

Original Research Article

A Systematic Review of Stakeholders' Engagement as a Critical Tool for Effective Project Performance

Mohammed Abba TOR^{1*}, Nasamu GAMBO (PhD)¹¹Department of Business Administration, Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja**Article History**

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Abstract: A comprehensive review of stakeholders' engagement (SE) articles published in the last decade (2014-2023) was undertaken in this work. 100 SE publications were identified using the Systematic Quantitative Assessment Technique. Time distribution, geographic distribution, article type, data gathering methods, and themes discussed were all covered in the review. The data revealed that interest in SE has been at increase in the last decade, and that North America and Europe are the regions with the least amount of SE research. The ratio of conceptual to empirical SE articles was skewed toward the latter, and the most common data collection method was survey. The most striking finding was that, in order to ensure successful implementation and performance of projects, stakeholders' engagement from conception to actual implementation and supervision of projects is not only desirable but necessary to ensure clear understanding, continuous, transparent, participatory, and more often than sustainable process.

Keywords: Stakeholders, Engagement, Projects, Systematic Review.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder engagement is a term commonly used in various fields, including business, management, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility. Scholars define stakeholder engagement as the process by which organizations interact with individuals or groups who have a stake or interest in the organization's activities, decisions, and outcomes. These individuals or groups are known as stakeholders and can include customers, employees, investors, government agencies, communities, and non-governmental organizations (Olowu and Sule, 2019)

Scholars emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement as a strategic approach to building relationships, managing risks, and creating value for both the organization and its stakeholders. The concept highlights the idea that organizations should not only consider their own interests but also take into account the perspectives and concerns of those affected by or affecting their activities (Ajayi and Salami, 2021).

Stakeholder engagement in construction projects refers to the process of involving and communicating with various individuals or groups who have an interest in or may be affected by the project. These stakeholders can include clients, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, government agencies, local

communities, environmental groups, and other relevant parties.

The significance of stakeholder engagement in construction projects is immense for several reasons including but not limited to building positive relationships, managing expectations, mitigating risks, enhancing project outcomes, compliance and regulatory requirements, sustainability and social responsibility.

Many studies were conducted in the area of stakeholders' engagement in different countries and by different scholars. For example, Olowu and Sule (2019) studies have highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in promoting sustainable development and addressing complex socio-economic challenges in Nigeria. For instance, emphasize the role of stakeholder engagement in enhancing governance effectiveness and improving service delivery in public institutions. Through participatory approaches that involve stakeholders in decision-making processes, governments can leverage diverse perspectives, local knowledge, and resources to design and implement policies that meet the needs and priorities of the populace.

Adejoh and Shaibu (2020) empirical evidence suggests that effective stakeholder engagement is essential for fostering trust and collaboration between

government institutions and civil society organizations. A study by underscores the importance of building partnerships and networks among stakeholders to address environmental and socio-economic issues, such as climate change adaptation and natural resource management. By involving communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders in planning and implementation processes, governments can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of environmental policies and programs.

Research by Ojo and Ayanda (2021) stakeholder engagement has been recognized as a key driver of innovation and entrepreneurship in Nigeria's private sector. Explores the role of stakeholder engagement in promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices among businesses. Through dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders, companies can identify social and environmental concerns, develop CSR initiatives, and build mutually beneficial relationships with communities and consumers. This proactive engagement not only enhances corporate reputation and competitiveness but also contributes to sustainable development and social welfare.

Ojukwu (2020) identify issues such as limited institutional capacity, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and power imbalances that hinder effective stakeholder participation in decision-making processes. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to strengthen governance structures, foster transparency, and promote inclusive dialogue among stakeholders. Despite the potential benefits of stakeholder engagement, empirical studies also highlight challenges and constraints in its implementation in Nigeria. Stakeholder engagement is particularly crucial in the context of natural resource management and community development projects in Nigeria.

Research by Arowosegbe (2020) examines the role of stakeholder engagement in promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development. By involving farmers, agricultural cooperatives, government agencies, and development organizations in decision-making processes, initiatives such as value-chain development programs and agricultural extension services can be tailored to local needs and priorities. This participatory approach not only enhances the effectiveness of agricultural interventions but also empowers rural communities and fosters social inclusion and economic growth.

Ajayi and Salami (2021) explores the role of traditional and religious leaders, community-based organizations, and civil society groups in mediating conflicts and promoting social cohesion at the grassroots level. Through dialogue, consensus-building, and conflict resolution mechanisms, stakeholders can address underlying grievances, mitigate tensions, and foster reconciliation, contributing to stability and peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected regions,

empirical evidence highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement in promoting peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Nigeria's diverse and multi-ethnic society.

Additionally, Research by Iheanacho (2020) stakeholder engagement is essential for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. Examines the participation of women in decision-making processes related to education, healthcare, and economic development. By ensuring the representation of women and marginalized groups in stakeholder consultations and policy forums, governments and development partners can address gender disparities, advocate for women's rights, and mainstream gender perspectives into development policies and programs. This inclusive approach not only empowers women as agents of change but also contributes to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

Ogbonnaya (2021) identifies barriers such as political marginalization, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural barriers that hinder the inclusion of marginalized groups, such as youth, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, in stakeholder engagement initiatives. Addressing these challenges requires targeted efforts to promote diversity, equity, and social justice in stakeholder engagement processes, ensuring that the voices and interests of all stakeholders are heard and respected. Despite the potential benefits of stakeholder engagement, challenges persist in ensuring meaningful participation and representation of diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Ogbuabor (2020) emphasized the significance of stakeholder engagement in health policy formulation and implementation, highlighting its role in addressing challenges such as inadequate healthcare infrastructure, workforce shortages, and access to essential services. By fostering collaboration and dialogue among stakeholders, governments and healthcare institutions can develop responsive and sustainable health policies that prioritize the needs and concerns of the population. Stakeholder engagement is fundamental in the healthcare sector in Nigeria, particularly in policymaking and service delivery. Studies have demonstrated the importance of involving stakeholders such as healthcare professionals, community leaders, and patients in decision-making processes to improve health outcomes and address healthcare disparities.

Olaniyi and Akindele (2020) explores the role of stakeholder participation in urban planning processes, emphasizing the importance of involving residents, community associations, and urban professionals in decision-making regarding land use, transportation, housing, and environmental management. Through participatory urban governance mechanisms such as town hall meetings, community workshops, and citizen forums, stakeholders can contribute local knowledge,

preferences, and priorities to urban development plans, ensuring that policies and projects are contextually appropriate and socially inclusive. Stakeholder engagement is crucial for promoting sustainable urban development and infrastructure planning in Nigeria's rapidly growing cities.

Moreover, Akinsolu and Ayeni (2021) examined the role of stakeholder participation in education policy development and implementation, highlighting the importance of involving parents, teachers, students, and education authorities in decision-making processes. By fostering collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, governments can develop evidence-based education policies, allocate resources effectively, and implement initiatives that improve learning outcomes and promote educational equity and inclusion. In the context of education, stakeholder engagement is essential for enhancing access to quality education and addressing challenges such as low literacy rates, inadequate school infrastructure, and teacher shortages.

Finally, Ajayi and Salami (2020) investigates the role of stakeholder engagement in corporate decision-making, emphasizing its significance in enhancing transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior among businesses. Through stakeholder consultations, shareholder meetings, and corporate social responsibility initiatives, companies can build trust and credibility with stakeholders, address social and environmental concerns, and contribute to sustainable development goals. Additionally, stakeholder engagement is critical for promoting corporate governance and responsible business practices in Nigeria's private sector.

Given the vital relevance of stakeholder engagement (SE) for the successful implementation, sustainability and performance of construction projects, this paper undertook a systematic evaluation of the previous decade of scholarship on this critical subject in order to address the following research questions:

1. Has there been an increase or decrease in scholarly interest in stakeholders' engagement (SE) over the last decade, 2014-2023?
2. How has stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship been distributed geographically over the previous years i.e. 2014-2023?
3. Is the emphasis of stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship empirical or conceptual?
4. What methods of data collection is often used in stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship from 2014 to 2023?
5. What themes have existing stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship mostly explored from 2014 to 2023?

The above research questions were answered through a systematic review of 100 stakeholders'

engagement (SE) research papers published by respectable academic journals from 2014 to 2023.

It is in the wake of the background this paper provides a systematic review of stakeholders' engagement (SE) in construction projects. The paper is divided in to four sections namely, introduction, materials and methods, results and discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper used Pickering and Byrne's (2014) systematic quantitative assessment technique (SQAT) to conduct a systematic review of stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship from 2014 to 2023. For undertaking an effective systematic review, the SQAT suggests following a five-step process:

1. Define your topic
2. Formulate your research questions
3. Determine key words
4. Locate and search databases, and
5. Read and evaluate publications

Table 1: Reviewed Stakeholders' Engagement (SE) Articles categorized by database

S/NO	Database	Frequency
1.	Taylor and Francis	29
2.	Science Direct	21
3.	Emerald	20
4.	Microsoft Academic	10
5.	Academia	7
6.	Research gate	4
7.	Core	3
8.	Cite seer	3
9.	SSRN	2
10.	JSTOR	1
	TOTAL	100

Source: Own Study

Stakeholders' engagement (SE) was used as a key term to direct the search process on Google Scholar in order to find relevant articles. Eighteen reliable academic databases were combed through for relevant papers on stakeholders' engagement (SE). This study reviewed 100 stakeholders' engagement (SE) publications published in the recent decade (2014-2023), and Table 1 shows the distribution of these research papers/articles based on academic databases. The findings of the systematic review are presented in the results and discussion section of the paper.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Has Scholarly Interest in SE Increased or Decreased Over the Last Decade, 2014–2023?

The number of stakeholders' engagement (SE) papers published in the 10 databases included for this research is shown in Figure 1. The quantity of articles published in 2024 was not considered in order to address

the first question of this paper, as shown in Figure 1 below:

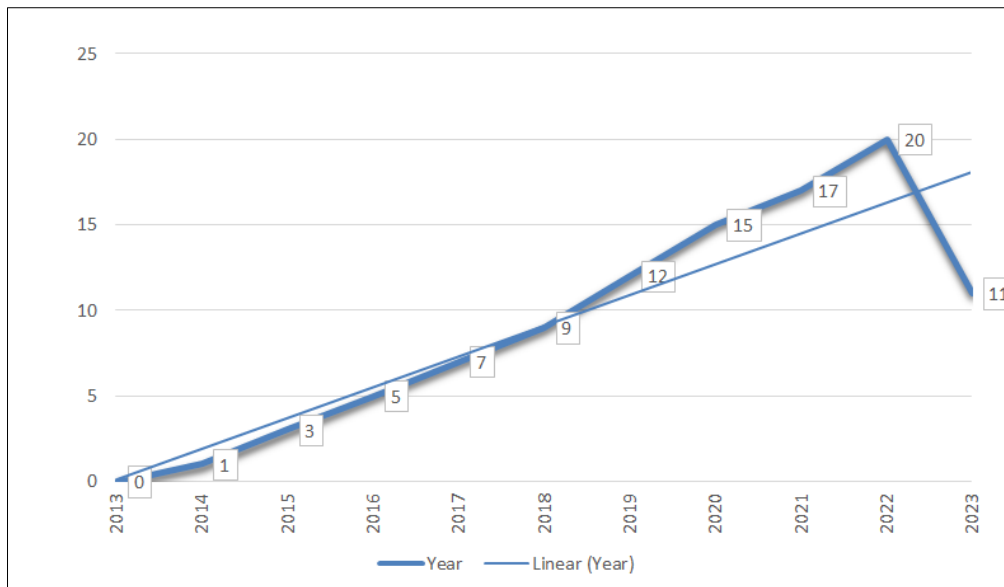


Figure 1: Trend of Scholarly interest in stakeholders' engagement (SE)
Source: own study

Over the ten-year period as well as 100 articles covered by this systematic review, scholarly interest in stakeholders' engagement (SE) has recorded a rise since 2014 until 2022, when the trends reached the pinnacle of scholarly interest in stakeholders' engagement (SE) with 20 papers published, whilst in 2014 occurred the lowest output, with only one (1) paper found. In this review, 2023 was the final full year studied.

3.2. What Has Been the Geographical Distribution of SE Scholarship from 2014 To 2023?

The geographic distribution of stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship is shown in this section in two ways: continent-by-continent distribution and country-by-country distribution. The continent-by-continent distribution of the stakeholders' engagement (SE) literature studied in this work is depicted in Figure 2.

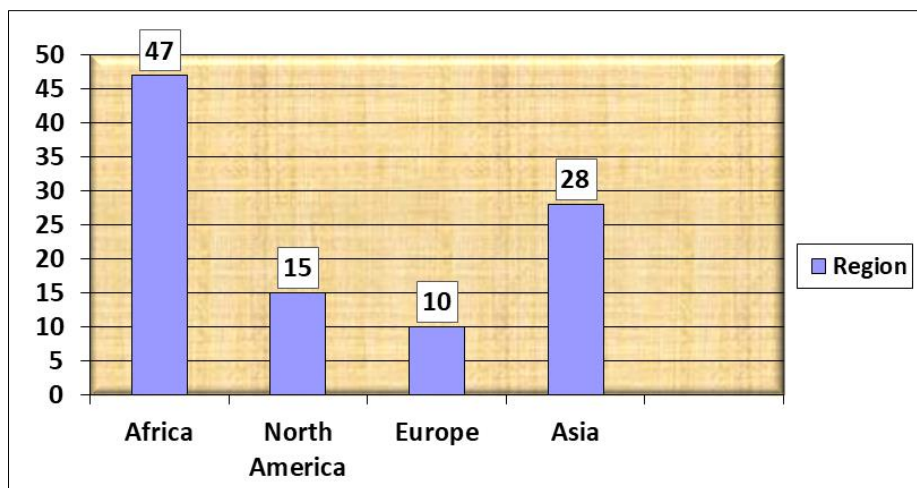


Figure 2: Geographical Distribution of stakeholders' engagement (SE) scholarship

Figure 2 shows that Africa had by far the greatest number of stakeholders' engagement (SE) papers analysed in this study, with 47. Asia came in second with 28 points, followed by Europe (10) and North America (15). Oceania and South America were not there. There are 13 nations in South America, thus it's astonishing that none of the stakeholders'

engagement (SE) articles reviewed in this paper came from one of there. It might be argued that this is due to the fact that the written and spoken languages in these nations are generally Portuguese or Spanish, while this study only looked at SE articles published in English.

This argument, however, falls flat because Asia had the second-highest number of SE articles, and Asia's countries do not speak English as their first language. Based on the findings in Figure 2, the obvious recommendation for future research is to conduct more SE research in South America in order to gain a better understanding of how SE occurs in the various countries that make up the continent.

Figure 3 shows countries that has the highest SE publications in our review. With 23 SE pieces, Nigeria was rated the country with highest SE scholarship in this study. With four SE articles, Ghana had less than the amount of Nigerian-based SE research papers in SE, followed by the Kenya with seven and South America with 10. The top five SE were Nigeria and South Africa.

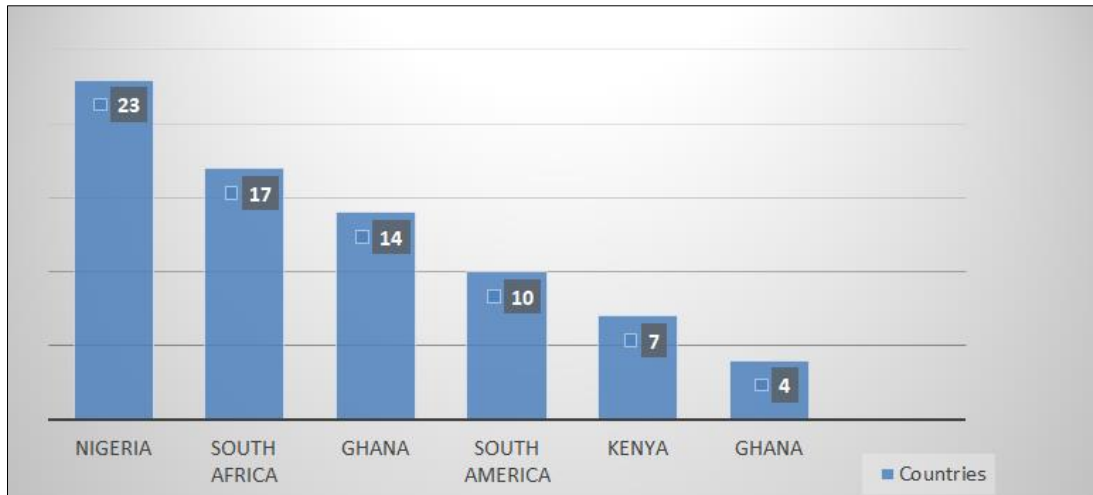


Figure 3: Countries with Most SE Articles

3.3. Has the Focus of SE Scholarship Been Empirical or Conceptual?

For the sake of this work, conceptual papers were defined as SE publications that offered perspectives or recommendations on how SE may be developed or improved in various types projects. These articles did neither carry out any fieldwork nor collect any data and

instead depended on the authors' opinions. All SE publications involving any type of data collecting, on the other hand, were classified as empirical. Figure 4 shows how the 100 SE publications studied in this work were classified based on whether they were conceptual or empirical, based on this classification.

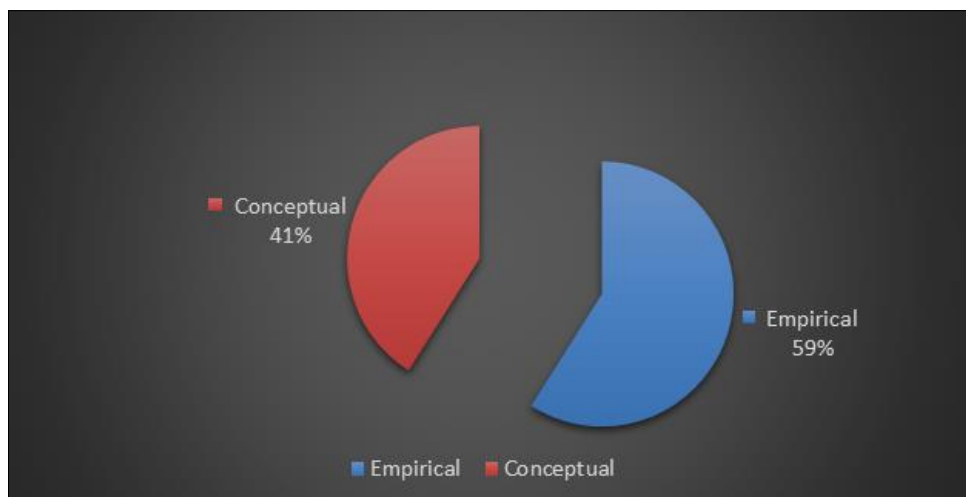


Figure 4: Focus of SE Scholarship

The majority of the SE papers found (59 percent) were empirical, in which it attempts to demonstrate the efficacy of some of the recommendations in organizations by collecting and analysing various data sets and mathematical models (Su, & Wells, 2018). While conceptual in nature, with the authors offering various explanations, prospects, and

issues around the SE. These articles also included suggestions for formalizing, improving, and enhancing the SE process. In the recent decade, there has been a clear imbalance in existing SE studies, with suggested SE ideas significantly below real empirical testing of these theories (see Figure 4).

3.4. What Data Collection Methods Have Been Used in Stakeholders’ Engagement (SE) Scholarship in the Last Decade?

Based on the reviewed SE articles, it was clearly shown that, 57% of the articles employed

primary/survey method/approach (questionnaire, focus group interview, observation etc), while 43% of the articles reviewed utilised secondary/desk-review) and content analysis approach (published articles, data from agencies etc. as depicted in the figure below;

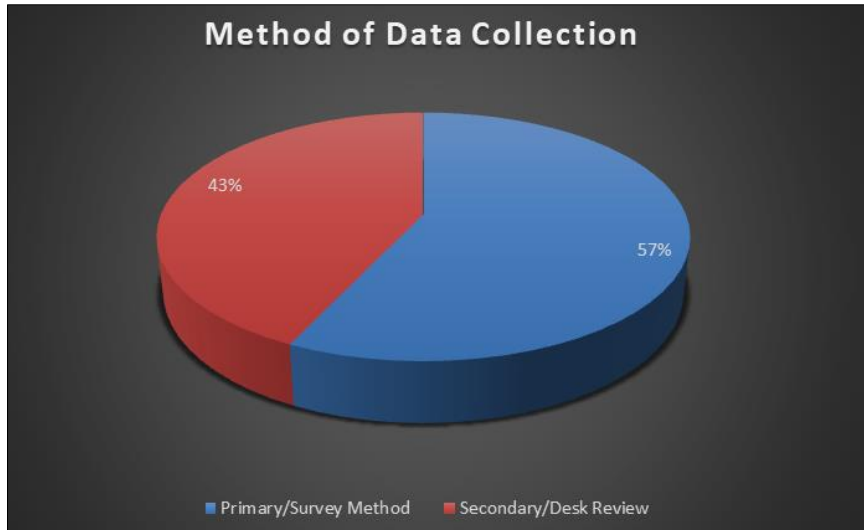


Figure 5: Method of SE data collection

3.5. What Themes Have Extant SE Scholarship Explored from 2014 To 2023?

Four different themes were explored by the 100 SE papers/articles reviewed in this study:

1. Assessing the level of SE in different contexts
2. Challenges to SE in construction projects
3. SE and project performance
4. SE and corporate social responsibility

Figure 6 illustrates information on the extent of the papers that concentrated on each of the aforesaid four themes. It indicates that 39% of the articles reviewed sought to determine the level of SE, 30% assesses the challenges facing SE, 24% examine the impact of SE on project performance, whilst 7% evaluate the role of SE on corporate social responsibility.



Figure 6: Distribution of Sub Themes

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper conducted a thorough review of the 100 Stakeholders’ engagement (SE) research papers published from 2014 to 2023, in order to respond to the

research questions raised in this paper. The study found that interest in SE has been at increase from 2014 to 2022, with Africa found to be productive area in terms of SE research. The research also found that the majority of

the SE papers examined were empirical, with survey data gathering being the most prevalent data collecting method among the few empirical studies undertaken in this field. SE and corporate social responsibility nexus was the least researched issue among the 100 SE publications analysed, with the assessment of the level of SE in different projects contexts being the most regularly explored theme. Despite the fact that this review attempted to include as many SE articles as possible by using papers from 10 reputable publishers, it is still limited by the fact that it does not include all SE articles published from 2014 to 2023.

Future research might take a more rigorous method by expanding the search horizon for SE publications and include other things to present a more complete portrait of SE scholarship's research voyage across time.

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