of their project. The significance of Project Monitoring, Evaluation, and Quality of Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing nations remains a critical topic, as project performance has been a global concern for project managers and stakeholders (Kyalo, 2017). Projects worldwide continue to face performance-related challenges, including low completion rates, and issues with project quality (Al-Nabae, 2021). Completion rates are a key indicator of project performance, as they reflect adherence to scheduled timelines. Timely project execution ensures stakeholders derive value and prevents cost overruns.

Monitoring and evaluating public projects and organizations is crucial for enhancing project effectiveness, promoting transparency in resource utilization, informing budgetary decisions, and assessing progress in poverty eradication efforts (Masilo, 2021). Effective Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) promotes responsiveness, accountability, and institutional productivity. Given the urgency of education sector transformation, prioritizing M&E planning, budget allocation, data collection, capacity building, and the utilization of M&E outcomes is essential to ensuring project success (Nyirenda-Mutambo, 2018). Shabbir et al., (2023) Project failures are often attributed to ineffective M&E practices. Project managers rely on M&E data to make informed decisions about performance and quality (Shabbir, 2023). The transition to results-based project management is necessary as project execution grows increasingly complex, requiring alignment with diverse stakeholder expectations. Systematic project monitoring and evaluation have become imperative due to growing demands for outcome-driven approaches (Chaplowe, 2016).

According to UNZA press (2022), The University of Zambia has, since its inception more than fifty-six years ago, been a beacon of excellence and hope, a lodestar for national and continental regeneration. It has produced, and continues to produce various clusters of professionals in different spheres of human capital. The Government of the Republic of Zambia established the University of Zambia as Zambia's first public university through the University of Zambia Act Number 66 of 1965. The University commenced operations in 1966 with an initial mandate of producing professionally trained human capital to meet the needs of the rapidly growing post-independence nation (Press, 2022). Over the years, the University's governance framework and operations have undergone several transformations. At first, the University of Zambia Act No. 66 of 1965 provided for the Republican President as the Chancellor, with the authority to appoint the Vice-Chancellor (VC) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC). This has since changed with the Head of State no longer being the Chancellor and appointing authority of the institution's heads (VC and DVC). At the commencement of operations in 1966, the University had three Schools, namely Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. In its first academic year, in 1966, the University enrolled 312 students. As the national need for training more human capital was recognised, new school infrastructure and facilities were introduced. These were Law (1967), Engineering (1969), Medicine (1970), Agricultural Sciences (1971), Mines (1973), Business and Industrial Studies (and Environmental Studies at Ndola Campus in 1978 and 1981 respectively), and Veterinary Medicine (1983).

The increase in infrastructure and expansion of academic programmes led to a consequent rise in student enrolments, but the Great East Road Campus of the University could not provide adequate facilities to accommodate the rapidly rising demand for higher education. Therefore, in 1975, the government decided to adopt a federal system of university education by establishing three constituent campuses at Lusaka, Ndola on the Copperbelt, and Solwezi in North Western Province. The Solwezi Campus was, however, never realised. In 1979, a new Act the University of Zambia Act No. 17, was promulgated to provide a definitive legal basis for the new federal structure. In 1987, the University of Zambia Act of 1979 was repealed and amended, on the advice of the Wesley P. Nyirenda Commission of Inquiry of 1981. The Commission recommended that the centralised University of Zambia administrative system created by the federal system should be discarded because it was 'too cumbersome, top-heavy, too bureaucratic and incompetent'. The new University Acts

(Nos. 19 and 20) of 1987 created two independent public universities; the University of Zambia in Lusaka and the Copperbelt University, which took over the infrastructure of the Zambia Institute of Technology (ZIT) in Riverside, Kitwe (ibid).

For several years, the University maintained the status quo until 2015 when a new School, the Graduate School of Business, at the Great East Road Campus, was added to the existing nine schools. In 2016, the School of Medicine was split into four Schools namely; the School of Nursing Sciences, the School of Public Health, the School of Health Sciences, and the School of Medicine, bringing the total number of Schools in the University to thirteen. However, the systematic review and situational analysis, which were undertaken by the end of the implementation period of the Strategic Plan for 2018-2022, highlighted two key sets of environmental variables which affected the development and growth of the University, namely, internal and external environmental variables, which have been identified; The internal environment of the University was analysed using the Mckinsey's 7S Model covering the following areas: strategy, structure, staff, skills, systems, style (of leadership) and shared values; Strategy: Full implementation of the 2018-2022 University of Zambia Strategic Plan was hampered by four key challenges.

These are clearly noted in the Midterm Review of the Plan. The first of the four key handicaps were the nonavailability of a substantive University Council for a long time (Caretaker committees have presided from 2016 to date). Secondly, the non-availability of funds was a major factor that hampered the full implementation of the Strategic Plan. In addition, implementation of e-learning platforms could not be fully attained because of limited e-learning infrastructure and because some academic staff members were unable to adopt and adapt to the new ICT-based teaching and learning delivery methods.

Lastly, various essential components of the Plan could not be implemented because of the lack of commitment by some staff members, and the teams tasked to undertake certain programmes. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that the implementation of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan takes cognisance of these strategic weaknesses in order to optimise the benefits from the Plan. The external environment was analysed by looking at the major political, economic, technological, legal, international, environmental and demographic factors. This analysis is indicated below: The Government provides general support to higher education, and UNZA is a major beneficiary. However, the government has an influence on some of the decisions and operations of the University (Press, 2022).

In addition to public universities, there are now more than fifty private registered universities, which offer a range of programmes most of which are also offered by the University of Zambia. This development has made the University to reposition itself so as to remain relevant in this emerging competitive environment so that it remains a centre of excellence as well as a trendsetter in postgraduate training. The high cost of living in the economy has had a negative impact on all the stakeholders of the University, although the degree of the effect is not the same. Generally, the degree of autonomy in the setting of tuition fees by the University of Zambia is limited and consequently, the income generated through non-government sponsored students still remains economically below market rates. The trend in the government grant has exhibited a pattern of consistent decline in real terms, and this calls for the University to seek alternative means of income generation. The University is operating in a liberalised economy where investment opportunities are numerous. Efforts should be made to take advantage of the numerous investment opportunities prevailing in the environment in order to increase its revenue portfolio. It has been observed and established that there is a weak link between industry and UNZA (academia in general). The University has not established strong collaborative linkages with the industry over the years. Efforts should be made to establish mutually beneficial linkages and partnerships with industry. When used appropriately, technology can enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the production and provision of products and services.

In the case of the University of Zambia, advancements in technology have led to some cost reduction, improvements in quality and generally, new innovations. Some of these developments and investments in technology, which have benefited the University community, include Online registration; Streamlined payment of fees; Accelerated access to the worldwide e-library due to Internet facilities; and Lecturers can now use ICT solutions to provide virtual lectures to a very large number of students at the same time. The University should develop technologies that would enhance productivity in the economy (ibid).

The legal factors relate to the legal environment within which all organisations are expected to operate. In the Zambian legal environment, the *Higher Education Act (Amendment)* No. 23 *of* 2021 has assisted in streamlining the positions in the University, and also to compel lecturers to undertake the teaching methodology course. The University of Zambia has positioned itself to collaborate with other local, regional and international universities, organisations and industries, thereby expanding its international recognition. In addition, staff and student exchange programmes have been enhanced to keep the international standards befitting a prestigious University.

The University of Zambia is undertaking promotion activities such as researches that are aimed at mitigating the impact of climate change. To this effect, the University is expected to harness these opportunities by applying its capacity to undertake various environmental activities such as conducting water analysis, engineering, testing and fostering a green environment. The population of Zambia is increasing and each year thousands of Grades 12 school leavers are graduating from secondary schools in Zambia. These school leavers are seeking higher education training. The University should, therefore, increase its capacity to enrol more students and become a steady source of revenue through tuitions and other fees (Press, 2022).

In addition to analysing the internal and external factors that have a bearing on the operations of the University of Zambia, a further analysis of the significant internal Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) of the University was also undertaken to gain a detailed understanding of the prevailing situation. According to the report, the strengths were that the University of Zambia was the highest ranked university in Zambia, broad range of academic and professional programs covering various spheres of employment, ownership and availability of lands for future developments, highly competent and accomplished and academic, professional staff. Furthermore, the report identified weaknesses that includes poor liquidity and financial positions thus, affecting timely implementation of operations, slow rate of adoption and implementation of ICT-based solutions for teaching, learning, and management skills (ibid).

Problem Statement

According to the report of the Committee of Cabinet Affairs on the Implementation of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy in Zambia (2023), the Government developed the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy to provide a framework to measure and track progress in the implementation of policies, plans, programmes and projects. This arose due to the need for a robust national Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework to guide the National Development Plan implementation and provide mechanisms for objective assessment of programme results (outcomes and impacts) which needed the urgent and coordinated attention of all stakeholders (NAZ, 2023). However, the University of Zambia under the Ministry of Education (MoE) was not familiar with the content of the Policy and the implementation plan. In addition, the current Zambian laws on M&E were ad-hoc, fragmented and generalised provisions which lacked explicit legal backing.The consequences of such gaps were weaknesses in the overall implementation of the M&E functions by the University of Zambia and Government, thereby, failing to appreciate the processes of planning and budgeting. The other weakness was the disjointed M&E framework for the MoE, the University of Zambia, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and cooperating partners that did not directly contribute to the National M&E framework. Without proper legal backing for the Policy, MoE and Spending Agencies (MPSAs) and cooperating partners were not compelled to adhere to the aspirations of the Policy (ibid). It was therefore, imperative to recognise that there was need for the legislature to enact laws that promoted the implementation of the Policy in the University of Zambia. In addition, there was no evidence that the Policy had aligned plans, programmes, projects and budgets to the national performance framework key result areas and their key performance indicators. Due to this, the Policy had failed to promote integrated results in development planning and implementation at all levels in the University of Zambia and by ensuring that each sector developed a sector performance framework linked to the defined set of key result areas and appropriate key performance indicators. In view of the foregoing, the Government was required to ensure that decisions of the National Assembly on matters surrounding the monitoring and evaluation of national plans and budgets were binding legally. Thus, the Government was required to review the current National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy which would clearly spell out the M&E function at all levels of the UNZA, Government and M&E practice in Zambia. Such a policy would work as a platform upon which an Act of Parliament would be based

(ibid). It is against this backdrop that the paper looked the Impact Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks on the Performance of Strategic Planning Process at the University of Zambia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Studies

Amina (2022), the assessment of Performance strategic planning and projects holds significant importance in both government sectors including public Universities as it serves to effectively highlight the progress made by these entities. In order to have a good performance of the strategic plan, it is imperative that all system components within the project are synchronized (Amina, 2022). Ogbe (2022) has extensively discussed strategic plan performance as a multifaceted subject encompassing various subcategories. Diverse approaches have been observed among project administrators, depending on their respective areas of expertise. Ogbe confirmed that certain studies equate strategic plan performance with project accomplishment, which entails timely completion of the project, adherence to the allocated budget, and meeting the customer's expectations.

According to Huaya (2023), the efficacy of M&E is substantially contingent upon the level of expertise of its technical workforce (Ogbe, 2022). A program's M&E framework implementation relies on expertise and abilities, which corresponds to continual modification of M&E practices and shapes program performance (Hauya, 2023). In order to adequately monitor and evaluate program performance, it is imperative to enhance the program team's expertise and proficiency in all aspects pertaining to monitoring and evaluation operations. He also stated that the M&E staff must have the appropriate expertise to carry out their duties successfully (ibid).

Okafor, (2021), observes that its possible that without the necessary monitoring and evaluation skills, individuals may not have a clear understanding of expectations, may struggle to interpret, and measure indicators accurately, and M&E staff may collect inaccurate data from unreliable sources in the field. Mokua (2022), the personnel responsible for overseeing development strategic plans within the University should assess the training requirements of the M&E staff and establish training initiatives to address any identified gaps in their skills and knowledge. The staff would then exhibit enhanced competence, resulting in the delivery of projects of superior quality (Mokua, 2022).

Onjole (2021) states that there is a substantial correlation between M&E training and the performance of strategic plans (Onjole, 2021). As a result of the enhanced project performance resulting from the M&E team's strength, it was necessary to assess and consolidate the particular attributes that contributed to the M&E team's strength to fully leverage the advantages of the M&E team to boost project performance (Chege, 2020).

The M&E team must have the ability to plan and implement M&E activities. The M&E plan guides the entire M&E procedure for a project. It allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the project's design for optimal performance and includes measures. According Jahaf (2021) findings, it was determined that the training of personnel in the context of Yemen Social Fund for Development (SFD) does not possess a significant influence on the performance of their development initiatives. However, she found that the outcome of the study demonstrated the practice of monitoring skills has a substantial impact on the success of development projects and strategic plans (Jahaf, 2021).

Chege & Bowa, (2020), It was determined that allocating 5-10% of the whole project budget was adequate for monitoring and evaluation activities to be carried out effectively, the allocation of this funds should be directed towards the M&E team in order for them to carry out their activities in accordance to their goals, without getting distracted by other project tasks. Based on the findings of Njoroge et al. (2023), it can be stated that M&E Budget has a significant impact on the performance of strategic plans inside non-governmental organizations (Njoroge, 2023).

According to Musyimi and Ondar (2022), it is vital to consider the inclusion of sufficient budgetary allocation in order to ensure the seamless implementation of strategic plans. The results of their study indicate that the costs associated with M&E processes have a significant impact on the performance of projects. Hence, it has

been proposed that a rational proportion of the project budget should be allocated towards facilitating strategic plans supervision and conducting regular M&E tasks for ongoing projects. They confirmed without sufficient budget allocation for monitoring and evaluation, it becomes difficult to effectively follow up and track the progress of a project. Therefore, it is vital for the organization's leadership to invest adequate finances for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating activities.

Murei et al., (2017), the M&E Budget has a big influence, and as a result, it helps to facilitate the successful completion of the project. Their descriptive analysis of research showed that even though the respondents were not directly involved in allocating and reviewing the budget, M&E budget still had an impact on the performance of projects. Therefore, it can be inferred that implementing a participatory budgeting process would enhance the effectiveness of project execution. In their study, the results of inferential statistics showed that the M&E budget significantly impacted the success of horticulture projects. The study's primary result is that there exists a notable correlation between the budget designated for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the performance of horticultural projects in Nakuru county (Murei, 2017).

According Simiyu and Okwoyo (2023), the study findings indicate a substantial correlation between the budget allocated for monitoring and evaluation and the overall performance of water and sanitation projects in Nakuru County. They stated that the allocation of sufficient financial resources towards monitoring and evaluation activities enhances the efficiency of the project process. This implies that initiatives that allocate sufficient resources for monitoring and evaluation are more likely to attain superior results in terms of quality, efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction (Simiyu, 2023). However, Jahaf (2021) contradicted these results as she found that there exists a negative correlation between financial resources and the performance of development programs. This finding suggests that the allocation of funds for M&E is not viewed as crucial, and there is no mandatory obligation to allocate a separate budget specifically for M&E.

In their study, Mokua and Mungai (2022) examined how the implementation of results-based monitoring and evaluation systems affects the performance of projects and strategic plans that get funding from the Constituency Development Fund in Kenya. The study findings indicate that a properly designed monitoring and evaluation framework facilitates a deeper understanding of the community's requirements by the project team. This aids in defining the extent of the project and establishing design goals that are relevant, quantifiable, and attainable. A clearly defined M&E strategy also explains the procedures and interventions that will result in the project's outputs and deliverables.

In a study conducted by Murithi and Muchelule (2023), it was discovered that the implementation of monitoring practices by Kenya state corporations had a major effect on the performance of projects. The approach used by the project for monitoring and evaluation has been observed to influence the effectiveness of education development projects.

In addition, Murithi and Muchelule (2023) found that the utilization of surveillance methods and strategies by companies had a notable effect on the effectiveness of projects in Kenyan state enterprises. In study that was conducted on government projects in Kisii County found out that performance is significantly influenced by several areas of M&E planning, including coordination, scope of monitoring and evaluation, instruments and methodologies, and feasibility of data collecting (Tong'I et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework - Systems Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901–1972), is credited with being the originator of the form of systems theory used in social work. Systems theory provides a framework for understanding how various components of a project interact and contribute to the overall outcome. This approach helps in addressing instances of suboptimal performance, allowing for adjustments and improvements throughout the project lifecycle. A robust M&E framework, including a Theory of Change, supports this systematic approach (Bertalanffy, 1968).

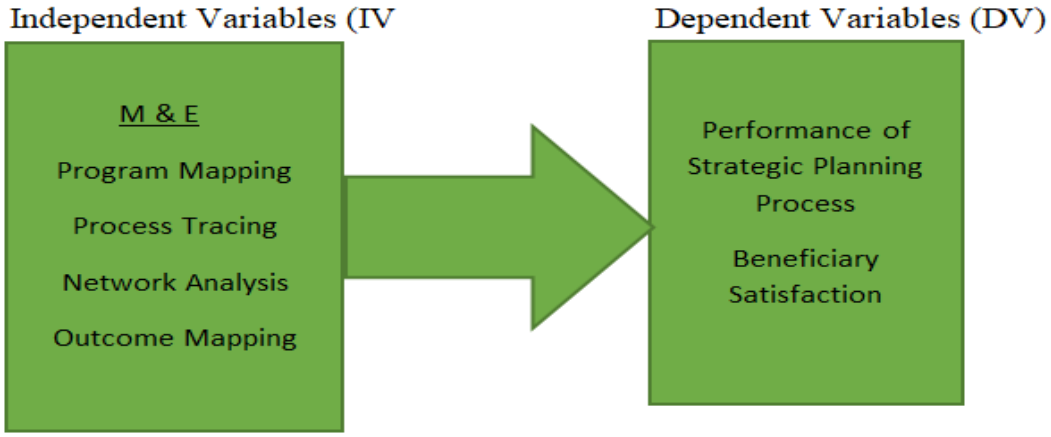
Systems Theory is an approach to evaluation that emphasizes the interconnectedness and complexity of social systems, and the need to understand and evaluate systems as a whole, rather than just individual components. The following are key concepts and principles of Systems Theory in evaluation: Holistic perspective: Systems

Theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the whole system and how its components interact, rather than just focusing on individual parts. This involves looking at the big picture and understanding how all the parts of the system work together to achieve the overall goal. Interconnectedness and interdependence: Systems Theory recognizes that components of a system are interconnected and interdependent, meaning that changes to one part of the system can have ripple effects throughout the system. This involves understanding the relationships between the different parts of the system and how they interact with each other. Feedback loops: Systems Theory recognizes that systems are dynamic and complex, and that they often involve feedback loops in which changes to one part of the system can feedback and affect other parts of the system. This involves understanding how changes to one part of the system can impact other parts of the system and lead to unintended consequences.

These key concepts and principles of Systems Theory provide a useful framework for understanding and evaluating complex social systems. By analyzing the relationships and interdependencies between different components of a program or intervention, Systems Theory can help evaluators identify areas of strength and weakness, and develop strategies for program improvement. A holistic perspective is a fundamental principle of Systems Theory in evaluation that emphasizes the importance of understanding the whole system and how its components interact, rather than just focusing on individual parts. This involves looking at the big picture and understanding how all the parts of the system work together to achieve the overall goal. Therefore, applications of Systems Theory in this study, the researcher identifies the following constructs or independent variables: Program mapping, Process tracing, Outcome mapping, Network analysis. By applying Systems Theory in evaluation, the study can gain a deeper understanding of complex programs and interventions, identify potential areas for improvement, and develop strategies for program optimization that take into account the dynamic and interconnected nature of the system. This can lead to more effective and sustainable interventions, and ultimately contribute to more positive outcomes (dependent variables) for stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework

From the foregoing discussion of systems theories, the study extracted the following constructs or variables; **M & E, Program mapping, Process tracing, Network analysis, and Outcome mapping independent variables (IV) while Empowerment of beneficiaries, Beneficiary satisfaction, Positive outcomes as dependent variables (DV).**



Conceptual Framework; Source: Authors (2025)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The researcher adopted quantitative research designs. Quantitative designs rely upon numerical data that allow one to conduct statistical tests to compare groups or examine relationships between variables. Quantitative methods involve the processes of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study. Specific methods exist in both survey and experimental research that relate to identifying a sample and population, specifying the strategy of inquiry, collecting and analyzing data, presenting the results, making an interpretation, and writing the research in a manner consistent with a survey or experimental study. Descriptive

and inferential statistics (frequencies, percentages, and regression analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data, exploring relationships between M and E integration and strategic outcomes (Gichuhi and Nyagah, 2019).

The population of interest for the study is comprised of the individuals, dyads, groups, organizations, or other entities one seeks to understand and to whom or to which the study results may be generalized or transferred and is the principal group about which the research is concerned. Populations create boundaries for the scope of a study and provide environmental and context cues for the reader. Such boundaries place natural delimitations upon the research to afford the researcher the proper focus so as not to present a one-size-fits-all set of results. The definition of boundaries also allows the researcher to clearly identify subpopulations, such as the target population, sampling frame, and sample, and to ensure alignment between these groups within the research (Salkind, 2010). The study population for this study was 200 UNZA staff including all employees in Lusaka district of Zambia.

The determining of sample size is mostly used within quantitative descriptive designs in which one is interested in describing the characteristics of the population of interest and when representing all members of that group are a priority. This method uses confidence level calculations, which provides the minimum sample size one must recruit to meet the desired statistical constraints; namely, the sample represents the characteristics of interest for the entire population of interest. A confidence level describes the extent to which the selected sample probabilistically represents the population of interest. Naturally, the higher the confidence level, the higher the probability the sample is representative of that population (Cohen, 2013). To calculate the sample size based upon confidence levels, the researcher adopted Yamane formula. It helps determine the appropriate sample size needed for a study based on the total population size and a desired margin of error.

Formula:

The formula is: $n = N / (1 + N * e^2)$.

Where:

n: represents the required sample size according to some researchers.

N: represents the total population size says a statistics website.

e: represents the desired margin of error of 0.05 for 5%.

Therefore, n=200/ (1+200+(0.05)2

n=133.

FINDINGS

What is the role of effective integrating monitoring and evaluation frameworks into the strategic planning process at the University of Zambia?

The study found that the current Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) structures exhibit notable strengths, particularly in performance tracking, which accounts for 40% of overall effectiveness. Data collection and analysis are also critical, representing 30%, providing a strong foundation for informed decision-making. The result agrees with Onjole (2021), who found that the process of M&E provides information beneficial for making crucial project decisions. He stated that good information that is not utilized is pointless and serves no purpose. Additionally, he stated that the ease of utilizing monitoring and evaluation findings is based upon the efficiency of the system, which is characterized by the timely generation of results and an effective feedback mechanism. Therefore, applications of the Systems Theory can be used to map out the components and relationships of a program, helping evaluators understand the different elements of the system and how they work together in order to make informed decisions.

By applying Systems Theory in evaluation, the study can gain a deeper understanding of complex programs and interventions, identify potential areas for improvement, and develop strategies for program optimization that take into account the dynamic and interconnected nature of the system. This can lead to more effective and sustainable interventions, and ultimately contribute to more positive outcomes (dependent variables) for stakeholders. However, the study found that 15% indicated that the strategic monitoring activities in some cases did not adhere to a formal Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, they relied on informal methods to assess project progress and adapt our strategies effectively. Key practices included regular check-ins and feedback sessions, which fostered open dialogue among team members. These informal gatherings allowed them to discuss project milestones, challenges, and immediate successes, creating a real-time feedback loop that facilitated timely adjustments to our approaches. Additionally, they utilized collaborative tools such as shared documents and project management software to track tasks and outcomes visually, helping us identify areas that required further attention.

How is the involvement of monitoring and evaluation frameworks into the strategic planning process at the University of Zambia?

The study reveals a significant gap in the allocation of human and financial resources for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, with 60% of respondents indicating that such resources are insufficient. Only 25% believe that adequate resources are in place, while 15% remain uncertain. The study further reveals a notable 25% remain neutral, which may indicate uncertainty or a lack of involvement with the M&E processes. On the other hand, 20% of respondents express some level of dissatisfaction, with 15% disagreeing and 5% strongly disagreeing. The study shows that a significant majority, 85%, of respondents have not engaged in strategic monitoring activities without the aid of a formal Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework. Conversely, the 15% of respondents who have conducted strategic monitoring without a formal framework may represent a more flexible or adaptive approach, potentially relying on informal methods or personal judgment.

This disparity underscores a crucial dynamic in monitoring practices, where adherence to formal frameworks is prevalent, yet there remains a small segment of practitioners who may be exploring alternative strategies that could offer insights into the effectiveness and adaptability of less conventional monitoring approaches. This finding differs with what Mulwa et al. (2022), found in their study that “participatory project monitoring and evaluation and performance of mango farming projects”, revealed that the deployment of participatory project monitoring and evaluation efficiently detects and handles performance abnormalities. In organizations that foster a culture of continuous learning and enhancement like universities, the findings of monitoring and evaluation are more likely to be utilized for implementing modifications that enhance project performance (Mulwa, 2022).

According to Amina and Ngugi (2022), the availability and usage of resources are significant factors in determining the level of success achieved in project performance. The identification of stakeholders' information needs, and the assurance of the M&E report's completion and usefulness are critical elements that depend on the effective exploitation of results. Amina and Ngugi’s (2022) study indicate that including monitoring and assessment outcomes significantly influences the efficacy of programs implemented. This particular finding goes against the Systems Theory that emphasizes that all components of a system are interconnected and that changes in one part of the system affect the others. At UNZA, the integration of M and E frameworks into strategic planning highlights this interconnectedness. Strategic planning involves setting long-term goals, making decisions about resource allocation, and defining institutional priorities. However, these goals and priorities cannot be effectively managed without full participation of stakeholders from M and E processes, which track progress and assess the outcomes of these decisions (Bennett, 2021).

What is the impact of integrating monitoring and evaluation frameworks into the strategic planning process at the University of Zambia?

The data indicates a strong consensus on the necessity of mainstreaming a formal Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework in future initiatives. A significant majority, totalling 65%, either strongly agree (35%) or agree (30%) with the need for a formal M&E framework. The survey results indicate a predominantly positive

impact of effectiveness among respondents, with 30% rating the initiative as “Very Effective” and 40% categorizing it as “Effective.” This combined total of 70% reflects a strong endorsement of the initiative's impact. Conversely, a smaller segment of the participants expressed less favorable views, with 15% remaining “Neutral,” while 10% deemed it “Ineffective,” and only 5% classified it as “Very Ineffective.” Generally, the data suggests a favorable consensus regarding the initiative's effectiveness, with a notable majority of respondents recognizing its positive contributions. The findings agree with Institutional Theory which focuses on how organizations, such as universities, operate within the constraints of norms, rules, and regulations. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organizations strive for legitimacy by adhering to institutional expectations, which can include accountability and transparency measures through M and E frameworks. At UNZA, Institutional Theory would highlight the need for M and E integration as part of its compliance with both national and international educational standards. Furthermore, the theory suggests that institutions adopt M and E frameworks to have a positive impact and align themselves with best practices in higher education governance. In this context, the operationalization of M and E is not just a strategic necessity but also a means of securing UNZ A’s reputation and credibility.

Other Findings

Out of the total responses, 64% identified the presence of an M&E unit or team, 32% indicated reliance on annual reports, 28% cited performance reviews, 5% mentioned project evaluation committees, while 0% selected other unspecified structures. Out of the total respondents, 2% indicated that M&E activities are conducted quarterly, 69% stated they occur biannually, 14% reported annual evaluations, while 12% noted that M&E activities are not conducted regularly, and out of the total respondents, 69% (89) have participated, while 31% (40) have not.

The high percentage (91%) of respondents indicating the presence of dedicated M&E structures at UNZA is a positive finding, reflecting a formal commitment to M&E within the university. This aligns with the research by Kaplan and Norton (1992), which emphasizes the importance of having balanced scorecards and performance management systems to translate strategic goals into measurable outcomes. The existence of these structures often indicates a university's desire to be accountable, improve performance, and adapt to changing environments.

However, as the research by Dill (1997) suggests, the mere existence of a structure does not guarantee effective M&E. It is crucial to consider the capacity, resources, and mandate of these units to ensure they can effectively implement and utilize the M&E processes. The 9% "not sure" response could indicate a lack of awareness or clarity regarding the M&E structures within the university, highlighting a potential communication gap or a need for better dissemination of information.

Regarding the frequency of M&E activities, the findings reveal that biannual M&E is the most common practice at UNZA (69%), which may be appropriate for tracking progress and making adjustments to strategic plans. Annual evaluations (14%) are also helpful for reviewing long-term goals. This frequency often aligns with the strategic planning cycle, allowing for assessment against key performance indicators (KPIs) and strategic objectives. However, as the World Bank (2004) research suggests, the value of M&E depends on the quality and use of the data collected, and its integration with decision-making processes.

The 12% of respondents who reported that M&E activities are not conducted regularly is a significant concern. Irregular M&E can lead to missed opportunities for improvement, reduced accountability, and ultimately, undermine the effectiveness of the strategic plan. This could indicate a lack of resources, capacity, or a lack of perceived importance of M&E. The 2% conducting quarterly M&E may be ideal, as it allows for very timely feedback.

Therefore, the findings on the existence of dedicated M&E structures and the frequency of M&E activities at UNZA suggest a formal commitment to M&E, but also highlight the need to ensure the capacity, resources, and integration of these processes within the university's decision-making and strategic planning. Addressing the potential communication gaps and ensuring regular and effective M&E practices can further strengthen

UNZA's ability to monitor and evaluate its strategic plans, ultimately leading to improved performance and adaptability.

The presence of a dedicated M&E unit or team, as indicated by the 64% response rate is a significant strength. Literature consistently emphasizes the importance of a centralized M&E function for the effective implementation of M&E systems. The utilization of annual reports (32%) and performance reviews (28%) as M&E structures are also common practices in higher education settings. These mechanisms provide regular opportunities to track progress, assess performance against established goals, and identify areas needing improvement. However, the relatively low percentage of project evaluation committees (5%) raises a potential concern. Project specific evaluations are essential for assessing the effectiveness of individual initiatives and for learning from both successes and failures. The absence or limited use of these committees could hinder the university's ability to systematically evaluate specific projects and apply lessons learned to future endeavours.

The frequency of M&E activities related to the strategic plan, with 69% reporting biannual reviews, suggests a relatively proactive approach to monitoring progress. However, the variations in frequency across different departments or units should be investigated to ensure that the system is consistently applied across the university. Accordingly, the findings indicate that the University of Zambia has made significant strides in establishing M&E structures and processes. The existence of a dedicated M&E unit and the relatively frequent monitoring of the strategic plan position the university favourably compared to some other institutions. However, the variation in the use of different M&E structures and the inconsistencies in the frequency of M&E activities highlight areas that could be strengthened.

Future research could explore the reasons behind these variations and identify opportunities to enhance the cohesiveness and consistency of the M&E system. This could involve promoting the use of project evaluation committees, standardizing M&E procedures, and providing training and support to ensure that all units are effectively implementing the M&E framework. By building on its existing strengths and addressing identified weaknesses, the University of Zambia can further enhance its M&E system and leverage it to improve its performance and achieve its strategic objectives. The findings from indicate that the majority of respondents (69%) perceived the current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) structures at the University of Zambia as ineffective, with an additional 2% rating them as very ineffective. Only 12% of respondents considered the structures to be very effective, while 9% found them somewhat effective. The remaining 7% remained neutral in their assessment.

In comparison with other studies in higher education, a study conducted by Ndoro et al. (2020) in Zimbabwean universities found that the majority of respondents perceived the M&E systems as ineffective, citing challenges such as lack of resources, poor data management, and limited involvement of stakeholders. The findings from the University of Zambia study align with these observations Isiiko and Kyaruzi (2018) examined the effectiveness of M&E systems in Tanzanian universities and reported that the systems were often fragmented, lacked institutional support, and faced implementation challenges. These issues may be contributing to the perceived ineffectiveness of the M&E structures at the University of Zambia. These factors may also be relevant in the context of the University of Zambia as supported by Ika and Donnelly (2017) who analyzed the effectiveness of M&E systems in international development projects and identified issues such as poor design, lack of stakeholder engagement, and insufficient capacity building as contributors to ineffective M&E practices. These aspects may be applicable to the University of Zambia's M&E structures as well.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate various structures in place for M&E at the university, including the M&E Committee, Subcommittees, the Strategic Planning Unit, and the Quality Assurance Directorate. Key responsibilities of these structures involve monitoring progress, conducting evaluations, and providing technical guidance. The data suggest that the M&E activities are primarily coordinated by Joint Committees and Faculty/Department Heads, with a focus on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Annual Reports as the main tools for assessment. However, the frequency of M&E activities varies, with most occurring biannually.

Despite the strengths identified in M&E processes, such as effective performance tracking and data collection, significant limitations persist. Respondents expressed concerns about the fragmented nature of M&E practices across departments, inadequate training for staff, and an overemphasis on quantitative metrics. The need for improved stakeholder engagement and integration of technology was highlighted, alongside recommendations for capacity building and a focus on actionable insights to enhance the effectiveness of M&E systems. Furthermore, a substantial gap in human and financial resources was noted, with 60% of respondents indicating that these resources were insufficient for effective M&E activities.

The findings also reveal a strong consensus among respondents on the necessity of mainstreaming a formal M&E framework into future strategic plans, with 65% supporting this initiative. A formal framework is deemed essential for establishing clear objectives, integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives, and ensuring sustainability through a culture of data-driven decision-making. The chapter underscores the importance of creating a centralized M&E unit, fostering feedback loops, and establishing partnerships to maintain the relevance and effectiveness of M&E practices at the University of Zambia, ultimately driving continuous improvement in educational quality and institutional effectiveness.

REFERENCES

1. Al-Nabae, M. &. S. D., 2021. Factors That Influencing Project Management Performance: a Review. International Journal of A. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences,, 11(8), pp. 628-643.
2. Amina, M. &. N. L., 2022. Effects of utilization of monitoring and evaluation results on Project Performance.. European Journal of Social Sciences, 7(5), pp. 104-113.
3. Bertalanffy, L. v., 1968. General system theory: Foundation, development, application.. New York:: George Braziller.
4. Chaplowe, S. G. &. C. J. B., 2016. Monitoring and evaluation training: A systematic approach.. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/78494516/ Monitoring_and_Evaluation_Training_A_Systematic_Approach: SAGE Publications.
5. Chege, F. M. &. B. O., 2020. Monitoring and evaluation and Project Performance in Kenya: The case of non- governmental organizations implementing education projects in Nairobi county.. International Academic Journal of Information Sciences and Project Management, 3(6), pp. 312-3337.
6. Hauya, C., 2023. Monitoring and evaluation practices on performance of government agricultural affordable inputs program in Lilongwe District, Malawi. Diss., Lilongwe: Diss. Africa Nazarene University,.
7. Jahaf, L. H., 2021. The effect of monitoring and evaluation practices on development projects' performance in yemen and its relation to gender. Arab Journal for Scientific Publishing (AJSP). Arab Journal for Scientific Publishing (AJSP) .
8. Kyalo, N. D. N. J. K. &. M. M. W., 2017. Learner Support Services and Quality ofEducation in Public Universities in Kenya.. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences ,.
9. Masilo, M. &. M. T., 2021. Monitoring and evaluation in the public sector: A case of the Department of Home Affairs (South Africa)., Pretoria: University of Pretoria..
10. Mokua, M. A. &. M. M. A.-M., 2022. Results based monitoring and evaluation systems on performance of CDF funded projects in Nairobi county, Kenya.. Social Sciences & Open , Volume 3, pp. 287-296.
11. Murei, C. K. H. &. G. C., 2017. Influence of monitoring and evaluation human resources capacity on performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru county, Kenya.. Journal of Science and Humanities.
12. NAZ, 2023. REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CABINET AFFAIRS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION POLICY IN ZAMBIA, Lusaka: National Assembly of Zambia.
13. Njoroge, J. W. &. M. A., 2023. Monitoring and evaluation data and Project. International Journal of Business Management Research, 7(2), pp. 61-80.
14. Nyirenda-Mutambo, E., 2018. Monitoring and Evaluation in the Education Sector. Monitoring and Evaluation Course Reader., Lusaka.. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/41058055/Monitoring_and_Evaluation_M_and_E_in_the_Education_Sector: University of

Zambia.

15. Onjole, D., 2021. Influence of Monitoring and Evaluation Exercises on the Performance of Water Development Programs in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, , Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
16. Press, U., 2022. The University of Zambia Strategic Plan 2023-2027, Lusaka: UNZA Press.
17. Shabbir, R. N. S. &. C. S. M., 2023. Evaluation of the Factors behind the Failure of Project Management Practices.. Journal of Development and Social Sciences,, 4(3), pp. 490-.
18. Simiyu, I. M. &. O. R. M., 2023. Monitoring and evaluation budget and performance of water and sanitation projects in Nakuru County, Kenya.. The International Journal of Business Management and Technology, , 7(5), pp. 70-76. .