Rationalising the Irrational: A Narrative Approach to Policy Implementation in African Governance

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Abstract
This study examines the paradox of rationalising the irrational in African policy implementation, focusing on the role of narrative channels in shaping legitimacy, outcomes, and stakeholder perceptions. It explores how institutional weaknesses are reframed through narratives that justify or normalise contradictions between policy design and practice. The study employs a qualitative research design, drawing primarily on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, policy documents, and grey literature. Data were analysed using content and document analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in policy narratives and rationalisation processes across African governance contexts. The analysis reveals five key barriers to policy implementation: communication gaps, lack of competent staff, inadequate technical and professional resources, limited institutional autonomy, and weak administrative capabilities. These weaknesses are frequently rationalised through practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal rationalisation strategies. Narrative channels media, advocacy campaigns, and public discourse shape whether these practices are legitimised, contested, or transformed, thereby influencing the overall success or failure of policies. The study recommends clearer role definition, stronger monitoring and evaluation, reward and sanction systems, stakeholder engagement, technical capacity building, institutional autonomy, and transparent communication strategies as pathways to more effective policy implementation. By integrating rationalisation theory with the concept of policy narratives, this study provides a novel framework for understanding how irrational practices persist in governance while retaining legitimacy. It advances theoretical debates and offers practical insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen governance and policy outcomes in Africa and beyond.
Keywords: administrative, governance, policy implementation, policy narratives, rationalisation

Introduction
Policy implementation remains one of the most critical yet challenging dimensions of governance in Africa. Although many governments have developed ambitious policies, translating them into practice often falters due to structural, institutional, and behavioural barriers. Implementation is not simply a technical exercise but is deeply embedded in political, social, and cultural realities. In African contexts, this process is frequently marked by contradictions in which rational frameworks for policy design confront irrational practices in execution (Murphy & Moosa, 2021). This paradox, described here as "rationalising the irrational," highlights how policymakers and institutions justify inefficiencies, inconsistencies, and ad hoc decisions through narratives that sustain legitimacy despite weak outcomes.

One conceptual lens for understanding this paradox is through policy narratives. Narratives are powerful communication tools that frame issues, simplify complexity, and align public perceptions with political agendas. They help governments explain delays, justify reforms, or redirect accountability, often by presenting irrational practices as rational responses to external or structural challenges (Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2022). Narrative channels such as media, advocacy campaigns, and public discourse play a decisive role in legitimising or contesting these justifications.

The challenges of implementation in Africa are further intensified by volatile and resource-constrained environments. Weak institutions, political interference, and limited administrative capacity create conditions where improvisation, clientelism, and selective enforcement become commonplace (Ndlovu et al., 2025). Yet these practices are seldom acknowledged directly; instead, they are rationalised through narratives that emphasise cultural values, resource scarcity, or political necessity.

The problem addressed in this study is that despite well-articulated policies, African states repeatedly face irrational decision-making and systemic inefficiencies that undermine outcomes. Existing research has examined institutional weaknesses and political interference, but less attention has been paid to how irrational practices are sustained and legitimised through discursive strategies (Aberi & Ogechi, 2025). This study therefore pursues four key objectives:
1. To conceptualise the paradox of rationalising the irrational in policy implementation.
2. To identify factors influencing this paradox, including institutional, political, and cultural dimensions.
3. To examine the role of narrative channels in legitimising or contesting irrational practices.
4. To propose practical recommendations for strengthening policy implementation.

The contribution of this study lies in integrating rationalisation theory with policy narrative analysis to provide a fresh framework for understanding implementation challenges. By showing how irrational practices are rationalised through narratives, the research highlights the communicative as well as technical dimensions of governance (Vaara et al., 2024). This approach not only adds to theoretical debates but also offers practical lessons for policymakers seeking to enhance legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness in African governance.

Literature Review

Concept of Policy Narratives

Policy narratives are central to understanding governance dynamics. A policy narrative is a structured discourse that frames an issue, attributes causes and consequences, and justifies specific choices. Narratives simplify complex problems by embedding them in culturally resonant frames such as progress, threats, or moral duty. In Africa, narratives often emerge as tools to bridge the gap between rational policy designs and weak institutional realities (Schlaufer et al., 2022). Governments use them to explain failures, attributing setbacks to external shocks or cultural resistance, while simultaneously legitimising reforms as necessary for development or modernisation. Thus, policy outcomes cannot be understood without recognising the role of narratives in shaping legitimacy and public perceptions.

Rationalisation Theory

Rationalisation is the process of justifying decisions with reasons that appear logical, even when they obscure irrational practices. Building on Weber's typology, four forms are relevant to African governance. Practical rationality justifies expedient shortcuts, often defended as essential to achieve immediate results. Theoretical rationality appeals to evidence, though policymakers frequently interpret data selectively to suit political priorities. Substantive rationality relies on cultural or ethical values, legitimising inefficiencies in the name of solidarity or justice (Renirie & Meléndez, 2022). Formal rationality emphasises rule-based methods but often serves to legitimise patronage or selective enforcement. Together, these rationalisations illustrate how policies that appear rational in design are distorted in practice yet reframed as legitimate.

Stakeholders in Policy Implementation

Policy implementation involves diverse stakeholders governments, NGOs, and communities whose roles and narratives influence outcomes. Governments provide legal frameworks, resources, and oversight, yet face challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiency and political interference. NGOs act as intermediaries, mobilising support and contributing expertise but sometimes reproducing irrationalities by aligning with donor-driven agendas. Communities are both subjects and participants, shaping narratives through lived experience and cultural values (Foli et al., 2025). Their active participation strengthens legitimacy, while exclusion often generates counter-narratives that resist or delegitimise policies. The interaction among these actors determines whether rationalisations are accepted or challenged, shaping the trajectory of implementation.

Channels of Influence

Narratives flow through media, advocacy campaigns, and public discourse, which serve as powerful channels of influence. The media, both traditional and digital, can legitimise policies by aligning them with development goals or delegitimise them by exposing contradictions. Advocacy campaigns organised by NGOs and civil society pressure governments to prioritise issues by highlighting stories of affected communities, thereby shaping public opinion and official responses. Public discourse in community meetings, forums, and informal settings provides spaces where narratives are negotiated, accepted, or contested (Maseko, 2024). These discussions often reflect cultural norms, reinforcing state narratives or generating counter-narratives that challenge implementation. Importantly, these channels are not neutral: they are arenas of power where actors compete to frame outcomes, emphasising that policy success depends as much on narrative framing as on technical capacity.

Gaps in Prior Research

Despite substantial literature, key gaps remain. First, research largely emphasises structural weaknesses such as resource limits, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political interference without adequately explaining how irrational practices are legitimised through communication. Second, while policy narratives have been examined in agenda-setting, less attention is given to their role during implementation. Third, studies seldom integrate rationalisation theory with policy narratives, leaving underexplored how institutional irrationalities are rationalised discursively (Chatterjee & Pal, 2021). Finally, there is limited comparative work situating African experiences within broader global debates on governance, weakening the international relevance of regional findings.

Theoretical Framework

This review demonstrates that policy implementation in Africa cannot be understood solely through structural or technical lenses. Narratives and rationalisations are central to the process, shaping how stakeholders interpret, justify, and contest practices. By situating the paradox of "rationalising the irrational" within rationalisation theory and examining how narratives circulate through channels of influence Abbott and Touchton (2022), this study provides a conceptual framework that explains persistent paradoxes in African governance and their broader implications for public administration.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena such as policy narratives and rationalisation processes in African governance. Unlike quantitative methods that emphasise measurement and statistical generalisation, qualitative research seeks to uncover meanings, interpretations, and processes that shape human behaviour and institutional practices. The focus of this article is not to quantify the extent of policy successes or failures, but to interpret how narratives are constructed and used to rationalise irrational decision-making during policy implementation. As such, the qualitative approach provides the flexibility to engage deeply with context, culture, and institutional dynamics that are central to governance in Africa.

This approach aligns with the research objectives: to conceptualise the paradox of rationalising the irrational, to identify influencing factors, to examine effectiveness of narrative channels, and to propose solutions. Each of these objectives requires a contextual, interpretive analysis of discourses, rather than numerical testing of hypotheses.

Data Collection

The study relied primarily on secondary data sources, collected through a systematic review of scholarly and policy literature. These sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, which provided both empirical insights and conceptual frameworks on policy implementation and governance. In addition, several books were consulted to establish the theoretical foundations of policy analysis and rationalisation.

The review also incorporated policy reports and official documents from governmental and intergovernmental organisations, which offered practical illustrations of how narratives are formally articulated and operationalised in policy processes. To capture emerging issues and supplementary perspectives, the research further employed desktop-based searches of online databases and repositories to include grey literature and recent studies not widely available in print. To ensure comprehensiveness and historical depth, both older and contemporary works were examined. Earlier studies, such as were included to provide historical context for rationalisation and public policy analysis, while more recent publications (2015–2023) were prioritised to reflect current governance challenges and policy dynamics in Africa. This balanced combination of classic and contemporary sources enhanced the reliability of the findings by situating them within both theoretical debates and practical experiences.

Analytical Approach

The study employed content analysis and document analysis as its primary analytical tools.

- Content analysis was used to systematically review texts, identifying recurring themes, concepts, and categories related to rationalisation, narratives, and policy implementation. This process included coding texts to extract insights on communication strategies, stakeholder roles, and institutional behaviours.
- Document analysis complemented this process by critically evaluating the structure, language, and framing of official policy documents and scholarly writings (Bowen, 2009). Particular attention was paid to how rationales were constructed in different contexts, and how irrational practices were legitimised through narratives.

By combining these approaches, the study was able to move beyond surface-level descriptions to uncover underlying patterns, contradictions, and discursive strategies. This allowed for an interpretive understanding of how rationalising the irrational unfolds in African governance.

Justification for the Qualitative Method

There are several reasons why a qualitative, literature-based method was most suitable for this study. First, the research problem examining how irrational practices are rationalised through narratives is inherently interpretive. Quantitative data cannot fully capture the subtleties of discourse, framing, or cultural context that shape policy narratives. Second, direct fieldwork with policymakers across multiple African states would be logistically and politically challenging, particularly given sensitivities around governance failures and irrational practices. Secondary data analysis offers a feasible and ethically sound alternative while still allowing for a broad comparative perspective.

Third, qualitative document analysis enables triangulation of sources, drawing on both scholarly and policy-oriented literature. This enhances the robustness of findings by integrating insights from academic research, practical reports, and official documents.

Finally, this approach contributes to theory-building. By synthesising diverse secondary sources through the lens of rationalisation theory and narrative channels, the study generates a conceptual framework that advances scholarly debates on governance in Africa.

Methodological Limitations

As with any qualitative, secondary data study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on published sources may introduce **selection bias**, since only accessible documents were reviewed. Furthermore, secondary data cannot fully capture the lived experiences of frontline implementers or community stakeholders. Despite these limitations, triangulating diverse sources helps to mitigate bias and ensures a well-rounded perspective. Future research could complement this approach with primary data collection, such as interviews or ethnographic fieldwork, to provide deeper empirical grounding.

the methodology employed in this study reflects the interpretive and contextual nature of the research problem. By adopting a qualitative design, drawing on diverse secondary sources, and employing systematic content and document analysis, the study provides a robust foundation for examining how narratives rationalise irrational practices in African policy implementation. This methodological framework enables the research to address both theoretical and practical dimensions, generating insights that are relevant for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike.

Results

The analysis of secondary sources revealed five central themes affecting policy implementation in African governance: communication gaps, lack of competent staff, inadequate technical and professional resources, limited institutional autonomy, and weak administrative capabilities. The expanded findings under each theme are presented below.

Communication Gaps

As shown in Table 1. Communication Gaps in Policy Implementation, policy implementation is often weakened by significant communication barriers across different levels of governance. At the horizontal level, duplication of responsibilities and limited information sharing between agencies undermine coordination and reduce efficiency.

Vertical communication is equally problematic, as feedback between central and local institutions is frequently delayed, creating bottlenecks in the flow of information. Public communication also remains inadequate, with citizens often denied timely and accurate access to policy information, which distances communities from decision-making processes and erodes trust in government actions.

Table 1. Communication Gaps in Policy Implementation

Dimension	Findings	Source
Horizontal coordination	Duplication of responsibilities; limited inter-agency information sharing.	Howlett & Cashore (2014)
Vertical communication	Delayed feedback between central and local institutions.	Munyoka & Maharaj (2017)
Public communication	Citizens lack access to timely and accurate policy information.	Blom & Uwizeyimana (2020)

Lack of Competent Staff

As illustrated in Figure 1. Human Resource Deficiencies in Policy Implementation, the shortage of competent staff continues to undermine the performance of governance institutions across Africa. Many agencies lack trained policy analysts, researchers, and monitoring officers, leaving them unable to translate directives into actionable strategies. High staff turnover intensifies the problem, as skilled professionals frequently migrate to the private sector or international organisations that offer better salaries and working conditions. This outflow erodes institutional memory and weakens long-term continuity. Evidence from a 2018 review of education reforms in West Africa highlights how frequent changes in district-level administrators delayed implementation, since each incoming officer had to relearn processes from the beginning. Low incentives and limited recognition further discourage commitment and innovation among public officials, while the absence of structured training programs denies employees opportunities for professional development. Consequently, staff members often resort to improvisation when faced with complex or unfamiliar challenges, further weakening policy outcomes.
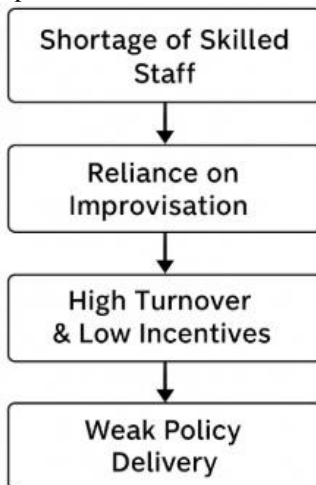

Figure 1. Human Resource Deficiencies in Policy Implementation

Lack of Technical and Professional Resources

As discussed in Table 2. Technical and Professional Resource Gaps, persistent shortages in technical and professional resources continue to hinder effective policy implementation. Incomplete and unreliable data systems make it difficult for policymakers to monitor progress and plan accurately, with many ministries still relying on outdated manual records.

Similarly, underdeveloped ICT platforms restrict coordination and reporting, as most rural offices in Sub-Saharan Africa lack stable internet connectivity, limiting integration with national monitoring frameworks.

Professional development is also severely constrained, with only a few training or mentoring programs available, and most of these concentrated in urban centres. As a result, staff capacity remains underdeveloped, leaving officials without the necessary skills to adapt to modern governance demands.

Table 2. Technical and Professional Resource Gaps

Resource Area	Findings	Source
Data systems	Incomplete or unreliable systems for monitoring progress.	Joseph (2015)
ICT platforms	Limited digital tools for coordination and reporting.	Abusamhadana et al. (2021)
Professional development	Few training or mentoring programs for staff capacity.	Eyupoglu & Kaya (2020)

Limited Autonomy of Institutions

As shown in Figure 2. Centralisation and Autonomy Constraints, excessive centralisation and political interference remain major obstacles to effective policy implementation. In many African countries, ministries retain decision-making authority that could otherwise be devolved to regional or municipal levels, preventing local governments from adapting national policies to their own cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Political interference compounds this problem, as staffing appointments, procurement contracts, and budget allocations are often shaped by partisan or patronage interests rather than merit or need. Such practices weaken the independence of implementing agencies and undermine public confidence in governance. For example, decentralisation initiatives in East Africa were frequently undermined when central governments maintained control over funding streams, leaving local authorities with mandates to act but without the resources to fulfil them.
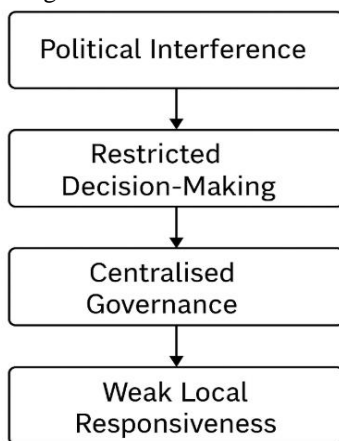

Figure 2. Centralisation and Autonomy Constraints

Weak Administrative Capabilities

As presented in Table 3. Administrative Weaknesses in Policy Implementation, fragile administrative systems pose further obstacles to effective policy delivery. Weak planning and budgeting processes frequently result in delayed disbursements, poor allocation mechanisms, and misuse of resources, which undermine the credibility of government initiatives.

Policy clarity is another pressing concern, as vague or even contradictory objectives create uncertainty for implementers; education reforms, for instance, may simultaneously promote decentralisation while reinforcing centralised standards, leaving frontline institutions unsure of which directives to follow.

Accountability also remains limited, with patronage networks and corruption weakening transparency and enabling bureaucrats to pursue personal or political interests rather than collective goals. These administrative weaknesses ultimately reduce consistency in service delivery and erode public trust in governance systems.

Table 3. Administrative Weaknesses in Policy Implementation

Dimension	Findings	Source
Planning & budgeting	Delays, weak allocation systems, and resource misuse.	Blom & Uwizeyimana (2020)
Policy clarity	Vague or conflicting objectives cause inconsistent delivery.	Joseph (2015)
Accountability	Patronage and corruption weaken transparency.	Mahlangu & Ruhode (2021)

Integrated Findings

As illustrated in Figure 3. Interaction of Institutional Barriers, the five identified themes are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Weak communication channels exacerbate administrative inefficiencies by delaying coordination and undermining clarity in policy directives. At the same time, shortages of competent staff reduce the capacity of institutions to effectively deploy available technical and professional resources. Centralised authority further restricts institutional autonomy, preventing timely and context-specific responses at local levels. When combined, these barriers create a self-reinforcing cycle of inefficiency that diminishes overall governance capacity and weakens the legitimacy of policy processes.
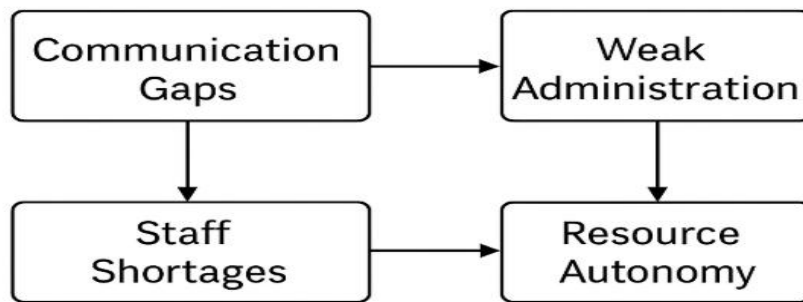
Figure 3. Interaction of Institutional Barriers

Summary of Results

The findings demonstrate that African policy implementation is obstructed by deeply entrenched institutional barriers:

- Communication gaps undermine inter-agency coordination, accountability, and citizen engagement.
- Lack of competent staff fosters dependence on improvisation and undermines continuity.
- Insufficient technical and professional resources prevent adaptation, monitoring, and innovation.
- Limited autonomy forces institutions into politically driven rather than context-driven implementation.
- Weak administrative systems perpetuate inefficiency, ambiguity, and corruption.

These interconnected barriers create environments where irrational practices such as improvisation, patronage, and selective enforcement become embedded in governance systems.

Discussion

Narrative Channels and Policy Outcomes

Policy implementation in Africa is shaped not only by institutional weaknesses but also by the ways these weaknesses are communicated and justified. Narrative channels media, advocacy campaigns, and community forums frame policy challenges as understandable and legitimate. For example, weak communication systems are narrated as the result of limited resources rather than mismanagement, while staff shortages are reframed as "brain drain" attributed to global inequalities (Airey, 2022). Through control of these narratives, governments maintain legitimacy even when outcomes fall short. Civil society organisations, however, often construct counter-narratives that highlight accountability gaps and demand reform. Thus, narrative channels are decisive in determining whether policy failures are tolerated, resisted, or transformed.

The Paradox of Rationalising the Irrational

The study highlights the paradox of rationalising the irrational. Policies are intended to promote order and efficiency, yet they are frequently undermined by improvisation, patronage, and corruption. These practices are legitimised through rationalisation. Practical rationality defends shortcuts as urgent solutions; theoretical rationality relies on selective evidence; substantive rationality appeals to cultural or moral values; and formal rationality justifies rigid procedures that obstruct responsiveness (Cornell & Svensson, 2022). In all cases, inefficiencies are reframed as rational, making failure appear necessary or even virtuous. This paradox underscores the communicative dimension of governance, where discursive strategies maintain legitimacy despite distorted implementation.

Cultural Context and Trust-Building

Cultural context shapes how narratives are constructed and received. In many African societies, values of solidarity, kinship, and tradition determine whether policies are accepted or resisted. Narratives aligned with these values are persuasive, while those ignoring cultural norms often face rejection. For instance, health campaigns that dismiss traditional practices encounter resistance framed as cultural defence. Building trust is therefore critical: transparent, inclusive, and culturally resonant narratives foster credibility. Communities are more likely to support policies when validated by trusted leaders or institutions. Without trust, even technically sound policies risk failure.

Long-Term Engagement and Feedback Loops

Narrative strategies must extend beyond policy launches and evolve through long-term engagement. Policies lose legitimacy when they fail to adapt to community needs. Feedback mechanisms that incorporate citizen voices enable governments to adjust strategies, sustaining credibility and responsiveness. Participatory budgeting in African municipalities illustrates how ongoing engagement enhances accountability and ownership. Conversely, absence of feedback creates mistrust and disengagement. Effective narratives are dynamic, adjusting to stakeholder experiences and reinforcing a sense of co-creation in governance.

Implications for African Governance

Several implications emerge. First, narrative management must be treated as integral to policy implementation: poorly framed policies risk rejection regardless of technical design. Second, narratives cannot indefinitely compensate for weak institutions; long-term success requires reforms in staffing, resources, autonomy, and administrative systems. Third, inclusivity and trust are essential, as policies co-constructed with communities are more likely to gain legitimacy and sustainability.

Finally, citizens must be recognised as active interpreters of policy narratives whose responses whether compliance or resistance ultimately determine outcomes.

Global Relevance and Theoretical Contribution

Though rooted in African contexts, these insights hold global relevance. Similar paradoxes occur in welfare states, where bureaucratic inertia is narrated as procedural necessity, and in Asia, where politicised policies are framed as culturally appropriate leadership. This study contributes theoretically by linking rationalisation theory with narrative analysis, offering a framework that explains how irrational practices persist while retaining legitimacy. Governance, in Africa and beyond, involves not only technical execution but also discursive negotiation. For scholars, this enriches public administration theory by merging rationalisation and narrative frameworks; for practitioners, it underscores the need to embed communication strategies into implementation design.

Summary of Discussion

Narrative channels strongly influence policy outcomes by shaping perceptions of institutional weaknesses. The paradox of rationalising the irrational shows how inefficiencies are reframed as legitimate, while cultural context and trust determine credibility. Sustained engagement and feedback loops are essential for adaptive governance. Ultimately, communication strategies must complement institutional reforms to build legitimacy. Globally, this study offers a conceptual framework for understanding how narratives rationalise contradictions between design and practice, illuminating universal challenges of governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Key Findings

This study has explored the paradox of rationalising the irrational in African policy implementation, with particular attention to how narrative channels shape outcomes. The analysis of secondary data highlighted five persistent barriers undermining policy effectiveness: communication gaps, shortage of competent staff, limited technical and professional resources, constrained institutional autonomy, and weak administrative capacity. These barriers do not operate in isolation; instead, they interact to generate systemic inefficiencies that weaken governance processes across different sectors. What is particularly significant is the way narratives are employed to reframe these weaknesses as rational or necessary responses to external and structural challenges. Such narratives legitimise practices that would otherwise be considered irrational, including improvisation, patronage, and corruption. The findings suggest that policy implementation in Africa must be understood as both a technical process and a communicative exercise, where legitimacy is actively negotiated through the stories told by governments, civil society organisations, and communities themselves.

Theoretical Contribution

The research makes a key theoretical contribution by linking rationalisation theory to the concept of policy narratives. Drawing on Weber's four categories of rationality practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal the study demonstrates how irrational practices can be justified and presented as rational in ways that maintain public legitimacy. For example, shortcuts may be explained as pragmatic responses (practical rationality), selective use of evidence can reinforce political agendas (theoretical rationality), cultural values may be used to justify inefficiencies (substantive rationality), and rigid rules are often defended as safeguards of accountability (formal rationality). By aligning these rationalisation forms with narrative channels such as media, advocacy, and community discourse, the study offers a new framework for understanding policy implementation. This approach enriches debates in governance and public administration by showing that implementation is not purely technical but also discursive, shaped by competing narratives that sustain or undermine legitimacy.

Practical Recommendations

The findings point to several practical measures that policymakers and practitioners can adopt to improve implementation outcomes. First, clarifying roles and responsibilities among ministries and agencies is vital, supported by inter-ministerial committees and digital coordination platforms. Second, governments should strengthen monitoring and evaluation by embedding oversight mechanisms and conducting regular audits. Third, reward and punishment systems are needed to motivate competent staff through performance-based incentives and to discourage corruption through consistent sanctions. Fourth, stakeholder engagement must be enhanced by involving communities, NGOs, and civil society actors as active co-producers of policy outcomes. Fifth, states should invest in technical and professional capacity, including ICT infrastructure, reliable data systems, and continuous training opportunities. Sixth, promoting institutional autonomy through genuine decentralisation reforms can empower local governments to adapt policies while maintaining accountability. Finally, trust and transparency should be prioritised through communication strategies that are both culturally sensitive and accessible to diverse populations, ensuring that policies resonate with local values and realities.

Limitations

While the study provides useful insights, it has some limitations. It relied entirely on secondary data sources, which cannot fully capture the lived experiences of frontline implementers or the perceptions of communities affected by policies. Moreover, the focus on African governance contexts may limit the applicability of findings to other regions, even though some

parallels may exist. Finally, the study presents a conceptual framework linking rationalisation and narratives but does not empirically test this through fieldwork or primary data collection. These limitations suggest that the conclusions should be treated as exploratory rather than definitive.

Future Research Directions

Future research should aim to address these limitations by conducting empirical case studies with policymakers, bureaucrats, and communities to capture first-hand experiences of narrative construction and contestation. Comparative studies across different African states, or between Africa and other regions, could also provide insights into the universality or specificity of these dynamics. Additionally, quantitative approaches, such as surveys or content analysis of media narratives, could complement qualitative research by measuring how narratives shape perceptions of policy success or failure. Given the growing influence of digital platforms, future work should also explore how social media and online discourse are reshaping policy narratives and creating new spaces for both governments and citizens to negotiate legitimacy.

In conclusion, this study highlights that policy implementation in Africa is shaped not only by institutional strengths and weaknesses but also by the narratives that legitimise them. Narratives are powerful tools: they can mobilise support and bring coherence, but they can also conceal inefficiencies and perpetuate irrational practices. The challenge for policymakers is to transform narrative channels into vehicles for transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, rather than tools of distortion. By strengthening institutions while simultaneously ensuring that narratives are credible, culturally resonant, and participatory, African governance can move closer to achieving more rational, effective, and sustainable outcomes in policy implementation.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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