

Challenges and Solutions in the Execution of Malawi's 2021 - 2026 Digital Economy Strategy

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Abstract

In this paper, the researcher sought to explore the challenges encountered in execution of the 2021 - 2026 Malawi Digital Economy Strategy (MDES), and the solutions. The MDES strategy was established in Malawi through the National Planning Commission (NPC) in February, 2021. The five - year digital strategy, offers a comprehensive roadmap in transforming Malawi into a prosperous and self-reliant nation through integrated and inclusive ICT, and digital systems. A qualitative approach was used, under the guidance of the New Public Management (NPM) model. The researcher purposively sampled a total of 28 study participants from the E - Government Department, the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE), and the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), as case studies. Data was collected through in - depth face - to - face Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and secondary sources. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The study results have shown that execution of the MDES has not been successful enough due to the following challenges; resistance to change, a lack of capacity building, a lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders, increased levels of corruption, political interference, a lack of commitment from the key stakeholders, and a lack of adequate resources. The solutions to these challenges include; provision of more training for capacity building, stakeholders' coordination and collaboration, political will and support, stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, and provision of adequate resources. Affirmed by the NPM model which advocates for efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, mitigating these challenges can assist in bringing excellent results in the implementation of the MDES.

Keywords: Challenges, Digital Economy Strategy, execution, Malawi, solutions

1.0 Introduction

The main objective of this paper was to explore the challenges that have been encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES and provide some solutions to mitigate the challenges. Globally, the Digital Economy Strategy (DES), has been very helpful in making governments communities and businesses adapt to the digital transformation, which includes economic growth as one of its benefits. In Malawi, the Government developed the 2021 - 2026 DES in February, 2021. The elements of MDES include internet access, skills acquisition, and access to devices. According to MDES (2021), it was through the National Planning Commission of Malawi (NPCM), when

DES was launched as a five years strategy with an aim of improving connectivity and improve internet access from 14% to 80% by the year 2026. This implies that the MDES was developed, with the aim of providing affordable internet by cutting out taxes and transform Malawi's economy through digital technologies. In addition, the MDES aims at helping in enhancing competitiveness and create economic value for the Malawi citizenry thereby, achieving an inclusive economic growth. As such, the MDES stresses on digital inclusion through the sharing of public Information Communication Technology (ICT) resources and infrastructure, and capacity development (MDES, 2021). This is in line with the Malawi 2063 agenda,

which has assisted in facilitating interaction and closing the gap between the ordinary citizens and the Government.

Implementation of the MDES has been part of the Public Sector Reforms (PSRs) that have been influenced by the NPM model. In Malawi, the PSRs have been influenced by the NPM model as asserted by Tambulasi (2010). This means that implementation of the MDES is an example of the NPM reforms. According to Hood (1999), NPM is a model of public administration which aims at improving performance of the public sector by adopting practices from the private sector. The NPM model which gained popularity in the 1990s has underpinned the recent reform initiatives in the Malawi public sector. According to Lufunyo (2013), one of the key features of NPM is the argument that the public sector lacks performance culture. As such, the MDES implementation is one of the continued applications of some of the elements of the NPM model, considering that the MDES was designed as a tool to improve the performance of the public sector by matching it with the private sector (Hope, 2002). In line with the NPM model, this entails that the MDES assist in efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector through improved performance. According to Khunga (2023), effective implementation of the MDES can assist in promoting efficiency as advocated by the NPM model. In the same vein, Vyas et al., (2021), argue that if the MDES is well implemented, it can promote innovation and efficiency through the digitization of processes and information; and support better service and goods delivery to the consumers and organisations through the automated systems and digital infrastructure. Guided by the NPM model which is based on the ethos of the private sector management in improving the public service delivery, implementation of the MDES attempts to extrapolate the NPM elements as it is an essential tool for the economic transformation of Malawi. What is central to the NPM model is the implementation of market-based principles in the running of the public sector (Hoque, 2005; Obong'o, 2009). This entails that the aim of the NPM model is to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the performance of the

public sector. According to Hoque (2005), the core characteristics of NPM perspectives include: marketization, decentralisation, productivity, service orientation, and policy - administration dichotomy. Based on the service orientation, the NPM model was used to help in the understanding of how service delivery can be improved through the MDES and assist in the justification of the specific research objectives, listed in the next paragraph.

In Malawi, the concept of DES is a well - known field of study but there has been limited literature. Confirmed by Makoza (2020b), in Malawi there is not much research on this topic as the literature that is available is for other countries. In addition, within the limited available local literature, researchers have not focused on how the MDES can be implemented effectively and efficiently. For example, a study conducted by Makoza (2022b), analysed the 2021 - 2026 MDES, against the Digital Economy Ecosystem Framework. The study, analysed the major themes in the execution of the MDES. According to the study that was conducted by Makoza (2022b), it is clear that the execution of MDES has not been successful in Malawi. Also, the continued outcry from the citizenry confirm that the execution of the MDES has not really achieved its intended goals as there has not been much improvement in internet connectivity and accessibility. This means that there has been a knowledge gap in the challenges encountered, and solutions for effective execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. As such, the researcher in this paper aimed at filling this knowledge gap by exploring the challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES, and providing solutions as suggested by the study participants. This topic was of great significance in creating new knowledge to the limited existing literature, for a better understanding of how the MDES can be executed effectively and improve performance of Malawi's public sector for better results. Within the guidance of the NPM model, this paper was guided by the following research objectives; (1) To investigate the challenges encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES, (2) To identify the solutions to the challenges

encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES, and (3) To examine how the key stakeholders can assist in successful execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. The insights that have been obtained from this study contribute to the knowledge body required for effective execution of the MDES in Malawi's public sector.

2.0 Methodology

The study was conducted at the MoICE, the E - Government department, and MACRA. The researcher purposively selected these organisations as case studies because they belong to the ICT sector, and they are the hub in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. The choice of these organisations helped with data and results triangulation. According to Yin (2014), one of the greatest strengths of a case study is that it helps to bring the richness in which a particular setting or phenomenon can be described. In this regard, the researcher used the above-mentioned organisations to complement each other and help to bring in variations in the study participants' selection. This helped the researcher to increase the external validity (transferability), of the study. In line with Yin (2009), triangulation helps to neutralise any bias and limitations inherent in a particular data source or method. This means that triangulation of these study areas helped to complement and validate the data and results of this study. In this paper, the researcher used purposive sampling technique to select research participants and used KIIs to collect primary data. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative methods go hand in hand with purposive sampling method. In the same vein, Bryman (2016) argues that the intention to utilize purposive sampling method is to select study participants in a strategic manner based on the research questions and aims. As such, the selected sample had a similar characteristic of being the key players in the execution of the MDES in Malawi. Since this study was qualitative and the researcher used purposive sampling method, it was not possible to predetermine the sample size. As such, the

sample size was guided by data saturation limit. To reach the data saturation limit, the researcher conducted additional interviews to verify the quality of data saturation. When the researcher found no new themes, ideas or opinions, that meant the sample size was enough and that the data had reached its saturation limit (Yin, 2014). In line with this, the researcher interviewed fourteen (14) participants from the E - Government department, nine (9) participants from the MoICE, and five (5) participants from MACRA. As such, the total sample size for the study participants was twenty - eight (28). The researcher also utilised snowball sampling technique to interview those that were not envisioned but had been recommended by the participants.

Guided by the study objectives and study approach, the researcher used in - depth face - to - face KIIs to collect primary data. This study used interview guide approach because it is flexible, as the questions can be asked in any order by the interviewer and question wording can be changed by the interviewer if it is deemed appropriate (Creswell, 2016). Although the interview guide was not considered as a questionnaire, it assisted in probing and posing of follow - up questions by the interviewer and there was relatively high response rate from the interviewees. However, the researcher did not give the participants an opportunity to move outside of the interview boundaries to avoid unnecessary responses. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured (open - ended) questions in order to collect an in-depth data from the purposefully selected sample. The duration of the interview was between 20 to 25 minutes for each study participant. To complement the KIIs, the researcher also utilised secondary data sources: peer reviewed journal articles, prescribed books, theses and government reports on MDES. The researcher utilised secondary data to explore more of the challenges that have been encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES and provide some solutions for mitigation. The secondary sources were important because they helped to broaden the understanding of the key concepts in the NPM model and MDES. In addition, the secondary sources

helped in the discussion and understanding of the empirical results. Triangulation of these data collection tools helped to provide complementary strengths and non - overlapping weaknesses to the study. The researcher ensured that all the research ethics were properly followed in all the stages of the data collection process. The researcher sought permission from the organisations where the research was conducted, and from the study participants. At individual level, the researcher first sought an informed consent from the study participants. The researcher informed each study participant on the objectives of the research and each study participant was asked to make an informed decision, as to whether to participate in the study or not. The researcher also informed the study participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. During the interviews, the study participants were provided with the consent form to sign and the researcher ensured that dignity and confidentiality of the study participants was respected. Also, the researcher made a careful consideration when collecting and analysing the data, to avoid the disclosure of personal identifiers. In consistent with Gray (2009), anonymity is an assurance that data will not be traceable to the study participants in a research project. As such, the researcher ensured that all the study participants were treated as anonymous, and all the information remained confidential.

Data analysis is one of the critical processes that requires analytical skills. According to Bryman (2016), data analysis is a process of creating a story through organisation, summarisation, categorisation, pattern, and theme identification in line with the subject under study. In this study, the researcher edited, classified, and tabulated the data prior to the data analysis. Since this study was qualitative in nature, thematic analysis was used to analyse the open - ended questions. In qualitative data, thematic analysis is a method of recognising and organising patterns in content and meaning (Willig, 2013). As such, the researcher closely examined the data in order to find themes and patterns that were used to describe and explain the phenomenon. The thematic

analysis helped the researcher to identify different categories for the various themes. Close attention was paid to patterns of responses from the study participants and based on their categorisations, they were grouped and then labeled and interpreted accordingly. When using open ended questions, data analysis can be time consuming because the responses are mostly long and unstructured (Bryman, 2016). As such, the researcher used thematic analysis to help in identifying patterns for deeper underlying interpretations. In line with Braun & Clarke (2006), to ensure that only the necessary data was transcribed, the researcher repetitively and analytically listened to the recorded interviews. This helped the researcher to make an informed decision on how and what was necessary to be transcribed. The researcher then assigned some pseudonyms to the research participants, for confidentiality reasons. This ranged from participant 1 to participant 28.

3.0 Results and Discussion

In this section, the researcher has presented and discussed the study findings on the challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES, and solutions. This includes a presentation and discussion on the findings for the challenges and solutions of MDES execution in Malawi. It also includes the findings on how the key stakeholders can assist in the successful execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. These findings have been discussed based on the participants' responses from the face - to - face KIs. In addition, global and national relevant literature on DES, has also been reflected on, to help in the discussion of the results. All these, have been guided by the NPM model, which advocates for efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector by embracing the market-oriented culture from the private sector. It is envisaged that the findings from this study will contribute richly to the body of knowledge on MDES in the public sector.

3.1 Challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES

According to the responses, all the study participants were knowledgeable with the MDES. In their responses, most of the participants responded that it is a roadmap for digital transformation. The other participants responded that MDES is a tool used for improving the performance of the ICT sector, through digital transformation. For example, one of the KIs said;

“MDES is a tool that helps in the economic transformation through digitalization.”

Similarly, another KI said;

“MDES is a strategy that is used in the transformation of the public sector, through digitalization.”

Also, another KI said;

“MDES is a strategic tool used for the economic transformation in the digital era.”

According to responses from all the study participants, there is a common knowledge of the MDES, that it helps in digital transformation. This entails that in the MDES, there is improvement of digital performance through increased internet connectivity and accessibility. As advocated by the NPM model, improved performance helps in the achievement of the intended goals thereby, improving the service delivery in the public sector (Hoque, 2005). This is in line with the MDES, whose aim is to improve the service delivery through effective and efficient internet connectivity and internet access. Affirmed by the NPM model, which focuses on efficiency and effectiveness as a way of improving the public service delivery, the MDES helps the public sector to have a competitive edge and be able to survive in the competitive digital environment. In the same vein, Kihara, Bwisa & Kihoro (2016), argue that proper alignment of business strategies with the new technologies help organisations to achieve competitiveness. This means that proper alignment of the digital strategies with new technologies

in the public sector can help to bring effectiveness and efficiency in public service delivery. In response to whether there has been any challenges encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES, all the study participants responded that there has been various challenges affecting the implementation of the MDES. As such, they responded that the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES, has been affected due to some challenges as presented below, in Table 1.

Table 1: The challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES

Participant ID	Challenges
1	A lack of enough resources, resistance to change, corruption, and a lack of capacity building.
2	A lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders.
3	Resistance to change, a lack of resources, and increased levels of corruption.
4	A lack of commitment from the key stakeholders, and a lack of adequate resources.
5	Resistance to change, increased levels of corruption, and political interference.
6	Political interference, corruption, and a lack of commitment from the key stakeholders.
7	A lack of capacity building, and a lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders.
8	Increased levels of corruption, a lack of enough resources, and a lack of commitment from the key stakeholders.
9	Resistance to change, a lack of capacity building, and political interference.

10	A lack of commitment from the key stakeholders, and a lack of adequate resources.
11	A lack of commitment from the key stakeholders.
12	A lack of enough resources, increased levels of corruption, and a lack of adequate resources.
13	Resistance to change, and a lack of adequate resources.
14	Resistance to change, a lack of enough resources, and a lack of capacity building.
15	A lack of commitment from the key stakeholders.
16	Resistance to change, and increased levels of corruption.
17	Resistance to change.
18	A lack of commitment from the key stakeholders, and a lack of adequate resources.
19	Resistance to change, and increased levels of corruption.
20	A lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders.
21	Resistance to change, a lack of enough resources, and a lack of capacity building.
22	A lack of capacity building, and increased levels of corruption, and political interference.
23	A lack of proper coordination, a lack of enough resources, and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders.
24	A lack of capacity building, and a lack of commitment from the key stakeholders.
25	Resistance to change, a lack of enough resources, and a lack of adequate resources.

26	Resistance to change, and increased levels of corruption.
27	A lack of capacity building, and a lack of adequate resources,
28	Increased levels of corruption, a lack of enough resources, and political interference.

As shown in Table 1, execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES has been affected due to several challenges. According to responses from the study participants, a lack of key stakeholders' coordination and collaboration, a lack of enough resources, increased levels of corruption, a lack of capacity building, political interference, and resistance to change are the challenges that have been encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. Resistance to change is one of the challenges that was mostly mentioned by the study participants. A lack of mindset change has led to resistance to change by some public employees and other key stakeholders, which has resulted into some unwillingness to adapt to new ways of doing things. Affirmed by Ihenacho (2018); Muriithi & Kidombo (2019), fear of the unknown is one of the significant causes of resistance to change in the public sector. This entails that resistance to change in most public sector organisations in Malawi, is due to a lack of proper understanding of the need for change. According to Hope (2002), several countries have been embracing the NPM model to modernize and re-engineer the public sector. Expressing similar views, Mackie (2008), asserts that the NPM model has a series of themes which are aimed at reforming the public sector to make it more efficient in the delivery of service. In the same vein, Endeki et al., (2021), assert that the NPM model emphasises on public sector increased efficiency to improve the input - output ratio. The rationale for this is to make the public sector more efficient just like the private sector. Although the NPM reforms help in improved efficiency, the NPM doctrines fail to explain how the public sector can be made more efficient for improved performance and service delivery

(Sikwese, 2020). This entails that there is a need for innovative ways on how efficiency can be improved. For example, efficiency can be increased through re-engineering of the public sector organisations. This means that the challenge of resistance to change, makes the execution of the MDES not effective, contrary to what is advocated by the NPM model. The other challenge that was mentioned by most of the study participants, was a lack of stakeholders' coordination and collaboration in the execution of the MDES. Consistently, Khunga (2023), asserts that proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders can assist in effective implementation of IT programs. In line with this, one of the KIs said;

“The execution of MDES has been challenged due to uncoordinated development or approach among the key stakeholders.”

In the same vein, another KI said;

“There has been a challenge of lack of coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders, thereby negatively affecting the execution of MDES.”

According to Ganeshu, Fernando & Keraminiyage (2023), a lack of stakeholders' coordination and collaboration has been regarded as one of the major obstacles in the implementation of various programs in organisations. In the same vein, Ali & Haapasalo (2023), argue that a lack of stakeholders' coordination and collaboration affect the achievement of organisational goals. This implies that a coordinated and collaborated approach amongst the key stakeholders can assist in effective execution of the MDES. Much as the NPM model advocates for performance in the public sector, there is a need for effective execution of the MDES, through proper coordination and collaboration of the key stakeholders. As such, in this paper the researcher identifies a great need for improved coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders to ensure that there is optimal outcome

in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. Some of the participants, mentioned that the other challenge that has mostly affected execution of the MDES, is increased levels of corruption. This is affirmed in several studies (Mwaura, 2007; Chilunjika & Mutizwa, 2019; Chunga & Ned, 2022), who found that corruption is deeply rooted in most of the African public sector organisations. Also, Chilunjika et al., (2019), argue that most of the prominent public officials in Malawi, have been implicated in corruption scandals for the past years. This means that corruption has been deeply rooted in most public sector organisations, posing a great threat to the democratic notion of the 'rule of law'. Although the NPM model has been debated for its potential to increase corruption in public organisations as some say that NPM reforms can lead to more opportunities for corruption, the researcher is of the view that the NPM model can help to deter corruption by increasing transparency and accountability. Lastly, according to responses from most of the study participants, there is a lack of capacity building for effective execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. Affirmed by Nakashona (2021), capacity building helps in the achievement of the intended results because of the knowledgeable and skillful personnel in an organisation. This implies that the key stakeholders lack necessary knowledge and skills to execute the MDES successfully, for better results.

3.2 Solutions to the challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES

According to the responses, the study participants mentioned that there are solutions to the challenges that have been encountered in the execution of the MDES. As responded by the study participants, the solutions to the challenges encountered in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES have been presented below, in Table 2.

Table 2: The solutions to challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES

Participant ID	Solutions
1	Provision of adequate resources, accept change, stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, and a provision of more training for capacity building.
2	Stakeholders' coordination and collaboration.
3	Accept change, provision of adequate resources, and stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices.
4	Commitment from the key stakeholders, and provision of adequate resources.
5	Accept change, stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, and political will and support.
6	Political will and support, stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, and commitment from the key stakeholders.
7	Provision of more training for capacity building, and stakeholders' coordination and collaboration.
8	Stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, provision of adequate resources, and commitment from the key stakeholders.
9	Accept change, provision of more training for capacity building, and political will and support.
10	Commitment from the key stakeholders, and provision of adequate resources.
11	Commitment from the key stakeholders.

12	Provision of adequate resources, stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, and provision of adequate resources.
13	Accept change, and provision of adequate resources.
14	Accept change, provision of adequate resources, and provision of more training for capacity building.
15	Commitment from the key stakeholders.
16	Accept change, and stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices.
17	Accept change.
18	Commitment from the key stakeholders, and provision of adequate resources.
19	Accept change, and stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices.
20	Stakeholders' coordination and collaboration.
21	Accept change, provision of adequate resources, and provision of more training for capacity building.
22	Provision of more training for capacity building, and stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices.
23	Stakeholders' coordination and collaboration.
24	Provision of more training for capacity building, and commitment from the key stakeholders.
25	Accept change, provision of adequate resources, and provision of adequate resources

26	Accept change, and stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices.
27	Provision of more training for capacity building, and provision of adequate resources.
28	Stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, provision of adequate resources, and political will and support.

As shown in Table 2, some of the study participants mentioned that there can be successful results in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES if there is provision of adequate resources. In the same vein, (Khunga & Magolowondo, 2023), argue that the public sector has always been challenged by limited resources which has affected the implementation of various initiatives, hence the need for provision of enough resources. This implies that much as the public sector can engage some partners to help with grants, there is a need for prioritisation of activities that do not realise more resources and expenditure should be well managed for successful results. In addition, to mitigate the challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES, some of the study participants mentioned that there is for; provision of more training for capacity building, the stakeholders should coordinate and collaborate well, there is political will and support, and there is stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices. For example, one of the KIs said;

“There is a need for a provision of more trainings for capacity building, In order to mitigate the challenge of a lack of capacity building,”

Another KI said;

“The key stakeholders should be well coordinated and collaborated this can assist in effective execution of the MDES.”

Then another KI said;

“If there is a strong political will and support, the MDES can be executed effectively and efficiently.”

In addition, another KI said;

“Provision of stiff punishments to all those that have been involved in the corrupt practices, can assist in effective and efficient execution of the MDES.”

According to the above responses, the execution of MDES can be successful enough, if there is effective and efficient mitigation to the challenges encountered. As advocated by the NPM model, implementing the above - mentioned solutions to the challenges encountered in the execution of the MDES, can assist in having better performance of the public sector. The five - year execution of the MDES offers a roadmap for transforming Malawi into a prosperous and self-reliant nation. Therefore, in view of the study findings, the researcher concludes that there is a need for ensuring that the challenges encountered by the key stakeholders are effectively addressed for successful results.

3.3 How the key stakeholders can assist in successful execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES

In every organisation, the key stakeholders play a very important role in identifying bottlenecks and suggest how to minimize or eliminate the bottlenecks (Ganeshu et al., 2023). This entails that the key stakeholders are very essential in the successful execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. Actions and decisions from internal stakeholders in an organisation can have a negative or positive impact on the external stakeholders (Louise, 2010). This means that both the internal and external key stakeholders play a very crucial role in helping an organisation achieve its intended goals. This is in line with the NPM model, which focuses more on improved performance, as the intended

output. According to the study findings, all the study participants responded that they have a role in the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES. However, the findings have revealed that majority of the study participants were not fully aware of their roles regarding execution of the MDES. Rather, they were more aware of their work roles in their respective organisations. The findings have revealed that only a few study respondents were fully aware of their roles as key stakeholders in the execution of the MDES. One of the KIs said;

“My role is to ensure that I participate in the execution of the MDES by being part of the decision-making process.”

In the same vein, another KI said;

“My role is to participate in meetings where decisions are made for Effective execution of the MDES.”

According to the above responses, some few study participants play a significant role at decision level, in the execution of the MDES. This can be justified as a result of the lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders, making some key stakeholders not fully involved in the execution of the MDES. According to Njoroge et al., (2014), involving the key stakeholders in the execution process creates a sense of ownership thereby, achieving the intended results. This means that the key stakeholders play a very significant role in the execution of the MDES. Some of the study respondents were not aware of how they can assist in the effective execution of the MDES. However, as mentioned by some few study participants, the key stakeholders can assist in the successful execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES, through a well - coordinated and collaborated effort, and through commitment from all the relevant key stakeholders. Although stakeholders' coordination and collaboration can help in

attainment of the intended results, there are some internal and external barriers to the coordination and collaboration of the stakeholders which also need to be addressed. This can be achieved by having clear policies and direction for a well-coordinated and collaborated approach. The stakeholders need to work together in an effectively coordinated and collaborated network for the achievement of the intended goals in an organisation (Liu et al., 2021). In the same vein, Invernizzi et al., (2019), argue that successful delivery of organisational goals and objectives demands effective collaboration amongst the key stakeholders. This entails that proper coordination amongst the key stakeholders can help in the effective execution of the MDES, thereby improving the overall performance as advocated by the NPM model.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The execution of 2021 - 2026 MDES has been very essential in assisting Malawi to be competitive in the ever - changing digital world. Despite being of great significance in Malawi's economy, the execution of the MDES has been limited due to some challenges. In this paper, the study results have revealed that the execution of the 2021 - 2026 MDES has not been successful enough due to challenges such as; a lack of capacity building, resistance to change, a lack of proper coordination and collaboration amongst the key stakeholders, a lack of adequate resources, increased levels of corruption, political interference, and a lack of commitment from the key stakeholders. Based on the study findings, solutions to these challenges include; provision of more training for capacity building, stakeholders' coordination and collaboration, political will and support, stiff punishments to all those involved in corrupt practices, and provision of adequate resources. The researcher has concluded that successful execution of the MDES and the realization of its intended benefits, depends on effective mitigation of the challenges encountered. In view of this, the researcher has suggested the following recommendations:

- All the relevant key stakeholders in

the government of Malawi, should assist in devising more strategies for effective execution of the MDES.

- The government of Malawi should continue providing more resources and financial support in the execution of the MDES, for better results.

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