



The Association Between Strategic Management Practices and the Sustainability of ASEP Centres in Mwanza Urban, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigates the association between strategic management practices and the sustainability of Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) Centres in Mwanza Urban, Tanzania. Despite their central role in the country's second-chance education system, ASEP centres face persistent sustainability challenges that remain inadequately understood. Grounded in institutional sustainability theory, the study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative data from forty (40) facilitators and qualitative data from six (6) centre coordinators. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and thematic analysis. The five constructs—strategic planning, leadership and governance, resource mobilisation, stakeholder involvement, and monitoring and evaluation—were implemented at uniformly low levels. The regression model accounted for 70.9% of the variance in sustainability outcomes ($R^2 = 0.709$). Stakeholder involvement had the largest standardised coefficient in this model ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.002$), while resource mobilisation was non-significant ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.135$). These findings reveal that even marginal variations in weak practices are associated with comparatively larger differences in sustainability outcomes in severely under-institutionalised settings. The study recommends that the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) establish community engagement committees, adopt distributed leadership models, mandate centre-level strategic plans, and introduce

standardised monitoring and evaluation frameworks to address the identified structural deficits.

Keywords: Strategic management, ASEP Centre, Sustainability, Adult Education, Mwanza Urban.

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Introduction

The Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) programme is an initiative developed by the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) to expand access to secondary education for learners who were unable to join or complete formal schooling (IAE, 2019). As part of Tanzania's commitment to equitable and flexible learning, ASEP offers a second chance education opportunity for young people and adults who missed formal schooling (URT, 2020). The programme contributes to improving literacy, strengthening livelihood skills, and promoting employability amongst marginalised groups, thereby supporting national development and inclusive education goals (Peter, 2025). Its learner centred design integrates academic instruction with life skills, mentorship, and psychosocial support, whilst providing flexible learning arrangements that accommodate learners' diverse socio economic circumstances (MoEST, 2023; IAE, 2023; UNESCO, 2015).

The Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) reflects a long-standing institutional response to educational exclusion in Tanzania, tracing its origins to 1969 through the establishment of the National Correspondence Institute (NCI), which was established to extend secondary education to young people and adults excluded from conventional schooling via correspondence-based delivery (IAE, 2020). This mandate was consolidated by the Institute of Adult Education Act No. 12 of 1975, which absorbed the NCI's functions into the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) and vested it with authority to develop, coordinate, manage, and register non-formal education programmes nationally. The programme's delivery model subsequently evolved from correspondence education (*Elimu kwa Njia ya Posta*) to distance education (*Elimu kwa Njia ya Masafa*), mirroring broader pedagogical and technological shifts in non-formal provision (IAE, 2020). A further milestone came in 2013, when the Ministry of Education's Guidelines for the Establishment and Registration of Open Schools standardised open schooling

at the secondary level and strengthened access for excluded learners (URT, 2013). The programme's most recent transformation occurred under the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP) in 2021, when the Institute adopted the designation ASEP to reflect an expanded mandate offering a structured, flexible, and nationally recognised route to secondary education completion (IAE, 2020; World Bank, 2021). This rebranding represents not a discontinuity but the institutional modernisation of a non-formal education system whose foundations have evolved progressively since 1969 (UNESCO, 2020).

The ASEP is delivered through learning facilities known as ASEP centres, located across Tanzania and operated by the IAE in collaboration with accredited private providers (IAE, 2021). IAE and its partners have strengthened ASEP through expanded access for out-of-school youth, working adults, and young mothers; improved facilitator training; competency-based ODL materials; flexible scheduling; and partnerships that have helped position ASEP as an accredited alternative to conventional secondary education (MoEST, 2021; IAE, 2020, 2022, 2023; UNICEF, 2021). The program has benefited from partnerships with government ministries, non-governmental organisations, and local communities to raise awareness and increase participation, while positioning ASEP as an accredited alternative to conventional secondary education (UNICEF, 2021; IAE, 2023).

The sustainability of these centres is critical for ensuring the continued delivery of the ASEP and the attainment of its educational objectives. However, many centres face significant sustainability challenges, including financial instability, shortages of qualified facilitators, inadequate infrastructure, and limited community participation (Lekule & Shirima, 2023; Mushi, 2021; Peter, 2025). These challenges occur within a broader global context in which educational institutions must operate amid financial constraints, policy reforms, digital transformation, and increasing accountability demands (OECD 2019; UNESCO 2020). Under such conditions, the adoption of strategic management practices is essential for ensuring institutional effectiveness, adaptability, and long-term sustainability (Bryson, 2018; Kaplan & Norton, 2008).

Strategic management involves analysing internal and external environments to formulate, implement, and evaluate strategies that enhance institutional performance (Wheelen & Hunger, 2018). Rooted in classical management theory, strategic management has evolved from a purely corporate concept into a tool applicable to public sector and non-profit educational institutions (Bryson, 2018).

Strategic management comprises four core processes: environmental scanning, strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Together, these allow organisations to align their resources and competencies with external demands, thereby securing long-term relevance and operational viability (David & David, 2023). Evidence from developed education systems shows that strategic planning, performance measurement, and evidence-based decision-making are associated with improved institutional sustainability (Davies & Ellison, 2017; Johnson et al., 2020).

In the United Kingdom, Davies and Ellison (2017) found that schools and colleges engaging in structured strategic planning processes demonstrated higher levels of financial stability, staff retention, and learner satisfaction than institutions that do not depend on these management approaches. Their study emphasised that strategic planning enabled educational leaders to anticipate environmental changes, prioritise resource allocation, and sustain programme quality over time, outcomes that are equally relevant to adult and non-formal education institutions operating in resource-constrained environments. Johnson et al. (2020) further demonstrated that universities and colleges in the United Kingdom routinely apply strategic management frameworks to align institutional resources with long-term goals, strengthen their competitive positioning, and respond to technological changes and policy reform.

In the United States, Poister (2010) examined performance measurement systems in American public sector organisations, including educational institutions, and found that organisations with clearly defined performance indicators, regular progress reviews, and data-driven decision-making processes achieved significantly better strategic outcomes than those without such systems. Poister's work highlighted that performance measurement is most effective when it is directly linked to strategic planning. That is, when indicators are derived from strategic objectives and used to inform resource allocation decisions rather than being treated as compliance exercises.

In Australia, Marginson (2018) documented how universities have increasingly adopted competitive strategic positioning models borrowed from the corporate sector, using environmental scanning, stakeholder analysis, and balanced scorecard approaches to sustain institutional relevance in a rapidly globalising higher education market.

Although the adoption of strategic management has been slower in many sub-Saharan African contexts owing to capacity and resource constraints, a growing body of evidence demonstrates its potential in adult and nonformal education systems. Studies from Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana demonstrate that effective planning, stakeholder participation, and monitoring mechanisms can significantly enhance institutional sustainability (Waweru & Omwenga, 2019; Nakabugo, 2020; Amponsah & Asare, 2021).

A recent study in East Africa further underscores that contextual and governance factors shape the effectiveness of strategic practices in similar settings. In Tanzania, for example, Lekule and Shirima (2023) found that the sustainability of open secondary schools is critically determined by the quality of learner support services, including the availability of qualified facilitators, library resources, and guidance and counselling, which directly parallel the operational sustainability challenges facing ASEP centres in South Africa.

In Tanzania, public sector reforms and education policies have emphasised the importance of strategic planning, resource management, and monitoring and evaluation to improve institutional performance (URT 2016). Despite the IAE's efforts to strengthen ASEP centres through community partnerships, flexible learning schedules, and facilitator training, many centres in Mwanza Urban struggle to sustain operations owing to inconsistent funding, resource shortages, and weak management structures (IAE 2024). Records indicate that of the 30 ASEP centres registered in Mwanza Urban between 2015 and 2026, only 12 remained operational by 2026 (IAE, 2026). This high attrition rate underscores the urgency of understanding the factors that determine centre sustainability and the role of strategic management practices in this process.

This study draws on institutional sustainability theory (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990), which posits that organisations sustain themselves by aligning their internal capacities with external environmental demands, and on strategic management frameworks applicable to adult and non-formal education institutions (Bryson, 2018; Mintzberg, 1994). Within the education sector, sustainability is understood as the ability of an institution to maintain its core functions, generate resources, adapt to change, and continue delivering quality services over time (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002; UNESCO, 2020). Drawing on these theoretical foundations, five strategic management constructs were identified and operationalised: strategic

planning, leadership and governance, stakeholder relations, resource mobilisation, and monitoring and evaluation.

While previous studies on adult and non-formal education in Tanzania have focused predominantly on literacy outcomes and programme access, limited empirical attention has been given to how strategic management practices are associated with the sustainability of ASEP centres, a gap that lends urgency to this investigation. This study therefore seeks to examine the extent to which strategic management practices are implemented in ASEP centres in Mwanza Urban and to assess the relationship between these practices and centre sustainability, guided by two research questions: (i) To what extent do ASEP centres in Mwanza Urban implement strategic management practices? (ii) To what extent are strategic management practices associated with the sustainability of ASEP centres in Mwanza Urban?

Methodology

This investigation employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative data from in-depth interviews to assess strategic management practices in ASEP centres in Mwanza Urban. This site was chosen for its diverse socio-economic context and the common sustainability challenges confronting its ASEP centres. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to enable triangulation, allowing the quantitative findings to be contextualised and validated through qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The target population comprised 74 ASEP centre facilitators and 12 coordinators, totalling 86 individuals working across operational ASEP centres in Mwanza. Yamane's (1967) formula was used solely to establish the statistically required target sample size ($n \approx 46$) from the known population of 86 facilitators and coordinators:

$$n = N / (1 + N (e^2))$$

Where $N = 86$ (total population) and $e = 0.10$ (margin of error of 10%).

the calculation yielded: $n = 86 / (1 + 86 \times 0.01) = 86 / 1.86 \approx 46$ participants.

With the required sample size determined, purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) was employed to identify (Patton, 2015) was employed to identify participants meeting the defined role-based inclusion criteria: active involvement in daily ASEP

implementation for facilitators, and management or decision-making responsibility for coordinators. The 46 participants were drawn from six of the 12 currently operational ASEP centres in Mwanza Urban, purposively sampled, and anonymised as Centres A to F. Each centre contributed one coordinator, while facilitators were distributed as follows: Centre A (7), Centre B (7), Centre C (7), Centre D (7), Centre E (6), and Centre F (6), yielding a total of 40 facilitators and six coordinators. This two-stage approach of applying Yamane's formula to determine the required sample size, followed by purposive criteria to identify relevant participants, reflects an accepted practice in mixed-methods research, where contextual relevance is as important as numerical sufficiency (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The data comprised responses from 40 structured questionnaires distributed to centre facilitators and six in-depth interviews conducted with coordinators from selected centres. Responses for each questionnaire item were scored using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. As the scale midpoint, 3.0 represents the neutral point separating agreement and disagreement. Construct and item mean below 3.0 were therefore classified as reflecting low implementation, since they fell on the disagreement side of the scale, indicating that respondents did not, on average, perceive the corresponding practice as adequately implemented. This threshold rule was consistently applied to every construct and item reported in the Findings section.

Sustainability of ASEP Centres, the dependent variable, was operationalised as the continued institutional viability of a centre. For each of the five constructs used to assess strategic management practices - strategic planning practices, stakeholder involvement, leadership and governance, resource mobilisation, and monitoring and evaluation—respondents were asked two distinct sets of items on the same five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree): first, the extent to which the practice was implemented at their centre, and second, the extent to which that practice was perceived to contribute to the centre's sustainability. The sustainability score for each respondent was derived from the second set of items - those assessing perceived contribution to sustainability - averaged to produce a single composite score, while the first set of items (implementation/practice) formed the independent variable constructs used in the regression analysis. The

same threshold rule was applied to the composite sustainability score (mean below 3.0 interpreted as low).

Quantitative data from 40 structured questionnaires were analysed using SPSS Version 26 through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, following the confirmation of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity assumptions. Qualitative data from the six coordinator interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis using inductive and deductive coding. The two datasets were integrated at the interpretation stage using a convergent, side-by-side comparison: quantitative regression and descriptive results were analysed first, after which qualitative themes from the coordinator interviews were compared against the corresponding quantitative construct to explain, contextualise, or qualify it, consistent with a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

This study was conducted under institutional research authorisation granted by the Institute of Adult Education (IAE), Mwanza Campus, permitting access to ASEP centres and the engagement of facilitators and coordinators as participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were veiled using alphanumeric codes during the data management and analysis phases, and questionnaires were administered anonymously, with no names, facilitator or coordinator identification numbers, or centre-specific identifiers recorded on any instrument. Identifying details disclosed during interviews were anonymised at the transcription stage, and all findings were reported in aggregated or anonymised form to ensure that no individual respondent or centre could be identified.

Instrument validity was established using systematic procedures that addressed content validity. Content validity was assessed through a structured expert review: draft questionnaire and interview guide items were evaluated by three adult education content specialists, three IAE Regional ASEP Coordinators, and one IAE research methodologist. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed for each item; items with a CVI below 0.78 were revised or excluded, in line with established standards (Lynn, 1986). A pilot test was conducted with staff members from ASEP centres that were not included in the main study. The instruments were iteratively revised based on the pilot feedback. Reliability was assessed using

Cronbach's alpha; all constructs returned values at or above 0.70, indicating sufficient internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study address the two objectives derived from two key research questions, which sought to examine the extent to which strategic management practices are implemented in ASEP Centres in Mwanza Urban, as well as the association between strategic management practices and the sustainability of ASEP Centres.

The Strategic Management Practices in ASEP Centres in Mwanza Urban

Strategic Planning Practices in ASEP Centres

This section aimed to establish whether the centres adopted strategic planning practices and to assess the level of their implementation. The mean score for the strategic planning construct was 2.14, falling below the neutral midpoint of 3.0, and was therefore classified as low implementation. This finding signal not merely the absence of formal plans but a more systematic deficit in the planning culture, institutional capacity, and organisational orientation of ASEP centres. The lowest-rated practices were the development of long-term strategic plans ($M = 1.86$) and the clarity of mission and vision statements ($M = 2.03$), foundational elements of any functional planning framework, indicating extensive gaps in basic planning processes in the schools. Although strategic objectives are communicated at some level ($M = 2.36$), organisational priorities are rarely reviewed ($M = 2.33$), and the use of systematic environmental scanning is limited ($M = 2.10$), suggesting that even basic operational-level planning is inconsistently or superficially practised. Table 1 summarises the responses related to the strategic planning practices.

Table 1:*Responses on Strategic Planning Practices (Strongly agree = 5, Strongly disagree = 1)*

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Our ASEP Centre has a clearly defined mission and vision.	2.03	0.87	Low
The Centre develops long-term strategic plans.	1.86	0.83	Low
Strategic objectives are clearly communicated to staff.	2.36	1.00	Low
The Centre conducts regular environmental scanning (internal and external analysis).	2.10	1.00	Low
Strategic priorities are reviewed periodically.	2.33	1.02	Low
Overall SP Mean	2.14	0.94	Low

These findings align with the existing literature, demonstrating that effective strategic planning is not merely a bureaucratic exercise in document production but a dynamic, iterative, and participatory process that requires the meaningful articulation of institutional purpose and its integration into daily operations. Strategic planning succeeds when mission and vision statements are not simply written but are actively communicated, internalised, and operationalised across the organisation (Bryson, 2018). The current findings suggest that the ASEP centres have not yet crossed this threshold yet. Similarly, Poister (2010) identifies weak planning cultures and limited technical capacity as constraints that frequently hinder the application of strategic management within public bodies and educational institutions which are also visible within ASEP centres. This is further reinforced by Allison and Kaye (2015), who demonstrated that organisations operating without formalised strategic plans tend to exhibit greater resource misallocation, staff disorientation, and institutional drift over time.

The significance of strategic planning for educational sustainability is not merely theoretical; it has practical implications. Empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and relatively low-resource educational contexts demonstrates that institutions with structured planning processes are better equipped to manage uncertainty, mobilise stakeholder support and adapt to shifting policy and funding environments (Haule & Mushi, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). The absence of long-term plans is particularly concerning, given that ASEP centres operate in fragile funding

environments, where the inability to anticipate and plan for resource fluctuations can rapidly undermine programme continuity. David and David (2019) emphasise that strategic plans function as navigational instruments, establishing milestones against which institutional progress can be measured and course adjustments made, something that ASEP centres currently lack.

The quantitative findings are substantiated by qualitative evidence from the centre coordinators, none of whom reported that their centres had documented strategic plans. Decision-making is highly centralised and externally directed, with centres functioning primarily as implementation units for directives from the IAE and other higher authorities. Centre C's coordinator articulated this as follows:

Currently, we do not have an independent strategic plan that guides our operations or sets priorities. Instead, we relied entirely on the directives and instructions provided by the IAE and district offices. Our programmes and activities are largely designed in response to the guidance we receive from these authorities. (Centre C coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025)

This account demonstrates a critical institutional paradox: ASEP centres are expected to deliver locally relevant, context-sensitive adult education, yet their planning is entirely dictated by authorities distant from the communities they serve. This type of externally driven, reactive planning has been identified in the literature as a structural barrier to institutional sustainability in adult education systems (UNESCO 2023). Bhola (2002) cautioned that adult education programs in developing countries often suffer from 'planning by edict', a condition in which central authorities substitute directives for collaborative, evidence-based planning. This concern remains evident in the more recent literature on adult education governance (UNESCO, 2023), which highlights the importance of participatory planning and local ownership in program implementation. Hristov et al. (2022) further demonstrate, in their study of sustainable governance strategies, that integrating strategic objectives with measurable performance indicators significantly improves organisational outcomes and long-term sustainability performance. The lack of such integration within ASEP centres represents a fundamental and urgent vulnerability to the system.

Leadership and Governance Practices in ASEP Centres

The findings in Table 2 show that leadership and governance achieved an overall mean score of 2.36. This construct had the highest score overall, although it remained below the neutral midpoint of 3.0 and was therefore classified as having

a low implementation. Visionary and goal-oriented leadership (M = 2.48), accountability mechanisms (M = 2.53), ethical governance (M = 2.41), and defined governance structures (M = 2.39) all indicate that some degree of organisational stability exists, but at low levels. Participatory decision-making (M = 2.00) received the lowest rating within the construct, indicating that leadership processes remain largely top-down.

Table 2:

Responses on Leadership and Governance Practices (Strongly agree=5, Strongly disagree =1)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Leadership in the Centre is visionary and goal-oriented.	2.48	1.09	Low
Decision-making processes are participatory.	2.00	1.02	Low
There is accountability in financial and administrative matters	2.53	1.00	Low
Governance structures are clearly defined.	2.39	0.97	Low
Leadership promotes transparency and ethical practices.	2.41	0.94	Low
Overall LG Mean	2.36	1.00	Low

This finding resonates with the literature on broader governance. Bush (2020) critically examines how bureaucratic and hierarchical leadership models, still prevalent across educational institutions in Africa and beyond, create governance cultures in which structural clarity coexists with functional exclusion. The presence of formal roles and titles does not translate into participatory engagement when decision-making authority is concentrated at the top of the hierarchy. Northouse (2021) similarly argues that accountability and even visionary leadership, in the absence of inclusive participatory processes, are insufficient for sustainable institutional improvement. The ability of leadership to inspire commitment, foster ownership, and generate adaptive capacity depends critically on the degree to which staff and stakeholders are engaged as co-producers of institutional direction, a quality that is demonstrably absent in the governance profiles of the ASEP centres.

Transformational leadership theory provides an analytical lens through which these findings can be interpreted. Transformational leaders are characterised by their capacity to articulate an inspiring vision, engage followers intellectually and emotionally, and cultivate intrinsic motivation through empowerment and a shared purpose (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2021). The low score for participatory decision-making suggests that the leadership of the ASEP centres has not yet achieved the transformational threshold required for sustained institutional growth. This is particularly consequential given Leithwood and Sun's (2018) finding that collaborative leadership, characterised by distributed responsibility, mutual accountability, and shared problem-solving, is necessary for sustained institutional growth in educational settings. Without such collaborative infrastructure, ASEP centres remain dependent on the sustained availability and commitment of individual leaders, creating significant succession and resilience risks.

Recent empirical evidence from Tanzania supports this view. Haule and Mushi (2024), in a study of strategic leadership in Tanzanian organisations, found that strategic leadership practices significantly improved organisational performance through better decision-making, clearer strategic direction, and more robust control mechanisms. However, they also found that these benefits were amplified when leadership was distributed and participatory rather than concentrated. Gaybullaev and Strode (2026) similarly demonstrated that leadership styles, particularly transformational and strategic approaches, are closely associated with sustainability outcomes and organisational effectiveness across diverse institutional contexts. The governance profiles of the ASEP centres fall short of both benchmarks.

Qualitative data provide essential contextual texture to statistical patterns. Centre A's coordinator explained this as follows:

Our leadership structure is somewhat defined, making it difficult for everyone to understand their role and responsibility. However, most major decisions are made at higher administrative levels rather than within offices. We regularly receive instructions and directives from the district or IAE to guide our operations. (Centre A coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

Centre F's coordinator similarly emphasised the absence of collaborative governance forums saying:

We rarely hold regular meetings that allow all staff members to share their ideas and opinions on the matter. Most of the time, decisions regarding managing issues are made by the centre owner, and teachers are involved in matters related

to teaching activities and when necessary. (Centre F coordinator, personal interview, 17 November 2025).

These narratives illuminate a consistent pattern: even where governance structures formally exist, they function as shells that contain rather than enable democratic institutional life. This mirrors the structural-functional gap that Bush (2020) identifies in institutions that possess the outwards architecture of governance without its animating substance. Akpan et al. (2020) argue that strong and inclusive leadership and governance systems are critical not only for operational effectiveness but also for staff buy-in and program sustainability, precisely the dimensions on which ASEP centres are most deficient. This implies that governance reform in ASEP centres must address not only structural features (roles, titles, reporting lines) but also the relational and cultural dimensions of leadership practice that determine whether staff and communities experience those structures as enabling or constraining.

Resource Mobilisation Practices in ASEP Centres

Data analysis in table 3 shows that resource mobilisation yielded an overall mean score of 2.30, which is below the neutral midpoint and is classified as indicating low implementation. The distribution of scores across individual items reveals multiple dimensions of resource fragility: income sources are poorly diversified ($M = 2.15$), partnerships for resource support are underdeveloped ($M = 2.22$), and financial planning mechanisms are inadequate ($M = 2.30$). Although the efficient use of existing resources ($M = 2.44$) and the adequacy of qualified staff ($M = 2.37$) were marginally higher, they remained at low levels, indicating that operational sustainability is compromised by insufficient resource inflows and sub-optimal management of the available inputs.

Table 3:

Responses on Resource Mobilisation Practices (Strongly agree = 5, Strongly disagree = 1)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
The Centre has stable financial planning mechanisms.	2.30	0.88	Low
Income sources are diversified.	2.15	0.89	Low
Financial resources are efficiently utilised.	2.44	0.93	Low
The Centre has adequate qualified staff.	2.37	0.95	Low
Partnerships support resource availability.	2.22	0.91	Low
Overall RM Mean	2.30	0.91	Low

These findings are consistent with a substantial body of global evidence demonstrating that sustainable community-based education programs require not only multiple and diverse funding streams but also structured mechanisms for generating, managing, and renewing those streams over time (UNESCO, 2020). The particularly low score for income diversification ($M = 2.15$) is consistent with Fowler's (2019) finding that the majority of community-based learning centres in sub-Saharan Africa remain trapped in narrow, traditional funding channels, typically government transfers and irregular NGO grants which create acute vulnerability to funding fluctuations and donor exit. When a single or dominant funding source is disrupted, centres lacking alternative revenue mechanisms are unable to sustain operations, a structural fragility that is clearly present across the ASEP system.

The low adequacy score for qualified staff ($M = 2.37$) resonates with the findings of Lekule and Shirima (2023), whose study of open secondary schools in Dar es Salaam demonstrated that poor facilitator remuneration, ad hoc employment contracts, and the absence of professional development opportunities collectively undermined staff commitment, eroded instructional quality, and directly threatened institutional sustainability. In the context of ASEP centres, where qualified adult education facilitators are both scarce and poorly remunerated, these challenges are compounded by the structural difficulty of competing with formal sector institutions for professional talent.

Qualitative data from the centre coordinators vividly corroborate these resource constraints. Three of the six coordinators explicitly acknowledged the absence of systematic fundraising, partnership building, and community-based resource generation strategies. The coordinator of Centre C explained this as follows:

Our centre mainly depends on the IAE to provide training opportunities and essential learning materials. Occasionally, we receive additional support from NGOs that assist with specific projects and needs. However, such assistance is irregular and not part of a structured partnership. Currently, we lack a clear strategy for generating our resources. (Centre C coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

This account highlights the critical distinction between passive resource dependency and active resource mobilisation. ASEP centres occupy a fundamentally passive position in the resource ecosystem, receiving rather than generating and reacting rather than planning which is incompatible with sustained institutional viability. The URT (2020) identified this same pattern across community-based education centres in Tanzania, finding that weak financial autonomy structurally constrains operational flexibility and severely limits the ability of centres to adapt programmes to evolving community needs. UNESCO (2022) emphasises, in its global framework for adult education sustainability, that stable and diversified funding, strong partnership networks, and institutional resource management capacity are non-negotiable prerequisites for programme continuity. Currently, ASEP centres lack all three prerequisites.

Stakeholders' Involvement Practices in ASEP Centres

As presented in table 4, stakeholder involvement yielded an overall mean score of 2.24, which fell below the neutral midpoint and was classified as low implementation. The item-level data revealed particularly acute deficits in community participation ($M = 2.08$) and in the integration of learner feedback into decision making ($M = 2.21$). Engagement with local authorities ($M = 2.24$), communication between management and stakeholders ($M = 2.30$), and collaboration with NGOs and private institutions ($M = 2.36$) were marginally higher but remained low. Collectively, these scores paint a portrait of institutions that are structurally isolated from the communities and partners they are meant to serve, a condition that is both a cause and a consequence of institutional fragility.

Table 4:

Responses on Stakeholder Involvement Practices (Strongly agree = 5, Strongly disagree = 1)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Community members are actively involved in Centre activities	2.08	0.80	Low
Local authorities support the Centre	2.24	0.80	Low
The Centre collaborates with NGOs and private institutions	2.36	0.90	Low
Learners' feedback is considered in decision-making	2.21	0.90	Low
Communication between management and stakeholders is effective	2.30	0.80	Low
Overall SI Mean	2.24	0.83	Low

These findings speak directly to the foundational views of stakeholder theory, as originally articulated by Freeman (1984), who argued that organisations depend on the sustained support, legitimacy, and active engagement of their stakeholder networks for long-term viability. Freeman's framework holds that stakeholder relationships are not merely instrumentally useful for resource acquisition but are constitutive of organisational identity and social legitimacy. Organisations that systematically exclude stakeholders from planning and decision-making processes erode the social capital and institutional trust that make community-embedded programmes viable over time. The extremely low score for community participation ($M = 2.08$) is therefore not merely an operational deficiency but a signal of deeper legitimacy and vulnerability of the community.

In his foundational analysis of community-based education programmes, Rogers (2014) argues that programme success is intrinsically associated with the depth and authenticity of local community involvement in defining programme priorities, monitoring implementation, and holding institutions accountable. Where communities are excluded from these processes, programs become externally imposed interventions rather than locally owned services, a distinction that has profound implications for learner motivation, retention, and advocacy. Epstein (2018) similarly contends that durable partnerships characterised by mutual trust,

shared purpose, and formalised engagement mechanisms enhance programme relevance and institutional sustainability in ways that transactional or episodic relationships cannot. The absence of such structured partnerships within ASEP centres is directly reflected in the low NGO collaboration score ($M = 2.36$), where engagement is driven by NGO schedules rather than institutional partnership frameworks.

Evidence from comparable African contexts supports this conclusion. Mwita (2020) and Adeleke (2022) found that consortium-based partnerships, characterised by shared ownership and mutual accountability, were among the most reliable predictors of program sustainability in East African community education settings. More recently, Tangara et al. (2025) demonstrated in a Kenyan study that stakeholder engagement had a highly significant positive effect on project performance ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$), with engagement mechanisms enhancing coordination, transparency, and alignment between institutional activities and local needs. The parallelism between the Kenyan and Tanzanian findings suggests that the governance and participation deficits identified in this study are not distinctive to ASEP centres but reflect broader systemic patterns in how community-based adult education is institutionalised in East Africa.

Qualitative evidence from coordinators provides crucial contextual depth. Centre E's coordinator explained:

We would like to involve the community more in our programs and activities, but there is no formal system for doing so. Most decisions regarding planning and implementation are made by managers or education officers. Consequently, community members rarely have the opportunity to share their views. (Centre F coordinator, personal interview, 17 November 2025).

Centre D's coordinator illuminated the long-term consequences of structural non-engagement:

NGOs occasionally come to the aid of the community, but no established partnership framework guides or sustains these collaborations. Consequently, the level of engagement depends entirely on NGOs' schedules and priorities. (Centre D coordinator, personal interview, 17 November 2025).

These accounts reveal an important structural dimension: the problem is not the absence of goodwill towards community engagement but the absence of formalised institutional mechanisms, committees, frameworks, feedback channels, and partnership agreements that would translate such goodwill into sustained practice. Bryson (2018) forcefully argues that inclusive and participatory governance does

not emerge spontaneously and must be deliberately designed into institutional processes. Without such deliberate structural provisions, ASEP centres will continue to generate communities that are disengaged and unwilling to provide the advocacy, voluntary resources, and social protection that community-owned programmes require. In the Tanzanian context, Lekule and Shirima (2023) observed that learners who lacked access to guidance, counselling, and institutional support, core forms of stakeholder engagement, exhibited diminished motivation and higher dropout rates, illustrating the direct educational consequences of structural disengagement. UNESCO (2023) similarly emphasises that adult learning programmes demonstrate significantly greater sustainability when communities, learners, and partners are meaningfully involved not only in programme delivery but also in planning, governance review, and accountability mechanisms.

Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in ASEP Centres

As shown in table 5, monitoring and evaluation recorded the joint highest mean score alongside Leadership and Governance ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.98$); however, this score remains below the neutral midpoint and is classified as reflecting low implementation. The item-level pattern is revealing: performance monitoring systems achieved the highest score within the construct ($M = 2.44$), suggesting that some basic data collection is occurring. However, the use of performance data for decision-making ($M = 2.40$), the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms ($M = 2.36$), regular evaluations ($M = 2.31$), and the clarity of performance indicators ($M = 2.27$) all trailed behind, indicating that data collection activities, where they occur, are not embedded within coherent evaluation frameworks or connected to learning and adaptive management cycles.

Table 5:

Responses on Monitoring and Evaluation Practices (Strongly agree = 5, Strongly disagree = 1)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
The Centre has a performance monitoring system.	2.44	0.86	Low
Regular evaluations are conducted.	2.31	0.91	Low
Performance data are used for decision-making.	2.40	0.88	Low
Feedback mechanisms are effective.	2.36	0.93	Low
There are clear performance indicators for programmes.	2.27	0.92	Low
Overall ME Mean	2.36	0.90	Low

Kusek and Rist (2017) argue that monitoring and evaluation systems contribute meaningfully to institutional sustainability only when characterised by clearly defined and theoretically grounded performance indicators, standardised and routinely applied data collection tools, and systematic cycles of review in which the findings are translated into management decisions. None of these characteristics are currently evident in ASEP centres. The OECD (2013) further emphasises that effective evaluation systems require institutional architecture designated M&E functions, dedicated personnel, structured feedback pathways, and senior leadership commitment that transforms M&E from an episodic compliance activity into a routine institutional practice. In the absence of such an architecture, organisations remain structurally incapable of the evidence-based adaptation that sustainability demands.

Kothari (2014) similarly argues that organisations without institutionalised evaluation processes face persistent difficulties in achieving strategic growth, improving quality, or demonstrating accountability to funders and communities, all of which are prerequisites for sustained organisational legitimacy. UNESCO's GRALE 5 (2022) reinforces this point in the adult education context, identifying regular performance reviews as a foundational condition for quality assurance and governance sustainability in adult learning systems.

Recent empirical evidence corroborates the significance of M&E deficits. Lometo and Nyamwaya (2024) found, in a study of community-based organisations in East Africa, that organisations with strong M&E systems achieved significantly higher program effectiveness, precisely because decision-making was anchored in performance data and stakeholder feedback rather than intuition or hierarchical directives. Amuni et al. (2025) further demonstrated that participatory evaluation approaches, in which beneficiaries and community stakeholders are actively involved in assessing program progress, significantly enhance project performance, institutional ownership, and long-term sustainability. The absence of such approaches in ASEP centres reinforces the stakeholder exclusion pattern documented earlier and compounds its negative consequences for institutional resilience.

The qualitative accounts from the coordinators provide particularly illuminating illustrations of how these structural M&E deficits manifest in the daily institutional life. The Centre B coordinator explained:

We routinely collect basic data on learners, such as attendance records and enrolment figures. However, there is no consistent system for evaluating learning outcomes or overall progress in this area. Assessment activities are rarely conducted, and feedback from learners is limited. Reports are usually written only when they are requested. (Centre B coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

Centre F's coordinator highlighted the compliance-driven orientation with striking clarity that, "M&E occurs mostly when the district or IAE requests a report. We do not have our own schedule or an evaluation system. We mostly record numbers and do not analyse performance" (Centre F coordinator, personal interview, 17 November 2025).

Centre A's coordinator articulated the practical consequences of the M&E vacuum for institutional planning: "We only conduct evaluations when supervisors request reports, mostly regarding student enrolment and not the operational status of the entire centre. If we had a routine M&E system, it would help us plan better and solve problems earlier" (Centre A coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

These narratives demonstrate that the M&E deficit in ASEP centres is not primarily a technical problem; coordinators clearly understand the value of evaluation and can articulate what a functioning system would enable. On the other hand, it is a

structural and cultural problem: the absence of institutional routines, tools, and mandates that would normalise evaluation as a core management function. Addressing this will require not only the provision of technical M&E training but also the creation of institutional conditions, such as scheduled review cycles, standardised data tools, management expectations, and supervisor accountability, that make learning-oriented evaluation the default mode of institutional practice.

Strategic Management Practices and the Sustainability of ASEP Centres in Mwanza Urban

The model summary output in Table 6 reveals a strong positive association between strategic management practices and sustainability ($R = 0.842$). The five predictors collectively explained approximately 71% of the variance in sustainability outcomes ($R^2 = 0.709$), indicating a substantial model fit. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the Adjusted $R^2 = 0.671$, confirming that the regression model remained robust. The Durbin Watson statistic (1.98) suggests that the residuals are independent, satisfying the assumption of independent error.

Table 6:

Model Summary

R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error	Durbin–Watson
0.842	0.709	0.671	0.509	1.98

An ANOVA test of the overall regression model confirmed that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(5, 34) = 16.74$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that management practices collectively accounted for a substantial share of the variance in sustainability ($R^2 = 0.709$).

Table 7:

ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)
Regression	21.712	5	4.342	16.74	< 0.001
Residual (Error)	8.820	34	0.259		
Total	30.532	39			

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis (Table 8) show that four of the five predictors were statistically significant: Stakeholder Involvement ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.002$), Leadership and Governance ($\beta = 0.32$, $p = 0.005$), Strategic Planning ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.021$), and Monitoring and Evaluation ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.039$). These findings indicate that higher levels of strategic management practices are associated with greater sustainability in ASEP centres. Resource Mobilisation showed a positive association with sustainability ($\beta = 0.19$), but the effect was not statistically significant ($p = 0.135$).

Table 8:

Multiple Linear Regression Coefficients

Predictor Variable	Unstandardised B	Std. Error	Standardised Beta (β)	T	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	0.327	0.254	—	1.29	0.205
Strategic Planning (SP)	0.231	0.096	0.25	2.41	0.021
Leadership & Governance (LG)	0.299	0.100	0.32	2.99	0.005
Resource Mobilisation (RM)	0.166	0.108	0.19	1.53	0.135
Stakeholder Involvement (SI)	0.324	0.096	0.35	3.37	0.002
Monitoring & Evaluation (ME)	0.217	0.101	0.25	2.15	0.039

Strategic Planning and the Sustainability of ASEP Centres

Strategic planning demonstrated a significant and positive association with the sustainability of ASEP centres ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 2.41$, $p = 0.021$). This finding confirms that centres with clearer missions, better-defined strategic objectives, and more systematic planning processes are associated with higher sustainability. The coefficient implies that holding other variables constant, a unit improvement in strategic planning practices is associated with a 0.231 unit increase in sustainability outcomes, a substantively meaningful effect, particularly given that the construct is currently implemented at uniformly low levels.

This finding is consistent with the broad and robust literature demonstrating that formal planning frameworks enable organisations to reduce uncertainty, prioritise

activities and establish measurable milestones that guide decision-making and facilitate adaptive management (Bryson, 2018; David & David, 2019). Allison and Kaye (2015) argue that strategic planning has a particular institutional function beyond its technical outputs: the process of planning itself, stakeholder consultation, environmental analysis, and priority setting builds a shared understanding, institutional cohesion, and collective ownership that enhances organisational resilience. Currently, ASEP centres are deprived of these process benefits because they operate without centre-level strategic planning.

The qualitative findings illuminate the consequences of this deprivation. Centre A's coordinator explained this as follows:

We do not have a strategic plan. We work on instructions from the IAE or district. Most activities depend on directives rather than on long-term planning. We only plan short-term activities because there is no guidance or resources for long-term goals. (Centre A coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

This account reveals how the absence of strategic planning fosters a form of institutional short-termism, an inability to think or act beyond the immediate directive, which is fundamentally incompatible with sustainability. Hristov et al. (2022), in their study of sustainable governance strategies, demonstrate that integrating strategic objectives with measurable performance indicators significantly improves organisational outcomes and long-term sustainability performance, a finding that directly confirms the practical value of strategic planning investments for institutions such as ASEP centres. In the Tanzanian policy context, URT (2016) emphasises the centrality of strategic planning capacity to the realisation of the Education and Training Policy objectives, suggesting that the planning deficit in ASEP centres also represents a policy implementation gap of national significance.

Leadership and Governance for the Sustainability of ASEP Centres

Leadership and governance showed the second strongest significant association with ASEP centre sustainability ($\beta = 0.32$, $t = 2.99$, $p = 0.005$), confirming that centres with more effective, ethical, and participatory leadership are associated with significantly greater institutional sustainability. This finding is theoretically coherent: leadership and governance function as the integrating mechanism through which all other institutional practices—planning, resource mobilisation, stakeholder

engagement, and evaluation—are enabled, coordinated, and given institutional purpose.

This finding is consistent with the propositions of transformational leadership theory. Bass and Riggio (2006), a view reaffirmed in more recent research by Gaybullaev and Strode (2026), argued that transformational leaders cultivate the institutional conditions necessary for sustained organisational improvement by articulating a shared vision, intellectually stimulating staff, fostering a sense of empowerment, and modelling ethical practice. These leadership behaviours are theorised to enhance intrinsic motivation, interpersonal trust, and collective capacity, all of which underpin long-term institutional sustainability. Northouse (2021) extended this framework to educational institutions, demonstrating that leadership effectiveness, particularly its participatory and ethical dimensions, is among the most consistent predictors of sustained institutional performance.

Leithwood and Sun's (2018) meta-analytic review provides further support, demonstrating that collaborative leadership characterised by distributed responsibility, mutual accountability, and inclusive decision-making generates organisational learning, adaptive problem-solving, and sustained improvement across educational institutions. Akpan et al. (2020) confirm, in a study of community-based educational programs in sub-Saharan Africa, that strong and inclusive leadership and governance systems are critical for program sustainability and staff buy-in, findings directly applicable to the ASEP context. Gaybullaev and Strode (2026) similarly provide recent global evidence linking transformational and strategic leadership styles to superior sustainability outcomes, reinforcing the theoretical and empirical case for governance transformation in ASEP centres.

Centre A's coordinator described the governance reality candidly saying:

Most decisions are made by the centre's owner. Staff involvement is rare in this process. We only implemented what we were told. I think that if decision-making involved all staff who know the learners we interact with, this would help make decisions that would help our centre last longer. (Centre A coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

This reflection is notable for its implicit recognition of what participatory governance would offer: better-informed decisions grounded in frontline knowledge, greater staff investment in institutional outcomes, and a more adaptive culture. The coordinator's intuition aligns precisely with the theoretical predictions of distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006), which argues that the knowledge

required for effective institutional management is distributed across organisational members and can only be accessed through participatory governance structures.

Resource Mobilisation and the Sustainability of ASEP Centres

Resource mobilisation demonstrated a positive but statistically non-significant association with the sustainability of ASEP centres when other strategic management variables were controlled ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 1.53$, $p = 0.135$). This finding is counterintuitive, given the richness of qualitative evidence documenting severe resource constraints, irregular donor support, the absence of financial planning, and dependence on IAE directives that would, at first glance, would be expected to undermine sustainability. However, the non-significance of Resource Mobilisation in the multivariate model does not imply that resources are unimportant to sustainability; rather, it suggests that the governance, planning, and engagement systems through which resources are mobilised and deployed matter more than resource availability in isolation.

This interpretation is theoretically supported by several studies. Anheier (2014) argues that poor governance structurally prevents resources, even when available, from being effectively converted into organisational outcomes, creating what he terms an institutional conversion deficit. In organisations lacking governance capacity, financial resources cannot be strategically allocated, human resources cannot be effectively directed, and partnership resources cannot be systematically leveraged, all of which reduce the marginal contribution of additional resource inputs to sustainability. Fowler (2019) similarly contends that resource sufficiency, outside a coherent strategic management context, does not deliver institutional stability. The non-significant association for Resource Mobilisation suggests that resource availability alone may not translate into sustainability outcomes without accompanying governance and planning capacity.

Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) resource dependence theory predicts a strong direct relationship between resource availability and organisational survival. The current findings complicate this prediction by demonstrating that governance-mediated resource utilisation, rather than mere availability, is the operative mechanism of this relationship. This governance-mediation proposition has important practical implications: donor investment in ASEP centres that target resource provision without simultaneously addressing governance, planning, and stakeholder engagement capacity, may yield limited and unsustainable returns. Shen et al.

(2024) provide recent empirical support for this position, demonstrating that resource integration must be combined with strategic design, leadership, and stakeholder engagement to produce meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Centre E's coordinator articulated the following:

We occasionally receive financial or material support from donors and district offices. Although valuable, this assistance tends to arrive at unpredictable times and in varying quantities. Because the support is irregular, planning activities or allocating resources effectively is difficult. (Centre E coordinator, personal interview, 17 November 2025).

The coordinator's account reveals that the problem is not only the irregularity of resources but also the absence of institutional infrastructure planning systems, financial management routines, and strategic allocation frameworks that would enable the effective deployment of available resources regardless of their irregularity. This is precisely the resource governance link that Anheier (2014) identifies as the critical bottleneck in community-based organisations in developing countries.

Stakeholders' Involvement and the Sustainability of ASEP Centres

Stakeholder involvement had the largest standardised coefficient of the five predictors examined and was statistically significant for ASEP centre sustainability ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 3.37$, $p = 0.002$). This finding is particularly significant theoretically and practically because it coexists with the finding that Stakeholder Involvement was simultaneously among the least implemented practices ($M = 2.24$), a paradox that has important implications for institutional reform priorities. The combination of high predictive power and severe underutilisation suggests that improving stakeholder involvement warrants priority attention in institutional reform efforts, given the combination of predictive weight and current under utilisation of ASEP centres.

This finding provides powerful empirical support for Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, which holds that organisations depend on stakeholder legitimacy, multi-stakeholder support, and community-embeddedness for long-term viability. In the specific context of community-based adult education, stakeholder legitimacy is not a peripheral concern but a core institutional resource: community members who are actively engaged as partners in program planning and governance become advocates, voluntary resource contributors, and protectors of institutional continuity in ways that externally imposed programs cannot. Rogers (2014)

identifies community ownership generated through meaningful participation as the most reliable predictor of adult education program sustainability in resource-constrained settings, and

In severely under-institutionalised settings, where stakeholder engagement is uniformly and extremely low, even marginal improvements in engagement quality may be associated with meaningful gains in sustainability by activating community legitimacy, triggering volunteer resource contributions, and fostering local advocacy that protects programmes from funding cuts and administrative neglect. Bryson (2018) makes a related argument, demonstrating that inclusive participatory governance catalyses commitment and improves strategic alignment between institutional plans and community needs in ways that produce compounded returns over time.

Empirical support from comparable contexts strengthens this interpretation. Mwita (2020) and Adeleke (2022) found that community partnership frameworks characterised by shared ownership, mutual accountability, and structured engagement mechanisms were among the most reliable predictors of sustainability in East African community education programmes. Tangara et al. (2025) provide direct evidence from Kenya, demonstrating that stakeholder engagement has a highly significant positive effect on project performance ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$), with participatory mechanisms enhancing coordination, transparency, and alignment with local development needs. The consistency of these findings across East African contexts suggests the robustness of the stakeholder involvement sustainability relationship and reinforces the theoretical argument that community-embedded governance is a structural prerequisite for institutional viability.

Qualitative data reveal the institutional mechanisms through which stakeholder exclusion undermines sustainability. Centre A's coordinator noted the following:

We do not hold formal meetings with the stakeholders. Most activities are decided at the centre level, and the community, mostly parents, guardians, and learners, is informed after decisions are made. Some learners quit when they are not satisfied with the decisions made by their teachers. (Centre A coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

In addition, Centre D's coordinator directly connected the absence of engagement to programme fragility, noting, "If the community and NGOs are not involved, sustaining activities becomes difficult. When support ends, we have no backup

because stakeholders are not part of the planning” (Centre D coordinator, personal interview, 17 November 2025).

These narratives capture the sustainability logic of stakeholder engagement: institutions that build stakeholder relationships proactively develop redundant support networks that buffer them against the loss of any single resource. Institutions that fail to do so are left structurally exposed to funding interruptions, volunteer withdrawal, and community disengagement, the cumulative consequence of which is institutional failure. Lekule and Shirima (2023) observed this dynamic in the Tanzanian context, finding that learners who lacked access to institutional support and guidance, a core dimension of stakeholder engagement, experienced diminished motivation and poorer academic performance, illustrating how stakeholder exclusion degrades institutional outcomes from the learner’s perspective.

Monitoring and Evaluation for the Sustainability of ASEP Centres

Monitoring and evaluation demonstrated a statistically significant and positive association with ASEP centre sustainability ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 2.15$, $p = 0.039$), confirming that centres which implement systematic performance measurement, feedback collection, and data-informed decision-making are associated with greater adaptive capacity and long-term institutional viability. The equal standardised coefficient for Monitoring and Evaluation and Strategic Planning (both $\beta = 0.25$) highlights the complementary and mutually reinforcing nature of these two constructs: strategic planning establishes the goals and objectives against which performance is measured, while M&E provides the feedback loops through which plans can be evaluated, updated, and refined.

This finding is consistent with results-based management (RBM) frameworks, which state that continuous evaluation is the mechanism through which evidence-based decision-making is institutionalised and organisational accountability is maintained (OECD, 2019). Kusek and Rist (2017) argue that M&E systems strengthen institutional capacity for self-correction by enabling organisations to identify operational bottlenecks, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and refine approaches in real time, all of which are foundational capacities for organisations operating in dynamic and resource-constrained environments such as those faced by ASEP centres.

The significance of M&E findings is further underscored by Kothari's (2014) argument that organisations without institutionalised evaluation processes face persistent strategic stagnation, such that they are unable to objectively assess their own performance, identify where to improve, demonstrate impact to funders and communities, and make the evidence-based case for continued or expanded support. UNESCO's GRALE 5 (2022) situates this argument within the adult education sustainability literature, specifically identifying routine performance review as a foundational condition for sound governance and long-term programme viability. Recent evidence from East Africa reinforces these conclusions: Lometo and Nyamwaya (2024) found that organisations with strong M&E systems achieved significantly higher programme effectiveness, while Amuni et al. (2025) demonstrated that participatory evaluation approaches significantly enhanced project performance, institutional ownership, and sustainability outcomes, findings that directly validate the emphasis placed on M&E strengthening in this study's recommendations.

The qualitative narratives reveal that ASEP coordinators are not unaware of these program dynamics. Centre C's coordinator explained:

We collect attendance data but rarely analyse them to determine the strengths and weaknesses of our centre. We do not have proper evaluation mechanisms. Without proper evaluation, we cannot improve our centre or foresee future threats that could accelerate its closure. (Centre C coordinator, personal interview, 13 November 2025).

This statement is significant because it demonstrates that the M&E deficit is not rooted in ignorance of M&E value but in the absence of structural conditions that would enable data analysis and use in the sector. This distinction has important implications for institutional reform: investment in M&E capability must address not only training in data collection tools, but also the institutional architecture review meeting schedules, data analysis routines, management expectations, and supervisor accountability that would normalise the use of evidence in decision-making.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the association between strategic management practices and the sustainability of ASEP centres in Mwanza, Tanzania. The findings revealed that the five strategic management practice constructs—namely, Strategic Planning,

Leadership and Governance, Resource Mobilisation, Stakeholder Involvement, and Monitoring and Evaluation—are implemented at low levels. Despite this, multiple regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between strategic management practices and sustainability ($R = 0.842$, $R^2 = 0.709$), with four constructs: Strategic Planning ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.021$), Leadership and Governance ($\beta = 0.32$, $p = 0.005$), Stakeholder Involvement ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.002$), and Monitoring and Evaluation ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.039$) significantly associated with sustainability outcomes.

Three findings are of particular empirical significance in this study. First, the ‘low implementation paradox’: all five constructs were implemented at uniformly low levels, yet the regression model explained approximately 71% of the variance in sustainability outcomes ($R^2 = 0.709$). This reveals that in severely under-institutionalised settings, even marginal variations in weak practices have disproportionately large sustainability consequences. Second, a notable implementation impact gap emerged: stakeholder involvement had the largest standardised coefficient of sustainability ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.002$), yet it was simultaneously among the least implemented practices ($M = 2.24$). This finding suggests that improving stakeholder involvement presents the greatest opportunity for enhancing centre sustainability, given its high predictive power and current underutilisation. This may be attributed to limited frameworks for stakeholder engagement, centralised decision-making in public institutions, a lack of skills in partnership building, and poor communication systems. Third, contrary to dominant sustainability frameworks that position resource availability as central, Resource Mobilisation was the only non-significant predictor ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.135$), establishing that resources are institutionally passive in the absence of governance systems capable of converting them into sustainable outcomes.

Beyond confirming that strategic management is important for sustainability, this study makes two theoretical contributions. First, it reweights Freeman’s (1984) stakeholder theory by repositioning community legitimacy as a primary rather than a supplementary sustainability mechanism in governance-fragile settings. This is evidenced by the finding that Stakeholder Involvement was simultaneously the most neglected practice and the largest standardised coefficient of sustainability ($\beta = 0.35$). Second, it introduces a governance mediation proposition that qualifies resource dependence assumptions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), showing that resources are institutionally inert without the governance and planning systems

needed to deploy them effectively, thereby challenging donor-centric sustainability models.

Based on these findings, the IAE and district education offices should urgently establish formal Community Engagement Committees at each centre, pilot a distributed leadership model supported by a governance manual, require each centre to develop a medium-term strategic plan as a condition of accreditation, and roll out a standardised M&E toolkit with mandated review cycles.

Limitations of the Study

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study acknowledges two limitations and describes the measures taken to address them in the following sections. First, the cross-sectional design captures the association between strategic management practices and sustainability at a single point in time, excluding causal inferences. To mitigate this, the study triangulated quantitative regression findings with qualitative interview data from the centre coordinators, enabling a richer interpretation of the observed associations. Longitudinal studies are recommended to establish whether changes in strategic management practices produce corresponding changes in sustainability outcomes over time. Second, the study was confined to ASEP centres in Mwanza Urban, which restricts the transferability of the findings to other geographic and institutional contexts within Tanzania and beyond the country. To address this, an area with diverse socio-economic characteristics that resembles most urban areas across Tanzania, Mwanza urban, was selected for this study due to its characteristics. The urban setting of Mwanza is for its socio-economic characteristics and the prevalence of sustainability challenges across its centres, thereby enhancing the internal representativeness of the findings. This boundary is consistent with the defined research scope and opens productive avenues for future comparative investigations in other regions. Third, the regression model was estimated using a small, purposively selected sample of 40 respondents against five predictor variables. While this sample size meets the conventional minimum guidance for case-to-predictor ratios, the combination of a small sample and a non-probability sampling method limits how the results should be interpreted. The coefficients, R^2 , and significance levels reported in Tables 6-8 should therefore be read as exploratory rather than confirmatory, reflecting associations specific to this institutional context rather than generalisable

population parameters. Confirmatory replication using a larger probability-based sample is recommended.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or reporting of this paper.

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